

# ***Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting***

Wednesday, March 24, 2021 9:00 a.m.-11:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting

## **Meeting Summary**

### **AGENDA SUMMARY**

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

- Welcome and Opening Remarks
- Birth to 8 State Policy Update
- Presentation/Discussion: Learning, Equity, and Accelerated Pathways (LEAP) Task Force
- Office of Child Care
- Staffed Family Child Care Network
- Central Providence Opportunities Initiative
- RI Pre-K Expansion Plan
- Announcements and Public comment

### **KEY POINTS**

Key discussion points from the meeting are summarized below:

#### **WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS**

Director Courtney Hawkins, Deputy Commissioner Ana Riley, and Elizabeth Burke Bryant welcomed the Council. The following comment was made:

- Rhode Island has been a national leader with over 70% of schools providing in-person instruction since September. Despite many challenges, all partners have worked collaboratively to support students and families.

#### **BIRTH TO 8 STATE POLICY UPDATE**

Kayla Rosen and Leanne Barrett presented a summary of the Governor's Birth to 8 budget proposal for FY22 and an overview of relevant state legislation that has been introduced. (See slides.) The following comments and questions were made:

- A clothing allowance for children age 0 to 3 is one of the Rhode Island Works improvements proposed for the FY22 budget. Currently, the youngest children are not included in the clothing allowance.
- The new funding in the FY22 budget for several ECCE priorities will help to ensure that our youngest children and their families have a strong start and are connected to services.
- COMMENT: Budget initiatives were included in the governor's budget before the American Rescue Plan Act was passed. We expect additional enhancements in investment for early childhood through the American Rescue Plan Act funding. The governor and legislature will work together to determine how that money will be allocated, but it is still early in the process. When there is more information, we will present it to this group.
- We will not know the full budget situation until our June meeting.

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- We are continuing to expand the RI Pre-K program during the 2021-2022 school year. Funding secured from PDG B-5 and COVID-19 related funding from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER) will be used to support that expansion.
- There are Zoom meetings this afternoon on the proposed bill to extend Medicaid coverage to 12 months postpartum and the proposed bill to provide Medicaid and commercial insurance coverage for perinatal Doula services.
- The Rhode Island Child Care is Essential bill seeks to increase or maintain current COVID-19 rates to meet federal equal access standards and promote access to high-quality care. It would restore family income eligibility levels to the pre-2007 levels, cap the family co-pay amounts at the federal affordability level, and provide a \$20 per week bonus for infants under 18 months because they need significantly more staffing resources and individualized care than toddlers.
- The RI Early Educator Investment Act asks the state to establish cross-departmental goals for early educator wages in child care, Early Intervention, family home visiting, and RI Pre-K.
- There is legislation to improve Rhode Island's paid family leave program (aka Temporary Caregivers Insurance). RI was a leader in its paid family leave program, but now we have the lowest number of weeks and lowest wage replacement among the states that offer paid family leave. Both Connecticut and Massachusetts offer paid family programs with higher wage replacement and more weeks, twelve weeks instead of RI's four weeks. It is important to increase wage replacement levels so that low-wage workers can afford to take time off when they have a baby. Currently low-wage workers are less likely to use the benefit than high-wage workers.
- There is legislation that has been introduced to increase the amount RI Works families receive in cash assistance. Families receiving cash assistance have not received an increase in more than 30 years.
- The Rhode Island Quality Enhancement in Afterschool and Out Of School Time Act has been introduced and would provide additional funding for after school and summer enrichment programs. RIDE would manage the requested \$2 million.

## **PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION: LEARNING, EQUITY, AND ACCELERATED PATHWAYS (LEAP) TASK FORCE**

Deputy Commissioner Ana Riley discussed the work of the LEAP Task Force. (See slides.) Comments and questions included the following:

- The Task Force consisted of 40 stakeholder members representing all populations involved in Pre-K to 12.
- The seven meetings were recorded and are available on the RIDE YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCI9aP7qCwsyieWrQXbaAQGw>

