



Rhode Island Early Learning Council

SEPTEMBER 27, 2023

9:00 - 11:00 A.M.

BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF RI

EARLY LEARNING RI

9:00	Welcome, Opening Remarks, and Meeting Overview	Lisa Odom-Villella , RIDE Kimberly Merolla-Brito , DHS Paige Clausius-Parks , RI KIDS COUNT
9:15	Update/Discussion: Early Childhood Governance Group	Kayla Rosen , Governor's Office/Children's Cabinet Elliot Regenstein , Foresight Law + Policy Nasha Patel , Watershed Advisors
10:15	Updates & Discussion: Birth through Grade 3 Staffing Challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Care/Head Start/Preschool/Pre-K • Early Intervention (IDEA Part C) & Family Home Visiting • PK-3 Public School/Special Education Brief Updates: Strategies to Address Staffing Challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Care WAGE\$ Pilot • CCAP for Child Care Educators/Staff Pilot • Child Care Pandemic Retention Bonuses • Supplemental Early Head Start/Head Start funding • Early Intervention Strategies 	Conversation Starters: Khadija Lewis Khan, Beautiful Beginnings Emma Villa, SEIU Family Child Care Union Casey Ferrara, Meeting Street Lori Wagner, RI Child Care Directors Association Mary Varr, RI Head Start Association Strategies to Address Challenges: Lisa Hildebrand, RI Association for the Education of Young Children Nicole Chiello, RI Department of Human Services Catherine Green, RI Head Start Collaboration Office/DHS Jennifer Kaufman, RI Early Intervention Program, EOHHS
10:45	Announcements, Public Comments, & Next Steps	

Rhode Island System Analysis

September 27 & 28, 2023

Rhode Island Systems Analysis

Rhode Island has ambitious goals for improving early childhood. The State's vision is for all children to be educationally, social-emotionally, and developmentally ready to succeed, putting them on a path to positive long-term outcomes.

Accomplishing these goals require that Rhode Island have an effective system of early childhood governance. In order to strengthen that governance system, Article 10 of the enacted Fiscal Year 2023 Budget established an Early Childhood Governance Working Group to support the development of an Early Childhood Governance System Analysis.

The System Analysis is being developed by Foresight Law + Policy and Watershed Advisors pursuant to a contract with the state. **This presentation accompanies a draft of the report, to support the collection of feedback in order to finalize the report.**

Agenda

- Report Overview
- Report Contents:
 - Early Childhood Governance
 - Experiences from Other States
 - Current State and Future Opportunities
 - Cross-cutting Considerations
- Discussion

Report Overview

Report Process

To arrive at the current draft, the team conducted the following activities:

- Information gathering with a wide range of Rhode Islanders engaged in the work of the early childhood system, summarized by the Landscape Analysis
 - Interviews were conducted with more than 70 people
 - Multiple public listening sessions were conducted
 - A survey was made available on the Children's Cabinet website
- Soliciting initial feedback on the draft Landscape Analysis in July and August to build consensus about the current conditions affecting providers and families
- Making recommendations, via this draft report, for potential next steps for Rhode Island

Next, we will engage the community on these proposed recommendations in order to finalize the report by December.

Report Overview

- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Landscape Analysis
- Governance Options in the National Context
- Governance in Rhode Island: Current State and Future Opportunities
- Cross Cutting Considerations
- Conclusion

Timeline

Date	Action
Sept 22	Share draft recommendations publicly on website (including cost analysis of different governance options)
September 28	Working group reviews draft recommendations and provides feedback
October 1	Submit most updated version to legislature for review
Month of October	Solicit additional feedback from 1:1 interviews and public sessions
Date TBD (likely early December)	FLP and Watershed will present final report findings in person
Date TBD (December)	FLP and Watershed will finalize report Final draft complete

Report Contents

Early Childhood Governance

Early Childhood Governance

- **The current early childhood system has many strengths to build on:** There are strong relationships among early childhood staff to foster interagency collaboration.
- **But there is room for growth:** The sentiment outside of state government is that the fragmentation among agencies has constrained the state's ability to support children and families.
- **The state's approach to governance matters:** 1) Governance impacts the state's ability to achieve its vision for early childhood services; 2) Equity demands a system that supports policies to improve services for the children and families that most rely on state-funded services; and 3) it is critical that the state use public funds effectively and efficiently.

The Current Early Childhood System

- **Excluding one-time federal funding, in Fiscal Year 2023 Rhode Island spent approximately \$130M on its early childhood system.** This included \$71.4M in federal money, \$53.5M in state funds, and \$5.8M in other funds.
- **The largest single early childhood funding stream is the Child Care Assistance Program.** In 2023 \$72.6M was spent on child care assistance through DHS. The state spent \$22.5M on early intervention, \$22.3M on Rhode Island Pre-k, and \$15M on early childhood special education.
- **Thousands of children use the system.** Rhode Island has 52,500 children under the age of 5. At a given time over 6,000 are likely receiving child care subsidies, and over 2,300 receiving pre-k. Approximately 1,200 receive federally funded Head Start services. Special education serves almost 3,000 children, and Early Intervention almost 4,000.

