

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Wednesday, September 28, 2022 9:00 a.m.-11:00 p.m.

RI Department of Administration, Room 2A

One Capital Hill, Providence

Meeting Summary

AGENDA SUMMARY

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

- Welcome, Opening Remarks, and Meeting Overview
- Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems – Prenatal to Three Asset and Gap Analysis
- History and Context for Recommendations on Pre-K Expansion and Early Childhood Workforce Plan
- Planning Process and Small Group Discussion to Inform Pre-K/Early Childhood Workforce Plan
- Announcements and Public comment

KEY POINTS

Key discussion points from the meeting are summarized below:

WELCOME, OPENING REMARKS, AND MEETING OVERVIEW

Director Kimberly Brito, Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green, and Elizabeth Burke Bryant welcomed the Council. (See slides). The following comments were made:

- The role of the Early Learning Council is more important than ever. Several different pieces of legislation passed that require robust plans for parts of the early learning system that that state recognizes need work.
- This is an opportunity for the Early Learning Council to make important recommendations to these processes.
- As we collectively work towards the same agenda, we need to make sure that our earliest learners are front and center in all work that we do.

EARLY CHILDHOOD COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEMS – PRENATAL TO THREE ASSET AND GAP ANALYSIS

Blythe Berger presented the findings of the Prenatal to Three Asset and Gap Analysis (See slides). The following comment was made:

- Health took all the written work related to the early childhood system and combined it for the systems coordination grant analysis.
- COMMENT: Interpreters should be both female and male so people can feel comfortable with the interpretation they are receiving.
- Email Blythe by Friday for additional comments or suggestions: Blythe.Berger@health.ri.gov

HISTORY & CONTEXT FOR RECOMMENDATIONS ON PRE-K EXPANSION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE PLAN

Leanne Barrett and Kayla Rosen explained the history and context for the recommendations requested for Pre-K expansion and the Early Childhood Workforce Plan (See slides). Key comments included the following:

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- The Early Learning Council has a long history of working together to develop recommendations and they are all important for continuing to improve the early childhood education system.
- We want to expand the state Pre-K program without having a negative impact on the infant toddler system. We want to strengthen the infant toddler system instead.
- Currently, each part of the early childhood education system is separately managed with different funding streams and different regulatory requirements, but all are significantly under resourced to achieve high quality and positive outcomes.
- We have a lot to build on with our current Head Start programs, our special education system, and our current state Pre-K program that started in 2008 and 2009. It was always our intention to serve 3 and 4 year olds with the state Pre-K program.
- Although we are currently only serving 4 year olds, we have a design to serve 3 year olds through the mixed delivery system.
- We are spending half as much state revenue on early childhood education than we were in 2005 and we are totally dependent on the federal government because expenses have increased significantly.
- The drop in state revenue happened during the Great Recession and we have not been able to restore it.
- We lost Child Care Assistance Program enrollment and state Head Start slots through reduced funding.
- The current \$8.1 million in federal funding for the state Pre-K program will be going away, putting 800 RI Pre-K seats at risk.
- There are large wage discrepancies in the early learning system with RI Pre-K teachers working in the school districts making significantly more than RI Pre-K teachers working in community-based programs. Head Start, child care, and community-based preschool teachers make even less. Investing in good wages in only one part of the system results in other parts of the system losing qualified staff.
- Children receiving a Child Care Assistance Program subsidy are less likely to access high quality early learning services than children enrolled in Early Head Start, Head Start, and RI Pre-K, due to inadequate funding and lower wages for staff working in the child care field
- We have had a goal for universal Pre-K for a long time, and the recently enacted budget includes a requirement for planning how we will get to 5000 state Pre-K seats by 2028. We are currently at

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2300 so we need to add 2700 more seats, which would include 3 year olds. For universal Pre-K, we would need 14000 total seats.

