

# Rhode Island Early Learning Council Strategic Plan 2012-2016



December 2012

Rhode Island Early Learning  
Council Co-Chairs

Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner,  
Rhode Island Department of  
Education

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive  
Director, Rhode Island KIDS  
COUNT

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE RHODE ISLAND EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL CO-CHAIRS .....	3
ROLE OF THE EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL .....	4
RHODE ISLAND EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL MEMBERS .....	6
RHODE ISLAND EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL WORKGROUP MEMBERS .....	7
DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN .....	8
RHODE ISLAND EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL FOCUS AREAS .....	9
OBJECTIVES AT A GLANCE .....	10
A. Expanding Access to High-Quality Early Learning and Development Programs, particularly for Children with High Needs .....	11
B. Improving Program Quality .....	17
C. Developing and Sustaining an Effective Early Care and Education Workforce .....	20
D. Improving Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children .....	23
E. Ongoing Measurement of Outcomes and Progress .....	25
DEFINITIONS.....	27

# LETTER FROM THE RHODE ISLAND EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL CO-CHAIRS

Dear Fellow Rhode Islanders,

Thank you for taking the time to read and understand our strategic plan. This plan outlines the long-term goals, targets and key strategies of the Rhode Island Early Learning Council - a collaborative, cross-sector, cross-departmental body intended to align systems and resources statewide to support high quality early care and education services and improve coordination and collaboration among multiple agencies, organizations and programs.

This plan is meant to be a living document that will help prioritize our work and set our direction as a Council over the next five years from 2012 – 2016. We believe the goals and targets that we have set are both ambitious and achievable. We have also worked hard to ensure that the strategies reflected in this document are aligned and integrated across the multiple state agencies responsible for early learning in this State. The broad goals and vision articulated in this plan are supported by all of the state partner agencies and we know that full implementation of all the components of this ambitious plan will require additional funding and advocacy support.

Our major goal, the primary charge of the Council, is to expand access to ensure that more children, particularly children from low-income and vulnerable families, participate in high-quality early learning and development programs, including high-quality child care (both center-based and family child-care homes), Head Start, Early Head Start, Pre-K, Early Intervention, preschool Special Education, and full-day kindergarten. This overarching goal is supported by strategies in five areas of focus:

- Expanding Access to High Quality Programs
- Improving Program Quality
- Developing and Sustaining an Effective Early Care and Education Workforce
- Improving Early Learning and Child Development Outcomes
- Measuring Outcomes and Progress

This is an exciting time for early learning in the State of Rhode Island. We have a strong foundation in place and a plan and resources upon which to build. We are especially excited by Rhode Island's recent Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge award, a competitive grant program jointly administered by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. This \$50 million award over four years (2012 – 2015) will go a long way toward accelerating Rhode Island's efforts to improve early learning and development opportunities for Rhode Island's youngest children and create an effective, accountable early learning system that increases access to quality early care and development programs for the highest need children in our State.

Sincerely,

Deborah A. Gist  
Co-chair, RI Early Learning Council  
Rhode Island Commissioner of Education

Elizabeth Burke Bryant  
Co-chair, RI Early Learning Council  
Executive Director, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

## **ROLE OF THE EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL**

Rhode Island's Early Learning Council was formed in June 2010 according to the guidelines for State Early Care and Education Advisory Councils outlined in the 2007 federal Head Start Reauthorization Act. The Council is made up of 24 key leaders representing all the sectors of the early learning and development field and is co-chaired by the Commissioner of Education, Deborah A. Gist, and by Elizabeth Burke Bryant, the Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, an independent children's policy and research organization.

The Rhode Island Early Learning Council's overarching goal is "to expand access to ensure that more children, particularly from low-income and vulnerable families, participate in high-quality early learning programs, including high-quality child care (both center-based and family child-care homes), Head Start, Early Head Start, Pre-K, Early Intervention, preschool Special Education, and full-day kindergarten." To achieve this goal, the Council works to facilitate the development and sustainability of high-quality systems of early childhood education and care serving children from birth through age 8, with the goal of improving school readiness and success in school. In this role, the Council has developed a collaborative, cross-sector, cross-department strategic plan that aligns strategies and resources to support high quality early care and education services and improve coordination and collaboration among multiple agencies, organizations and programs. This initial plan is focused on developing and sustaining a high-quality system of early childhood education and care for our youngest children, age birth to five.

### **Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge**

In December 2011, Rhode Island was one of nine states awarded grants from the \$500 million Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge fund, a competitive grant program jointly administered by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. Rhode Island was awarded \$50 million over four years to improve early learning and development opportunities for Rhode Island's young children. These grant funds will enable Rhode Island to build on its many strengths and accelerate its efforts to create an effective, accountable early learning system that increases access to quality early care and development programs for the State's highest need children.

This initiative will be managed and implemented by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and its partner agencies, including the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Health and the Department of Children, Youth and Families. The work will be carried out by Core Project Management Teams led by state agency staff. Each Core Project Management Team includes a representative from the Early Learning Council in addition to state staff to carry out the work. Core Project Management Teams will consult with local and national experts for policy guidance as needed.

The Rhode Island Early Learning Council will provide leadership and oversight to the grant implementation to ensure the development of cross-sector and cross-departmental systems and programs. It is also charged with facilitating overarching policy decisions to help ensure the effective implementation of the grant. To support the work, seven Early Learning Council Sub-Committees have been established and will take the lead

in gathering and synthesizing stakeholder and public input and recommendations to inform the Core Project Management teams which are responsible for carrying out the grant activities on a day-to-day basis, ensuring the goals are achieved. The Early Learning Council Sub-Committees are as follows:

Early Learning Council Sub-Committee	Sub-Committee Co-Chairs
<b>Early Learning and Development Standards</b>	Susan Dickstein and Kristen Greene
<b>Early Childhood Assessment</b>	Mindy Mertz and Judy Stevenson-Garcia
<b>Program Standards Alignment</b>	Elizabeth Burke Bryant and Michele Palermo
<b>Program Quality Improvement</b>	Leanne Barrett and Karen Beese
<b>Workforce Knowledge and Competencies</b>	Khadija Lewis Khan and Karen Beese
<b>Data System</b>	Tammy Camillo and Mike Bosworth
<b>Access to High Quality Programs</b>	Elizabeth Burke Bryant and Lawrence Pucciarelli

Early childhood stakeholders will be a critical partner in the process and will be provided a number of opportunities to review documents and make recommendations to the Core Project Management team as the work progresses. This input is considered vital for the success of the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Initiative.