The Current Early Childhood System

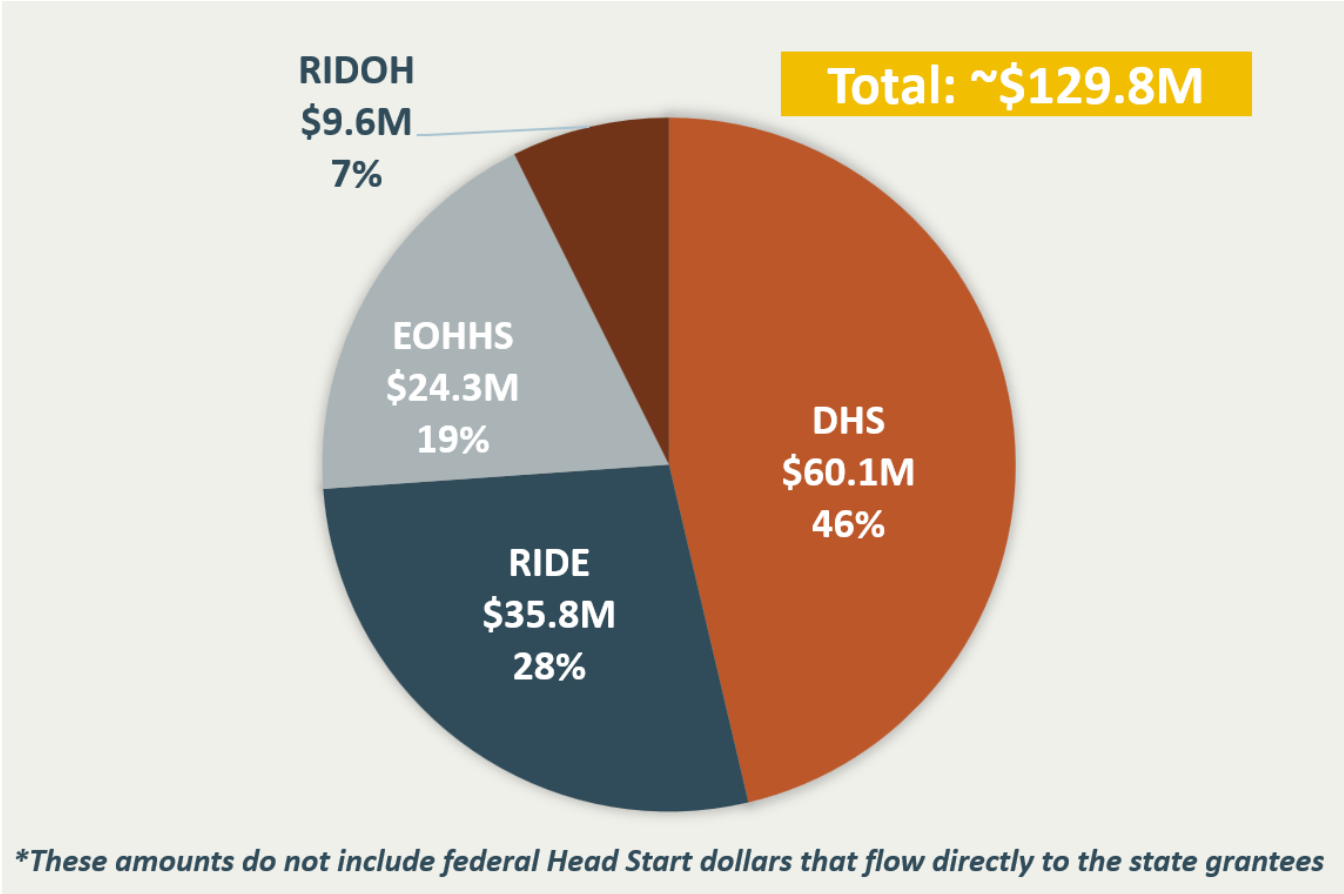


Figure 2: Total estimated Rhode Island ECCE spending in SFY2023, excluding one-time COVID-19 federal funding

Three Models of Early Childhood Governance

Unification Models

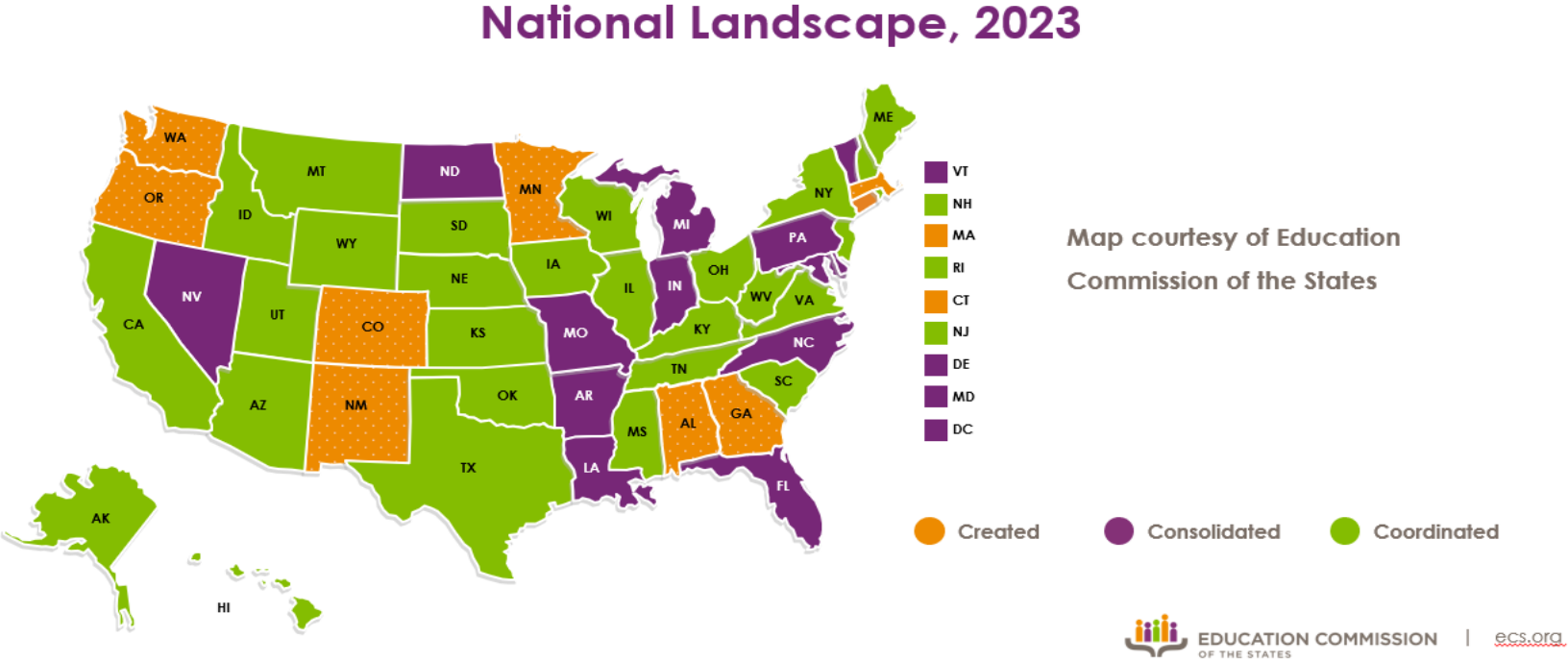
Coordinated
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Early childhood funding streams and functions live in multiple, distinct agencies – requiring coordination across those agencies• Sometimes a centralized office helps to facilitate coordination

