

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Wednesday, June 26, 2019 10:00 a.m.-11:00 p.m.

Save the Bay

Meeting Summary

AGENDA SUMMARY

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

- Welcome, Opening Remarks, and Meeting Overview
- State Budget & Legislation Update
- Presentation and Discussion of PDG Birth to 5 Grant
- Policy and Program Updates
- Announcements
- Public comment

KEY POINTS

Key discussion points from the meeting are summarized below:

WELCOME, OPENING REMARKS, AND MEETING OVERVIEW

Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green and Elizabeth Burke Bryant welcomed the Council. The following comments were made:

- Director Courtney Hawkins sends her greetings because she was too ill to attend today's meeting.
- As an Early Learning Council, we read the report on the Providence Schools with alarm, but not surprise. As we work to provide high quality childcare to children B-5, we need a K-3 system that is prepared to serve those children.
- Commissioner Infante-Green is a champion of early learning and development, multi-language learning and support for children with special needs.
- Commissioner Infante-Green urges educators to remember that they serve the community. The entire state needs to shift its mindset to focus on what we value when a child first enters the world. Then, we must envision what our schools could look like once we make that shift.
- Although this report talks only about Providence, it is not only happening in Providence. These issues are occurring throughout the state.
- Commissioner Infante-Green is hopeful that schools will be better come September and RIDE is ready to do the work necessary to achieve that. But to make the necessary changes, everyone needs to commit to working with RIDE.
- There will be 8 public forums to discuss the report on Providence Public Schools. Please encourage everyone to attend and to bring as many people as possible to show support for the changes that are needed. The list of forums can be found at:
<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/AdditionalInformation/ProvidencePublicSchools2019Review.aspx>
- The public forum on June 28th from 8:00 to 9:30 a.m. at William D'Abate Elementary is a joint session with the Children's Cabinet.

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- COMMENT: The early learning community can prepare children for school, but the public schools need to be ready to receive those children. There is still a major divide between early childhood and the next phase. Districts must collaborate with early childhood programs to ensure continuation of best practices and learning experiences.
- COMMENT: RIDOH will work with RIDE so Family Home Visiting can partner with public schools.
- COMMENT: Families want to engage, but do not know how to get involved in the public school system. The public forums are the first step in the process to help families feel less disenfranchised and silenced. Families need to be part of the solution.
- COMMENT: In other states, health and human service agencies are helpful in supporting positive economic outcomes. Director Hawkins wants to work collaboratively with RIDE to encourage families to rise out of poverty.

STATE BUDGET & LEGISLATION UPDATE

Cara Harrison and Elizabeth Burke Bryant updated the Council on the state budget and relevant legislation. (See slides.) The following comments and questions were made:

- For State Pre-K expansion, the Governor asked for \$4.25 million to increase the number of slots by 50%, but the House approved only \$2.9 million for State Pre-K expansion. That amount will fund an additional 270 slots, as opposed to the 540 originally requested. The House also approved the requested amount of \$5.75 million to maintain our current 60 classrooms. Although this state funding for Pre-K was a big win, we are still a long way from providing universal State Pre-K. This school year, Rhode Island will offer about 1400 State Pre-K seats and universal State Pre-K would require 7000 seats.
- The House did not pass a Pre-K budget article that contained several important items, including a requirement for Kindergarten transition plans and a plan to support ECEDS (Early Care and Education Data System). The Governor may put these initiatives in her budget again next year and will provide support for them during this year, although they are not currently statutory requirements.
- Because \$1.3 in federal funding for Family Home Visiting is going away this year, state funds were needed to maintain the 1400 current slots. The Governor requested \$650,000 in state funding, which would have been matched by \$650,000 in a Medicaid waiver match. Because the House did not include any investment in Family Home Visiting in the budget, the state cannot leverage the Medicaid waiver match and the program will have to eliminate 250 family slots. These slots will not be cut, but will disappear through attrition. The Medicaid waiver match is still available next year so the Governor may include this funding in her budget for next year.
- The House approved \$150,000 for tiered reimbursement for family child care providers, but did not approve \$697,000 to increase the rates for preschool programs in centers to the 75th percentile of the market rate.