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- Multiple feedback sessions collected as much information as possible. The Task Force welcomes additional feedback on the draft recommendations.
- LEAs, districts, charter schools, and education agencies are in the best position to support students. RIDE seeks to empower these groups by providing the right conditions and setting appropriate targets.
- RIDE wants students to be successful and accelerate their learning.
- The Task Force seeks to prioritize partnerships and intentional collaboration across the entire educational system and all its partners.
- The 5 absolute priorities of the Task Force are:
  - Engage and energize students, families, educators and communities
  - Ensure students have access to high quality and personalized support from adults
  - Universally screen all students and align resources
  - Improve and support student transitions
  - Close the digital divide
    - Pre-K and Kindergarten students, in particular, did not attend school this year. We need to bring them back to school so they can receive supports and services. The goal is to launch a statewide campaign to engage families and bring them back.
- The Task Force Recommendations fall into 3 buckets:
  - RIDE
    - RIDE will address structural educational inequalities across the state through anti-racist and anti-bias policies and practices.
    - RIDE will elevate LEAP absolute priorities to support the recommendations through policy and regulation.
    - RIDE will create alignment across preexisting systems, partnerships, and initiatives and will ask everyone else to do the same.
    - RIDE will launch Summer 2021 work at the state level to create programming that will begin in Summer 2022.
    - RIDE will shift from an agency of compliance to an agency of support through proactive communications and public transparency.
    - RIDE will provide supplemental funds to districts.
      - Districts used the initial \$46 million in ESSER 1 funds to reopen. ESSER 2 and 3 funds are targeted to support students in mitigating learning loss, accelerating learning and reengaging students disconnected from education this year.
  - Districts/LEAs
    - Districts will provide targeted, progressive supports to those most in need, particularly those who have been historically marginalized.

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- Districts will untether learning from seat time and will reimagine mastery. This could involve extending the school day in a manner that provides new ways of engaging students and new opportunities for enrichment.
- Districts will continue to purchase and implement high quality instructional materials and to provide additional learning for teachers.
- Districts will leverage relationships with community partners.
- Districts will remove barriers to collaboration.
- Districts will reconfigure human capital to provide in-school services to students who need support.
- Community Based Organizations (CBOs)
  - CBOs will provide programming that promotes academic growth and social emotional wellbeing.
  - CBOs will leverage existing relationships with students and families to develop strategies to engage students.
  - CBOs will partner with municipalities, parent organizations and school systems.
  - CBOs will create intentional engagement with and alignment to LEAs.
  - CBOs will join with districts to engage in professional learning.
- Additional information on the Task Force can be found at:  
<https://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/AdditionalInformation/LEAPTaskForce.aspx>
- RIDE is working on an equity tool that will guide all projects at RIDE. RIDE will share the tool with districts once it is complete.
- RIDE is talking to districts about participating in an equity audit to address racism and bias.
- Q: Any thoughts about learning recovery strategies for B-8?  
A: One focus is on supporting districts in purchasing and implementing high quality curricula. RIDE is also exploring high quality curricula for Pre-K.
- Q: Have you thought about removing barriers to sharing data? For years, Head Start has been looking to access data as children move through the educational system. It is beneficial for districts to have access to Head Start data, and it is also helpful for Head Start to have access to data on how students are performing in later years so Head Start can continually improve upon the services they provide.  
A: RIDE wants to establish a universal data sharing agreement that will serve as a model for all CBOs and districts to use at all levels and in both directions, including summer enrichment providers and higher education.
- Q: Does the Task Force support encouraging LEAs and early childhood programs to have sustaining MOUs?  
A: If you have a good model MOU, then RIDE can share that with districts. It is beneficial to have strong MOUs that allow for collaboration.