- Rhode Island's state Pre-K system has always been high quality, but access is lacking.
- We are fairly balanced in the delivery methods for state Pre-K. This speaks to the commitment the state has to the mixed delivery system. We need to determine how to move forward in a way that equitably distributes funds through the mixed delivery system while leveraging the mixed delivery system to support the system as a whole.
- In 2021, we piloted a funding model that allowed us to braid funds so we can add funds to an already existing Pre-K classroom to help that classroom reach the state Pre-K standards. This braded funding build on the existing strengths we have in the state. To reach the goal of 2700 seats, we can support existing classrooms to become state Pre-K classrooms.

PLANNING PROCESS AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION TO INFORM PRE-K/EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE PLAN

Kayla Rosen facilitated the small group discussion to inform Pre-K expansion and the Early Childhood Workforce Plan. (See slides). There will be additional deep dives after this meeting with two open Zoom meetings happening in October and November. Anyone can email feedback directly to Kayla. There will be a draft report completed by mid to late October, on which people can provide substantive feedback. Discussion points included (number of dots reflects support for comment):

Expanding RI Pre-K with Equity

- **Thoughts**
 - Impact of evaluation on dropping geographic barriers (1 dot)
 - Place centered or people centered? (1 dot)
 - Should not be either/or – should be “AND” (2 dots)
 - Use the Head Start model (3 dots)
- **Challenges**
 - Duration of day – need all day care
 - More developmental delays – new normal/ knowing whether you need help (2 dots and 2 checks)
 - MLLs – equitable access to ECSE and screening (1 dot)
 - EI to ECSE (family to classroom) transitions
 - Family child care's role and inclusion (3 dots)
 - Partner with housing and providing stable housing with activities (First 10 communities, The Basics)
 - Family engagement and recruitment awareness across the system including language access (3 dots)
 - Fair compensation for the workforce (6 dots)
 - Political will
 - Infant toddler access

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• Solutions

- Grassroots organizations can help reach out for lottery and BIPOC organizations (1 dot)
- Coordinate Head Start and Pre-K recruitment and enrollment (3 dots)
- Incorporate the family child care network into the Pre-K system, which would help with equity (6 dots)
- Use the Equity Institute for a TA to BA program, including for family child care providers (1 dot)
- Utilize other programs for engagement and connection, i.e., family home visiting and community health workers (1 dot)
- Offer pipeline support for families needing P-K programs
- Encourage school districts to help families become aware of programs
- Utilize Kidsnet
- Have pediatricians learn more about programs to spread awareness
- Partner with BIPOC and community programs
- Implement regional approach to ECSE
- Leverage funding formula to determine equity score
- Increase mental health consideration
- Offer more professional development and technical assistance
- Increase public awareness about Pre-K
- Provide depth in high needs communities before expanding to all communities, including offering Pre-K for two years (3 and 4 years olds) for priority populations (4 dots)

Incorporating 3 year olds

• Thoughts

- Are LEAs going to do general education for 3 year olds?
- Curriculum – is it an issue?
- Do 3 year olds get spots in 4 year old classrooms so they can stay in same program? (1 dot)
- Do we move forward with a lottery system? (1 dot)
- Is enrollment allowed if a child is 3 years old by September 1st or is enrollment based on whether it is developmentally appropriate or the child instead of being age based?
- Can they enroll in a program after September 1st?
- Is it a 3 year old/4 year old mixed classroom or will it be separate classrooms? (1 dot)
- How many 3 year olds and 4 year olds, what are the metrics? (balance of 3 year olds and 4 year olds)
- Costs of furniture/startup/professional development/technical assistance/funding
- How does family child care fit into this system?
- What will be the availability of school age and summer care?
- How does this interrupt continuity of care?

