

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Wednesday, June 28, 2023 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of RI

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
- 2023 Legislative Session B to 8 Early Learning & Development
- Review of Governor's Workforce Board Recommendations on Early Childhood Workforce Development
- Announcements, Public Comment & Next Steps

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 Paige Clausius-Parks welcomed the Council. (See slides). The following comment was made:

- Welcome and thank you for coming today and being part of this advisory committee to the Governor and the Children's Cabinet.

2023 LEGISLATIVE SESSION B TO 8 EARLY LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

Kayla Rosen and Leanne Barrett updated the Council on the 2023 Legislative Session B to 8 Early Learning & Development. (See slides.) The following comments were made:

- The TANF funding in the FY24 budget represents the first time the state has invested in Early Head Start.
- Approximately 62% of public school preschool programs are currently participating in BrightStars. The rest will now be required to participate to comply with the legislative mandate.
- We are one of a small number of states that does not have a summer camp licensing system.
- Compared to other states, the Rhode Island Temporary Caregivers Insurance Program offers the fewest number of weeks and the lowest wage replacement rates among the 12+ states with paid family leave programs.

REVIEW OF GOVERNOR'S WORKFORCE BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Alyssa Alvarado, Khadija Lewis Khan, Nicole Chiello, and Lisa Hildebrand reviewed the Governor's Workforce Board Recommendations on Early Childhood Workforce Development (See slides). Key comments and questions included the following:

- A subcommittee of the Governor's Workforce Board, the Early Childhood Workforce Advisory Committee, developed recommendations for Early Childhood Workforce Development. The

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subcommittee met approximately 7 times over 6 months and submitted its recommendations in April.

- The Advisory Committee analyzed the wages of child care workers in New England. The workers analyzed were a subset of the total early childhood workforce and did not include, for example, individuals who were categorized as kindergarten, elementary school, or preschool (?)_teachers.
- Nearly 50% of annual job openings for child care workers are due to transfers to other occupations because jobs in other industry sectors have similar educational requirements yet offer higher wages. Job openings are also due to the tight labor market, with 3 or 4 job openings for each unemployed person.
- Real Jobs Rhode Island offers training to meet the demand for workers and provides tuition for qualified candidates.
- Early childhood workers and educators should be diverse like the families they serve.
- The Advisory Committee recommends CCAP base rates be set at 100% of the average market rate. At a minimum, they should be at 75% of the average market rate.
- Q: What are the next steps with the recommendations? Will there be legislation proposed?
A: The Governor's Workforce Board was tasked to research, develop, and submit recommendations. It does not have the authority to submit legislative requests. The Department of Labor and Training does have the ability, as an administrative entity, to make legislative requests, but there are no plans to do so at this time.
- Q: Was there any consideration of the impact of increased wages for those early childhood workers that receive public benefits?
A: We determined that \$18 per hour is the amount sufficient to stop the transfer of early childhood workers to other industries and we concluded that we can provide that wage by increasing income to facilities through CCAP reimbursement rates. Slowing transfers was the primary consideration for increasing wages.
- **VOTE**
 - Motion to endorse the recommendations of the Governor's Workforce Board, seconded.
 - Passed with no one opposed

DISCUSSION: EARLY CHILDHOOD GOVERNANCE IN RHODE ISLAND

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Kayla Rosen, Elliott Regenstein (Foresight Law + Policy), and Nasha Patel (Watershed Advisors) led a discussion on Early Childhood Governance in Rhode Island. (See slides). Comments and questions included:

- The governance analysis project was established by FY23 legislation, which included \$250,000 to fund the work. A report is due October 1st.
- There have been 28 meetings with stakeholders and approximately 10 more are planned. There are workgroup public conversations scheduled for July 27th and September 28th. Those conversations will be hybrid.
- The Early Learning Council is tasked with acting in an advisory role for the project process.
- The local community ecosystems in Rhode Island look different because of its size. In Rhode Island, there is more intimacy between community level work and state level work, which is unusual. The recommendations will try to make that well developed cultural piece a part of a successful system.
- Initial findings on early childhood governance in Rhode Island will be released at the end of July. After stakeholders have had time to process the findings, a final report with recommendations and options will be submitted in September.
- Priorities for the governance system to address include:
 - Workforce development including pay, working conditions, and the pipeline
 - Support for home-based child care providers to ensure they have what they need to be successful
 - Ongoing engagement between state government and the field
 - Integration of data systems
- COMMENT: The state needs central leadership to look at the entire system so they can factor in strategies to benefit each sector while moving forward as a whole. Impact to one part of the early childhood system can negatively or positively affect other parts of the system and having one place tasked with understanding those impacts will benefit the entire early childhood education system.
- COMMENT: We need to bring health into the conversation. Health and education are well integrated with Early Intervention but become disaggregated in the PreK/Early Elementary space. Child Outreach has struggled to meet the needs of screening young children, particularly those children not in child care settings. Many of those children do go to pediatric health providers, however. Therefore, pediatricians should be doing screenings for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds like they do for children under 3 years old. This is an opportunity to make developmental screenings part