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- Q: Are there strategies for learning recovery for the younger children that did not attend an educational program this year?  
A: With the exception of Providence, state Pre-K classrooms did not see a reduction in attendance. That could be because of the lottery to enroll and the attendance requirement attached to enrollment. RIDE has been strategizing around the reduction in Kindergarten attendance, including increasing family awareness during summer work. Starting in September, state Pre-K attendance and other data will be added to the RIDE system, which will help with data sharing and the development of strategies related to that data.
- Q: Did the Task Force consider Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in their plans?  
A: Yes, ACEs are included in the Task Force document. Social emotional learning and wellbeing is a priority across all districts and funding will go to support that work over the next year. Some districts have already provided ACE training and RIDE will make recommendations to all districts on which training programs have the best research base. RIDE encourages districts to hire more mental health workers, but there are not enough people to do the work needed. Districts will need to utilize community partners and increase professional learning for educators to provide all the necessary mental health services. In order to inform the development of the draft recommendations of the LEAP Task Force, the Early Learning Council shared with the Task Force its Social Emotional Health Recommendations and B through 8 Recommendations as well as its work with the Education Commission of the States on linking the early years to the early grades. The Early Learning Council also shared its recommendations on early educator compensation since stabilizing the early childhood workforce is essential for a high quality early childhood experience for children.
- Q: KIDSNET includes some educational data from Child Outreach and medical data from pediatricians. Since absenteeism is often tied to health issues, could data on absenteeism also be included so it could be viewed by pediatricians?  
A: RIDE will look into sharing that data and whether it is prevented by HIPAA or HERPA.

## **OFFICE OF CHILD CARE**

Caitlin Molina, Katja Hamler, and Lisa Hildebrand presented updates from the Office of Child Care. (See slides.) Key comments and questions included:

- The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act child care funding is one of potentially four buckets of federal funding available to child care programs.
  - To support recovery and stabilization during the pandemic, just under \$24 million from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act will fund an operationalized stabilization grant program for child care providers.
  - The American Rescue Plan Act allocates additional funding that will go directly to Head Start programs.
  - The American Rescue Plan Act also provides \$57 million in stabilization grants not covered by this presentation.
  - An additional \$35.7 million is offered through CCDBG with guidance similar to the block grant administered by DCYF.

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- As a leader, Rhode Island convened Region 1 state child care secretaries and commissioners to align on a common framework for distributing federal aid to child care programs. Every state in the region committed to assigning a minimum of 65% of its Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act child care funding toward stabilizing early child care programs via stabilization grants. Rhode Island's commitment of 75% of its CRRSA allocations, totaling \$17.9 million, exceeded this collective commitment.
- For a better understanding the impact of COVID-19 on child care during the pandemic, DHS collected data through a series of statistically valid surveys sent to all licensed child care programs. The data collected showed that programs are struggling to resume full enrollment and are operating, on average, at 75% capacity. CCAP enrollment is down 44% since the pandemic started. DHS is working on strategies to increase family awareness and participation in CCAP.
- The Child Care Stabilization Grant program moves away from an individual child cost model to an operational cost model. The grant program seeks to support programs in reopening and to help stabilize them for ongoing operations.
- The grant program is available to all DHS licensed and DHS approved license exempt providers. The goal of the grant program is for 90% of providers to submit successful applications. To reach that goal, DHS has partnered with Public Consulting Group to administer the grant application and to offer technical assistance to providers needing help with completing the application.
- The grant will provide eligible centers with a \$4500 stipend per classroom, based on licensed capacity, distributed in two rounds. There is a \$50,000 cap on each distribution for a total cap of \$100,000.
- The grant will provide eligible family child care providers with two program based \$1500 stipends released at the same time, amounting to a single distribution of \$3000. Group family child care homes are receiving a slightly larger program based stipend of \$4500.
- DHS is strongly recommending that providers use the stipends in whatever way best supports them in stabilizing their budgets, remaining open and maintaining compliance with health and safety standards. DHS is not requiring any specific categories of spend, however.
- Centers will receive a 20% add-on incentive if they dedicate 20% of their round one award to wage enhancements, e.g., increased wages, hazard pay, spot bonuses. The round two application is a short survey that includes an attestation that the center committed 20% of round one funds to wage enhancements. Once that attestation is made, a center will receive the 20% add-on with its round two distribution. The add-on need not apply to wages.
- This 20% incentive is only offered to centers because workforce stabilization funds are already accounted for in the family child care providers' program based stipends. This decreases the administrative burden for family child care providers accessing assistance.