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- Funding for First Connections to serve 1200 pregnant women was not included in the budget.
- The House did not approve a requirement that schools with at least 60% free or reduced-price lunch eligibility take advantage of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This is a food program that offers free breakfasts and lunches to all students without the need to submit individual eligibility forms. Schools with at least 70% free or reduced-price lunch eligibility would have been required to offer an alternative breakfast model, such as food in the classroom or a grab and go system. By not including these requirements in the budget, the state forfeited up to \$3 million in potential federal funding. The Governor's Office will continue to support districts and schools to take part in these programs.
- DHS is hoping to limit the CCAP child support enforcement requirement to just the child seeking a CCAP voucher and not require it for every child in the home. The statute's wording is vague and DHS is working with legal to determine the correct interpretation of the language.
- When DHS provides CCAP reimbursement, it is required to obtain a program's private pay rates. If the private pay rate is lower than the state rate, DHS is required to pay the private pay rate. Currently, the system has no functionality to determine which rate is lower so DHS always pays the state rate. Because the state rates are already devastatingly low, if a program's private pay rate is even lower, then DHS will work with the program to increase the rate. Rates lower than the state reimbursement rates are unacceptable.
- DHS uses the Family Asset Limit test to determine a family's eligibility for CCAP. It had required families to submit documentation to prove that they did not have over \$10,000 in liquid assets available. Since virtually all families applying for CCAP reimbursement do not have \$10,000 in liquid assets, this test was amended to \$1 million to streamline the application process.
- The legislature removed the 24 month limit in the RI Works Cash Assistance program so families participating in job training programs could continue to receive support.
- The majority of families participating in the RI Works Cash Assistance program are single mothers who are encouraged to engage with Family Home Visiting. DHS is working with RIDOH to think about the sustainability of Family Home Visiting for B-8 families. The RI Works Cash Assistance program does benefit children and is an important piece of the whole family approach.
- Q: What is the timeline for meeting the CCDBG requirement that child care reimbursement rates be at 75% of the market rate and what are the implications if that timeline is not met?
A: DHS tried to make a modest request this year to increase the preschool rates, but the House still did not adopt the increase. ACF can enact a 4% penalty on the state's discretionary funds if the state does not meet that timeline. This penalty could impact future funding cycles.
- Q: Can any of the unapproved spending requests still be included in the budget?
A: Once the House approves the budget, further additions are unlikely.

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- Q: Were there any changes to CCAP eligibility for parents in school?
A: The House specifically rejected CCAP eligibility for parents in college. However, there is a pilot offering CCAP eligibility for families enrolled in approved job training programs. The pilot is not broadly promoted. Approximately 20 individuals are currently accessing the pilot. DCYF is trying to better understand the pilot so it can be expanded to families enrolled in non-college coursework, such as GED and ESL courses.
- Elizabeth Burke Bryant thanked everyone who fought for all the early childhood priorities this year. Advocacy for the unappropriated items must continue throughout the coming year.
- COMMENT: We need to start thinking now about our strategies for next year's budget. Specifically, instead of just focusing on tiered reimbursement rates, we need to advocate for an increase in the CCAP base rates to 25% of the market rate. Currently, infant-toddler base rates for centers are at 4% of the market rate. Additionally, we need to do a better job with our public campaign and getting parents involved in the process. The Governor starts the budget process in the Fall so we need to propose strategies early to ensure they are included in the budget.
- Improving early childhood is one of the Governor's top priorities and expanding State Pre-K is just one of the strategies for achieving that. The Governor will continue to fight to include additional early childhood priorities in next year's budget. She will also continue to propose creative ways to increase revenue to pay for those priorities.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Caitlin Molina and Sam Saltz discussed the PDG Birth to 5 Grant. (See slides). Comments and questions included the following:

- The PDG grant preserves and expands the state's early childhood education mixed delivery model.
- A PDG Strategic Plan will provide ongoing grant support and will align with the state's B-8 system.
- The PDG needs assessments will provide opportunities for the community to understand and be involved in the design of the PDG B-5 Strategic Plan.
- LISC, as part of its Facilities Needs Assessment, will create a crosswalk that will determine action steps for educating and advising the community of various regulations, which will ensure the health and safety of children served in facilities.
- Abt will conduct the Family Needs Assessment and the Workforce Needs Assessment. For the Family Needs Assessment, Abt will capture feedback from families engaged in B-5 programs, but it will prioritize collecting feedback from families that are not currently participating in B-5 programs.

