



# Early Childhood Care and Education Strategic Plan

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Adopted in 2020 &  
Updated for 2021



**RHODE  
ISLAND**

# Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Strategic Plan for Rhode Island

**Mission:** Rhode Island's comprehensive focus on Early Childhood Care and Education brings together providers, programs, advocates and families to ensure that our children prenatal through age five have equitable access to high-quality educational, health and developmental care, and services and supports needed in order to enter school healthy and ready to succeed.

**Vision:** All Rhode Island children enter kindergarten educationally, social- emotionally, and developmentally ready to succeed, putting them on a path to read proficiently by 3rd grade.

## Guiding Principles:

- **Focus on Vulnerable Populations:** We believe in focusing our work to address systemic barriers and race equity. In doing so, we prioritize actions that will deliver outcomes for our highest-risk children to ensure kindergarten readiness, putting them on a path to reading proficiently by third grade.
- **Inclusive and Diverse Engagement:** We believe our work is best supported through strong, sustained partnerships with families, caregivers, community members, educational institutions and providers. Collectively, we can positively impact outcomes for children.
- **Commitment to a Mixed Delivery Model:** We believe in providing child care and education through a diverse set of programs, services and providers so that young children and families can access the resources they need to thrive, in a setting that works best for them.
- **Cross-system Alignment:** We believe that the early childhood system – inclusive of early learning, development, and health – needs to be a coordinated, aligned system that is easily navigable for families and is connected with systems of support for children ages 5-8.
- **Workforce Advocacy and Support:** We believe in, and support, the individuals caring for and educating our youngest constituents and support the expansion of programs that help recruit, prepare and retain a high- quality early childhood care and education workforce.
- **Collaborative Leadership:** We believe in the mutual alignment and advocacy of the Governor, her Cabinet, and those agencies representing the health, well-being and education of young children and families, from prenatal and maternal health through to school- aged services, education and support.
- **Alignment of Funding with Impact:** We believe in rigorously pursuing diverse and sustainable funding, while also assessing the impact of our investments against desired outcomes for children. RI commits to refining our strategies and actions based on those finding

The ECCE Strategic plan has five core objectives to ensure that all children are on a path to reading proficiently in third grade.

**Vision:** all children on a path to reading proficiently in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade

**Objective 1:**

Rhode Island's early childhood programs meet high-quality standards for care and education as defined by our Quality Rating and Improvement System

**Objective 2:**

Children and families can equitably access and participate in the early childhood care, services, and supports that will help them reach their potential and enter school healthy and ready to succeed.

**Objective 3:**

All four-year olds in Rhode Island have access to high-quality Pre-K, inclusive of parental choice and student needs.

**Objective 4:** Secure the quality and delivery of ECCE through increased and sustainable funding and operational improvements.

**Objective 5:** Expand the depth and quality of family and child-level data accessible to and used by agencies, programs, and partners to drive decisions.

# Objective 1: Rhode Island's early childhood programs meet high-quality standards for care and education as defined by our Quality Rating and Improvement System.

**Strategy 1:** Strengthen and streamline foundational quality standards through regular review and robust data collection.

ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Align licensing standards and QRIS to make licensure the foundation of quality	In progress
Review and revise health and safety guidelines and licensing requirements to incorporate latest COVID-19 research	Ongoing
Analyze regulations and identify opportunities to reduce confusion and blockers to ensure the successful launch (and expansion) of licensed high-quality child care programs.	In progress
Solidify a shared set of quality standards for use across all B-5 classrooms, with intentional linkages to national standards of preschool quality and RI early learning standards.	2021

**Strategy 2:** Expand high quality programs by providing access to a range of data-informed initiatives, resources and supports that will improve their quality and better support the needs of families in the PN-5 system.

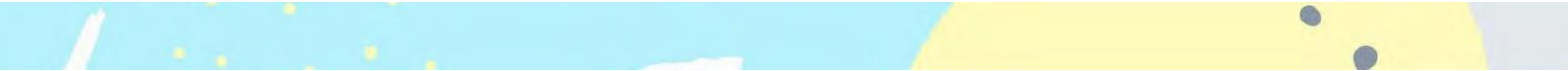
ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Align health and safety priority areas to professional development and quality investments	In progress
Pilot and expand models that demonstrate improved outcomes for children, beginning with the I/T model.	In progress
Build RI's supply of quality family child care providers by identifying and developing a pipeline of prospective, qualified individuals to become DHS-licensed/CCAP-approved.	
Continue the facility planning grant program and award 5-15 additional grants on a rolling basis	Ongoing
Prepare to implement the Early Learning Facilities fund in anticipation of the bond initiative.	Ongoing
Increase CCAP rates to be at the 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile of the market rate	In progress

**Strategy 3:** Ensure the workforce of early childhood educators and care professionals are professionally prepared, fairly compensated and have meaningful pathways towards career advancement.

ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Establish a shared definition of preparation and development for early childhood educators and care professionals working in high-quality programs. Analyze existing workforce data to establish baseline and goals.	In progress
Articulate clear pre-service requirements for the PN-5 ECE workforce (including Family Home Visiting, Early Intervention, pre-k, and child care).	In progress
Pilot an apprenticeship program that supports the recruitment, retention and advancement of the infant/toddler workforce.	In progress
Launch streamlined professional development platform for early childhood workforce, with content aligned to RI quality standards, and with pathways for advancement.	2021
Develop clear articulation of degree requirements across institutes of higher education.	2021
Develop higher education partnerships, particularly among professional development and technical assistance vendors, and explore models that support flexible degree attainment.	2021
Identify and evaluate additional strategies for supporting wage and compensation increases among early childhood professionals.	2021
Identify grant funding to support student loan repayment and/or supports for early childhood degrees.	2022

**Strategy 4:** Fully integrate child care licensing and business operations into the quality improvement efforts of RI’s early childhood system.

ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Visit all licensed care providers.	In progress
Pilot a hybrid approach to coordinated monitoring by thoughtfully integrating BrightStars’ staff into the DHS Child Care Licensing Unit.	In progress
Pilot, improve and implement a Universal Application for programs to become both child care subsidy eligible (CCAP) and DHS licensed.	Complete
Assess all ECE classrooms across the state’s mixed delivery system to ensure compliance to COVID-19 Emergency Child Care Regulations. Identify 3-5 high level trends re: non-compliance to high-risk COVID regulations and deploy dedicated technical assistance within the PDTA Hub for remediation.	In progress



## Objective 2: Children and families can equitably access and participate in the early childhood care, services, and supports that will help them reach their potential and enter school healthy and ready to succeed.

**Strategy 1:** Ensure that all families and children under age five involved with DCYF are provided with the option to access five-star child care programs that provide services through a trauma-informed approach.

ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Develop systems of data sharing to help RI determine if children B-5 involved with DCYF are able to access and enroll in five-star programs and/or high quality ECE programs	2021
Analyze the enrollment patterns of foster care children in child care (family and center based) and determine the pathways to ensure all DCYF involved children under age five have access to Head Start and/or five-star ECE programs.	2021 2022
Develop a system w/ RIDOH/DCYF/DHS to ensure foster children enrolled in high-quality ECE programs have access to mental health consultation.	2021-2022
Prioritize children in foster care who are 4 years old in the RI Pre-K lottery, ensuring they are able to enroll in a high-quality publicly funded pre-k.	Ongoing
Provide professional development for early childhood providers on trauma-informed care, and training for mental health providers working as consultants to early childhood programs	Ongoing

**Strategy 2:** Create a system for connecting families PN-5 to appropriate services and programs, and for monitoring families' continued engagement in those services.

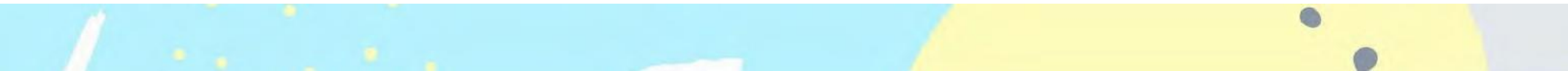
ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Refine definition of vulnerable populations, including baseline population demographics for children and families within the definition.	Complete
Advance our data systems to understand the enrollment and engagement levels of parents and families in services and supports that mitigate adversity and help children become ready for kindergarten, including Early Intervention, Family Home Visiting, Head Start, Parent Education and Support Programs and high quality child care.	2021
Use agency data and community data to understand the factors that make families vulnerable to disengaging in services- implement supports to alleviate these factors.	In progress
Increase cross-enrollment for programs to increase impact. In 2021, focus on WIC-SNAP cross-enrollment.	2021
Create more streamlined connections between programs through the development of a standard information flow, shared referral protocols and electronic information sharing.	2021-2022

**Strategy 3:** Leverage community-embedded resources to help parents understand, navigate and remain engaged in the comprehensive array of PN-5 opportunities, programs and services.

ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Expand parent support programs for families with young children within the Health Equity Zones based that meet specific community needs.	In progress
Expand Family Home Visiting to increase accessibility to more vulnerable families.	In progress
Develop and implement a model of family navigators tailored to each Health Equity Zone based on community needs assessment information.	In progress
Partner with Health Equity Zone community members and Family Home Visiting local implementation teams to determine the appropriate infrastructure needed to support family navigators within the Health Equity Zone.	2021-2022

**Strategy 4:** Build on RI’s leadership in children’s access to healthcare to improve prevention and screening.

ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Support RI’s First 1000 Days of RIte Care initiative through better integration of the Medical Home with other, community based family supports- such as WIC, Family Home Visiting, Child Care, and the network of partners such as literacy- and mental health- focused non profit agencies.	Ongoing
Cover perinatal doula services for Medicaid beneficiaries	2021
Maintain nation-leading vaccination rates & support COVID-19 vaccinations for children in 2021	In progress
Increase lead screening rates	In progress



### **Objective 3:** All four-year olds in Rhode Island have access to high-quality Pre-K, inclusive of parental choice and student needs.

**Strategy 1:** Establish a diverse and sustainable funding structure across state agencies to support the expansion of high-quality pre-k for all 4-year old children in Rhode Island.

ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Finalize and release RI Pre-K Grant Application for SY 22 and determine prioritization of vulnerable populations in the lottery process.	2021
Work with LEAs to develop long term transition plan to move LEA Pre-K classrooms to receiving funding through the funding formula as well as local supplemented funding.	In progress
Meet with LEAs to review impact of moving to Rhode Island's school funding formula and finalize a memorandum of understanding for moving to funding formula in FY 2021.	2021
Establish incentives and supports for school districts, alongside requirements for meeting and maintaining high-quality standards for classrooms	2021
Conduct short survey/focus group with Head Start programs to determine potential barriers to maintaining high-quality standards and utilizing multiple funding sources within their programs.	Complete
Work with Head Start programs to address any potential obstacles to meet the state's established high-quality pre-k standards.	In progress
Evaluate the feasibility of supplementing pre-k seats through blended funding.	2021
Evaluate the non-program expenses associated with RI Pre-K to identify the non-program per student funding needed (for example, delivering professional development and technical assistance, monitoring/evaluating progress, delivering mental health consultations, etc.) and identify cost savings for existing contracts when scaled.	2021



**Strategy 2:** Increase the number of classrooms that meet high-quality pre-k standards

ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Analyze current needs and develop a plan for improving the quality of targeted programs serving the communities with our most vulnerable populations.	2021
Establish and support requirements for LEA programs currently funded through the state funding formula to attain high-quality standards for pre-k.	2021
Revise Comprehensive Early Childhood Education (CECE) regulations to ensure alignment with high-quality standards.	Complete
Provide quality grants or seed money to help programs achieve and/or maintain quality once achieved.	2021
Develop a model for assigning seats within a high-quality program through the lottery, as opposed to full classroom enrollment.	2021
Engage more LEA's, CBO's and Head Start programs in partnering with RI's Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) Itinerant Model, supporting children with differing abilities in Gen Ed classrooms.	2021
Support the General Education workforce, through education and technical assistance, as more children are placed in general education classrooms receiving the itinerant model	2021

**Strategy 3:** Attract, develop and retain a strong workforce of qualified and well-supported educators to both build a pipeline for future expansion needs and support the current demand.

ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Establish a pathway for the current workforce that will lead to PreK-2 certification.	2021
Coordinate with DHS, DOH and EOHHS to establish a streamlined professional development platform for early learning professionals.	In progress
Create content that will provide synchronous and asynchronous opportunities for professional learning in areas aligned to the needs of pre-k classrooms.	2021

## Objective 4: Secure the quality and delivery of ECCE through increased and sustainable funding and operational improvements

**Strategy 1:** Drive an aligned advocacy effort to accomplish legislative and budgetary priorities, as well as increase community awareness of early childhood priorities and options.

ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Establish a framework for mutually aligned advocacy for early childhood priorities, inclusive of role definitions and operational expectations.	In progress
Share resources and information that enable stakeholder advocacy on research-based areas of impact for children and families PN-5.	Ongoing
Build a broad coalition of support for early childhood priorities, including legislators, advocates, families, educators and businesses.	Ongoing
Enhance video, web and print assets to increase awareness and utilization of care, services and supports.	Ongoing

**Strategy 2:** Increase high-impact investments in the PN-5 system through innovative financing levers and proactive sources of funding such as grants.

ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Continuously identify and secure outside funding streams to support early childhood priorities (i.e. grants, new revenue opportunities, new federal opportunities).	Ongoing
Leverage stimulus and other one-time federal funding opportunities to achieve ECCE strategic plan goals	Ongoing
Use the Children's Cabinet budget to develop a comprehensive review of funding available and allocated for early childhood care and education within supporting agencies.	Ongoing
Identify programs that are not meeting objectives and recommend opportunities for reinvestment based on allowable use of funding.	Ongoing

**Strategy 3:** Support interagency collaboration and coordination to optimize and streamline operations and use of funds.

ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Manage the Preschool Development Renewal Grant funds to support early childhood strategies and actions as defined by the Strategic Plan.	Ongoing
Identify opportunities for coordinated procurements and support execution of contracts.	Ongoing
Secure interagency memorandums of understanding (MOUs) as needed to support sharing of funds allocated to early childhood priorities.	Complete
Provide useful metrics, reports and tools that allow other objective areas to blend fiscal and program data in order to make informed budget and program decisions.	Ongoing

**Strategy 4:** Develop a sustainable PN-5 ECCE governance structure that allows for interagency and public-private collaboration and decision-making to achieve the ECCE mission and vision.

ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Design a shared governance model for PN-5 ECCE, focused on clear decision making and accountability	Complete
Implement regular Governance meetings and process to track progress towards objectives and action steps	Ongoing
Engage with the Early Learning Council as an advisory council on key strategic decisions	Ongoing
Develop and engage with the Family Advisory Council as an advisory council on key strategic decisions	Ongoing
Engage the Children’s Cabinet as the overarching Governance body	Ongoing
Consider further structural and governance changes to create a more family-centered system	Ongoing

## Objective 5: Expand the depth and quality of family and child-level data accessible to and used by agencies, programs, and partners to drive decisions.

**Strategy 1:** Use data to drive action and updates to the Strategic plan. Regularly review progress and performance data on each Objective to measure progress on the Strategic Plan, identify opportunities for improvement, and determine the overall health of the Early Childhood System.

ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Establish baseline measurements, targets and progress indicators for programs within the strategic plan and PDG renewal grant; develop program performance evaluation (PPE) plan.	In progress
Implement biweekly governance meetings to review and improve performance.	Ongoing
Review and update Action Plan bi-annually to align with latest research and address opportunities identified through the performance evaluation	In progress
Provide useful metrics, reports and tools that allow other objective areas to blend fiscal and program data to support informed budget and program decisions.	Ongoing
Publish and present data publicly to engage stakeholders, programs, and families in review of the ECCE system.	Ongoing

**Strategy 2:** Deepen the person-level data collected and accessible in our early childhood system by enhancing current system capability and eventually developing a full Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS)

ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Develop and operationalize data governance sub-committee with authority to recommend operational and programmatic changes to the early childhood Steering Committee.	In progress
Create data-sharing agreements among agencies to integrate RIDE data into the EOHHS data ecosystem.	Complete
Produce a maintenance agreement for Early Childhood Education Data System (ECEDS), including ownership, access and resourcing plans for future builds and system administration.	In progress
Onboard new staff, including ECEDS Coder and ECE Performance Lead.	2021
Further develop ECEDS ability to identify which child is in which early learning program with which member of the workforce.	2021
Develop a long-term plan for creating an ECIDS.	2022
Determine the goals, strategy and resourcing for the ECEDS workforce registry, including use of the workforce registry by programs.	2021

**Strategy 3:** Improve and expand the use of state’s ECCE data among users, including families and programs.

ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Identify resources for data support dedicated to ECCE.	In progress
Support all Head Start programs in using state data systems such as ECEDS and KidsNet.	In progress
Explore the expansion of additional providers using KidsNet to track and monitor child-level health information such as immunizations.	2021
Utilize data governance subcommittee to provide oversight and support for research and data report requests from state agencies, users, families and programs.	2021
Develop useful communication strategies, tools and reports that help families, students, and the community access and understand data on education, health and development.	Ongoing

**Strategy 4:** Conduct ongoing research and needs assessments to inform updates to the Strategic Plan.

ACTION STEPS	Timeline
Conduct annual ECCE Survey to understand population-level access, needs, and barriers	Complete
Partner with the Hassenfeld Child Health Innovation Institute to pursue longitudinal research.	Ongoing
Pursue targeted research studies to understand needs of high-priority communities and families.	2021



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# Lagging metrics

**These five lagging metrics will be our high level measures of whether we are on track to increase the number of children ready for Kindergarten.**

Objective	Lagging Metric
1. High quality early learning opportunities for children:	% of CCAP children enrolled in 4 or 5 star providers
2. Equitable access to high quality services & supports	% improvement of vulnerable population participation rates in high-quality programs
3. Universal Pre-K access	# of 4 year olds enrolled in high-quality Pre-K
4. Sustainable system	\$ in new funding leveraged for ECCE purposes (state budget, federal funds, grants, etc)
5. Continuous improvement through integrated data	# of data elements that are integrated at the child level