

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Wednesday, March 29, 2023, 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Rhode Island

188 Valley St., Suite 125

Providence, RI

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
- Child Care WAGE\$ in Rhode Island
- Update: Early Childhood Governance Working Group
- Update: Children's Cabinet/RIDE/DHS Report and Recommendations on RI Pre-K Expansion
- 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, Acting Director Kimberly Brito and Paige Clausius-Parks welcomed the Council. (See slides). The following comments were made:

- Parents and families can learn about the RI Pre-K registration and lottery at www.riprek.com. More information is coming to the website soon.
- RIDE received \$4 million in funding for grants to community partners that are working with students needing extra support after the pandemic. The governor gave an additional \$4 million, for a total of \$8 million. Grants have been awarded to 21 partners statewide, including the Boys and Girls Club. Examples of funded activities include after school STEAM programs.
- The deadline for Surveyworks is April 7th. We already have 100,000 responses, but we want more than the 125,000 responses received last year. Data from Surveyworks informs school practices.
- A reminder that the purpose of the Early Learning Council is to provide a forum for community members and state leaders to work together to improve outcomes for young children, birth to 8. It is an opportunity to provide advice and feedback to the governor and his administration.

BIRTH TO 8 STATE POLICY UPDATE

Meg Hassan, Kayla Rosen, and Leanne Barrett updated the Council on 2023 legislative and budget proposals related to birth to 8 policy. (See slides.) The following comments and questions were made:

- RI Pre-K was expanded by leveraging many fund sources, but, after this school year, time limited federal funds will end and 800 seats could be lost as a result. The Governor has included state general revenue funding in his FY24 state budget proposal to maintain all existing RI Pre-K seats. State funding is needed to maintain all of the existing 2300 seats, with further investments necessary for operations, administration, and maintenance, such as updating the lottery system and the RISES data system in development at DHS.

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Wednesday, March 29, 2023, 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Rhode Island

188 Valley St., Suite 125

Providence, RI

Meeting Summary

- As described in the December 2022 state RI Pre-K expansion plan, investments are needed to make sure the RI Pre-K system is ready to expand to 5000 seats by 2028 and, eventually, 7000 seats and beyond. This expansion will require investments across the mixed delivery system both in the quality of programs and in the support of the educator workforce to help them pursue career pathways and certifications.
- The Wavemaker Fellowship is a competitive student loan state tax credit program to help recipients pay down student debt. It is offered to people working in the science and technology and health sector fields in Rhode Island. The governor wants to add eligibility for teachers and increase funding for the entire program, which is proposed in his FY24 budget. RIDE will determine the definition of “teacher.”
- With only a one-year temporary rate increase for 2022-2023, one of the five agencies operating the First Connections newborn home visiting program terminated their contract in July 2022. Family Service RI has been able to expand their service area to cover South County Home Health’s territory. A permanent rate increase is needed to keep this program going.
- Compared to last year, family home visiting is serving fewer children, due in part to the staffing crisis. Federal money for family home visiting now has a state matching requirement, which did not exist previously, so the state will need to commit funds to family home visiting beginning in the FY25 state budget so Rhode Island will be able to access federal money and sustain services. Rhode Island currently provides no state funding for family home visiting.
- Speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists in early childhood education all qualify for the Wavemaker Fellowship currently, but legislation is requesting that 10 slots be specifically reserved for them.
- Oregon, New Mexico, California, Washington, Georgia, and Ohio currently offer or are considering offering stable continuous Medicaid coverage for all eligible children to age 6 once they are approved at any point before age 6.
- Child Care for All is a new state legislative proposal that has been introduced in the House that would help all families access quality child care regardless of income and would provide contracts to all programs. It delivers funding for quality and does not limit program revenue to just what families can afford.
- Historically, half day preschool programs were approved to operate by RIDE and full day child care programs were licensed by DCYF (now licensed by DHS). Many programs had both a licensed from DCYF and an approval from RIDE. For at least 10 years, all community-based programs have

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Wednesday, March 29, 2023, 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Rhode Island

188 Valley St., Suite 125

Providence, RI

Meeting Summary

been required to be licensed as the foundation and RIDE preschool approval has been voluntary. New legislation proposes to eliminate this two-tiered system by eliminating the RIDE operating approval in state law. The proposed legislation also requires schools to participate in the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System.