## **RHODE ISLAND EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL MEMBERS**

### **Co-Chairs**

Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

### **Members**

Jim Berson, Chair, RI Interagency Coordinating Council on Early Intervention

Tammy Camillo, Executive Director, Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children

Regina Costa, State Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate

Janice DeFrances, Director, Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families

Susan Dickstein, President, RI Association for Infant Mental Health

Colleen Dorian, President, Family Child Care Homes of Rhode Island

Maryann Finamore-Allmark, Director, Westbay Children's Center

Dr. Michael Fine, Director, Rhode Island Department of Health

Cynthia Garcia Coll, Professor of Education, Psychology, and Pediatrics, Brown University

Leslie Gell, Director, Ready to Learn Providence

Deborah Grossman-Garber, Associate Commissioner, RIOHE

Pamela High, Director of Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics, Hasbro Children's Hospital

Cindy Larson, Senior Program Officer, Rhode Island Child Care Facilities Fund

Khadija Lewis Khan, Executive Director, Beautiful Beginnings Child Care Center

Susan Lusi, Superintendent, Providence Public Schools

Anthony Maione, President and CEO, United Way of Rhode Island

Aimee Mitchell, RI Head Start Association

Charlotte Moretti, Chair, RI Child Care Directors Association

Michele Palermo, Associate Director, Early Childhood Education, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Sandra Powell, Director, Rhode Island Department of Human Services

Larry Pucciarelli, Director, Island Head Start Collaboration Office

Neil Steinberg, President & CEO, The Rhode Island Foundation

Susan Warford, Coordinator, URI Child Development Center

### **Ex Officio:**

Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT & Coordinator, Rhode Island Early Learning Council

## **RHODE ISLAND EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL WORKGROUP MEMBERS**

### **Co-Chairs**

Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Michele Palermo, Associate Director, Early Childhood Education, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Larry Pucciarelli, Director, Rhode Island Head Start Collaboration Office

### **Members**

Brenda Almeida, Licensing Supervisor, Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families

Chris Amirault, President, Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children

Christine Arouth, Executive Director, Newport Family and Child Opportunity Zone

Karen Beese, Child Care Specialist, Rhode Island Department of Human Services

Blythe Berger, Team Leader – Perinatal and Early Childhood Health, Rhode Island Department of Health

Tammy Camillo, Executive Director, Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children

Diane Cook, State Child Care Administrator, Rhode Island Department of Human Services

Terese Curtin, Executive Director, Connecting for Children & Families

Susan Dickstein, Ph.D., President, RI Association for Infant Mental Health

Colleen Dorian, President, Family Child Care Homes of Rhode Island

Brenda Duhamel, Chief, Family Health Systems, Rhode Island Office of Health and Human Services

Rhonda Farrell, Rhode Island Head Start Association

Maryann Finamore Allmark, Director, Westbay Children's Center

Ruth Gallucci, Education Specialist: Early Childhood Special Education, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Leslie Gell, Director, Ready to Learn Providence

Jerry Hatfield, Professor and Chair – Department of Human Services, Community College of Rhode Island

Cindy Larson, Senior Program Officer, Rhode Island Child Care Facilities Fund

Khadija Lewis Khan, Executive Director, Beautiful Beginnings Child Care Center

Mindy Mertz, Supervisor, Providence Public Schools

Susan Orban, Coordinator, Washington County Coalition for Children

Leslie Sevey, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Rhode Island College

Melinda Smith, Director of Curriculum, Lincoln Public Schools

Susan Warford, Coordinator, URI Child Development Center

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

This strategic plan integrates and consolidates the plans developed by the Rhode Island Early Learning Council since its inception in June 2010 including strategies and priorities from the following work products of the Council:

- State Early Learning Council ARRA application
- Early Learning Council Access Recommendations
- Early Learning Council Kindergarten Entry Assessment Recommendations
- Early Learning Council Data Team Recommendations
- Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Application
- Rhode Island’s Early Learning and School-Age Professional Development System Plan

It is important to note that the Council’s plan, while inclusive of the Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge strategies is broader and more encompassing. The Council will continue to work towards its overarching goal of “expanding access to ensure that more children, particularly from low-income and vulnerable families, participate in high-quality early learning programs” after the four year Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenges grant is over and the systems building initiatives are in place by continuing to: conduct regular ongoing assessment of needs and gaps in services and identify opportunities for and barriers to increasing access, including financing as well as other strategies for expanding access to ensure that more children (particularly children with high needs) participate in high quality early learning.

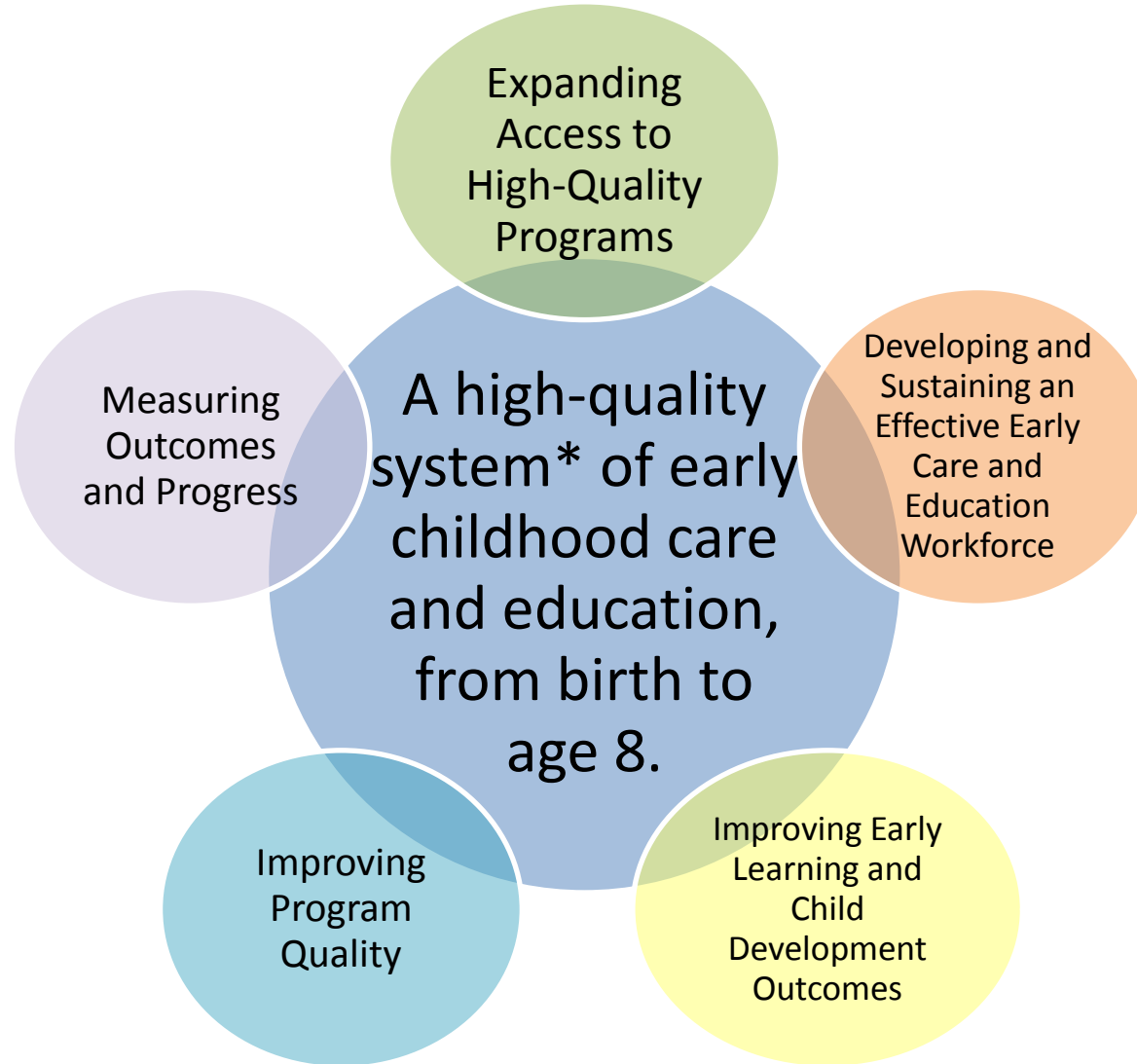
Each of the work products that informed the strategic plan were reviewed and endorsed by the Rhode Island Early Learning Council. In addition, initial drafts of the strategic plan were reviewed by Council Work Group members. Feedback was gathered and used to revise the draft, and at the Council meeting on December 5, 2012, the Rhode Island Early Learning Council unanimously approved the plan.

