

RI Prenatal – 5 System Action Plan Executive Summary

Draft October 2019

Introduction

In 2019, Rhode Island (RI) received a \$4,194,057 grant from the US Department of Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (HHS-ACF) to participate in the Preschool Development Grant Birth - Five (PDG B-5). The PDG B-5 grant calls for states to assess the current status of, and plan for needs related to:

- Expanding partnerships, coordination, collaboration, and quality improvement activities across the mixed delivery system;
- Improving transitions between early childhood programs, and from early childhood programs into elementary schools; and
- Increasing overall participation in high-quality early childhood programs, particularly for the State's vulnerable children.

In alignment with the focus of the PDG B-5 grant, Rhode Island's vision for the state's early childhood system is that all RI children prenatal - 5 and their families have equitable access to the high-quality services and supports they need to enter kindergarten educationally and developmentally ready to succeed, putting them on track to read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade. This vision is founded on three integrated outcomes:

- Families and children B-5 are empowered to lead healthy and engaged lives through timely, targeted services;
- Children ages birth – 5 equitably access high quality early childhood care and education; and
- Four-year-old children participate in high-quality Pre-K.

RI Prenatal - 5 Context

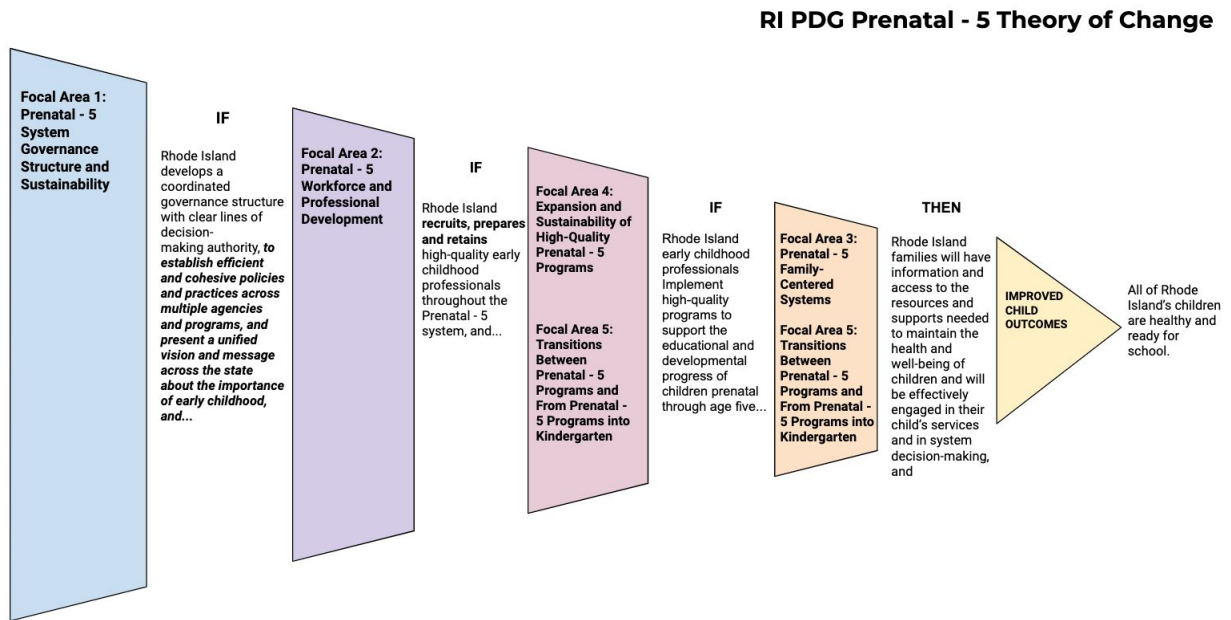
Rhode Island's prenatal - 5 system is a mix of programs that cover three main areas of services and supports: early childhood learning; family support, and health and mental health. To ensure that the multiple needs of families, as well as the unique expertise and best practices for each program were included in this Plan, representatives from the following agencies and programs gathered together to review needs assessment data and existing strategic plans, discuss the implications of each, and use them to plan out the scope of this Action Plan:

- Executive Office of Health and Human Services (Office of Medicaid; IDEA Part C Early Intervention),
- Department of Health (Perinatal and Early Childhood Health; Family Home Visiting and Newborn Screening),
- Rhode Island Department of Education (IDEA Part B Preschool Special Education; Instruction, Assessment and Curriculum; and State Pre-K),
- Department of Human Services (Children and Families; Child Care; Head Start Collaboration; PDG Grant Management and Support),
- Department of Children, Youth and Families Licensing Division,
- Children's Cabinet, and
- The Governor's Office.

With the support of expert consultants, and based on comprehensive data and feedback from across the state this group -- the State Core Design Team -- integrated information from different sources; conducted root cause analyses; and determined focal areas, goals and strategies for the Action Plan.

RI Prenatal – 5 Vision and Theory of Change

RI seeks to support the creation of a comprehensive and actionable statewide Prenatal - 5 System Action Plan that builds upon current successful initiatives to increase collaboration; streamline coordination; and improve the quality of care, educational experiences, and associated outcomes throughout the state for children prenatal through age 5 and their families. This mission is reflected in the following diagram, which represents the RI Prenatal - 5 Theory of Change:



This theory of action supports RI's vision that **all RI children prenatal - 5 and their families have equitable access to high-quality services and supports they need for children to enter kindergarten educationally and developmentally ready to succeed.**

Focal Areas and Goals

In order to realize this vision, RI has identified five focal areas to drive improvement in the early childhood system and improve child outcomes. Within each focal area are areas of need and improvement identified through the needs assessments and discussed at length with the State Core Design Team. Additional feedback from

stakeholders was solicited and confirmed each focal area as important to include and address through this Action Plan.

Focal Area 1: Prenatal - 5 System Governance Structure and Sustainability

RI has more state agencies involved in the direct oversight of programs in the prenatal - 5 system than most states. RI continues to advance its governance model to ensure there is effective collaboration across these agencies. A governance structure is defined as *how programs and entities are managed and resourced to promote efficiency, excellence, and equity. It comprises the traditions, institutions, and processes that determine how authority is exercised, how constituents are given voice, and how decisions are made on issues of mutual concern.* By instituting a unified prenatal - 5 system governance structure, RI will increase efficiency in the use of resources, ensure alignment in implementation of policies/procedures across districts, and sustain data-driven cross-agency decision-making.

- Goal 1.1: The Prenatal - 5 system has a coordinated governance structure that delineates clear lines of decision-making authority, supports cross agency projects and work streams, and ensures shared accountability.
- Goal 1.2: Prenatal - 5 data is secure, accessible, accurate, high-quality, and is used regularly to inform decision-making across the early childhood system.
- Goal 1.3: RI has an established, diverse and sustainable funding structure across state agencies to support the implementation of high-quality programs and services in the Prenatal - 5 system.
- Goal 1.4: Mechanisms are in place to support cross-agency identification of operational efficiencies and opportunities for mutual support.

Focal Area 2: Prenatal - 5 System Workforce and Professional Development

A well-qualified early childhood workforce, defined as *professionals that are specifically prepared to work with or on behalf of young children (prenatally through age 5) and their families*, is a key lever for improving access to and uptake of high-quality services for young children, their families, and expectant mothers.

Enhancing and expanding workforce pipelines by engaging the higher education and business communities in creating streamlined and effective preparation and support paths will create *professional development systems that will ensure that the early childhood workforce is qualified and supported to offer high-quality programs and services.*

“The children are learning and following curriculum. They are challenged every day. High quality means there is an investment in staff and teachers.”

- Goal 2.1: Strengthen career pathways which support recruitment, retention and advancement in the profession.
- Goal 2.2: Improve the compensation and wages of early childhood professionals in Rhode Island.

- Goal 2.3: Implement ongoing, targeted and competency based professional development and implementation support initiatives which ensure high-quality programming.