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- The short round one grant application goes online on Monday, March 29<sup>th</sup>. Providers can apply on a rolling basis. The round one grant application closed on May 21<sup>st</sup>. The round two application will be available in early July.
- The next two months will focus on comprehensive outreach and technical assistance to increase awareness of the grant funding and to help providers prepare applications. The first in a series of webinars will be available this week.
- For now, this grant includes Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act child care funding. DHS will add American Rescue Plan Act funding later.
- If you have any questions, email Caitlin, [Caitlin.molina@dhs.ri.gov](mailto:Caitlin.molina@dhs.ri.gov) or Katja, [katja.hamler@dhs.ri.gov](mailto:katja.hamler@dhs.ri.gov)
- Q: Are the applications for the round one money available now and due March 29<sup>th</sup> or are they being release March 29<sup>th</sup>?  
A: Applications are being released on March 29<sup>th</sup>. All providers will receive an email with a link to the live application on Monday morning.
- It has been remarkable to see the different systems coming together to support child care during the pandemic.
- Q: Is the webinar this week?  
A: Providers will receive a link to the webinar this week through direct email, one for family child care providers and a separate one for centers. The webinar is recorded. Upcoming webinars will be made available through email as well.
- BrightStars is working closely with DHS to strengthen the BrightStars governance structure. BrightStars will reestablish a steering committee to help think through ways to strengthen the public private relationship that has been the foundation of the BrightStars work over the past 12 years.
- The steering committee goals will be to organize the governance framework for RIAEYC and to solicit information from the community to modify or strengthen the QRIS standards and/or the BrightStars policies and procedures.
- The steering committee will include state partners and other stakeholders.
- Anybody can submit a proposal for review by the steering committee.
- The steering committee will submit approved proposals to an advisory committee that will meet quarterly. The advisory committee will establish subcommittees as needed to convene more frequently and to research more deeply.

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- BrightStars is open to ideas and suggestions to make the process more manageable for child care programs.
- If you have questions, email Lisa, [lhildebrand@riaeyc.org](mailto:lhildebrand@riaeyc.org).

### **STAFFED FAMILY CHILD CARE NETWORK**

Dulari Tahbildar updated the Council on the Staffed Family Child Care Network. (See slides.) The following comments and questions were made:

- The SEIU Education and Support Fund's (ESF) mission is to provide education and training programs that empower workers, raise standards, and promote high quality jobs.
- ESF is not a union even though it is part of the name. ESF is a separate entity that works closely with the union.
- In Rhode Island, ESF manages the labor-management training fund for DHS licensed and license exempt family child care programs who serve families enrolled in CCAP. It is a collectively bargained benefit. There are 385 family child care programs enrolled in CCAP that benefit from ESF programming. There are additional family child care providers who are licensed, but who serve only private pay families.
- Q: Does a family child care provider need to be a dues paying member of the union to benefit from ESF educational programming?  
A: No, but the family child care provider must be a CCAP provider.
- ESF educational programming includes professional development and training, technical assistance and coaching, workforce development, and community and network building.
- ESF will support family child care providers in accessing the DHS Child Care Stabilization Grant funds by helping them submit successful applications.
- There is not one agreed upon model for a staffed family child care network, but various models have been doing great work.
- Staffed family child care networks lead to increased sustainability, improved quality and enhanced community connections.
- Each community must decide which activities and benefits its network should provide.
- The Rhode Island staffed family child care network is aligned with the union, which increases its leveraging power at both the state and national level.
- ESF has a partnership with All Our Kin, which manages successful family child care networks in Connecticut and NYC.

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- Family child care providers need to be at the center of the planning and decision-making process.
- ESF's interactive strategic planning process resulted in a provider centered vision statement for what the family child care network could be in Rhode Island. It also resulted in a list of programmatic priority areas.
- The national ESF organization received a grant to design family child care networks in four states, including Rhode Island. Utilizing a human centered design methodology, the four states are planning a process for national network building. States will submit implementation plans in September for funding from private philanthropy.
- If you have questions, contact Dulari, [dulari.tahbilder@seiuesf.org](mailto:dulari.tahbilder@seiuesf.org).
- Q: How will non-CCAP family child care providers get information about and access to training and support?  
A: Because ESF's training fund is a collectively bargained benefit, it is available only to CCAP family child care providers. Communities can have more than one network, however, so Rhode Island could establish a network for private pay family child care providers.