- The summer camp licensing proposed legislation focuses on summer camp programs that want to accept CCAP subsidies.

PDG Planning Grant

- Rhode Island won a 1 year PDG planning grant meant to focus on strategic planning efforts to advance the state's early childhood system. The grant runs concurrently with the no cost extension of the PDG renewal grant. Both grants end December 30, 2023. The planning grant cannot be used to pay for seats in programs. If the grant program continues to be funded, we think we might be eligible to apply for future funding because we were awarded this planning grant.
- The focus of the planning grant is to fund areas repeatedly discussed by the RI early childhood community: workforce pipeline and supports, dedicated focus on infants and toddlers, support of the mixed delivery system, family voice and choice, equitable access to programs, and supports for priority populations.
- COVID precipitated changes in the workforce. Therefore, we must repeat the wage study because the information contained in the earlier study is now out of date. We need clear and current information to develop recommendations to inform future practices.
- This planning grant will allow RI to pilot a tiered supplemental compensation program, WAGE\$. Half of the grant funds will go toward this pilot, which will help increase the workforce pipeline by providing funds directly to educators.
- The RI Pre-K expansion report was not able to deeply focus on infants and toddlers, so this planning grant is an opportunity to do so.
- The planning grant will fund the Infant/Toddler Mental Health Task Force's efforts to gather family and provider input through surveys and other methods. Grant funds can then be used to implement work developed in response to that feedback because it is related to planning.
- BrightStars was last formally reviewed in 2014. The planning grant will fund a new review of BrightStars to ensure its components are updated and aligned with national best practices.

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Wednesday, March 29, 2023, 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Rhode Island

188 Valley St., Suite 125

Providence, RI

Meeting Summary

- Improvements to the RI Pre-K lottery system will help families with siblings and/or families with specific program preferences.
- Many children and families are engaged with multiple providers, and we want a more cohesive experience for those families while helping providers offer more effective supports.
- COMMENT: The Head Start model has perfected its robust developmental support system over many years so RI should look to Head Start for ideas when planning its Pre-K system.
- COMMENT: As 3 year olds are included in RI Pre-K classrooms, we should work with Head Start for outreach and lottery coordination.
- COMMENT: Through First 10's The Basics program, Woonsocket Head Start offered play and learns in the community and used those programs as recruitment tools to find families not otherwise engaged with the early childhood education system. Communities participating in RI's First 10 program include Woonsocket, Johnston, East Providence, and Westerly. Providence will join next year. First 10 offers a way to access children that are not usually accessible. The program is funded by the PDG grant that is ending in December.
- Q: Where will the early educator registry/data system reside?
A: Funding for the data system will come from several sources: the no cost extension of the PDG renewal grant, CCDBG money, and state budget money for the workforce registry. The resulting system needs to be well-integrated and configurable to be helpful. Right now, the system is still in the procurement process, and we hope to provide more information about it at the next Early Learning Council meeting.
- COMMENT: Having authentic family engagement will require DHS, DCYF, and RIDOH to evaluate how certain meetings are conducted and how family engagement is happening, which is a process in itself. The agencies need to operate differently to ensure they share power with families and actually engage with them, especially with families that have challenging schedules, speak languages other than English, or have had negative experiences engaging with agencies. Agencies will have to listen and make changes accordingly.
- Families who provide feedback related to the PDG planning grant work will receive compensation for their time.

CHILD CARE WAGES IN RHODE ISLAND

Meg Hassan, Nicole Chiello, and Lisa Hildebrand presented on the WAGES program in Rhode Island. (See slides). Key comments and questions included the following:

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Wednesday, March 29, 2023, 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Rhode Island

