

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Wednesday, June 29, 2022, 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.
Rhode Island Department of Administration, Room 2A
One Capitol Hill, Providence

Meeting Summary

AGENDA SUMMARY

The Early Learning Council's agenda addressed the following topics:

- Welcome, Opening Remarks, and Meeting Overview
- Birth to 8 State Policy Update
- ChildTrends Research: Systemic Racism and Early Care and Education in the U.S.
- Updates: Early Childhood IDEA Advocacy Planning, DHS, and RIDE
- Announcements and Public comment

KEY POINTS

Key discussion points from the meeting are summarized below:

WELCOME, OPENING REMARKS, AND MEETING OVERVIEW

Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green, Director Yvette Mendez and Elizabeth Burke Bryant welcomed the Council. (See slides). The following comment was made:

- PLEE will offer technical assistance to families for state Pre-K lottery registration from 12 to 7 tomorrow, June 30th, at 60 Valley St. in Providence.

BIRTH TO 8 STATE POLICY UPDATE

Kayla Rosen updated the Council on the state's Final FY23 Budget. (See slides.) The following comments were made:

- This budget includes phenomenal wins for early childhood education and is a testament to our advocacy.
- Child care reimbursement based on enrollment instead of attendance did not pass.
- COMMENT: During the pandemic, reimbursement was based on enrollment so programs could still receive funds even when children were periodically absent. With reimbursement based on attendance, students may lose slots to families on the waitlist because programs will not be able to maintain needed revenue during a child's absence. This is a big issue with immigrant families that move more often.
- All CCAP reimbursement rates increased and are now above pandemic rates.
- Cover All Kids provides Medicaid access to all eligible children regardless of immigration status.
- The number of state Pre-K seats remain the same as last year, but RIDE, DHS, and the Children's Cabinet are charged with developing a comprehensive plan to achieve 5000 seats within five years. Work on that plan will begin soon.

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- The chair of the Children's Cabinet will convene a working group to develop a plan, due by October 2023, for Early Childhood Governance. The Children's Cabinet staff will supply assistance to the working group. The Early Learning Council is specifically listed as the advisory body for that process. The Children's Cabinet is thinking about opportunities to engage people regularly during the process.
- COMMENT: The Council will develop a formal way of making recommendations to the Early Childhood Governance working group.

Leanne Barrett updated the Council on the state's enacted and pending legislation. (See slides.) The following comments were made:

- The Child Care is Essential bill was not enacted separately, but early childhood care and education proposals related to money were included in the FY23 Budget Bill, including increased rates for providers and expanded eligibility for families. Families may now qualify with incomes under 200% FPL (first expansion at entrance since CCAP cuts in 2007 were enacted) and families may now keep their subsidy until incomes reach 300% FPL. Access for low-income college students was made permanent.
- A parent is still required to establish parentage and obtain a court order for child support as a requirement for CCAP eligibility. We are one of the few states that have a child support requirement, and it is a significant barrier.
- The Early Educator Investment Act did not pass, but key elements were included in the FY23 Budget, including a requirement for the state to develop a plan by December 31, 2022 to prepare, recruit and retain a highly-qualified early childhood workforce, including adequate wages for early childhood educators, regardless of setting.
- The state Pre-K program legislation specifically mentions 3-year-olds in addition to 4-year-olds. It also requires that the state plan ensures no disruption to infant toddler care. This could be interpreted to mean that the funding can be applied to infant toddler care as well as to preschool education.
- There was a permanent Medicaid rate increase for Early Intervention and a temporary Medicaid rate increase for First Connections. The ARPA section included specific language about family home visiting and screening programs, which possibly could help First Connections with its staffing issues. There was no ARPA stabilization funding included for First Connections, however.
- RI Works is part of the same state statute as the Child Care Assistance Program and they were passed together in 1998 when RI Works was known as the Family Independence Program.