Consolidated
Early childhood funding and functions are consolidated into an existing agency that has other responsibilities (typically the state education agency or a human services agency)

Created
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Early childhood funding and functions are consolidated into a single agency created to focus on early childhood services• Agency has a sole or primary focus on early childhood, without other responsibilities

National Landscape: Early Childhood Governance

Roughly half of the states use a coordinated approach and the other half have consolidated or created governance structures.



Three Models of Early Childhood Governance

Coordinated

- Early childhood funding streams and functions live in multiple, distinct agencies – requiring coordination across those agencies
- Sometimes a centralized office helps to facilitate coordination

Consolidated

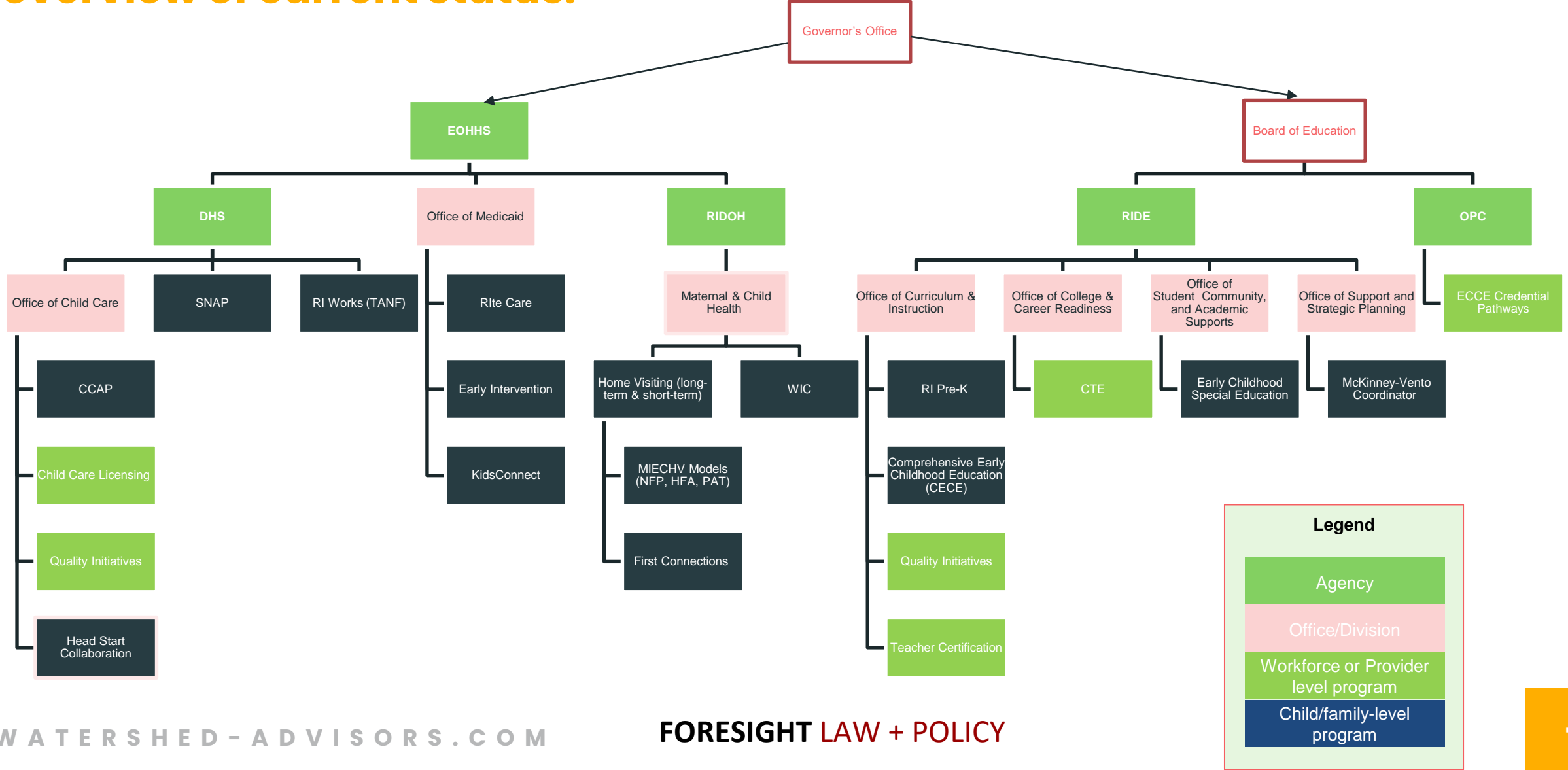
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- Early childhood funding and functions are consolidated into a single agency created to focus on early childhood services
- Agency has a sole or primary focus on early childhood, without other responsibilities

Rhode Island currently uses a coordinated approach across EOHHS, DHS, RIDE, and RIDOH. Each agency has responsibility for important funding streams serving young children in the state.

Currently, early childhood programs are embedded within several state agencies. The below graphic is not comprehensive, but provides an overview of current status.



