

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Wednesday, September 20, 2017 9:00 a.m.-12:00 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
- Highlights: Learning from RTT-Early Learning Council
- Policy and Program Updates
- RI Children's Cabinet Cross-Departmental Plan to Advance the Governor's 3rd Grade Reading Goal
- RI Reads: The Campaign for 3rd Grade Reading
- Policy and Program Updates
- Public comment
- Upcoming events and meetings

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 ("Council") and thanked David Jacobson and the team from the Education Development Center for a wonderful early care and education meeting with representatives from Connecticut, Massachusetts and across New England.

HIGHLIGHTS: LEARNING FROM RTT-ELC

Leanne Barrett presented an update on lessons learned from the 5-year Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant. The lessons were identified by Early Learning Council members and participants at the June 2017 meeting. It is important to note that comments reflect participants' opinions about successes, challenges and priorities for the future. They do not reflect consensus or priorities. (See slides). Key comments and questions included:

- The Council will take what we learned from the RTT-ELC and apply it to the governor's broader 3rd Grade Reading goal.
- The Council will continue to act in an advisory capacity to establish recommendations that inform the governor through the Children's Cabinet. The Council and the Children's Cabinet both engage directors across state agencies.
- Early in the revision process, there was some concern that the new DCYF licensing regulations would not be aligned with BrightStars, but after listening to community feedback, DCYF maintained alignment in the areas of ratios and group size for toddlers.
- The governor's office has asked the Children's Cabinet to present an aligned and integrated budget request, which is not a separate budget but is, instead, a coordination of the individual budgets of the state agencies represented at the Children's Cabinet. By reconciling the individual agency budgets, the directors can all stand united in their budget requests, which would hopefully result in more successful advocacy efforts.

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- Director Hawkins supports the importance of tiered reimbursement to improve access to high-quality child care through the Child Care Assistance Program and DHS plans to include it in its budget, which, in turn, would be part of the Children's Cabinet's integrated budget request.
- RIDE established a Pathway Endorsement for high school diplomas and transcripts and one of those 6 pathways is for teaching. With the help of the Council, that pathway, when combined with the RI Promise program at CCRI, will provide an opportunity for developing a more diverse early childhood education workforce.
- COMMENT: We need more preschool focused professional development classes.
- COMMENT: We should explore the possibility of making early childhood education teachers eligible for federal loan forgiveness.
- COMMENT: In the Program Quality Section, we should add a focus on improving alignment and collaboration between community Pre-K programs and elementary schools to improve the transition for children.
- Following the denial of the Kindergarten Entry Profile funding request in the FY18 state budget, RIDE cannot move forward with that effort. Advocacy is needed to continue the funding so the state can implement the supports needed so districts can implement processes to gather and manage information about children's learning and development (across all domains of learning) at kindergarten entry.
- COMMENT: The state must continue to fund the ECEDS system because programs have provided a significant amount of data to it and that data is important to track to ensure we are continuing to improve the quality of and access to our early childhood education programs. ECEDS also includes critical information about BrightStars ratings by community, an important resource for parents looking for high quality childcare and early learning programs.
- COMMENT: We should add a future focus on access to high quality early care and education for high needs children.
- RI submitted a final report to the federal government on the accomplishments of the RTT-ELC. A link to that report will be included in the next Early Learning Council eNews and on the www.earlylearningri.org website.

POLICY & PROGRAM UPDATES

DCYF: Child Care Licensing

Veronica Davis discussed updates to the DCYF child care licensing regulations. (See slides). Comments and questions included the following:

- The Child Care Licensing Regulations are in effect as of Monday, September 18.

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- DCYF child care licensing has been operating under four sets of regulations (child care centers, school-age centers, family child care, and group family child care) and the goal is to consolidate those four sets into two sets to make it easier for the provider community to comply. The newly promulgated regulations combine the child care center regulations and the school age regulations.
- Prior to the new regulations going into effect, DCYF offered twenty opportunities for public feedback through various formal and informal methods, such as in-person feedback, large scale meetings, small scale meetings, one-on-one phone calls, and surveys. That feedback revealed some problem areas. In response, DCYF used these new regulations as an opportunity to add some nuanced and carefully worded language to address those problem areas and to help programs achieve compliance while maintaining a high level of quality.
- These regulations read differently than the previous version because of the new state requirements in the Administrative Procedures Act.
- DCYF is continuing to compile information from public feedback to include in a guidance document that DCYF will release soon. That document will contain information and resources to assist programs in compliance. Because it is not a promulgated regulation, the guidance document can be updated more easily in the future as needed.
- DCYF is updating its website to make it more user-friendly and to include links to resources, forms, and regulations, and ongoing training is being developed.
- To achieve consistency between the providers' understanding of the new regulations and DCYF staff's understanding and implementation of the new regulations, DCYF staff participated in a 3 day intensive review of the new regulations.
- Key indicator monitoring is the process of identifying specific regulations that are indicative of other compliance requirements and using those regulations to monitor the compliance of programs. If a program is not compliant on those key indicators, DCYF will further investigate the program's compliance with all of the regulations. DCYF will implement key indicator monitoring immediately with the new regulations.
- DCYF staff will use tablets to complete the online monitoring reports. Monitoring reports are now more comprehensive and clear, and final reports will be emailed to programs immediately after completion of the inspection.
- Background checks are now required every 5 years. DCYF will stagger implementation of this federal requirement since there are multiple barriers to compliance. DCYF will keep programs updated on its implementation of this requirement.
- Sometime before 2018, DCYF will host information sessions, perhaps live webinars, to identify and address some continued areas of concern.