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- Adding public recreational centers to the Health and Educational Building Corporation legislation may help finance facilities for after school and summer programs.
- Because of the challenges from the pandemic, the state has extended the time by which teachers are required to demonstrate proficiency in knowledge and practices of scientific reading and structured literary instruction under the Right to Read Act. To help complete their training, teachers are allowed up to three more professional development days to replace student instructional days over the next three years.
- COMMENT: We need to keep advocating for the goals of the Right to Read Act. Unfortunately, the changes enacted this year are taking instructional days away from students.
- COMMENT: This has been an amazing year in terms of investment for early learning. There have been significant long term systemic changes that will help families for years to come. However, family child care providers do not have a contract yet so there is more work to be done.
- Taxpayers that have not been able to obtain a driver's license due to immigration status will now be able to get a driver's license.

CHILDTRENDS RESEARCH: SYSTEMIC RACISM AND EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION IN THE U.S.

Chrishana Lloyd, Ph.D, and Sara Shaw, Ph.D, presented ChildTrends Research on systemic racism and early care and education in the U.S. (See slides). Key comments and questions included the following:

- There are two papers reporting out ChildTrends research on systemic racism and early care and education in the U.S. The research was funded by the Early Educator Investment Collaborative (EEIC). EEIC charged ChildTrends with thinking about root inequities in the early care and education system. ChildTrends examined the country's history from early colonization to present time to understand the extent racism, sexism, and class have played into early childhood education compensation, both salary and benefits.
- The research looked specifically at the continental United States.
- The webinar, papers and executive summary for this research project are available on the EEIC website: <https://earlyedcollaborative.org/>
- The emphasis of the work is that society is coming from a history of chattel slavery. Child care is associated with domestic work, which, in turn, is tied to black women. During the slavery period, black women were in charge of taking care of both the black children of other enslaved women who were unable to care for their own children (kinship care) and the white children of slave owners. As a result, the concept of early childhood education began at the inception of America.

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- The negative and disrespectful perception of enslaved black women has impacted the entire early childhood education field. It stems from slavery's racial and gender discrimination and exploitation but affects every person in the early childhood education field, regardless of race or gender.
- Native American and Hispanic women have had similar experiences, but due to this project's resource constraints, those stories need further examination.
- To research these papers, ChildTrends examined over 200 different policy, grey literature and opinion pieces, all of which were beyond the typical peer reviewed publications utilized by research studies. ChildTrends viewed these sources through a womanist, feminist, and racial equity lens. Across the diverse literature, the story remained the same. Images aligned with the findings as well.
- A womanist lens is different from a feminist lens. Women of color experience the world differently from white women. Although they may share certain experiences as women and as part of the early childhood education workforce, their challenges are not always the same. Compensation for women of color in early childhood education is much lower than for white women. White women are often seen in early childhood education leadership positions, as directors, administrators, and policy makers. Also, women of color are disproportionately home childcare providers. That is because many black women intentionally pulled out of formal systems to protect their children and themselves.
- Approximately 75% of U.S. history occurred before policies were introduced to address oppression.
- The periods of time on the timeline are fluid, e.g., colonization is still happening today.
- The timeline is not specific to women or the early childhood education workforce, but the highlighted policies and events are rooted in the experience of today's early childhood education workforce. For example, *partus sequitur ventrem* was the first formal policy in the colonies and it codified the fact that white men had no responsibility for the children they fathered with enslaved women.
- The Fair Labor Standards Act was enacted as the country moved away from slavery. People were attempting to find work, but it was difficult because of racism, discrimination, and a desire to keep Native Americans and black people in place. Additionally, the South's economy would crumble without free labor. In an attempt to maintain some of the benefits of free labor, people could not access higher paying jobs and, instead, had to settle for long hours with low wages. The Fair Labor Standards Act was intended to combat that practice, but it specifically excluded field workers and domestic workers, jobs dominated by black men and women.