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of the Medicaid system and then to develop a system of communication between pediatricians and school departments so children can get the services required through IDEA. This could become a model for the rest of the country.

- COMMENT: A central leadership structure in the state could focus on IDEA for young children starting in infancy. If we move developmental screening from public schools to pediatrician offices, we need to ensure children get IDEA services. A central leadership office could be responsible for helping families and health care providers navigate those services and collect that data.
- The findings submitted by the workgroup in July will not say anything about the model of governance. That will come later. For the July submission, the workgroup will look at the critical functions of the system that the state wants to see addressed by whatever governance design we end up choosing.
- COMMENT: It is important to support home based providers, but that support should be expanded to the entire mixed delivery system, which includes every child, prenatal to age 8, regardless of whether they are currently part of the early childhood system.
- The workgroup is looking at the whole mixed delivery system, but home based providers were singled out for special emphasis.
- COMMENT: Why wasn't the Workforce Registry mentioned because until that is operative, we do not really know the workforce, quantitatively or qualitatively. We also do not know where our kids are. After the pandemic, 40% of families dropped out of CCAP so where are those children now and what services are they receiving. The Workforce Registry would help us find those children and see their needs.
- COMMENT: With respect to the integration of health within the early childhood system, we should include an emphasis on infant/early childhood mental health as well. Universal promotion of early relational health could extend and improve care.
- COMMENT: The Rhode Island Early Learning Council's advisory responsibilities include up to and including 3rd grade. If we had a leadership center coordinating health, IDEA, home visiting, and early childhood education, then we could be a better partner with K to 3, especially when supporting multilingual development.
- COMMENT: Children are with child care providers the majority of the day. Providers make recommendations to parents based on what they see or if they need assistance at the child care center to provide for a child's needs. A lot of the time, neither Child Outreach nor pediatricians see

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the issues providers are seeing because they do not spend as much time with the child. We need to make coordinating and speaking with providers part of the screening process. Providers are seeing a difference between state PreK classrooms and other preschool classrooms because the communication expectations are different, but they should be the same. Providers need to be part of the team for children.

- For the report, the workgroup will look for opportunities to be more intentional from the start to ensure services and supports are lined up. The recommendations will promote intentional proactive engagement of families around services.
- Based on today's feedback, the workgroup will consider the following:
 - Pediatricians and child care providers should be more involved in the screening process and with schools, including an emphasis on infant and early childhood mental health
 - The entire mixed delivery system should be examined, including infants and toddlers who are not in the system
 - The Workforce Registry should be included in the data work to better identify where/if children are receiving services
- COMMENT: Inclusion/Itinerant models are the gold standard for children with significant developmental needs. Therefore, coordination between the school department and early child care providers at all levels is important, as well as coordination between health care providers and school departments.
- COMMENT: Data supports the importance of integrated IECMH consultation that focuses on child/family concerns AND ongoing support/PD/reflective consultation for early learning professionals.
- There is a public workgroup meeting on July 27th where the group will share its initial findings. The comments and feedback from today will drive that discussion.
- There is a page on the Children's Cabinet website for the workgroup: kids.ri.gov/cabinet. The page includes a description of the workgroup, presentations and minutes, a calendar of public events, and a feedback/comment survey.
- Tonight at 6 pm there is a workgroup feedback session for early childhood professionals who work directly with children.

ANNOUNCEMENTS, PUBLIC COMMENT AND NEXT STEPS

Public comments included the following:

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- COMMENT: As a child care provider, I see a need for parents to have a space to get better attention for their children with special needs, but providers do not have training or certification to provide those special services.
- On Monday, Head Start is lifting the vaccine mandate for its employees.
- Updated Head Start priorities will go back to the basics with health and safety, supporting the workforce, focusing on mental health, K to 12 partnerships, and data.