[For additional information about the Rhode Island Early Learning Council:](#)

Contact Leanne Barrett, Coordinator, at 401-351-9400 or [lbarrett@rikidscount.org](mailto:lbarrett@rikidscount.org)



## RHODE ISLAND EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL FOCUS AREAS



\*The Early Childhood Care and Education System must have intentional linkages to systems that support the health and wellness of children and families, acknowledging the importance of children's development in the context of culture and supportive relationships.

## OBJECTIVES AT A GLANCE

### A. Expanding Access to High-Quality Early Learning and Development Programs, particularly for Children with High Needs<sup>1</sup>

**ACCESS1:** Assess needs and gaps.

**ACCESS2:** Identify opportunities for and barriers to increasing access, including financing.

**ACCESS3:** Expand access to ensure that more children (particularly children with high needs) participate in high quality early learning.

### B. Improving Program Quality

**QUALITY1:** Adopt a common, statewide quality rating and improvement system (BrightStars).

**QUALITY2:** Promote 100% participation in BrightStars for early learning programs.

**QUALITY3:** Ensure effective rating and monitoring of the quality of programs participating in BrightStars.

**QUALITY4:** Invest resources to improve the quality of early care and education programs and sustain quality over time.

**QUALITY5:** Study the effectiveness of the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System and make adjustments as needed.

### C. Developing and Sustaining an Effective Early Care and Education Workforce

**WORKFORCE1:** Develop workforce knowledge and competency frameworks and corresponding progressions of aligned credentials.

**WORKFORCE2:** Support early childhood educators in improving their knowledge, skills and abilities.

### D. Improving Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

**CHILD OUTCOMES1:** Develop and use high-quality early learning and development standards.

**CHILD OUTCOMES2:** Support effective uses of comprehensive child assessment systems.

### E. Ongoing Measurement of Outcomes and Progress

**MEASUREMENT1:** Develop and implement a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment aligned with State Standards.

**MEASUREMENT2:** Build an early learning data system.

---

<sup>1</sup> Children with High Needs includes young children with disabilities and developmental delays; who have behavioral and mental health needs; young children who have been victims of an indicated case of child maltreatment (including children in foster care); young children who are from low-income families; who are English Language Learners (ELL) and/or have experienced homelessness.

## **A. Expanding Access to High-Quality Early Learning and Development Programs, particularly for Children with High Needs**

### **Goal**

Increase access to high-quality programs for Children with High Needs, including children who are low-income, English language learners, children who have disabilities or special needs, and children who are involved with the child-welfare system or have experienced homelessness.

### **Targets**

#### ***Child Care Assistance Program***

- By 2016, more children from low-income families will be participating in the Child Care Assistance Program, growing from 7,708 in December 2011 to 10,000 in December 2016. (30% increase in child enrollment).
- Increase the percentage of children receiving CCAP, age birth to K entry, that are in high-quality early learning programs.

#### ***Early Head Start/Head Start***

- By 2016, more eligible low income children will be enrolled in Early Head Start growing from 519 (6.5%) in 2011-2012 to 800 (10%) in 2015-2016. (54% increase in enrollment).
- By 2016, more eligible children from low income families will be enrolled in Head Start growing from 2,432 (43%) in 2011-2012 to 2,972 (53%) in 2015-2016. (22% increase in enrollment).

#### ***State Pre-K***

- By 2016-2017 school year, there will be at least 504 children enrolled in a state Pre-K program (28 classrooms), growing from 144 children in 2012-2013 (8 classrooms), a 250% increase.

#### ***Early Childhood Special Education***

- By 2016, 100% of children, age birth through 3, who have been victims of child maltreatment, will be referred to Early Intervention/First Connections by DCYF for assessment and access to appropriate intervention services, up from 65% in 2011.
- By 2016, 85% of preschool children with disabilities and developmental delays will be receiving their special education services within high quality inclusive early childhood settings, up from 52% in 2011.

#### ***Full-Day Kindergarten***

- By the 2016-2017 school year, 100% of Rhode Island kindergarteners enrolled in public school will be enrolled in full day kindergarten, growing from 64% in 2011-2012.

### **Overview**

State economic and budget conditions resulted in major reductions in State funding for the Child Care Assistance Program (through a decrease in eligibility levels and rates that have not been updated for several years) and for Head Start programs. More work needs to be done to continue to demonstrate that

investments in high quality early learning programs pay greatly increased dividends down the road by ensuring that young children have the early childhood foundation they need to succeed in school and in life. Rhode Island has implemented two critical system-building efforts that will lead to lasting change by emphasizing increased access to *high-quality* early learning programs, particularly for children with high needs:

- 1) BrightStars, Rhode Island's research-based Quality Rating and Improvement System; and,
- 2) The planning, design and launch of the State Pre-K Program and the work to include the state Pre-K Program as a categorically funded program in Rhode Island's newly adopted Education Funding Formula, which successfully passed the General Assembly in 2010. Funding for the State Pre-K program, as a categorical program in the school funding formula, started to flow in State FY 2013 and will ultimately expand over ten years to \$10 million per year.