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- Will RIDE allow a different ratio for 3 year olds and 4 year olds?
- How do we deal with inequity in pay as we add 3 year olds?
- **Challenges**
 - Will 3 year olds move or change programs when they turn 4 years old, are they guaranteed placement in the same program?
 - How do we get IPA more involved?
 - Will children with a disability enter on 3rd birthday? 2 dots)
 - We are going to run into no 4 year olds to fill slots
 - How do we determine appropriate developmental levels for Pre-K entry instead of being strictly age based?
 - Consider equity (1 dot)
 - There will be additional staffing challenges created by adding 3 year olds (3 dots)
 - How do we embed 3 year olds in childcare before and after state Pre-K programs? (2 dots)
 - LEA quality is a concern
 - Will there be quality summer camp opportunities?
 - There is a big difference between young 3 year olds and almost 5 year olds, which may be a concern if there a mixed groups in classrooms
 - State Pre-K for 3 year olds may disrupt the 2-3-4 flow of education
 - How will RIDE monitor the 3 year old programs?
- **Solutions**
 - Individualize curriculum for 3 year olds
 - Consider how charters incorporate 3 year olds (2 dots)
 - Utilize community-based placement teams (EI, HS, LEA) (1 dot)
 - Enrollment practices need to be developmentally appropriate and based on family needs (2 dots)
 - Create a place-based strategy that includes family child care homes (2 dots)
 - Mixed age classrooms need a responsive/emergent curriculum (1 dot)
 - Programs should start with 4 year olds before including 3 year olds
 - The state should talk with providers before making decisions
 - Increase support for baccalaureate programs for providers (1 dot)
 - Advocate for bigger state investment to include infants and toddlers
 - Ensure all 3 year olds should stay with the same program for age 4. There is lots of research that shows this is critical.
 - Implement same age/multi-age looping, which are important options
 - Comment: Early relationships are a key consistency

Early Childhood Special Education, and Transitions

- **Thoughts**
 - Create system to collaborate with EI and LEAs
 - Expand EI to age 5
 - Engage all families and be inclusive of all – cultural, MLL, differently abled, undocumented

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- How do we get everyone together?
- Use the MTSS model
- Establish shared vision for early childhood education
- How will transitions work for student from out of the district?
- Support families during summer learning, 3 year olds ,4 year olds and Kindergarteners
- How do we trade success after 4 years old?
- Ensure transitional meetings both internally and externally
- Use the MTSS model more broadly
- **Challenges**
 - There are staffing challenges for 3 year olds to 4 year olds (2 dots)
 - There will be extensive furniture/startup costs to provide support to children with special needs (1 dot)
 - EI to ECSE is a huge transition – going from one-on-one support to very limited communication (2 dots)
 - We need to avoid lots of jumping around programs during summer months
 - How do we engage families in cultural/linguistic ways? (1 dot)
 - If we allow children to matriculate (nonresidents) what about CWDs (equity)
 - We should be concerned about LEAs that are not providing services in programs (1 dot)
 - We need to improve communication and collaboration among systems (EI to CBO/HS)
 - EI needs to embed services too (1 dot)
 - The EI waiting list needs funding to resolve (1 dot)
 - Capacity of systems needs to increase
 - We need to better facilitate special education services with out of district 3 year olds (1 dot)
 - Out of district matriculation can cause many issues like lack of support for residents (1 dot)
 - Lack of funding for cultural supports and bilingual supports needs to be addressed
 - We need more translation services and a phone line for translation
- **Solutions**
 - LEND (parents) crafted a brief document for families with IEPs to complete during transition (can be used for multiple transitions)
 - Increase capacity of Pre-Ks to provide summer programs
 - Engage community organizations (DORCAS) to support culturally diverse families
 - Offer support for undocumented families – how do we ensure families are aware of these services
 - Better access existing Head Start resources
 - Distribute transition packets
 - Require LEAs to collaborate with early childhood programs and provide embedded services (4 dots)
 - Utilize the MTSS model

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- Create a shared vision to support EI/ECSS children – state needs a plan (1 dot)
- Establish a state team to provide ECSE (3 dots)
- Better fund EI and increase funding for ECSE