188 Valley St., Suite 125

Providence, RI

Meeting Summary

- The T.E.A.C.H. National center requires that the same entity that manages T.E.A.C.H. manages WAGE\$ and the programs have many structural similarities. That is why RIAEYC is implementing both programs.
- Step Up to WAGE\$ was an initiative for states with short term money to put towards it. In RI, those funds came from PDG.
- WAGE\$ is a supplemental compensation stipend provided directly to educators. Programs still need to confirm that an educator works for them. The stipend helps with compensation, but also acts as an incentive for retention.
- We anticipate a number of stipends will be renewed every six months, but some people will come in and out of the program as they change employers.
- Educators with more higher educational credentials will receive larger stipends.
- There will be specific outreach to infant and/or toddler educators and family child care providers because those providers are more likely to be lower paid.
- Educators will apply like they did for retention bonuses. After they apply, there will be a verification process for credentials. The transcript evaluation process will be similar to the process utilized by T.E.A.C.H. and BrightStars. There will be two stipend distribution periods over the course of the planning grant, but the hope is to find funding to extend the program for subsequent years.
- Q: Black and brown educators often have an associate's degree as opposed to a bachelor's degree, even though they might have more experience. How are you ensuring that this stipend is not perpetuating racial and ethnic disparities?
A: WAGE\$ is intended to help individuals increase qualifications, by working together with T.E.A.C.H. to help people in the program earn more qualifications and continue on the career pathway. Many people in the T.E.A.C.H. program are women of color. Once they earn additional credentials then the stipend will go up. Outreach for the WAGE\$ program will focus on infant and toddler educators and family child care providers, who are often women of color. The materials and many staff members are bilingual. We recognize the importance of not perpetuating disparities and will actively work to avoid it.
- COMMENT: WAGE\$ cannot be seen in isolation from everything else happening in early childhood education. The retention bonus offered during the pandemic was important because it was a flat amount to anyone regardless of education level. WAGE\$ is on top of that retention bonus. We

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Wednesday, March 29, 2023, 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Rhode Island

188 Valley St., Suite 125

Providence, RI

Meeting Summary

must increase higher education opportunities to help providers get additional compensation support.

- We want this to become a longer term model so people can go through T.E.A.C.H. and then receive more compensation through WAGE\$.
- COMMENT: A government supported universal child care system would provide higher rates to programs so they could adequately compensate employees. Because we do not have that, our CCAP and private pay rates are determined by what families and the market can pay, which suppresses wages because employers cannot afford to cover expenses and pay more in wages. That is why we need a program like WAGE\$.
- Q: What are your tight deadlines?
A: The PDG funding expires on December 30th. We are working quickly to complete the work so all WAGE\$ funds through PDG can be distributed before that time.

UPDATE: EARLY CHILDHOOD GOVERNANCE WORKING GROUP

Kayla Rosen updated the council and led a brainstorm/discussion on the Early Childhood Governance Working Group. (See slides). Comments and questions included:

- Early childhood programs are split across difference agencies, which creates challenges in oversight and administration.
- Many states are moving to a more coordinated or consolidated governance structure for early childhood education.
- “Early childhood program” could mean a lot of things. What is the scope of the work?
- Our tentative vendor for the Early Childhood Governance Working Group is Foresight Law and Policy in partnership with Watershed Advisors.
- Our working group’s focus is on how we should approach this work while thinking about where we want to be as a system. We need to define what our goals are and what aspirations we have for how the system will function.
- We need to address barriers that might be stopping us from achieving the goals we have already established for our early childhood system. We do not need new goals, just better ways of accomplishing the ones we have.
- This is a long term economic investment. Early learning consistently requires high public spending. Therefore, buy in to the system is necessary to ensure proper government support.

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Wednesday, March 29, 2023, 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Rhode Island

188 Valley St., Suite 125

Providence, RI

Meeting Summary

- COMMENT: The T.E.A.C.H. scholarship is wonderful, but there is a capacity issue. How do we support degree attainment in light of the capacity issue? We need to address barriers related to the parts of the system that are necessary for the early childhood education system's success.
- COMMENT: The goal of the entire project should be to support and improve the early learning and development, inclusive of social emotional development, of all preschool age children in our state with a keen eye to the needs of children from underrepresented and vulnerable communities. The overarching goal is to put families and children in the center of the project. Families should be in the first and not last column on slide #31 because that is what we should be thinking about as we build the system.
- COMMENT: Parents need more support than ever too. They need good referral resources, and they need to learn how to advocate for their children in all areas, not just with education.
- COMMENT: As a professor, I would like to emphasize the importance of teaching candidates knowledge, skill, and dispositions. They need to be well trained in working with MLLs and families and have a clear vision of how to provide equitable services for all.
- COMMENT: From a principal's perspective, we need more opportunities for school based and private/community based RI Pre-Ks to meet and collaborate.