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- Key takeaways from the research include the following:
 - There is an intersectionality among race, gender, and class. White women had a lack of agency in many areas, but they were able to own property. As a result, they enslaved women and children and passed them on to their own children. That relationship between those that were enslaved and those that were not enslaved is very complex and interconnected and has shaped how we view funding policies in the early childhood education field.
 - Child care labor is undervalued, along with other female dominated fields.
 - Government often views child care as a private issue based on the assumption that if you made the decision to have children you should be able to take care of them. However, children are our country's greatest resource and, in order for us to have a productive society, the government should help take care of them.
 - Racism and sexism are embedded in our laws and even policies intended to help often end up exacerbating the problems.
 - State policies often trump federal legislation, which has resulted in discriminatory policies towards women of color in certain regions of the country.
 - COVID-19 has exposed and intensified many of the challenges in the early childhood education field and has produced a shift in public opinion on the value of early childhood education. Often, key historical events allow for shifts and changes in policy, e.g. universal childcare in response to war in the 40s, and the pandemic might provide a similar opportunity.

- Recommendations from ChildTrends research include:
 - Any approach to addressing systemic issues must focus on antiracism and decolonization. Historically, the public's value of the early childhood education field has been rooted in racist and sexist ideas that were influenced by the continuation of colonial practices. Therefore, public investment is essential to helping everyone understand how to address these issues.
 - The early childhood education workforce is at a crisis point and needs public investment to move forward. We know public investment can work quickly, as we saw during the pandemic, so we need to address this crisis as it is unfolding.
 - Policy solutions with limited reach, e.g., wage supplements, do not adequately address the root causes of inadequate compensation. They only go so far and may serve to further entrench white privilege into the field itself.
 - To create policy solutions reflective of the early childhood education workforce, a range of early childhood education professionals and families must be involved in the policy making.
 - Policy solutions like reparations might not feel directly related to early childhood education but they are. Many family child care providers are women of color and are often the victims of predatory lending that has historical roots but continues today. We need to

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increase the ability of these providers to pay off mortgages and help them access home ownership opportunities through renting and lending.

- We need to invest in better data to increase our understanding of inequities and progress. We have a limited understanding of the larger workforce and their current experiences.
- “Mary Pauper” is a play on Mary Poppins, the quintessential early childhood provider. “Pauper” references being poor.
- COMMENT: LISC appreciates this conversation because the early childhood education sector is often underfunded. LISC tries to find solutions through housing programs.
- COMMENT: The Council tries to do what it can to ensure family child care providers are engaged. These providers often have a language barrier that prevents them from engaging in meetings or submitting applications and reports. That is why we provide simultaneous interpretation at Early Learning Council meetings.
- COMMENT: We hope that the arc of history bends towards justice.
- COMMENT: Policy changes happen incrementally, but we are still making progress. We are becoming more polarized in this country around some issues related to child care and women’s health and rights, but we remain optimistic.
- COMMENT: There should be reports that tell the story at the state level. There should also be a comparison between the U.S. and other countries, to show how other countries value their early childhood education workforce. There is a need for more family voices in this conversation.
- COMMENT: The state policy of requiring child support enforcement for CCAP eligibility could be considered an example of systemic racism.
- Q: Is there anything you have seen other states do to address financial wealth building for educators other than through wages, e.g., home ownership? Are there initiatives that address historical disadvantages or help increase generational wealth?
A: There have been some conversations in D.C., but they have been at the foundational level and not at the city/state level. Not being able to own a home limits access to child care, but these conversations are not happening around early childhood education. There are some more nominal reparation initiatives happening at institutions like colleges and universities, but not on a larger scale. The country is not ready yet.
- COMMENT: Head Start has officially included SNAP eligibility as a categorical eligibility for Head Start enrollment. In Rhode Island, our SNAP eligibility is up to 185% of the poverty level so this change greatly increases the number of families now eligible for Head Start services.

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- COMMENT: At the Head Start Region 1 meeting, there was a presentation on utilizing Head Start as a health equity intervention.
- COMMENT: Connecticut Head Start is providing housing vouchers to families through a pilot program.