These system elements have significantly strengthened Rhode Island's foundation upon which to build a coordinated, comprehensive State system, however much more work needs to be done to improve access to high-quality early learning programs. The objectives and strategies articulated on the following pages represent the Council's key actions for putting in place policies and funding that will enable more children, particularly children with high needs, to access high-quality, early learning and development programs and services and help to close achievement gaps in young children. These strategies are supported by all of the state partner agencies but due to the role they play with year by year budgets they cannot endorse specific recommendations that have budget implications.

The objectives and strategies outlined below articulate our key actions for achieving these goals.

## Objectives

### ACCESS Objective 1: Assess Needs and Gaps

**Strategy 1.1** Conduct annual statewide needs assessments on the quality and availability of early childhood education and development programs and services from birth to school entry.

**Strategy 1.2** Identify gaps in access, quality and affordability with special attention to Children with High Needs

### ACCESS Objective 2: Identify Opportunities For and Barriers to Access, including Financing

**Strategy 2.1** Use the Early Learning Council as a vehicle for seeking regular input on opportunities and barriers to collaboration.

**Strategy 2.2** Ensure regular two-way communication with existing advisory bodies which focus on the systems and programs which touch young children (e.g. between the Successful Start Steering Committee, the Permanent Legislative Commission on Child Care and the Early Learning Council).

## ACCESS Objective 2: Identify Opportunities For and Barriers to Access, including Financing (Cont'd)

**Strategy 2.3** Identify current financing structure and develop financing recommendations that will increase children's access to high quality learning programs.

## ACCESS Objective 3: Expand Access to Ensure that More Children (Particularly Children with High Needs) Participate in High Quality Early Learning.

### **Child Care Assistance Program- Strategies**

**Strategy 3.1** Develop and implement community outreach strategies to ensure more low-income, working families (including non-English speaking families) know about and participate in CCAP.

**Strategy 3.2** Develop educational materials and outreach strategies for families participating in CCAP to inform them about importance of quality and opportunities to enroll in high-quality early learning programs through CCAP.

**Strategy 3.3** Through passing the "exit bill," implement a cliff-effect prevention policy in CCAP 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. There are 19 states that have differential entrance and exit income limits to help families avoid the "cliff effect" where they lose child care subsidy but are not earning enough money to pay for licensed child care.

**Strategy 3.4** Continue to pursue changing CCAP policy through legislation to restore eligibility for child care subsidies to 225% of the FPL.

**Strategy 3.5** Change CCAP policy to allow families to maintain eligibility for child care assistance for 12 weeks during periods of unemployment (beyond current 3 week period).

**Strategy 3.6** Change CCAP policy to take in to account a family's expenses associated with repayment of student loans when determining eligibility for child care subsidy.

**Strategy 3.7** Incentivize and support program quality improvement by implementing tiered reimbursement rates, above the current base rates, for programs serving children receiving child care subsidies so higher quality programs receive higher rates of reimbursement.

**Strategy 3.8** In order to help ensure that low-income children have access to high-quality programs, implement the Rhode Island Biennial Child Care Plan's goal of having all providers that receive Child Care Assistance Program payments participate in BrightStars, the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System.

### **ACCESS Objective 3: Expand Access to Ensure that More Children (Particularly Children with High Needs) Participate in High Quality Early Learning (Cont'd)**

**Strategy 3.9** Change CCAP policy so that 4-year old children who are enrolled in quality early learning programs (including center-based and family child care) can remain enrolled during their entire pre-K year at least half-time (20 hours per week) when a parent loses a job.

**Strategy 3.10** Coordinate RI Works with CCAP to ensure that all children ages 3-K entry who are receiving RI Works are enrolled in a quality early learning program (through CCAP, Head Start, State Pre-K, or Preschool Special Education – including both center-based and family child care programs) regardless of parent work status.

**Strategy 3.11** Change CCAP policy to remove specific approved hours from CCAP vouchers, while still maintaining maximum approved hours, so low-income, working families can have better access to high-quality early learning opportunities through CCAP. Families who are approved to drop off children at 11:00 a.m. are missing key early learning opportunities in the morning. Families approved for child care during 2nd or 3rd shift have very few options to access high-quality early learning through CCAP and likely need to sleep during the morning.

**Strategy 3.12** Review and strengthen the KIDS CONNECT program managed by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to ensure families of children with disabilities and behavior challenges have access to high-quality child care and early learning programs (both center-based and family child care) in every community. Ensure the KIDS CONNECT program helps high-quality early learning providers in every community accept and meet the needs of children with disabilities and behavior challenges.

**Strategy 3.13** Review and strengthen DCYF policies and education/support for foster parents to ensure children receiving CCAP subsidies through DCYF involvement are enrolled in high-quality early learning programs (both center-based and family child care). Ensure foster parents and DCYF workers across the state are aware of opportunities and resources available to enroll children in high-quality child care and early learning programs.

**Strategy 3.14** Amend eligibility requirements for teen parents so that the grandparent's income is not considered for eligibility.

## ACCESS Objective 3: Expand Access to Ensure that More Children (Particularly Children with High Needs) Participate in High Quality Early Learning (Cont'd)

### ***Early Head Start/Head Start - Strategies***

**Strategy 3.14** Advocate for increased federal and state funding to expand access to Early Head Start and Head Start.

**Strategy 3.15** Expand collaboration between Head Start and community-based child care programs (center-based and family child care) to better meet the needs of low-income children enrolled in child care.

**Strategy 3.16** Review and strengthen DCYF policies and education/support for foster parents to ensure children involved with DCYF have opportunities to enroll in Head Start and Early Head Start.

### ***PreK - Strategies***

**Strategy 3.17** Continue the implementation of the education funding formula plan to expand the state Pre-K program to provide a high-quality early childhood education program through a diverse delivery system, including center-based and family child care programs, Head Start, and public schools, for 3- and 4- year old children in the critical preschool years.

**Strategy 3.18** Continue the policy of targeting communities with greatest numbers of students in free/reduced priced lunch to ensure children in low-income families and other children with high needs have priority access to state Pre-K .

### ***Early Childhood Special Education - Strategies***

**Strategy 3.19** Adopt recommendations from the Early Intervention – Child Welfare Committee convened by DCYF and the Early Intervention Interagency Coordinating Council to improve access to and quality of Early Intervention services available for children, age birth through 3, who have been victims of child maltreatment.