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- DCYF will implement weighted caseloads for staff members to ensure DCYF staff has sufficient capacity to respond to provider inquiries and to provide programs with the necessary support.
- DCYF will phase in differential monitoring, which will allow DCYF to invest more time with programs that need additional support to comply with the new regulations. Instead of monitoring every program equally, DCYF will spend less time with programs that have demonstrated a history of compliance. Before full implementation of differential monitoring, DCYF will collect additional baseline data to ensure that a program's compliance history is accurate and complete.
- Q: When will inspection reports be posted online, pursuant to the federal requirement?
A: Posting inspection reports online improves the consistency of inspections and acts as a deterrent for programs, thereby improving the quality of programs. A system is currently under development to push inspection reports to the web, but there are state policy and legal implications that are inconsistent with the federal requirement that may delay that process.
- Q: Will programs know what the key indicators are?
A: No, programs are responsible for all of the regulations at all times. Key indicators are items that DCYF staff is required to track, but they are not the only items that licensing specialists will be examining so if a program focuses only on key indicators, they could be noncompliant in other areas, which would still jeopardize their licensing status. The key indicators are just an internal regulator for DCYF staff.

DOH: Safe Sleep

Ailis Clyne discussed updates to the DOH Safe Sleep initiative. (See slides). Comments and questions included the following:

- We are talking about the DOH safe sleep initiative now for several reasons. In October 2016, the American Academy of Pediatrics updated the safe sleep guidelines to reduce SIDS, which resulted in more media attention to safe sleep habits. Additionally, DOH staff is currently participating in a national learning collaborative to reduce infant deaths by communicating messages related to safe sleep best practices. Furthermore, in response to some recent sleep related deaths of children in DCYF care, DCYF reached out to DOH in early 2017 for additional training for DCYF caseworkers and staff so they would be better equipped to inform families about safe sleeping. This is the perfect forum to discuss the DOH safe sleep initiative because the Early Learning Council includes representatives from programs and services that support care givers and families.
- SIDS is a sleep related sudden unexpected infant death that cannot be explained after an exhaustive examination. A sleep related sudden unexpected infant death where the examination cannot be completed for any reason is considered an "undetermined" sudden unexpected infant death. The safe sleep initiative addresses SIDS, undetermined sudden unexpected infant deaths and accidental suffocation of infants.
- Evidence suggests that sudden unexplained infant deaths are not caused by lack of access to safe sleep products, but by the lack of proper use of safe sleep products.

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- Only 1/3 of the 36 sleep related infant deaths in RI lived in Providence, yet 2/3 of the deaths occurred in Providence, so 1/3 of those infants were in Providence at the time of their deaths for reasons other than domicile.
- There is an interagency safe sleep workgroup between DCYF and DOH. There have been five DCYF staff trainings so far as well as two trainings for RIDOH family visiting program local implementation team in South County.
- Q: What is the mechanism by which people will learn about the safe sleep initiative?
A: Parents receive education materials in hospitals after giving birth and safe sleeping is discussed both at the hospital before discharge and at follow-up pediatrician appointments. However, this is not an optimal time to provide information to new parents so some prenatal classes include information about safe sleep habits as well. DOH is conducting an environmental scan now to determine who is currently offering information about safe sleeping, who needs more information about the safe sleep recommendations, and what the best way to disseminate the information is. DOH will ensure that the safe sleep messaging is consistent and that more prenatal care providers are spreading that message. The interagency Safe Sleep work group is developing a standard graphic for safe sleep recommendations.
- Q: Is there a genetic component to SIDS?
A: SIDS is not completely understood and there are several factors that may contribute to it, such as baby factors like genetic illness, the vulnerability effect that occurs in early infancy, and an environmental piece that includes exposure to soft bedding, toys and chemicals in the sleep environment. Once babies are rolling, the suffocation risk is even higher and it is even more important that there are no pillows, blankets, etc., in the sleeping area. Despite the focus on back sleeping as a safe sleeping habit, whenever babies are awake they should have significant belly time to ensure the integration of the right and left brain hemispheres, which supports literacy.
- Q: Is SIDS more likely at certain ages?
A: Yes, there is a much higher risk of SIDS during the first 2-3 months, but SIDS can happen to babies up to a year old if there is a sudden unexpected death and no cause is found.
- Q: Has Rhode Island considered using baby boxes like in Finland where the infant mortality rate is much lower?
A: Although Finland has a low infant mortality rate, only 40% of families in Finland use the baby boxes so they are not the primary reason for the low infant mortality rate. There are concerns about baby boxes too, since they are not waterproof, not fireproof and they come with a lid. No evidence supports the effectiveness of baby boxes in this country.