Experiences from Other States

Experiences of Other States:

Potential benefits to unification

Based on interviews with leaders in seven other states (CO, CT, MA, NM, NC, ND, OR), potential benefits include:

- More alignment between pre-k and child care
- More coherent policies for workforce development, professional development, quality ratings, and data integration
- High level early childhood system leader can define state's early childhood agenda and marshal resources toward persistent challenges
- Increased communication, accountability, and transparency with stakeholders
- Easier to track use of all funds, including federal funds, toward state's goals
- Increased clarity for the legislature on early childhood issues, and better access to expertise for the executive branch

Experiences of Other States:

Potential challenges to unification

Potential challenges identified in other states includes:

- Unifying ECE can result in other siloes – for example, when unified outside the education agency, it could lead to difficulty working with LEAs
- Governance change not insulation against turnover at the state level
- A governance change can add complexity to the already nuanced relationship between K-12 and early childhood
- New unified structure does not necessarily equate to greater investment, and can cost resources

Experiences of Other States: Considerations

Should the state choose to change, other states suggested that in a transition Rhode Island would need:

- Political leaders and external champions who will support the agency during transition and keep progress on track
- A well designed structure to ensure the agency's accountability structure
- Strong administrative leadership trusted by the Governor and staff to support the transition
- A transition window with clear action plans and responsibilities
- Strong interagency collaboration after a unification
- Clear, consistent, and frequent communication during the transition period
- Local implementation that can support the state's vision

Current State and Future Opportunities

Core Functions of State Government

State government serves these critical functions. As Rhode Island evaluates which governance model is most likely to help it succeed, it should consider:

- Collaboration
- Money management
- Setting standards for service quality
- Supporting professionals
- Engaging and supporting families and stakeholders
- Communications and public relations

Current Model of Coordination

Impact on Core Functions (1 of 2)

The current model in Rhode Island allows the state to leverage different kinds of expertise from different agencies. Maintaining the current model would eliminate transition costs and avoid disruption.

The landscape analysis indicated the following takeaways regarding core functions:

- **Collaboration:** Stakeholders generally praised the ability of state government to collaborate with stakeholders – and also believe that collaboration within state government has improved in recent years.
- **Money management:** Stakeholders do not believe that the current system of money management is optimizing quality experiences for children and families in an equitable manner.
- **Setting standards for service quality:** There is a sense that quality rating in the state has improved over the years, but that there are still challenges and disconnects.

Current Model of Coordination

Impact on Core Functions (2 of 2)

The landscape analysis indicated the following takeaways regarding core functions:

- **Supporting professionals:** Like many states, Rhode Island is struggling to support its early childhood workforce. While many of the problems on this front go beyond what administrative agencies can control, we did hear that fragmentation in the system has hampered the state's efforts to best support its professionals.
- **Engaging and supporting families and stakeholders:** We heard some stories of success in engaging and supporting families and stakeholders – but here, as in other areas, those efforts were siloed across agencies, not part of a coherent statewide approach.
- **Communications and public relations:** None of the individual state agencies is well set up to communicate broadly about the benefits of the early childhood system as a whole.
- **Integrating early childhood data:** Having services hosted by different agencies requires interagency data use agreements to provide a holistic view of the system.

Consolidation or Creation Model

Impact on Core Functions (1 of 2)

Rhode Island choosing to consolidate or create a new governance model could have the following impact on core functions:

- **Collaboration:** Certain problems cannot be solved in the current structure. A governance change would take certain issues that currently require interagency collaboration and turn them into issues a single agency can address.
- **Money management:** Unification can make it easier for the state to budget for early childhood holistically and to think about interaction among program funding streams.
- **Setting standards for service quality:** Unification improves the likelihood that Rhode Island will be able to implement a more comprehensive approach in quality evaluation and improvement work.

Consolidation or Creation Model

Impact on Core Functions (2 of 2)

Rhode Island choosing to consolidate or create a new governance model could have the following impact on core functions:

- **Supporting professionals:** The state can more comprehensively support workforce initiatives through unification. This work could be driven by an overarching set of expectations, rather than the regulations governing specific funding streams.
- **Engaging and supporting families and stakeholders:** Through a change in governance, the state could build upon its good work in engaging families and stakeholders through a more coherent approach.
- **Communications and public relations:** The state could have the opportunity to engage with the public and families on early childhood issues in a holistic way. It currently does not have a unified communications and public relations approach.
- **Integrating early childhood data:** Creating a unified agency would make it incrementally easier to integrate data from core early childhood programs.

Challenges of Change

As Rhode Island considers embarking on a governance transition, the state will need to discuss the following challenges that would be forthcoming:

- Deciding what to include in a unification
- The process of transition
- The costs of transition (including state and philanthropic costs)
- The relationship between early childhood and K-12

Cross-Cutting Considerations

Cross-Cutting Considerations

- **State-Community Connections:** Regardless of the state's governance model, the state will need to consider its partnership with community leaders and providers.
- **Interagency Connections:** There will be a need for interagency connectivity no matter what governance approach the state chooses. One way or another, the state will have to strategize how to address issues that fall at the junction points among multiple agencies.

State-Community Connections

- Community-level collaboration can support improved coherence at the local level. Some states support capacity for individual communities to work on issues including improving professional development, increasing access, supporting the workforce, analyzing local data, and making it easier for families to access the system.
- In a small state like Rhode Island, local infrastructure might not need to be as extensive as it is in other states. But there are still some decisions that are best made locally, and stronger local collaboratives could facilitate that decision-making.

Interagency Connections

- The state has numerous forms of interagency collaboration, including the Children's Cabinet, the Early Learning Council, and collaborative tables for key early childhood staff.
- As part of the governance conversation, the state may want to revisit the mandate of these bodies – taking advantage of their respective strengths. This can occur regardless of whether or not Rhode Island changes its governance model within state government.

Discussion

Discussion

What do you want the Rhode Island early childhood system to look like in 5–10 years?

- State governance model
- State–local collaboration
- Interagency collaboration

Next Steps

We look forward to your additional feedback!

