

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Wednesday, March 13, 2019 10:00 a.m.-1:00 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
- Presentation and Discussion of the Governor's FY20 Proposed State Budget, Relevant State Legislation and Federal Advocacy
- Presentation and Discussion of State Pre-K Family Outreach and Enrollment Planning and the Transition to K Pilot
- 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 Ken Wagner and Elizabeth Burke Bryant welcomed the Early Learning Council. The following comments were made:

- With RIDE entering a leadership transition, this might be Commissioner Wagner's last Early Learning Council meeting. Commissioner Wagner has focused on long-term sustainability of RIDE's work so the improvements made to RI's education system will continue beyond the transition.
- There is a joint hearing tonight of the Senate Finance and Senate Education committees on Article 10, Sections 1-4. Members of the early learning community will testify and parents of children enrolled in State Pre-K classrooms are especially encouraged to attend.
- The legislative hearings last week on Articles 10 and 15 for Pre-K, child care, and school breakfast, were well attended and productive.
- The Rhode Island congressional delegation supports the Childcare for Working Families Act.
- The governor has added DHS Director Courtney Hawkins as an additional co-chair of the Early Learning Council.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Governor's FY20 Proposed State Budget

Cara Harrison discussed the governor's FY20 proposed state budget. (See slides.) Key comments and questions included:

- Because the original preschool expansion grant is ending this year, additional funding is needed to maintain the current 60 State Pre-K classrooms. Further funding is required to expand the program to add 540 new high quality State Pre-K seats. Of the \$10 million requested for State Pre-

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K expansion, \$700,000 is designated for tiered reimbursement rates for preschoolers in child care centers.

- Some of the federal funding for family home visiting is ending this year so the requested \$1.3 million (\$650,000 in state funding with \$650,000 in federal funding matched through Medicaid) is required to maintain the existing 1400 family slots in FHV. We hope to expand this program in the future. If this funding is not approved, the state will lose 300 FHV slots.
- Because referrals to First Connections have significantly increased, additional funding is needed to meet the demand.
- The state would use the money requested for the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program for comprehensive environmental lead inspections, primary prevention, education of physicians, and WIC clinics.
- The funds requested to mitigate adverse risk staff capacity will help the state address the recommendations of the maltreatment project.
- Q: On the Mitigating Adverse Risk Staff Capacity slide, what does it mean to “refer all children”?
A: There is a liaison at DCYF that receives referrals for children under 3 that are indicated victims of abuse and/or neglect as well as other children under age 3 who may be involved in child welfare. That liaison connects families to EI or First Connections as required under federal law. Because the process is going so well, there is an enormous number of referrals and the liaison needs help. The requested funding will increase staff capacity to help that liaison.
- The Federal Preschool Development Grant awarded to the state will address a variety of different issues across the Birth to 5 system and will touch on objectives from the 3rd grade reading plan. The grant is not contingent on the governor’s budget, but it aligns with and supports initiatives in the budget.
- The handout on the governor’s FY20 budget priorities is on the Early Learning Council website and will soon be on the Children’s Cabinet website.
- COMMENT: The state has made tremendous progress in reducing lead poisoning, but the latest report indicates that one sixth of families in Providence have at least triple the federal allowable levels of lead. The state needs to address this from both the public side (the water mains into housing) and the private side (the pipes in housing). Additionally, kinship placement for foster children should be in lead safe homes. Advocacy around housing is needed, including advocacy to prevent discrimination against housing vouchers because that denies access to housing for many families.

Relevant State Legislation

Leanne Barrett reviewed pending legislation. (See slides). The following key comments were made:

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- The Diaz and Crowley bill to expand CCAP tiered quality rates differs from the governor's proposal because it applies includes school-age children and increases rates to meet the federal benchmark at 5 stars. Family childcare homes are not included in the bill because the union is working directly with DHS on the collective bargaining agreement, but tiered quality rates for family child care providers are included in the governor's proposed budget (Article 15).
- COMMENT: Some research suggests that class size only matters if it is smaller than 20 children, but other research posits that class size does matter if teaching practices change.
- COMMENT: Higher education teacher preparation programs need to embrace consensus science recommendations.

State and Federal Advocacy

Leanne Barrett and Lisa Hildebrand presented an update on State and Federal Advocacy. Key comments and questions included:

- This is the third year for a postcard campaign. Last year, the postcard campaign was one the reasons the legislature implemented tiered reimbursement.
- There are three different postcards this year: increasing tiered rates, implementing universal Pre-K, and improving compensation for early childhood teachers. We will soon be adding a 4th postcard focused on funding home visiting.
- Early childhood programs are distributing postcards to families and friends. Participants should fill out two postcards, one for their representative and one for their senator. RIAEYC then uses the secretary of state's website to link people with their elected officials, fills out the postcards and distributes the postcards to the state house.
- Legislators are paying attention to the postcards because they let the legislators know that their constituents care about these issues.
- RIAEYC is tracking how many postcards go to each legislator so it can reference that number when asking the legislators to support these issues.
- Rhode Island Reads will be the last week of March or the first week of April. Legislators distribute and read books in infant toddler classrooms and Pre-K classrooms.
- A federal sign-on letter requesting a \$5 billion increase in CCDBG funding went to Rhode Island's four delegates. Even though CCDBG funding doubled last year, reimbursement rates are still so low that many programs will not accept them. We need more money to improve the system further.