**Strategy 3.20** Expand opportunities for children with disabilities and developmental delays to enroll in community-based and public school early learning programs serving typically developing children.

**Strategy 3.21** Ensure adequate training and supports are available to all early learning programs (child care, Head Start, Pre-K, and public schools) so that children with disabilities and developmental delays can be successful in inclusive settings.

**ACCESS Objective 3: Expand Access to Ensure that More Children (Particularly Children with High Needs) Participate in High Quality Early Learning (Cont'd)**

***Full-Day Kindergarten***

**Strategy 3.22** 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).

**Strategy 3.23** Secure funding for the new Full-Day Kindergarten Start-Up Fund managed by RIDE (enabling legislation passed in 2012 legislative session).

**Strategy 3.24** Prioritize state Full-Day Kindergarten resources for districts serving high percentages of low-income children. It is particularly important to restore Full-Day Kindergarten in Woonsocket.

***Cross- Sector strategies to expand Access for Children with High Needs***

**Strategy 3.25** Expand transportation resources so more children with high needs can participate in high-quality early learning programs.

**Strategy 3.26** Expand training and resources available for community-based child care and early learning programs (including both center-based and family child care) so they can successfully serve children with disabilities and developmental delays.

**Strategy 3.27** Expand training and resources available for community-based child care and early learning programs (including both center-based and family child care) to serve non-English speaking children and provide research-based English language learning opportunities.

**Strategy 3.28** Expand resources for preschool-age children with mental health/behavioral needs, who are not eligible for special education, so they have access and can be effectively served in high-quality early learning programs.

**Strategy 3.29** Develop and use a Statewide Early Learning Data System to track specific populations of Children with High Needs participation in high-quality early learning programs.

**Strategy 3.30** Develop resources to improve early learning opportunities for young children who are not enrolled in formal programs (care from families, friends and neighbors).



## B. Improving Program Quality

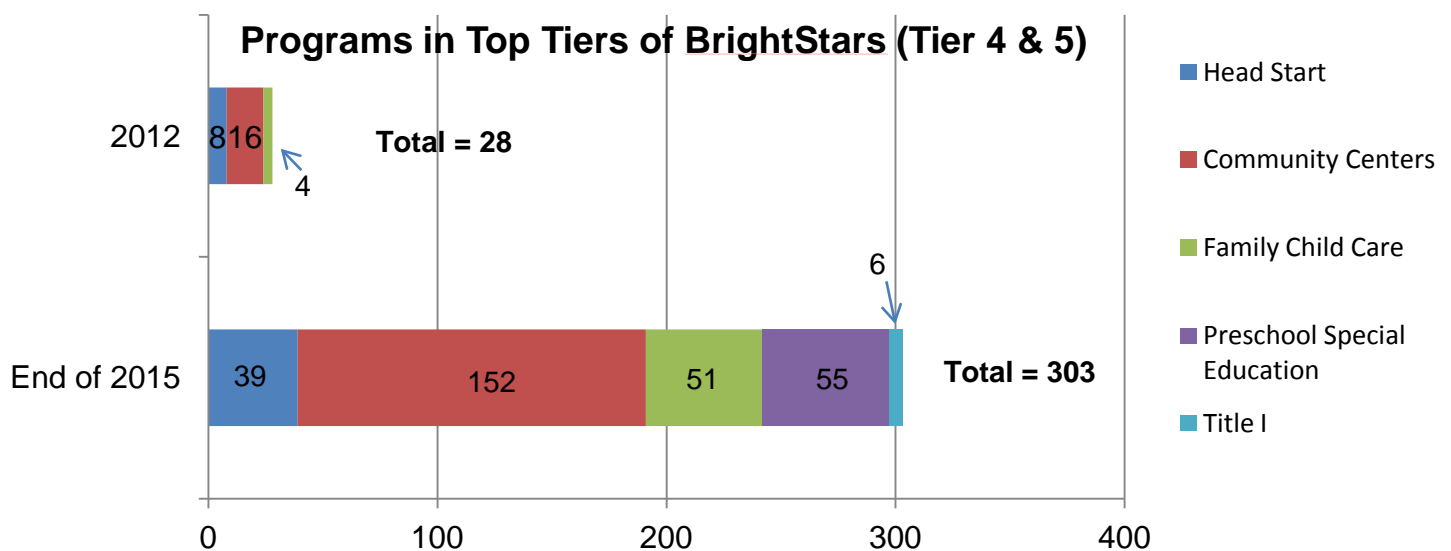
### Goal

Increase the quality of early learning programs, particularly those serving children with high needs.

### Targets

By December 2015, 303 early learning programs in Rhode Island (30% of programs) will achieve the Top Tiers of BrightStars as follows<sup>2</sup>:

- 100% of Preschool Special Education (51 out of 51)
- 100% of Title I (6 out of 6)
- 100% of center-based Head Start/Early Head Start (39 out of 39)
- 56% of centers that do not offer Head Start/Early Head Start (151 out of 272)
- 8% of family child care (51 out of 700)



### Overview

Rhode Island has established a research-based Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System, called BrightStars, which serves as a roadmap for programs seeking to improve the quality of their program. In addition, there are three other key sets of state-level Program Standards that exist in Rhode Island including: 1) child care licensing standards for center-based and family child care homes; 2) the Rhode Island Department of Education's (RIDE) Basic Education Program Standards for programs in public schools; and, 3) Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Standards reflecting voluntary requirements for RIDE Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Approval. The Council's goals are to align all of these standards into a common Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS), and to promote participation in the TQRIS through policy changes, resources, incentives and technical assistance with the goal

<sup>2</sup> This target is based on a percentage of the total licensed programs and schools which may change in any given year.

of achieving 100% participation in BrightStars by December 2013. The objectives and strategies outlined below represent our key actions for aligning these standards and creating a continuum of incentives and supports to help programs increase their quality designation within the TQRIS.

The objectives and strategies outlined below articulate our key actions for achieving these goals.

### **QUALITY Objective 1: Adopt a Common, Statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System.**

**Strategy 1.1** Use BrightStars as the State’s Unified QRIS with linkages to DCYF Licensing and RIDE Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Approval.

**Strategy 1.2** Ensure alignment of program quality standards and monitoring practices across all programs and settings.

- Use a collaborative process to revise and align BrightStars standards, DCYF licensing regulations and RIDE Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Approval standards.
- Improve community understanding of the alignment of standards for early learning programs.
- Ensure that BrightStars standards are clear and measurable and meaningfully differentiate quality.