- The full report is posted on-line at this link
- Please share our survey about the report (linked here)
- Or email us:
 - elliott.regenstein@flpadvisors.com
 - nasha.patel@watershed-advisors.com
 - lizzie.cosse@watershed-advisors.com

EI Staffing and Fiscal Crisis Efforts

STATE EFFORTS

\$14.6M in COVID relief related funding since 2020

45 % Rate Increase beginning SFY23

Temporary State Referral Process

Workforce Campaign

OHIC Rate Study

Expanding Service Capacity

National Advocacy

EI PROVIDER DIRECT EFFORTS

Intensive and extensive advertisement and recruitment for new staff

Bonuses for staff to take on student interns

Salary Increases for current staff

Increased salary scales

Sign-on and retainment bonuses

Incentive Programs

Tuition Reimbursement

Additional PTO time

Mileage reimbursement bonus

Professional Development Opportunities

Staff Appreciation Days/Activities

Note: This is not an exhaustive list



Birth- Grade 3 Staffing Challenges

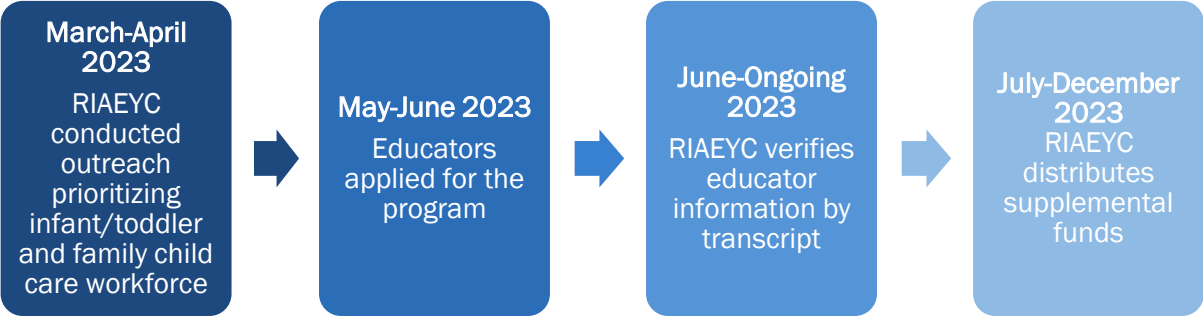
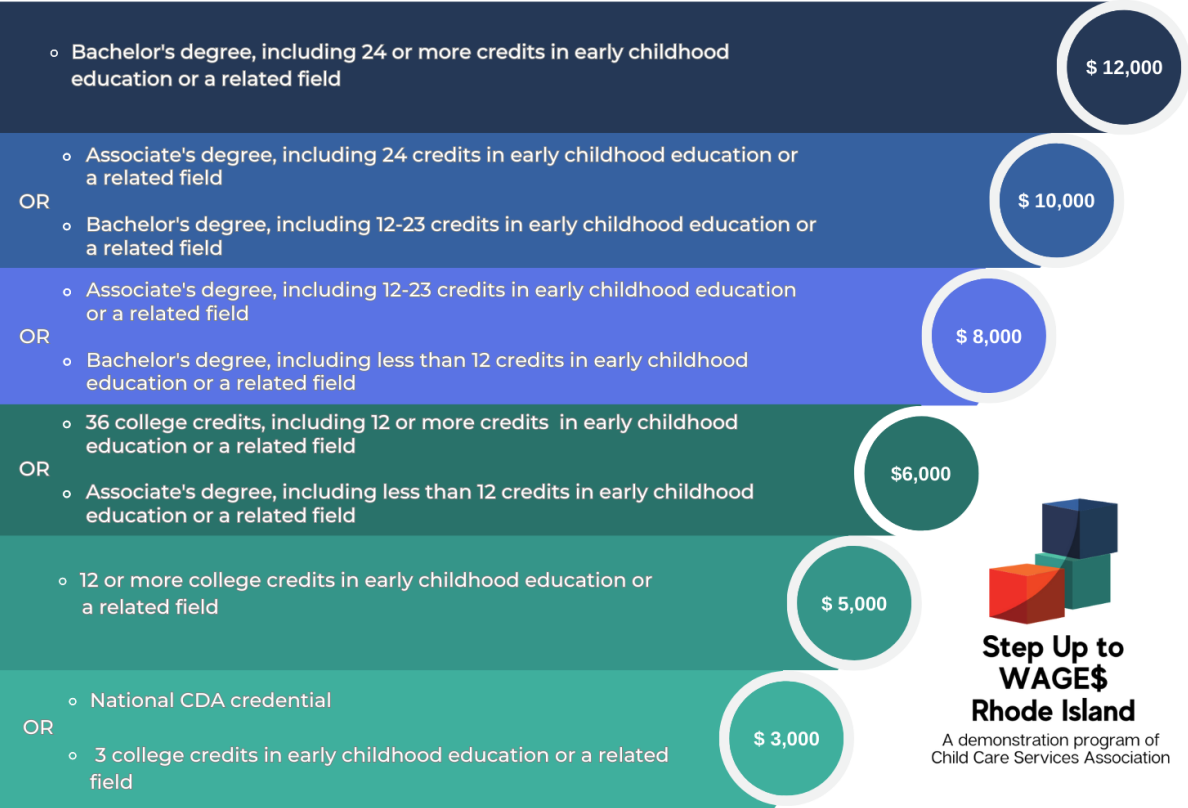
COMMUNITY UPDATES ON
STAFFING

UPDATES ON STRATEGIES TO
ADDRESS CHALLENGES

Step Up to WAGE\$ Pilot

Step Up to WAGE\$ provides supplemental compensation to educators based on their education and credentials

Supplement Qualifications & Totals



Progress to Date

Since the application opened in May 2023, Rhode Island's Step Up to WAGE\$ pilot program has received:

- 584 applications
- From the center-based applications we have a wide-range of roles including teacher assistants, lead teachers, education coordinators, assistant directors and directors
 - 99% of the applicants are female
 - 23% of applicants have a college degree (AA through MA)
 - 77% have either a CDA or some college credits but no degree

To date:

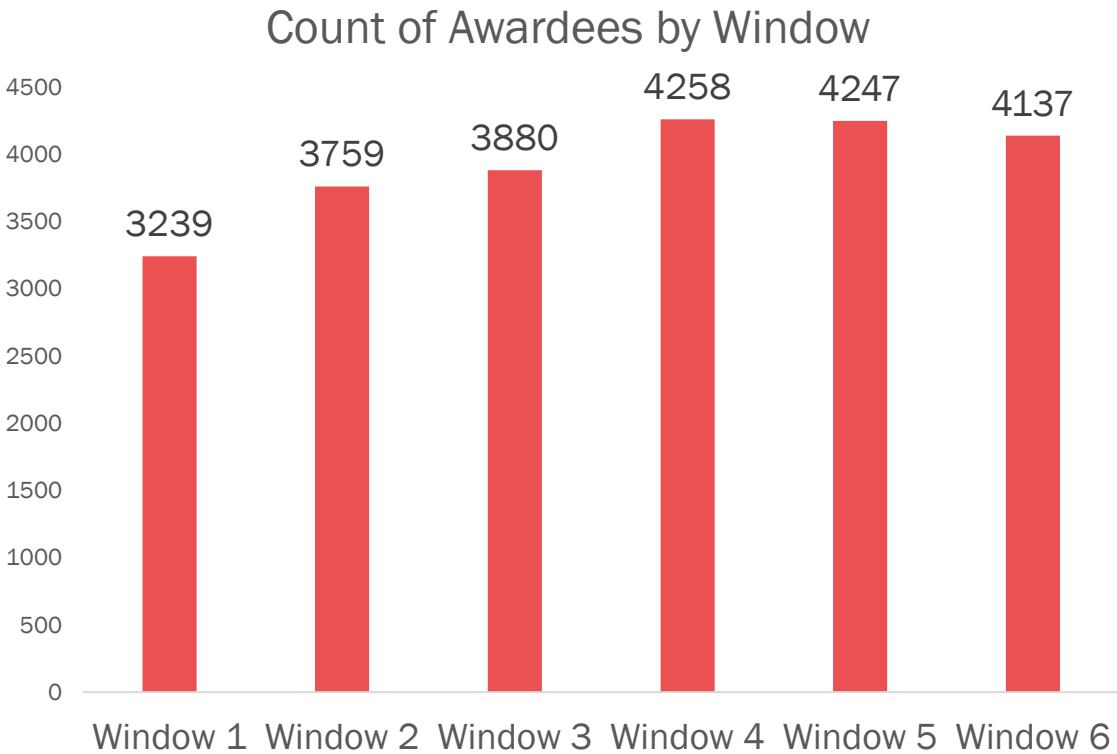
- ROUND ONE: 54 educators; \$150,437 awarded (*44 educators in center-based programs and 10 Family Child Care providers*)
- ROUND TWO: 102 educators \$305,250 awarded (*88 educators in center-based programs and 14 Family Child Care providers*)
- **ROUND THREE: COMING SOON!**
- The average wage of those being funded to date is approximately \$16.50 per hour
- Award was determined based on a variety of factors including date of completion of the application and eligibility for the program. Future rounds of awardees will be announced in the coming months.

Pandemic Retention Bonus Update

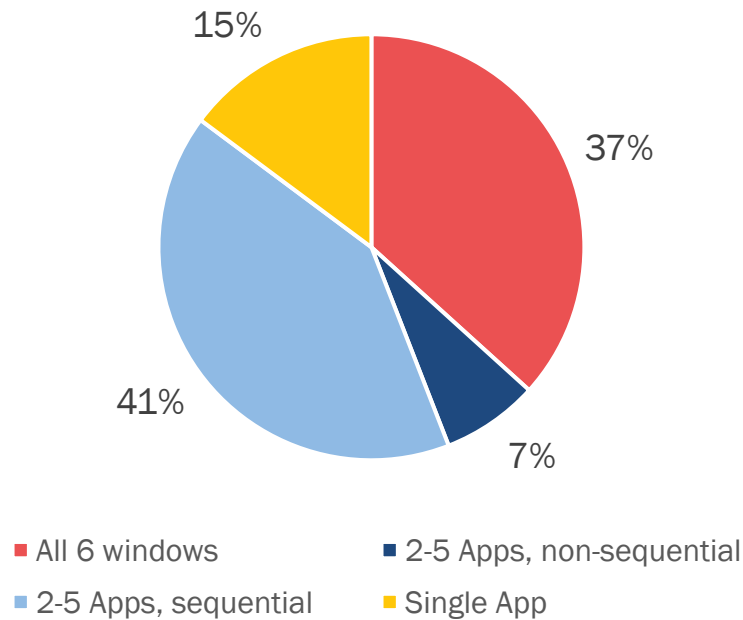
Pandemic Retention Bonus Program Overview

5,820 unique applicants have been awarded across Windows 1- 6 of the bonus program (from March 2022-Present).

85% of unique applicants have applied in 2 or more windows, with 37% of unique applicants applying in all windows.



Percent of awards by application frequency category



PRB Impact

In a recent window, we asked the providers what the Pandemic Retention Bonuses have meant to them so far.

- *“Being in school and working part time it is hard to make enough money to get by while also being a full time student in college. I am working towards my bachelors in early childhood. These funds have helped me while I am still in college.”*
- *“As much as I love my career field it sadly doesn't pay enough to support yourself and bills. Getting this money really helps catch up on expenses.”*
- *“Food is very expensive I have 3 children since prices have gone up it's been very hard even with gas to get to and from work and to be able to bring my children to school and this is so helpful.”*
- *“Having extra funds is extremely helpful when money gets tight and I need to pay bills, or put gas in my car to get to work, it is always a great bonus.”*
- *“I have been able to worry less about how I am going to pay bills and expenses. These grants have given me opportunity to save money instead of living pay check to pay check.”*