Infant/Toddler System

• Thoughts

- There is a shortage of available care because the state doesn't incentivize caring for this age group
- There are infant care QRIS challenges (1 dot)
- FCC QRIS/FERS doesn't reflect the realities of infant care
- The workforce needs simultaneous supports to prevent turnover
- How are we building capacity for programs who want to be in the state Pre-K program?
 - If only high quality providers are eligible for state Pre-K, the balance of where infants and toddlers are cared for changes and the business model does not work
- Increase family child care homes involved in the state Pre-K program (2 dots)
- What about the business/private sector?
 - They benefit from child care so where do they fit in? (3 dots)
- Parents of infants: they need access to quality, affordable care
- Are there ways to support providers to maintain infant toddler rooms? (we're making Pre-K free!) (2 dots)
- How do we get people into this field and passionate about going to school?
- Housing instability increases have an effect on infant toddler care/development
 - McKinney/Vento covers early childhood too
- Start an awareness campaign to understand the issue

• Challenges

- Family child care ratios – the number of infants and toddlers allowed in a home – need to be adjusted
- How do we include family child care homes in the mixed delivery system? (1 dot)
- Salaries need to increase (4 dots)
- Infant care is so expensive that parents are struggling to pay and providers are struggling to maintain high quality (3 dots)
- Providers are switching infant toddler seats to Pre-K rooms (1 dot)
- Higher ed is seeing enrollment challenges, which has long term consequences. How can we build value and build interest in infant toddler work? How do we leverage those already in the workforce?
- Are there any business incentives to open infant toddler rooms?
- Child support enforcement needs to be removed from CCAP

• Solutions

- Establish a rate for infants (distinct from toddlers) to incentivize infant care (4 dots)
- Contracted care? Stabilize programs with classroom rates for quality (1 dot)

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- Increase ratios for infants/toddlers in family child care homes (increased rates would help with this) (1 dot)
- Offer more help to parents for infant care, i.e., paid family leave, more time off, higher rates of reimbursements (3 dots)
- Launch something for infants/toddlers at the same time we begin to expand 3 year old and 4 year old classrooms (4 dots)
- Start incentivizing higher education to get people into the field (3 dots)
 - Create a career ladder/pathway that honors experience in QRIS
 - Retention bonuses
- Leverage McKinney/Vento for early childhood
 - Housing instability and CCAP – do they need an address to qualify?
- Remove child support enforcement provision on CCAP (1 dot)
- Build a public awareness campaign on the need for infant/toddler care
- Expand Early Head Start (federal funds), but even EHS federal funds are not enough to provide quality care for infants (1 dot)
- Increase the child tax credit
- Engage non-child care businesses to partner around the importance of child care (1 dot)
- Look at Dunamis project model (two generation and housing/child care comprehensive models)
- Utilize family child care shared service modeling
- KY child care workers eligible for CCAP – we should incorporate that here

Early Childhood Workforce: Preparing, Recruiting, Retaining a Highly Qualified Workforce with Adequate Compensation Regardless of Setting

• Thoughts

- Fulfill new positions without poaching from established non state Pre-K programs
- Offer more support, training, and guidance for mental health needs and challenges (2 dots)
- Provide health insurance benefits in all CBOs
- Incentivize the private sector to support the child care/early childhood education workforce from which they benefit

• Challenges

- English language skills – can we do Pre-K in Spanish/bilingual? (3 dots)
- Some immigrants already have teaching experience, expertise, and education in their primary language (1 dot)
- Students currently only receive 3 universal (not Field I) college credits through the CDA Credential once they matriculate at CCRI. Years ago they received 12 credits. (1 dot)
- Create 100% reciprocity between URI, CCRI and RIC
- Establish an actual real attainable pathway for family child care to provide high quality care (1 dot)