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- The Workforce Needs Assessment will leverage data from other needs assessments in the state while adding further depth in high priority areas, such as pathways, wages and workforce stability.
- The needs assessments will start in July, with preliminary reports released in September.
- To create a comprehensive B-5 system plan with actionable deliverables, AnLar will build on current strategic plans within the state's B-5 system by identifying common themes across all plans. AnLar will also identify partnerships that the state can leverage to achieve the plan's action steps and priorities.
- The PDG Strategic Plan will propose recommendations and solutions to some barriers we know exist.
- DHS will engage key stakeholders to develop the needs assessments.
- The needs assessments will drive policy decisions moving forward.
- DHS is trying to streamline the needs assessments so families and the workforce are not overwhelmed with questionnaires. The Council can help encourage people to respond.
- The needs assessments will involve a variety of focus groups and online surveys. The needs assessments will specifically target 2 communities for more individualized data collection and in-person interviews with families.
- There are 3 main focus areas for the needs assessments:
 - What are the needs of families with young children B-5 in the state of Rhode Island?
 - Are we meeting those needs with our existing early childhood services?
 - What do families perceive as a benefit to receiving these early childhood services?
 - These perceived benefits will not shift the design of the early childhood system, but will inform the development of it.
 - What do families value in the early childhood education setting?
 - How do we define success, e.g., parent efficacy or child outcomes?
 - What whole family supports are being offered to families with children B-5?
 - What are incentives and motivators for families to participate in the B-5 system?
 - Are families understanding the early childhood system?
 - Is the system actually benefitting families in the way we think we designed the system?
- Agencies must collaborate to think strategically about how best to meet the needs of families.
- We must build an early child care system that parents want, but that also offers the high quality child care that parents need.

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- All early childhood programs must be included in the Workforce Needs Assessment, including family child care homes, Family Home Visiting, and Early Intervention. We will assess supply and demand once we collect the data.
- The Workforce Needs Assessment will include key questions that look across all sectors of the workforce, not just the B-5 system. DHS can use the responses to those questions to create action steps for DLT, RIDE, DCYF, RIDOH and for career pathways.
- Providers and other workforce members should want to participate in the pathways offered in the state and those pathways must result in actual improvements in child outcomes and teaching practices.
- Rhode Island has a pattern of investing in pilots without thinking about the long-term sustainability of those projects. With the needs assessments, we want to determine whether it is feasible to use state and federal funding to sustain the B-5 system we create.
- Council members should help distribute the needs assessment surveys. The surveys will be accessible on phones and DHS will offer incentives for participation. We specifically want participation by families not currently being served by the B-5 system.
- Suggestions for Areas of Inquiry:
 - Include an outcome component in the Workforce Needs Assessment like in the Family Needs Assessment. This component can include data on burnout and turnover in the workforce as well as whether professional development and coursework result in longevity in employment and wage increases.
 - Prioritize families with children with special health care needs or at risk children.
 - Prioritize families with children in the foster care system, both from the workforce and family side. Are foster care families considered part of the B-5 workforce or a special population of families?
 - Reach out to families in homeless shelters. This can be part of the work in the 2 target communities.
 - The 2 target communities should include an urban and a suburban/rural community.
 - Elicit feedback from case workers to determine if access to child care is a barrier for families seeking employment. Looking at program waitlists could also help determine the real demand for infant toddler slots at child care programs.
 - Encourage all providers, especially all high quality providers, to accept CCAP.
- Q: What is the deadline for the survey?
A: DHS will disseminate the surveys in mid-July and respondents will have to complete it immediately to meet the PDG grant deadlines.
- Later this week, Abt will distribute materials that Council members can use as a script to encourage participation in the needs assessments.