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Lisa Nugent discussed State Pre-K lottery family outreach and enrollment planning and the transition to K pilot. (See slides). Comments and questions included the following:

- As we move to universal Pre-K, Rhode Island will not need a lottery, but we still need a lottery next year.
- The end date of the lottery is movable if there is an increase in applications once the state budget is approved, but it will not be moved too far out because families need time to plan.
- RIDE will announce eligible State Pre-K communities on April 22nd.
- The September 1st age cut-off is non-negotiable.
- RIDE would like help developing ideas on how to reach children not connected to programs or activities. Please send ideas to Lisa Nugent, lisa.nugent@ride.ri.gov.
- Q: How can you advertise State Pre-K classrooms when you do not know which communities will be eligible?
A: The lottery is advertised to everyone. Once eligible communities are determined, RIDE will notify all families to inform them whether their community is eligible and if they have a classroom slot.
- Q: If you do not receive all the State Pre-K classroom funding you requested, how will you determine which communities receive funding?
A: RIDE knows which communities to prioritize and will distribute the funds accordingly.
- Q: What percentage of students from the lottery get assigned to a classroom?
A: About 50% of students from the lottery get assigned a classroom. Last year we had over 2000 applicants for 1080 seats. Before school started, an additional 12% of students were placed in classrooms from the waitlist because some parents chose to place their children elsewhere.
- Q: Can families attend State Pre-K programs outside of their home district?
A: No, because many are identified with disabilities and those children have to be serviced in their home district.
- Some of the PDG Supplemental Funds were used to extend the Boston Public School Curriculum beyond Pre-K classrooms to kindergarten and first grade classrooms.
- Mary Varr was instrumental in Woonsocket's involvement in the summit series. Working together, LEAs and community-based programs realized they did not have a common language. Jointly, they developed goals and action plans. At a successful citywide event, child care centers, family child care homes and the Woonsocket school department talked about how to get children ready for school. Now all parts of the system are working together on common goals. Woonsocket is developing a video featuring kindergarten children discussing what it is like to be in kindergarten.

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- PDG Supplemental Funding will help develop a survey of kindergarten teachers to find out why they are not utilizing information from TSG at transition.

POLICY AND PROGRAM UPDATES

Child Care Licensing

Caitlin Molina and Veronica Davis updated the Council on child care licensing. (See slides). Key comments and questions included:

- The governor is committed to better coordinating early childhood services through DCYF and DHS. As part of the governor's proposed budget, DCYF's licensing unit would transition to DHS. This would allow DHS to continue to issue child care subsidies for working families, while also having the ability to address licensing concerns for programs and families. Currently, they are not able to answer licensing questions because the two offices are housed in separate state agencies, which confuses many providers. Many states coordinate both of these offices within the same department.
- During the transition and after, the health and safety of children will be the paramount concern for both DCYF and DHS. This will require continued coordination of child protective services between DHS and DCYF. Even after the DCYF licensing unit transitions to DHS, DCYF will still have strong representation in programs on issues related to child welfare, particularly when there are allegations of abuse or neglect, which DCYF is statutorily responsible for investigating.
- DHS will have a clear division of duties between its subsidy office and its licensing office. This division will ensure that providers do not feel like their licensing is affected by whether they receive subsidies.
- After the data system transitions, DHS will examine efficiencies and will try to streamline the process for business owners. This will include eliminating duplication in reporting similar information to licensing, BrightStars, subsidies, and RIDE.
- The current focus of both DHS and DCYF is to ensure that there is no lapse in monitoring and general services for existing licensed providers when the system transitions. The goal is to have the data system available throughout the process.
- Q: What is the fiscal implication of the data system transition?
A: The transition will be budget neutral. Once the transition is complete, there might be a need for additional investments to improve the system.
- Q: What is the timeline for the transition?
A: The reorganization will occur in July from a budget perspective, but the data system would not move right away. The timeline is still flexible at this point.

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Caitlin Molina discussed how the state will use the \$4.1 million PDG grant to strengthen our Birth to 5 delivery model. The funding will support implementation of universal Pre-K as well as a workforce study, a facilities assessment and a strategic plan that coordinates the strategic plans of various state agencies. The state has hired a PDG grant manager who will run the grant full time and will coordinate work streams. Grant funds will support a strategic cross agency collaborative effort involving family home visiting, family childcare homes, infant toddler care and EI.