DISCUSSION

State Government

- There needs to be dedicated adequate funding for the early childhood education system that increases every year.
- We need additional resources in the system to fight barriers, which are excluding people.

Early Childhood Providers

- The goal is to improve the quality of programs and to develop and implement a strategic plan to accomplish that.
- Providers must be more responsive to the various populations they are serving, including different linguistic and other needs.
- Different programs need different supports to meet children's needs.

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Wednesday, March 29, 2023, 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Rhode Island

188 Valley St., Suite 125

Providence, RI

Meeting Summary

Early Childhood Education Workforce

- We need a professional development plan that lists out goals that improve teaching practices and educational levels.
- Early childhood education needs to be seen as a career and the only way to accomplish that is through compensation for work, which progresses as educators achieve more levels of education.
- The workforce is key so we need to find a way to attract and retain quality educators and compensate them in a way that shows them they are valued
- We need additional supports for the early childhood workforce. There is so much happening in the classrooms and providers need more than just money, they need help. They need support to get children where they need to be to be successful. We need to acknowledge the changed classroom experience.

Families

- Families are at the core of what is happening in early childhood programs. Families need to be committed to what is going on in programs like in the Head Start model or with parent advisory councils.
- Families need to understand that they are the first teacher and that they should be involved in all aspects of their child's education.
- Families need equitable access to high quality child care not dependent on zip code, race, or economic status. All families have a right to a high quality early childhood education system.

UPDATE: CHILDREN'S CABINET/RIDE/DHS REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON RI PRE-K EXPANSION

Kayla Rosen, Zoe McGrath, and Nicole Chiello explained the report and recommendations of the Children's Cabinet/RIDE/DHS on RI Pre-K expansion. (See slides). Key comments and questions included:

- After COVID, children are coming into classrooms struggling more than ever before with social emotional skills, regulation skills, developmental challenges, and health and medical problems.
- There was high turnover at RI Pre-K programs this year, unlike in past years. It was due in part to increased open spaces at public schools, where compensation is higher. The additional transitions have been challenging.
- Most existing programs are at capacity so we will need to braid and blend funding in order to reach 5000 seats by 2028. We need to increase the pipeline of classrooms and educators.

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Wednesday, March 29, 2023, 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Rhode Island

188 Valley St., Suite 125

Providence, RI

Meeting Summary

- We are not expanding the RI Pre-K program this year so we can begin prepping to accelerate expansion in future years.
- There are 3 year olds in classrooms now, but they do not technically count as RI Pre-K seats. The programs they are in are at capacity, though, so there is not a lot of room to expand when 3 year olds are required to be included in the RI Pre-K program.
- Public schools get an increase of 3% funding every year, but RI Pre-K has been static funded since 2011 on a per child basis, so they are forced to make the same amount of money spread further.
- Funding for all RI Pre-K programs is the same, but programs in public schools use that funding 100% for salaries while centers and Head Start programs need to use that money for other expenses in addition to salaries, like rent, furniture, and food. RI Pre-K programs are required to increase salaries each year regardless, so each year decreases the amount available for those other costs.
- There are many factors to consider when making the cost model work. We had to make assumptions because costs change over time. That is why there are high and low estimates.
- The governor offered an additional \$1.3 million for the pipeline of future classrooms in addition to the \$7 million in time limited federal funds. The highest cost estimate for the 5000 seats in 2028 is \$94 million.
- Q: What percentage of the entire state budget is \$94 million?
A: The overall state budget is \$13 billion, but that includes federal funds. The \$94 million would be just state funds unless there are changes at the federal level.
- COMMENT: This investment could reduce other costs in the state budget, like family services.
- COMMENT: Early education connects to other goals like reading by third grade. There is a societal piece that is greater than the financial piece. We need a good foundation for society to flourish.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no comments from the public.