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- Q: What are families going to get in return for their participation?
A: From the fall until December, AnLar will offer community engagement and outreach that will specifically make a connection between family responses and the state strategies in the PDG Strategic Plan.
- COMMENT: Perhaps families can provide email addresses so they can receive updates on the PDG Strategic Plan.
- Email Caitlin or Sam with any additional ideas or suggestions.

POLICY AND PROGRAM UPDATES

Work Group: Young Children's Social-Emotional Needs Work Group

Jennifer Kaufman and Ruth Gallucci updated the Council on the Young Children's Social-Emotional Needs Work Group. Key comments included:

- The Young Children's Social-Emotional Needs Work Group is finalizing their recommendations now. Once that is completed, they will contact key stakeholders for action planning.
- Kids Connect is in the process of a major certification standard overhaul, which will support the recommendations of this work group.

Data Dashboard: Progress Toward Council Goals

Elizabeth Burke Bryant updated the Council on the Data Dashboard and the progress toward the Council goals. Comments included:

- Each year the Early Learning Council updates its progress toward the goals included in the Rhode Island Early Learning Council Comprehensive Advisory Plan and Recommendations 2016-2020.
- The goals in this plan will inform the PDG Strategic Plan.
- The Council should think about the Rhode Island Early Learning Council Comprehensive Advisory Plan and Recommendations 2016-2020 before the September Early Learning Council meeting and provide feedback at that meeting on whether the right recommendations were included in today's data dashboard.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Kristine Campagna discussed the Home Visiting Strategic Plan, the Successful Start Committee, and the Substance Exposed Newborns Task Force. Key comments included:

- The Successful Start Committee is the advisory council for Project Launch and Family Home Visiting. Starting in September, the Family Home Visiting Strategic Plan process will install a new governance structure for the Successful Start Committee.
- The State Opioid Response Grant funds the Substance Exposed Newborns Task Force. The new initiative will assign a specialized team to every newborn exposed to opioids. That team will engage with families at the hospital and continue to follow the family after discharge. Families will also connect with a peer recovery coach.

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Lisa Hildebrand discussed the BrightStars Advisory Committee and the Infant/Toddler Workforce Compensation Group. (See slides.) The following key comments were made:

- Beginning last January, after the release of its think tank report, BrightStars reconvened the BrightStars Advisory Committee. The Committee will meet quarterly going forward. The Committee will share data, including a review of the number of programs increasing star ratings. Centers, public schools and school age programs have continued to increase their star ratings. The hope is that tiered reimbursement will motivate and incentivize family child care homes to improve their star ratings as well. The Committee will also be involved as BrightStars transitions to the Ecers/Iters 3 tools.
- Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, through the Think Babies grant, is collaborating with the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood National Center and its Moving the Needle on Compensation Work Group to focus on compensation for the early childhood workforce. They have created a team of state agencies, including Early Intervention and Family Home Visiting, to talk about compensation every month. The work group has identified common challenges within the state's compensation structures and has developed a wage scale vision for what they think the early childhood workforce deserves to be paid. Those items will inform the development of an action plan. The Work Group will finish its report this summer and will present the report at the September Early Learning Council meeting. The Work Group hopes for funding for an additional year so it can track progress on its action plan.
- The Infant/Toddler Workforce Compensation Group will include its wage scale vision within its report.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Comments and questions from the public included:

- Rachel Flum of the Economic Progress Institute can electronically distribute an issue brief on how the state used its \$5 million in extra CCDBG discretionary funding to support tiered reimbursement rates. The R.I. delegation can use the information from the Economic Progress Institute to push for additional discretionary funding to support further improvement of tiered reimbursement rates.
- Raymond Neirinckx encouraged the inclusion of housing at the Early Learning Council table and in other conversations about the B-5 community. Recently, several housing projects have included resources for children B-5, including a partnership with Head Start, an activity center with after school programming and a two generation model to ensure children do not follow their parents into poverty. Partnering with housing could provide additional support for families with young children.