RI CHILDREN'S CABINET CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL PLAN TO ADVANCE THE GOVERNOR'S 3RD GRADE READING GOAL

Commissioner Ken Wagner and Kirtley Fisher discussed the Children's Cabinet's cross-departmental 3rd Grade Reading Plan. (See slides). Key comments and questions included:

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- Not only is the Children’s Cabinet 3rd Grade Reading Plan integrating knowledge about policies and programs that impact children’s literacy development, but the plan also builds a coalition of state agencies to ensure that all partners are working together and using similar language to contribute in an attuned way to a successful outcome.
- The Children’s Cabinet has reimagined its work to focus on the 3rd grade reading goal as a central mission, in addition to discussing other topics. The Children’s Cabinet has developed an action plan with metrics and strategies to support early learning and development from birth through grade 3. This is a project management approach to the work that makes the 3rd grade reading goals more achievable.
- A core team meets in between Children’s Cabinet meetings to make sure all the work is aligned and is continually advancing.
- The Children’s Cabinet is working on fiscal 2019 budgets with an increased awareness of how the work fits together across state agencies. This process of coordinating the budgets of the various state agencies ensures that the Children’s Cabinet does not miss any individual action plans or key advocacy goals.
- Academic partners are helping the Children’s Cabinet identify evidence-based and high impact strategies. Patrick Vivier, MD, is helping with the Hassenfeld Birth Cohort Study, which is gathering data in partnership with Pawtucket and Central Falls. Justine Hastings and other data scientists at the RI Innovation Policy Lab are helping with policies related to the Children’s Cabinet work. Steve Buka from the Population Studies and Training Center is looking at cumulative evidence gathered over time that is related to best practices. Steve will take the Children’s Cabinet action plan and create a schematic that not only includes the evidence on best practices but will also attribute a weight to the impact of each proposed intervention towards the 3rd grade reading goal. The evidence of best practices combined with the weight of the interventions will help the Children’s Cabinet make more informed policy decisions as well as anticipate the impacts of those decisions. The Children’s Cabinet also partners with RI Kids Count and DataSpark for data collection and analysis.
- The Children’s Cabinet will coordinate with RI Reads to launch a marketing campaign, entitled “Talk. Read. Listen.”, aimed at improving all children’s literacy from prenatal to school age. The goal is to encourage parents and caregivers to think about literacy 24/7 and to act with intention and an awareness towards improving literacy in every daily interaction with children. This foundation for childhood literacy development will help children succeed as they progress through early childhood education into elementary school and beyond. Social media efforts and infographics will help spread this information.
- Q: Have you considered mentioning the importance of an investment in high quality child care in the marketing campaign?
A: If we can emphasize the importance of early literacy and high quality child care in the public sector, it will provide a greater incentive for the General Assembly to fund the work because

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constituents will support it and ask for it. Ultimately, the public sector, elected officials, state agencies and service providers all need to reach a consensus that early childhood education is a good investment.

- Q: What is the reach of the Children's Cabinet, how long will it last and will it increase over time?
A: The Children's Cabinet's work is mostly unfunded. As a result, the state agencies represented at the Children's Cabinet are just reorganizing how they do their work and what the work is. This work has to be perpetual and has to shift the public's mindset to the importance of early literacy.
- COMMENT: Becoming naturally curious about the world builds both literacy skills and social emotional competence.
- COMMENT: The transition from preschool to elementary school is critical to 3rd grade reading. Communities with significant collaboration between community based preschools and elementary schools experience a substantial positive impact on 3rd grade reading because children receive several consecutive years of high quality education. This collaboration is achieved by creating early learning partnerships at the community level with extensive district and principal involvement, including activities where teachers share expectations, participate in site visits, and learn at joint professional development. Of all interventions, collaboration at transition has the highest weight and the highest likelihood of 3rd grade reading success. This collaboration can even begin prenatally to increase the impact.
- COMMENT: In addition to talking, reading and listening, families should also play together with intention.
- Monday's Children's Cabinet meeting will include a presentation by the communication leads about the "Talk. Read. Listen." campaign.

RI READS: THE CAMPAIGN FOR 3RD GRADE READING

Elizabeth Burke Bryant and Diana Perdomo discussed the RI Reads campaign for 3rd grade reading.