**Strategy 1.3** Update DCYF licensing regulations.

**Strategy 1.4** Clarify/streamline cross agency roles and responsibilities regarding program quality.

### **QUALITY Objective 2: Promote 100% Participation in BrightStars.**

**Strategy 2.1** Design and implement changes needed to enroll all licensed DCYF and RIDE funded programs in BrightStars.

**Strategy 2.2** Require that all DCYF-licensed, DHS Child Care Assistance Program-funded and RIDE-funded programs enroll in BrightStars.

**Strategy 2.3** Build the capacity of BrightStars program-assessment and improvement systems to include more participating programs.

### **QUALITY Objective 3: Ensure Effective Rating and Monitoring of the Quality of Programs Participating in BrightStars.**

**Strategy 3.1** Build the staff capacity of BrightStars to provide ratings for all eligible programs as the State moves to 100-percent participation by early learning programs.

### **QUALITY Objective 3: Ensure Effective Rating and Monitoring of the Quality of Programs Participating in BrightStars (Cont'd).**

**Strategy 3.2** Review, strengthen, align, and improve efficiency of monitoring practices and systems within DCYF, BrightStars and RIDE.

**Strategy 3.3** Identify and train a pool of assessors to achieve reliability on standardized classroom quality assessments.

**Strategy 3.4** Build the capacity of DCYF licensing to inspect licensed family child-care homes at least once per year.

**Strategy 3.5** Build data and information-sharing systems to share licensing compliance information with parents/public via the Internet.

**Strategy 3.6** Share licensing compliance information with parents/public.

### **QUALITY Objective 4: Invest Resources to Improve the Quality of Early Care and Education Programs and Sustain Quality Over Time.**

**Strategy 4.1** Implement a tiered quality incentive payment system.

**Strategy 4.2** Offer Program Quality Improvement Contracts to help programs serving Children with High Needs meet quality benchmarks.

**Strategy 4.3** Research and implement policies and financial supports to incentivize program quality improvement and encourage retention of effective early childhood educators.

**Strategy 4.4** Expand and align technical assistance resources to help program serving Children with High Needs meet quality benchmarks.

### **QUALITY Objective 5: Study the Effectiveness of the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System and Make Adjustments as Needed.**

**Strategy 5.1** Work with an independent evaluator to conduct a study of BrightStars to validate its effectiveness.

## C. Developing and Sustaining an Effective Early Care and Education Workforce

**Goal:** Increase the capacity of the State’s professional development and higher education system to provide a range of high-quality supports to improve the knowledge and competencies of the early childhood workforce. Ensure that individuals have the ability to progress to higher levels of credentials and increase their access to higher-education credits for applicable training and education.

### Targets

- By December 31, 2015, the number of Early Childhood Educators progressing to higher levels of credentials that are aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework in the State Career Progression will grow to at least 1,000 individuals at Level 1 (12 college credits in ECE), 700 individuals at Level 2 (AA degree in ECE), 500 individuals at Level 3 (BA degree in ECE) and 100 individuals at Level 4 (MA degree in ECE).
- By December 31, 2015, the number of Early Childhood Educators receiving credentials from postsecondary institutions and that are aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework will grow to at least 150 individuals per year (100 percent of postsecondary credentials at CCRI, URI, and RIC), and the number of Early Childhood Educators receiving professional development aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework will grow to at least 2,500 individuals per year.
- By December 31, 2015, 11 higher education institutions and professional development providers that are providing programs that are aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.
- By December 31, 2015, 2,500 early childhood educators will be credentialed by higher education institutions or professional development providers that are providing programs that are aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.

### Overview

The most important factor in high-quality early learning is having an effective educator in every setting every day. The objectives and strategies outlined below list a number of key strategies that will significantly increase the capacity of the State’s professional-development system to improve the knowledge and competencies of the early childhood workforce and ensure that individuals have the ability to move up their respective career progressions and increase their access to higher-education credits for applicable training and education.

The objectives and strategies outlined below articulate our key actions for achieving these goals.

## WORKFORCE Objective 1: Develop Workforce Knowledge and Competency Frameworks and Corresponding Progressions of Aligned Credentials

**Strategy 1.1** Complete the development and release of teacher and teacher assistant Workforce Knowledge and Competencies (WKC) and Career Progressions. Develop WKC's and Career Progressions for preschool special educators, family child care, early intervention providers, program administrators/directors, education coordinators, professional development providers and higher education.

**Strategy 1.2** Ensure alignment of higher education teacher-preparation programs and professional development training with the workforce knowledge and competencies.

## WORKFORCE Objective 2: Support Early Childhood Educators in Improving Their Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

**Strategy 2.1** Develop an adequately funded, evidence-based system of both credit bearing and non-credit bearing professional development.

**Strategy 2.2** Increase the availability and accessibility of a variety of high-quality professional development opportunities that are aligned with Rhode Island's new Workforce Knowledge and Competencies Frameworks.

- Ensure that professional development opportunities are proven, evidence-based and data informed, build core competencies, and incorporate adult learning principles.
- Ensure that only professional development that meets these requirements is accepted for meeting program standards requirements, such as licensing.
- Expand access for infant, toddler, and preschool educators and administrators, including family child care providers, to high quality professional development, particularly in the areas of curriculum development, child assessment and differentiated instruction.
- Ensure that trainings are accessible to working professionals.
- Ensure that trainings are accessible for Spanish speaking providers.
- Identify, recruit and train bilingual professional development providers to meet the professional development needs of the current workforce
- Identify, recruit and train professional development providers with expertise working with English Language Learners (ELL) children
- Review and identify best practices from other states to ensure early childhood educators are trained to support the development of young children's language and literacy skills, with particular attention to ELL.

**Strategy 2.3** Develop clear, articulated Career Progressions for early learning:

- Develop one clear resource (website/calendar) for access to information – Professional Development information, registration, Workforce Knowledge and Competencies, Career Progressions, career advising, etc.
- Incorporate strategies to support the transfer of skills and knowledge gained through Professional Development to actual practice in programs (e.g. require teams of teachers to attend training together with program administrators, provide on-site technical assistance as follow-up to classroom based Professional Development).

## WORKFORCE Objective 2: Support Early Childhood Educators in Improving Their Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (cont'd)

- Explore alternative pathways for earning college credit / teacher certification.

**Strategy 2.4** Explore the development of a Birth through 2nd grade state certification for teachers that is aligned with the Workforce Knowledge and Competencies.