Focal Area 3: Prenatal - 5 Family-Centered Systems

Family-centered systems treat families with dignity and respect; provide family members with the information needed to make informed decisions and choices, and actively involve families in obtaining resources and support. This action plan presents RI with an opportunity to center the individual needs of children and families into the design and constant refinement of the state’s prenatal - 5 system to ensure *collaborative, sustained, strengths-based, respectful, positive, and intentional relationships with families are central to all programs and services.*

- Goal 3.1: Families are supported in navigating the prenatal - 5 system by having the information they want, in an accessible manner, about their array of options for community-based prenatal - 5 opportunities, programs, and services.
- Goal 3.2: Families are supported in using the prenatal - 5 system by having equitable access to community-based opportunities, programs, and services for which they qualify and have a desire to participate.
- Goal 3.3: Families will be partners and decision-makers at all levels of the system.

<p>“She coached me and built up my confidence, any doubts I had she was there to motivate me and walk me through things.”</p>	<p>“I don’t even know if someone came to talk to us at the hospital. All I remember is people talking to us about the bill...I think I turned down a home visitor. I was like what are they going to do? I didn’t understand what the point was.”</p>	<p>“They came to my house with information on how to deal with running out of food, how to meet bills and where to go to find resources...[Agency] helped me get things I needed for the baby and referred me to [community partner] for help.”</p>
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Focal Area 4: Expansion and Sustainability of High-Quality Prenatal - 5 Programs

Expanding access to prenatal - 5 programming is not enough to address the needs of young children and their families. When it comes to prenatal - 5 programming, quality matters. In studies of programs ranging from family visiting state Pre-K children who receive services that are rated as high-quality benefit more than those who receive low-quality services. This action plan presents RI with an opportunity to expand and sustain high-quality programming by adopting and adhering to appropriate quality standards. Expanding and sustaining high-quality programming includes *elements of the early childhood system that support the implementation,*

sustainability, and expansion of high-quality experiences for children and their families, including quality standards, data systems, funding streams, and resources that support a cycle of continuous quality improvement.

- Goal 4.1: Design and implement high-quality early childhood programs that are aligned to the state vision of quality and designed to drive positive child outcomes.
- Goal 4.2: Expand and sustain existing high-quality early childhood programs, ensuring access and equitable participation for all children and families.

“When I looked at child care it was so expensive. It would make no sense for me to go to work and make what I was making to cover child care.”

“My child [told] me once when I was stressed, “Mom, take a deep breath.” They take home learning about emotions, stress and that to me is high quality.”

“Yes, I would participate because preschool has a learning focus...Many of the cities in Rhode Island with more low-income residents have public preschool. I would like to see that available across the state.”

Focal Area 5: Coordination and Transitions Between Prenatal - 5 Programs and From Prenatal - 5 Programs into Kindergarten

Transitions to new care and learning settings impact the entire family. Transitions between settings can bring excitement and joy, but also uncertainty or concern. By providing support and guidance, early childhood professionals and programs can ensure that families feel secure and ready to make the move to a new setting. By focusing on transitions, RI is committed to improving the *processes, policies, structures, services, and supports associated with a child moving from one program or setting to another.*

- Goal 5.1: Children and families’ transitions among programs within the same day are smooth.
- Goal 5.2: Children and families’ transitions to future programs are clearly discussed, communicated, and facilitated.
- Goal 5.3: Children and families are supported holistically through coordination with adult support.

“...[preschool] helps kids get a jump start in learning, so they aren’t behind the others when they start kindergarten.”

Each focal area of the Action Plan contains strategies designed to address the goals identified. Additionally, state agency owners have been assigned strategies and goals for accountability purposes; but given the nature of the strategies to address multiple areas at once, extensive collaboration and coordination will be needed not only at the state level, but within programs and communities as well to realize the goals included in this Action Plan. A Vision of Success with targets and metrics will allow the state track progress towards the goals for the duration of the Action Plan.