Comments and questions included:

- Since, even among higher income students, there is a low percentage of children meeting the 3rd grade reading levels, we must improve literacy for all children.
- The campaign for 3rd grade reading is a great way to bundle the priorities of the early childhood field from birth through age 8. This literacy effort begins prenatally and involves the whole child and family.
- This is the time to get involved as a partner in the RI Reads campaign. Partners can sign-up on the website, www.rireads.org. The website also includes tip sheets for pediatricians, parents, and school professionals to use and share. RI Reads will host a partner meeting this fall with the hope that the partners will spread the message and continue the work.

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- COMMENT: It is important to engage the families that need services the most. Many families do not identify themselves as “poor” or “at risk” so that might prevent them from participating in necessary services. A campaign is needed to direct parents and children into the openings that currently exist at many programs and services aimed at helping families. Once engaged, we should track those families to validate the positive outcomes and demonstrate the need for early interventions.
- Q: Will there be a call to action for the RI Reads partners?
A: The partner meeting in the fall will explain how partners can continue their engagement.
- COMMENT: The Children’s Cabinet meets monthly at public meetings so that is another place where interested parties can keep up-to-date with state agency efforts.
- Q: Why are boys struggling more with reading?
A: The gender issue is in all areas, including math and science. We have work to do to properly address the needs of boys in school.
- The Striving Readers grant application is pending. If approved, RIDE will send out an overview of the grant funding and the strategies included.
- Rhode Island has a comprehensive literacy plan that is a great document, although it is not widely known. We will see if RIDE can provide an overview of the plan at a future Early Learning Council meeting.
- In RIDE’s weekly newsletter, there is a 3rd grade reading tip. If you have ideas for tips, send them to lisa.nugent@ride.ri.gov.

POLICY & PROGRAM UPDATES

DCYF: Getting to Kindergarten Initiative (Kellogg grant)

Joe Carr explained the Kellogg grant. (See slides). Comments and questions included:

- The Kellogg grant is a three year project.
- Since the July 2017 implementation of DCYF’s new CAPTA referral policy for infants and toddlers who are victims of child abuse or neglect, screening and Early Intervention referral rates have exceeded 90% for young children identified as victims of abuse and neglect, an increase over the previous 60%.
- Referral for screenings is just the first step. This grant will help determine whether screenings led to supportive services to improve learning and development outcomes.
- In year 2 of the grant, DCYF wants to increase access to high quality early care and education for all children in the child welfare system and not just for children in foster care.

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- The target population for this grant is the 1300-1400 young children that are involved with the child welfare system each year. DCYF wants to ensure these children are ready to enter Kindergarten and succeed in school.
- The grant launches October 1st.

EOHHS/RIDE: Young Children with Developmental Delays and Disabilities

Jennifer Kaufman and Ruth Gallucci provided updates on young children with developmental delays and disabilities. (See slides). Comments and questions included:

- Starting October 1st, EOHHS will closely examine the 18-20% of children that were referred to EI but were determined not eligible for additional services. EOHHS will see if those children should have been initially sent somewhere other than EI and will also see whether the persons evaluating the children were following the regulations and looking at all the risk factors, including social emotional needs.
- When EOHHS investigates the children considered not eligible for EI services, they will specifically focus on ensuring that evaluators did not overlook the social emotional eligibility criteria.
- EOHHS and DOH will evaluate a month's worth of CAPTA referred children that were screened by EI or First Connections. EOHHS and DOH will track those children to see whether they were engaged, did they receive supportive services, how long they received those services and how many were lost. That data will inform future policies focused on engaging families.
- EOHHS will examine where EI referrals are coming from, e.g., pediatric offices, and EOHHS will extend appropriate outreach efforts to practices and programs that are not regularly referring children to EI.
- RIDE collects aggregated data on what happens to children after Child Outreach screening. That data is analyzed at both the state and district levels. Some districts performed significantly better than other districts in particular areas. The district level data is shared with local Child Outreach coordinators to help them improve procedures.
- Q: How do you determine who is falling through the cracks and what are the strategies for reaching those children?
A: The district level performance reports highlight the areas where individual districts are having difficulty (percent of children screened, percent referred to special education, percent evaluated for special education, percent found eligible for special education) so each district can focus on those areas. Child Outreach coordinators can initiate conversations with special education directors to improve problem areas and RIDE can provide technical assistance to help districts develop improvement strategies.

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- COMMENT: Children can be found eligible for both EI and ECSE when they demonstrate significant social emotional concerns. There are a variety of standardized norm and criterion referenced assessments that measure social emotional skills and support eligibility decisions.
- COMMENT: Movement in education should be evaluated to determine its impact on gender learning differences.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no additional comments from the public.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

The next Early Learning Council meeting is on December 13th from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at Save the Bay.