**Strategy 2.5** Adequately finance the Professional Development system:

- Expand resources available to provide a variety of high-quality professional development opportunities for early childhood educators across the workforce spectrum, including family child care providers, infant/toddler caregivers, preschool teachers, teaching assistants, , education coordinators, program administrators, and special educators.
- Work cross-sector (child care, Head Start, state Pre-K, Early Intervention, and Preschool Special Education) to provide high-quality, shared professional development opportunities and to combine funding streams to more effectively match professional development needs.
- Identify resources to support staff participation in comprehensive professional development (e.g. scholarships, funds for substitutes to cover staff release time, stipends for staff to attend training on weekends or at night).
- Expand higher education resources for early care and education, including expanding the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood program and other effective pathways to increased educational attainment for the full range of the early learning workforce in Rhode Island.

**Strategy 2.6** Map the capacity of the institutes of higher education in the development of early educators and assess effectiveness in meeting the needs of the workforce:

- Continue to support articulation agreements, policies and procedures among higher education institutions that are formal, transparent, active and easily accessible to students.
- Work with organizations who offer Professional Development to connect community-based Professional Development to higher education.

**Strategy 2.7** Collect, use and publicly report aggregated data on early childhood educator development, advancement and retention to inform the Professional Development system:

- Use national research to identify effective Professional Development models in areas of high need identified through data system, registry and workforce study.
- Support the development of a state-wide comprehensive Early Learning Data System.
- Develop a Trainer and Workforce Registry.
- Develop systems to evaluate and assess learning outcomes for participants.

## D. Improving Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

### Goals:

Improve outcomes for all children, but especially for children with high-needs, by developing and ensuring the effective use of early learning standards for children at birth through age five.

Ensure that delays and disabilities which impact children's learning and development are identified as early as possible so that children's needs can be addressed.

### Targets

- By 2013, the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards will be revised and updated and will include learning guidelines for Infants and Toddlers. By 2016, the standards will be implemented and used statewide in all early learning programs.
- By 2016, by 36 months of age, 50% of children will have a complete set of developmental screenings in KIDSNET.
- By 2016, 80% of 4 year olds will have received at least one Child Outreach screening.
- By 2015, the state Kindergarten Entry Assessment will be piloted in at least 4 urban core districts. By 2020, the state kindergarten entry assessment will be implemented in all districts statewide.
- By December 31, 2016, Rhode Island will have a system in place across State Departments to use the Early Learning Data System and Kindergarten Entry Assessment data to address the readiness gaps for children with High Needs, including young children with disabilities and developmental delays; who have behavioral and mental health needs; young children who have been victims of an indicated case of child maltreatment(including children in foster care); young children who are from low-income families; who are English Language Learners (ELL) and/or have experienced homelessness.

### Overview

The overarching goal of the Rhode Island Early Learning Council is to improve outcomes for children in order improving school readiness and success in school. This requires attention to several elements including, common standards for what children should know and be able to do as they develop along the birth-to-kindergarten age span, comprehensive assessment and developmental screening. Rhode Island has a strong foundation in place for all of these elements and plans to use that foundation to:

- 1) Build a comprehensive set of birth to five early learning standards.
- 2) Provide professional development to support the use of the Early Learning Standards by early childhood educators.
- 3) Expand availability of parent-training opportunities designed to support children's learning and development across all domains of child development.
- 4) Expand the use of a research-based comprehensive formative assessment system, e.g. Teaching Strategies GOLD, so that classroom teachers can tailor instruction to the needs and strengths of individual children and groups of children.
- 5) Expand the capacity of primary health care providers, especially those serving large numbers of high-needs children, to conduct reliable developmental screenings. This effort will ensure that even children

who are not currently enrolled in programs will be recognized if they have a disability or developmental delay that needs attention.

The objectives and strategies outlined below articulate our key actions for achieving these goals.

### **CHILD OUTCOMES Objective 1: Develop and Use High-Quality Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS)**

**Strategy 1.1** Develop birth-to-age five early learning and development standards for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

**Strategy 1.2** Incorporate knowledge and use of new early learning and development standards into existing program standards and workforce knowledge and competency frameworks.

**Strategy 1.3** Develop and implement a process for reviewing and approving curriculum resources aligned with the ELS.

**Strategy 1.4** Develop and implement new professional development and technical assistance opportunities to support the use of the ELDS. Align existing professional development opportunities.

**Strategy 1.5** Review K-3 curriculum, teaching strategies and assessment practices in RI and best practices in other states and recommend strategies to build children’s language and literacy skills.

### **CHILD OUTCOMES Objective 2: Support Effective Uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems**

**Strategy 2.1** Provide professional development opportunities to develop reliability in child assessment and to support the use of assessment data to inform practice.

**Strategy 2.2** Use policies and incentives to expand the use of research-based formative assessment systems, e.g. Teaching Strategies GOLD.

**Strategy 2.3** Invest in technological supports to facilitate seamless entry of child assessment data by teachers.

**Strategy 2.4** Modify KIDSNET to track developmental screening data and use data to develop strategies to increase the numbers of children birth to 5 years old who receive regular developmental screening, including training and supporting pediatric primary care offices to use developmental screening tools and ensuring efficient communication and referral pathways.

**Strategy 2.5** Train regional English Language Learner (ELL) teams to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate Child Outreach screening to young English learners.

**Strategy 2.6** Create a public-awareness campaign regarding the importance of regular developmental screening for children between birth and age 5.



## E. Ongoing Measurement of Outcomes and Progress

**Goal:** Ensure that the state has data on programs, children, the workforce, and the overall system needed to inform policy decisions. Design and develop effective data systems and to improve outcomes across all domains of child development.

### Targets:

- By December 31, 2015, Rhode Island will have a cross-departmental, shared Early Learning Data System that includes all of the essential elements<sup>3</sup> and is fully integrated with the State Longitudinal Data System and KIDSNET (the universal health-and-development database). This data system will enable the State to track child outcomes by population and program.
- By December 31, 2015, Rhode Island will support the use of a statewide formative child-assessment system to track children’s development and learning from birth to kindergarten entry.
- By December 31, 2015, Rhode Island will have a system in place across State Departments to use the Early Learning Data System and Kindergarten Entry Assessment to ensure that specific populations of Children with High Needs have opportunities to participate in high-quality early learning programs and to address the readiness gap, including young children who are English learners, young Latino children, young children involved with the child-welfare system, and young children who have experienced homelessness.

### Overview

Rhode Island is working to build a comprehensive longitudinal data system that will provide child, program, and educator data so that stakeholders across systems and sectors (birth through Grade 3) can promote continuous improvement. This includes providing aggregated data to inform policy makers and guide resource allocation to support increased school readiness of children. A longitudinal data system that starts at birth and continues into elementary school and beyond can help identify areas most in need of intervention, and inform decisions on how to improve program quality, build a skilled workforce, increase access to programs and services, and improve child outcomes. It should also be used to track the results of these investments, monitor trends over time, sustain and grow current investments in effective programs.