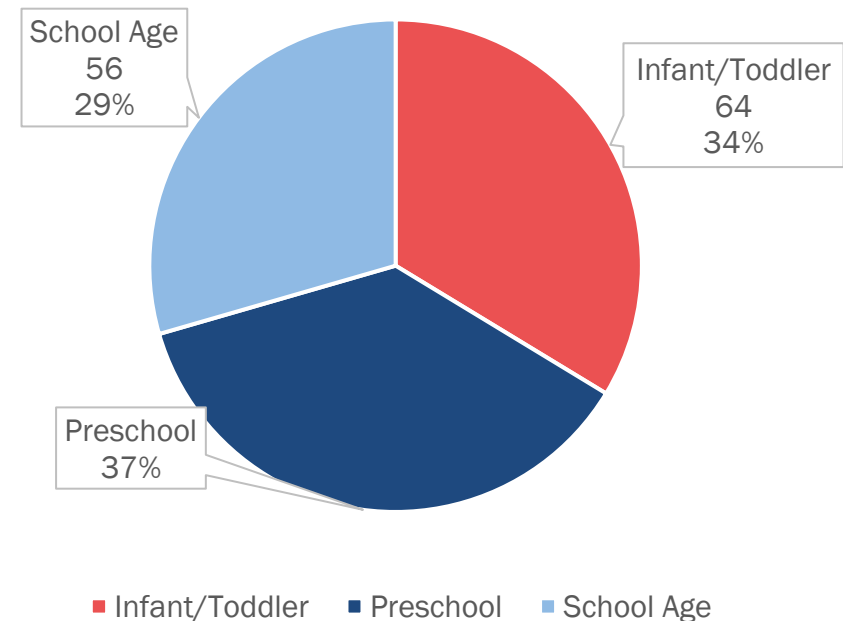
CCAP for Child Care Pilot

CCAP for Child Care Pilot

The Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) for Child Care Staff is a one-year pilot offering CCAP benefits to subsidize the cost of child care for eligible early childhood educators and staff working in DHS licensed child care programs.

- Pilot start date: Thursday, August 25th
- Total applications received as of 9/22: 195
 - Total completed applications: 153
 - In process: 42
- Count by Children:
 - Approved: 190
 - Denied: 33

Total Number of Children in Pilot = 190



Head Start & Early Head Start

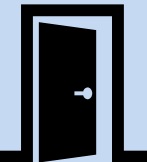
Impact: Sustaining Early Head Start & Head Start

RI SFY24 Budget included \$3M to Sustain Early Head Start & Head Start. In collaboration with the Administration for Children & Families Office of Head Start and RI center-based Grant Recipients we developed a 2-fold distribution plan.

Two-fold Distribution:



- 1) Increase state cost per child for existing 130 Head Start slots to match federal cost per child.



- 2) Reopen two classrooms per center-based provider that were not operational during the 2022-2023 school year.

Reopening Classrooms:

- EHS Classrooms: 5
- EHS Slots: 38
- HS Classrooms: 7
- HS Slots: 99

Total Classrooms: 12
Total Slots: 137

Communities: Cranston, East Providence, Newport, North Providence, Providence, South Kingstown, Warwick, Woonsocket

Sustaining Programs Post-COVID:



Personnel

- A) Mental Health & Disabilities
 - Clinician
 - Coordinator
 - Case Management
- B) Additional Classroom Staff
 - Additional Support Staff/Teachers
- C) Retention Efforts
 - Center-wide bonuses



Head Start Collaboration Offices: National Priorities

The Office of Head Start (OHS) established four priority areas to guide the work of the Head Start Collaboration Offices (HSCOs).

Collaborate with state systems to align early care and education services and supports for children and families from pre-natal to age 5.

- Services and supports for children experiencing:
 - Homelessness
 - Children in foster care
 - Children w/ disabilities
 - Dual Language Learners
- Comprehensive service delivery
- Quality improvements
- School readiness initiatives
- State background check systems
- Child care
- Home visiting
- Health, mental health and social emotional well-being
- Child welfare
- Early Head Start child care partnerships
- Early childhood comprehensive systems health integration from prenatal to age three programs

Work with state efforts to collect and use data on early childhood programs to guide decision-making and improve child and family outcomes.

Support appropriate access to and use of data to guide decision-making and to improve outcomes in areas such as coordinated eligibility and disparities in access to services.

Support the expansion of and access to high-quality workforce and career development opportunities for staff

Work with state professional development systems, including workforce registries and career pathways and with institutions of higher education to promote expansion and high-quality career development opportunities.

Coordinate with school systems to ensure continuity and alignment across programs, as appropriate.

Promote continuity of services, program alignment, and support for successful transitions, particularly with state preschool, kindergarten, and with Title I, McKinney-Vento, and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act programs.

El Staffing and Fiscal Crisis Efforts

STATE EFFORTS

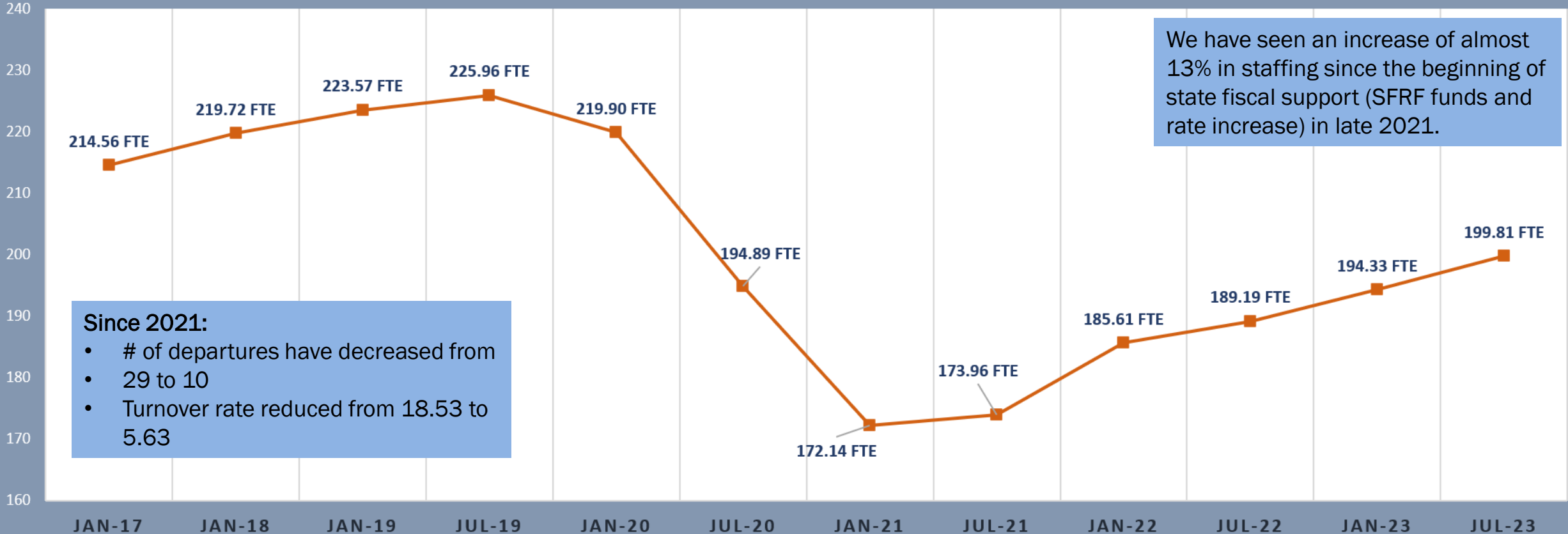
- \$14.6M in COVID relief related funding since 2020
- 45 % Rate Increase beginning SFY23
- Temporary State Referral Process
- Workforce Campaign
- OHIC Rate Study
- Expanding Service Capacity
- National Advocacy

