

Rhode Island Early Learning Council

Expanding Access to High Quality Early Learning Programs

March 23, 2011

Access Priorities: These priorities were endorsed by the Rhode Island Early Learning Council on March 23, 2011 as key strategies to improve children's access to high-quality early learning programs. These recommendations are categorized by program funding area to help clarify the key areas for change. It is important to recognize that children's needs often don't fall into only one program/funding area. It is a goal of the council to remove barriers and to improve coordination and integration across early learning program areas, including strategies to increase access for English Language Learners and children involved with the child welfare system.

Child Care

- Change the Child Care Assistance Program policy so that currently enrolled families ($\leq 180\%$ of the Federal Poverty Level) remain eligible for the program as their income increases, up to an exit income limit of 225% of Federal Poverty Level. Work to restore eligibility for child care subsidies to 225% of the FPL.
- Increase the state's reimbursement rates paid to child care providers serving children from low-income working enrolled in the Child Care Assistance Program to a fair market rate based on the most recent market rate survey.
- Request that the Rhode Island Department of Human Services amend current regulations so that:
 - ❖ Low-income working families participating in the Child Care Assistance Program are re-certified every 12 months instead of every 6 months
 - ❖ Families can maintain eligibility for child care assistance for longer periods of time during periods of unemployment (beyond current 3 week period) so they can more effectively engage in job search.
 - ❖ Information about case closures is immediately shared with providers serving children in the Child Care Assistance Program with a 2 week final payment.
- Increase the consistency of children's participation in high-quality early learning programs by providing continued child care assistance regardless of changes in parent work status to children in their pre-kindergarten year for children enrolled in a high-quality early learning program.

Head Start/Early Head Start

- Restore state funding for Head Start to support enrollment of 500 low-income children. (currently 156 slots).
- Provide transportation to children enrolled in Head Start (between home and Head Start)

Rhode Island Early Learning Council

Expanding Access to High Quality Early Learning Programs

March 23, 2011

Public Pre-K

- Maintain the funding formula plan to expand the state Pre-K program to provide a high-quality early childhood education program with a mixed delivery system for 3- and 4-year old children in the critical preschool years.

Early Childhood Special Education

- Increase the proportion of children under age 3 who are involved with DCYF who receive Early Intervention (EI) services.
 - ❖ Consider expanding eligibility for EI to all children birth-3 with a substantiated case of abuse or neglect (categorically).
 - ❖ Simplify EI consent for treatment process.
 - ❖ Incorporate evidence-based parenting education programs into EI.
- Ensure access to appropriate services (including evidence-based parenting education programs) to support families with children exhibiting behavioral concerns that may not rise to the level of special education
- Improve transitions for children as they move across early intervention, early childhood special education and school age (K-3) education systems.
- Provide access for children with special needs, but who are not Medicaid eligible, to home based services, respite, care management, etc. (particularly related to children with Autism)

Full Day Kindergarten

- Encourage school districts to expand access to full day kindergarten by maintaining differential reimbursement within the funding formula (e.g. half-day funding for half-day programming).