## **CENTRAL PROVIDENCE OPPORTUNITIES INITIATIVE**

Jennifer Hawkins presented on the Central Providence Opportunities Initiative. (See slides.) Key comments included the following:

- One Neighborhood Builders is a community development corporation based in the Olneyville section of Providence. Its mission is to develop affordable housing and to engage neighbors across greater Providence to cultivate healthy, vibrant and safe neighborhoods.
- One Neighborhood Builders has developed over 500 homes. It has expanded to East Providence and plans to expand to other cities as well.
- The Central Providence Health Equity Zone (HEZ) is one of ten HEZs across the state. Life expectancy in this HEZ is eight years less than in more affluent areas of Providence.
- A fall 2019 survey asked 265 residents in the HEZ about impediments to economic mobility. Almost 50% said there were no well-paying jobs nearby. The majority had to cut back on food and necessities to prioritize housing and utilities and 51% said there was no affordable housing available. A third of residents said there was no access to affordable child care options. Families that fell below the federal poverty level were more likely to have access to affordable child care because of dedicated programs available only to them but not to higher wage earners. A positive sign is that 73% of residents said there were enough affordable healthy food options available. Residents with lower income had more access to affordable food options because of SNAP.
- The mission of the Central Providence Opportunities Initiative is to improve social and economic mobility for residents in the Central Providence HEZ. Economic mobility is the most salient social

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determinant of health. The two-year initiative was awarded an \$8 million grant to work on economic mobility in the 02908 and 02909 zip codes.

- The five things the Initiative is working to accomplish during the two years are:
  - Amplify and coordinate the existing work to improve social and economic conditions
  - Invest \$5 million in new and existing initiatives that lead to expanding affordable housing, increasing third grade literacy, improving residents' wages and skills, and supporting the profitability of local businesses
  - Learn how place-based community-led transformation happens and develop baseline metrics for quantifying economic mobility
  - Suggest new public sector policies and legislation that will help the Initiative achieve long term transformation
  - Participate in EOHHS/RIDOH-led scaling working groups that will inform the state's HEZ expansion strategy and its comprehensive approach to place-based equitable revitalization
    - There will be four working groups: housing, local business support, living wages, 0 - 8 early education
  
- There will be listening sessions by mid-May.

## **RI PRE-K EXPANSION PLAN**

Lisa Nugent and Zoe McGrath updated the Council on the RI Pre-K Expansion Plan. (See slides.)

Comments included:

- Grant applications for new state Pre-K programs closed yesterday.
  
- Rhode Island is currently at 26% of our universal Pre-K goal.
  
- RIDE is looking to expand the state Pre-K program this year with additional PDG and GEER funding.
  
- RIDE is piloting new models to remove barriers without impacting quality.
  
- RIDE received applications from over 25 programs and over 50 classrooms with about \$7 million requested. There is \$2 million funding available.
  
- RIDE received multiple applications for all models presented so all pilots will be able to move forward.
  
- New classrooms will be announced around April 19<sup>th</sup>.
  
- The lottery for parents will start late spring and will include the newly awarded classrooms.
  
- The RIDE state Pre-K page has information about the lottery and a Survey Monkey for families to fill-out to receive lottery notifications.

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<https://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/EarlyChildhoodEducation/RIPre-K.aspx#31841520-lottery-application>

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PUBLIC COMMENT**

Comments from the public included:

- RIDE has a high quality curriculum RFI out now for vendors to submit early childhood education curricula for endorsement on CECE regulations. RIDE is reviewing curricula for 3, 4, and 5 year olds, and is also collecting curricula that have a B to 3 component and/or a K to 3 component. If providers want a curriculum reviewed, have the vendor send it to RIDE or contact RIDE to have the RFI sent to the vendor. RIDE will announce the endorsed curricula in June. The RFI is posted on the RIELDS webpage:  
<https://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/EarlyChildhoodEducation/EarlyLearningandDevelopmentStandards.aspx>
- The Aspen Institute awarded the West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation, CCAP, Dunamis Synergy Initiative, and ResCare its 2Gen Policy Acceleration Partnership Grant. The kickoff is today.
- The Coalition Against Gun Violence urges Early Learning Council members to consider the bill against guns on school grounds. Go to <https://www.ricagv.org/> to see the bills and to submit testimony via email or in person.