Early Childhood Facilities Needs Assessment

Cindy Larson updated the Council on the Early Childhood Facilities Needs Assessment. (See slides).

Comments and questions included:

- LISC has provided funding, technical assistance, training and resources, advocacy and outdoor space improvements to the RI childcare and early learning community.
- The 2019 RI Early Learning Facilities Needs Assessment Project will launch in March and run through the summer. Once completed, the project will produce a preliminary report in the summer and a final public report in the fall.
- The project will focus on four areas: quality and condition of spaces, access issues, financing and funding implications, and regulatory issues.
- The project will involve working closely with organizations, LEAs and municipalities to think through space priorities.
- By mapping out facilities throughout the state, the project hopes to identify access gaps in space and quality.
- Site visits for this project will be different from the randomized site visits conducted during the 2014 ECE Assessment. These site visits will be more targeted and aligned with state objectives.
- Part of the assessment will involve looking at other places around the country that have implemented systems supporting facilities.
- The assessment project will map regulations relating to facilities to see where the state could improve efficiency and eliminate barriers.
- For the assessment project, surveys will not be the traditional type of survey. Instead, the project's surveys will consist of conversations with every provider and LEA in the state. The goal is to have back and forth exchanges to understand fully each particular situation.
- The primary assessment team is the LISC team, but there will also be consultants such as an architect, a graphic designer, and a market research partner. Anne Connery will also join the team.
- Q: Will the facilities assessment be center based or will it also include family childcare homes?

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A: The project will prioritize centers, but facility issues in family childcare homes could be examined through focus groups. LISC will look to other states to determine best practices for this.

- The time frame for this assessment project is greater than the 2014 assessment so there will be more time to offer concrete recommendations.

Think Babies

Leanne Barrett updated the Council on Think Babies. (See slides). The following comments were made:

- The National Partnership for Women and Families fact sheet for Rhode Island is available on the RI KIDS COUNT website. <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/paid-leave/strengthening-paid-family-leave-will-help-rhode-island-families.pdf>
- Paid family leave in Rhode Island needs to improve so more low wage workers can access it. The number of weeks and the percentage of wage replacement both need to increase.
- Moving the DCYF licensing unit to DHS will improve childcare licensing. Another improvement would be putting inspection reports online.
- Rhode Island has convened a Wage Strategy Work Group consisting of 12-15 people. The meetings will run through July with the goal of developing a pilot wage enhancement project for infant/toddler child care teachers and recommendations to improve compensation for home visiting and Early Intervention staff. Child care, home visiting and EI are all facing a crisis in attracting and retaining qualified staff, which an increase in wages or a wage supplement would address.
- There was a great luncheon on January 28th celebrating young children.
- There will be op-eds coming out soon on the state of babies. Zero to Three will rank states based on policy goals. Rhode Island is in the top quarter of states because of its strong infant toddler policies, but we still have a long way to go.
- On March 28th, the AAP will host a film, dinner, and panel discussion at the Rhodes on the Pawtuxet from 6-8pm. The film will be *No Small Matter*.
- Last year, thirty-six legislators participated in Rhode Island Reads. There are new participants this year.
- Families with children under age 3 are invited to participate in Strolling Thunder on May 1, 2019. Families that register and attend are eligible to receive a 1 year membership to the Roger Williams Park Zoo. Families will advocate at the State House for child care, Pre-K, home visiting, and paid family leave.

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- COMMENT: Everyone should attend a Nurse-Family Partnership graduation. It is a great experience.
- At Strolling Thunder, BrightStars will offer professional development hours and a luncheon for the early childhood workforce. Anne Douglass from Boston will be the keynote speaker. Participants at this luncheon will join the families on their walk to the State House.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Jenn Kaufman, Susan Dickstein and Aimee Mitchell made announcements. (See slides). Comments included:

- On May 13th there will be a full day conference looking at the intersection of attachment, trauma and culture. There will be conversations on collaboration around trauma informed systems. Chandra Ghosh Ippen is the keynote speaker. Lia Stuhlsatz, presiding justice of the Safe and Secure Baby Court, will also speak. Register soon.
- The recommendations collected at the last Early Learning Council meeting on supporting the social emotional needs of children in early care settings are informing the development of a survey. EOHHS will distribute that survey in the next couple of weeks. EOHHS will present a draft plan based on the survey results at the next Early Learning Council meeting.
- EOHHS is revising the Kids Connect program with input from current providers to improve access to the program and to offer more support for mental health consultation in the classroom.
- Aimee Mitchell will be leaving Children's Friend to become the Chief of Staff at DCYF. In this role, she will look across systems and focus on administering a human centered system.
- The 25th anniversary of the RI KIDS COUNT Factbook breakfast will be on April 8th and all are invited to attend.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no additional comments or questions from the public.