EI PROVIDER DIRECT EFFORTS

- Intensive and extensive advertisement and recruitment for new staff
- Bonuses for staff to take on student interns
- Salary Increases for current staff
- Increased salary scales
- Sign-on and retainment bonuses
- Incentive Programs
- Tuition Reimbursement
- Additional PTO time
- Mileage reimbursement bonus
- Professional Development Opportunities
- Staff Appreciation Days/Activities
- **Note: This is not an exhaustive list**

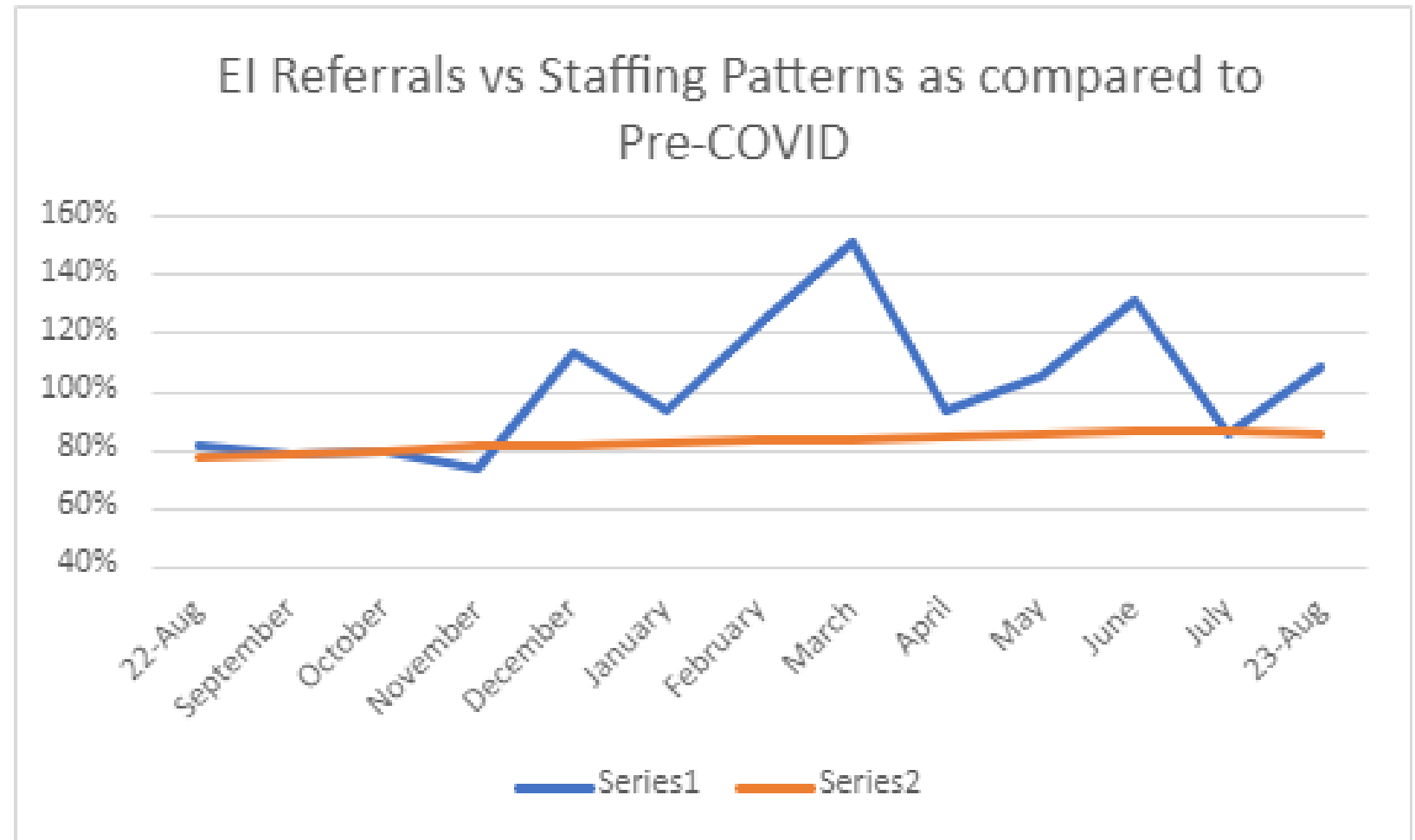
Early Intervention Staffing Over Time

EARLY INTERVENTION STATEWIDE STAFFING 2017-2023



Continued EI Staffing Shortages

- Despite intensive efforts to recruit and retain staff, EI Providers still need to increase direct care staff to meet demand
- Continued staffing shortages means it takes longer for families to be enrolled in Early Intervention
- Similar trends occurring across the country



Public Comment

2023 Early Learning Council Meetings:

- Wednesday, December 6th, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.
Big Brothers Big Sister of RI

ELC Special Input Session on Early Childhood Governance

- October 31, 2023, 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

ZOOM Registration link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAocuChqT0jHNBOJlERSAB2_HZ8A8ozW4NF

See www.earlylearningri.org for meeting schedules, handouts, notes, and state reports