UPDATES: EARLY CHILDHOOD IDEA ADVOCACY PLANNING, DHS, AND RIDE

Leanne Barrett and Ramona Santos Torres updated the Council on Early Childhood IDEA Advocacy Planning. (See slides). Comments included:

- The grant for the advocacy planning came from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Partnership for America's Children. It was a one-year grant to develop a policy agenda for Early Intervention and preschool special education with parents at the center.
- Rhode Island KIDS COUNT partnered with PLEE to support grassroots parent organizing. Parents must be at the table to understand and advocate for policies that include funding and outcomes for children.
- Key partners in developing the advocacy agenda included the four core cities of Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls and Woonsocket. A parent from East Providence was also included.
- These parents are not traditionally included at the table, so leadership development training was included as part of the process.
- All meetings were bilingual and 100% of the participants were parents of color. Those parents were intentionally recruited.
- The policy agenda resulted in four infographics.
- In order to initiate change, people have to (1) agree that there are problems, (2) agree on what those problems are, (3) agree on a set of policy solutions that should be tried, and (4) move things forward.
- Compared to other states, Rhode Island's IDEA program is strong in many areas:
 - Our Early Intervention is in the top 10 nationally in terms of percentage of access for infants and toddlers
 - Our preschool special education program is usually in the top half nationally for the percentage of children receiving preschool special education services
 - Our itinerant Preschool Special Education model is an outstanding idea that other states are very interested in looking at
 - We have a top state Pre-K program for meeting quality standards.

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- Even though we serve a higher percentage of children compared to many other states, our early childhood IDEA programs are nowhere near what they should be, however. We are underserving children in Early Intervention and preschool special education. Early Intervention programs have waiting lists and struggle to hire and retain staff. Only half of the referrals for developmental concerns get evaluated in preschool special education. Woonsocket and Central Falls are doing better than the state average on a lot of preschool special education indicators, but Providence is still struggling.
- Some data indicates that children of color and low income children are less likely to receive services in early childhood education programs, are not enrolled as young, receive less consistent services, and make less developmental progress.
- Many jobs in the IDEA field require a master's degree or higher to provide essential therapies, supports and education to the youngest children. Higher education and other parts of the system need to make changes so more people can acquire these credentials and degrees.
- COMMENT: Please consider unifying Early Intervention and Part C of IDEA into one state agency. With one state agency, families will have just one contact regardless of the ages of their children.

Katja Hamler updated the Council on the DHS Pandemic Retention Bonus. (See slides). The following comments were made:

- The Rhode Island Rebounds Retention Bonus for the early childhood education workforce was intended to supplement the salary of low wage early childhood education workers and help improve retention within programs.
- Window 2 has been extended to July 8th. 263 educators have not completed the second step in the process. DHS is doing outreach to make sure those educators do both steps necessary to receive the bonus.
- The email and hotline for questions are available in both English and Spanish:
dhs.childcarelicensing@dhs.ri.gov, 833-930-3540
- An additional year of the program was included in the FY23 Budget. That program is prepared to launch in late September or early October and will distribute bonuses more frequently.
- Updates on funding opportunities will be posted on the Children's Cabinet webpage:
<http://kids.ri.gov/cabinet/funding-opportunities/>

Kayla Rosen updated the Council on RIDE's Pre-K Lottery, other Pre-K information, and the Kindergarten Transition Program. (See slides). Key comments were as follows:

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- The state Pre-K program has the same number of seats as last year but hopes to expand further in future years.
- Through the partnership between DHS and RIDE, the program has rapidly expanded because they were able to blend and braid different funding streams. Also, they were able to build the Head Start program to support expanded time in the classroom, both during the day and throughout the year.
- The state Pre-K lottery closes July 6th so please get the word out. Even though the application is short, families need an email address to receive the notification when they get a seat.
- COMMENT: PLEE set up a private email address to enroll families. PLEE monitors it for families who do not have access to email. They have not needed it yet, but it is available.
- Lottery information can be found on the RIDE website: <https://www3.ride.ri.gov/pklottery>
- Over 3000 children are signed up, but we want more.
- 800 seats are funded through limited time federal grants, so we need money to sustain the current RI Pre-K classrooms beyond the 2022-2023 school year, and to address issues like pay parity.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Comments from the public included:

- The LISC Early Childhood Education Capital Fund is officially accepting applications starting July 1st. This is an amazing opportunity for improvement of early childhood education facilities. There was an informational session on June 15th and all information from that session is available on the LISC website: <https://riccelff.org/early-childhood-care-and-education-capital-fund/>
- Email Erin with questions: ecox@lisc.org