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- There is a significant difference in salaries for RIDE personnel and other child care teachers within same center and there is also a discrepancy between funding for LEAs and CBOs (2 dots)
- Eliminate residency requirements, which create a financial burden on candidates
- Offer tuition support beyond TEACH (2 dots)
- No TEACH program for students at post-BA levels. We need financial support for certification.
- RI Promise has impacted enrollment at IHEs
- Student teaching should apply for certification (2 dots)
- **Solutions**
 - Create a big marketing campaign to draw more people to the field (3 dots)
 - We still need to address compensation (3 dots)
 - Stop communicating how difficult our profession is (2 dots)
 - Develop exposure to the child care field for high school students so they are aware of career options (2 dots)
 - Leverage existing employment options for high school students
 - ORS, DLT, Career and Employment Services, etc.
 - Offer more degree programs with hours (nights, weekends, online) that make sense for early educators (8 dots)
 - Create need more pathways (alternatives) to achieve early childhood certification (3 dots)
 - Develop coursework in home languages with ESL support (expand RIC 16C infant toddler ESL Spanish certification program) (2 dots)
 - Build a ECCE career pathways project
 - Establish a fair wage scale that is connected to qualifications and has parity with K-12 (similar qualifications) across the 0 to 5 system (2 dots)
 - We should include infant toddler educators in child care/ EHS/family home visiting/EI (1 dot)
 - Dedicate more state money for degree programs (2 dots)
 - Award college credit toward a degree for high quality professional development and for working/competency in the classroom (1 dot)
 - Expand on existing programs (ex. RI Promise or Wavemaker Fellowship) vs making a new program, which will make expansion for high need, higher impact professions potentially easier to get through the legislature
 - Create permanently stackable credits that can be earned through CDA and high quality professional development (2 dots)
 - Offer CCAP categorical eligibility for all early childhood educators (4 dots)

Improving and Ensuring Quality Across Settings and Equitably Supporting the Mixed Delivery System

- **Thoughts**
 - Protect the mixed delivery system's diversity of choice, setting, and full day/year services (3 dots)

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- Demonstrate how PR can strengthen the financial picture of the system and centers (1 dot)
- Allow programs to maintain autonomy on their philosophy of mixed 3 year olds and 4 year olds. (7 dots)
- Establish a feeder room or waiting pool if necessary
- Increase state Head Start funding (2 dots)
- Create priority points for comparable services, i.e., CBO, infant toddler care, full day/year, EHS CCP, family engagement, itinerant model, braided funding, Kindergarten transition (1 dot)
- Utilize Kidsnet
- **Challenges**
 - Provide a continuous eligibility extension for families due to mid-year recertification (2 dots)
 - Improve equity of access, pay, and work schedule/load for the workforce (3 dots)
 - There is a lack of public awareness of the model and the expansion intentions for state Pre-K (1 dot)
 - Ensure we thoughtfully plan to build programs that include 3 year olds (1 dot)
 - Recognize the importance of early childhood development and community, including the science on brain development (2 dots)
 - Increase connections with the community of residence, especially for children with IEPs (1 dot)
 - Improve facilities (2 dots)
 - Address our lack of data (1 dot)
- **Solutions**
 - Provide quality programs that will support learners, LISC, teachers, and teaching assistants (2 dots)
 - Offer mentoring from high quality programs to prospective state Pre-K programs (1 dot)
 - Establish a state Pre-K orientation for programs before the application is due
 - Build more high quality programs with the capacity to deliver state Pre-K instruction (1 dot)
 - Modify the ESSA plan to include MOU's with CBOS
 - Better engage the small business community, local chambers of commerce, and large businesses and corporations
 - Offer programs professional development and technical assistance on business modeling/forecasting for quality improvements and state Pre-K expansion (3 dots)

Other

- Recognize workforce challenges for family-based providers (1 dot)
- Support and elevate the role of community health workers (1 dot)
- Provide administrators/owner operators with business training to expand non Pre-K programming (1 dot)
- Increase state investment in early learning. Treat it as a public good (4 dots)
- Raise revenues to fund these system investments (1 dot)

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

The first round of awards for the facilities bond comes out in the coming weeks. There was an overwhelming number of applications, which shows the importance of the bond.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Comments from the public included:

- Head Start was created to address equity as its mission.
- On Friday, the Attorney General's office and Health are sponsoring a summit at RIC on lead poisoning prevention.
- The General Assembly authorized two housing plans to be developed in 2023 with the new Secretary of Housing department, a state housing plan and a state infrastructure plan.
- Housing and community development hopes to get more support from the early childhood sector to recognize the importance and intersection of the work in both areas.
- It is exciting that the state has committed to expanding Pre-K and high quality programming for children 3 to 5, but we should also make sure that the Birth to 5 system supports the youngest, most vulnerable children, i.e. infants and toddlers.