In addition, Rhode Island is committed to developing a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment, as part of a comprehensive system of assessment for children age birth through eight, that is aligned with the

---

<sup>3</sup> The Rhode Island Early Learning Data System will include all of the Essential Data Elements: a unique child identifier (expansion of RIDE student ID system); a unique early childhood educator identifier (expansion of RIDE teacher ID system); a unique program-site identifier (expansion of RIDE school ID system); child and family demographic information (captured from KIDSNET birth certificate data and other sources); early childhood educator demographic information by program site (entered during licensing process for community-based programs) with verified data on professional development, educational attainment, and teacher certification (still to be determined how this data will be collected and verified); program-level data on structure (entered during licensing process for community-based programs) and quality (captured during BrightStars QRIS and RIDE Preschool classroom approval processes); and Child-level data on program participation and attendance data (entered directly by programs).

state’s Early Learning and Development Standards and covers multiple domains of readiness, including social-emotional development, to inform instruction in the early elementary grades.

The objectives and strategies outlined below articulate our key actions for achieving these goals.

**MEASUREMENT Objective 1: Develop and implement a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment aligned with State Standards.**

**Strategy 1.1** Review kindergarten assessment systems in other states and develop a kindergarten assessment system that addresses all domains of child development.

**Strategy 1.2** Ensure that the assessment can be used for the purpose of guiding instruction and to describe the entry status of children at the population level (state and community).

**Strategy 1.3** Utilize Early Learning Council recommendations for the development and implementation of a statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment.

**MEASUREMENT Objective 2: Build an Early Learning Data System.**

**Strategy 2.1** Plan and build an data infrastructure to track data on young children’s development and learning from birth to kindergarten entry, including development and implementation of a statewide common formative child assessment system during the early childhood years and at entry to kindergarten.

**Strategy 2.2** Create a governance structure and data-oversight process that ensures shared planning, access and use of the Early Learning Data System across State Departments, by early learning intermediary organizations and by early learning programs.

**Strategy 2.3** Expand RIDE’s Longitudinal Data System and build a strong link to the RI HEALTH KIDSNET database to track information on children, programs and the workforce.

**Strategy 2.4** Expand KIDSNET to track information on children’s developmental screening and follow-up action.

**Strategy 2.5** Establish a central storage place for program quality data (including BrightStars star level, licensing status, accreditation status, RIDE preschool classroom approval status). Strengthen resources to encourage program participation and support quality improvement.

**Strategy 2.7** Establish a central storage place for data on Rhode Island’s early learning workforce (including demographic, education, compensation/benefit, and turnover/retention data). Build on data collected and systems in place at DCYF, BrightStars, RIDE, and R2LP (TEACH). Consider using licensing data as the foundation for requiring programs applying for and renewing a DCYF license to enter/update workforce data in a registry where they can also track annual professional development hours.

## DEFINITIONS

**Basic Education Program Standards** – A set of regulations promulgated by the Board of Regents that articulates the standards for the Rhode Island public education system and the maintenance of local appropriations to support its implementation.

**BrightStars** – Rhode Island’s Quality Rating and Improvement System for child care and early learning programs. BrightStars assesses programs in six quality domains: Child’s Daily Experience, Teaching and Learning, Staff-Child Ratio and Group Size, Family Communication and Involvement, Staff Qualifications, and Program Management.

**Rhode Island’s Child Care Assistance Program** - A state program that helps eligible working families pay for child care. For parents that participate in the Rhode Island Works Program, there is no income limit for child care because if a family is eligible for RI Works, they already meet the income requirements for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). For families not participating in the RI Works Program, eligibility for child care assistance is based on working at least 20 hours per week at or above Rhode Island's minimum wage. Child Care Assistance is only available to families with earnings up to 180% of the federal poverty level and only available to cover hours of employment. Families may be required to pay a co-payment based on their family size, income level, and number of children.

**Children with High Needs** - Young children with disabilities and developmental delays; who have behavioral and mental health needs; young children who have been victims of an indicated case of child maltreatment(including children in foster care); young children who are from low-income families; who are children of adolescent parents; who are English Language Learners (ELL) and/or have experienced homelessness.

**Comprehensive Assessment System** - A coordinated and comprehensive system of multiple assessments, each of which is valid and reliable for its specified purpose and for the population with which it will be used, that organizes information about the process and context of young children’s learning and development in order to help Early Childhood Educators make informed instructional and programmatic decisions and that conforms to the recommendations of the National Research Council reports on early childhood. A Comprehensive Assessment System includes, at a minimum:

- (a) Screening Measures;
- (b) Formative Assessments;
- (c) Measures of Environmental Quality; and
- (d) Measures of the Quality of Adult-Child Interactions.

**Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Standards** - Comprehensive program quality standards that reflect the substantive advances in the field defining what constitutes high-quality education for children ages 3 to 6 developed and used by the RI Department of Education to approve Comprehensive Early Childhood Education programs. The standards cover physical facilities, health and safety, class size and adult-child ratio, staff qualifications and ongoing professional development, program administration, curriculum, child assessment, differentiated teaching and learning, and family engagement. The standards are voluntary, and all types of early learning and development program may seek approval under these standards - provided they are in compliance with either DCYF child-care licensing or the Basic Education Program standards.

**Developmental Screening Measures** - Age and developmentally appropriate, valid, and reliable instruments that are used to identify children who may need follow-up assessment to identify if further supports are

needed to address developmental, learning, or health needs in, at a minimum, the areas of physical health, behavioral health, oral health, child development, vision, and hearing.

**Early Childhood Educator** - Any professional working in an Early Learning and Development Program, including but not limited to center-based and family child care providers; infant and toddler specialists; early intervention specialists and early childhood special educators; home visitors; related services providers; administrators such as directors, supervisors, and other early learning and development leaders; Head Start teachers; Early Head Start teachers; preschool and other teachers; teacher assistants; family service staff; and health coordinators.

**Early Learning Program** - Any State-licensed or State-regulated program or provider, regardless of setting or funding source, that provides early care and education for children from birth to kindergarten entry, including, but not limited to, any program operated by a child care center or in a family child care home; (b) preschool program funded by the Federal Government or State or local educational agencies (including any IDEA-funded program); (c) Early Head Start and Head Start program; and (d) a non-relative child care provider who is not otherwise regulated by the State and who regularly cares for two or more unrelated children for a fee in a provider setting; and other programs that may deliver early learning and development services in a child's home, such as the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting; Early Head Start; and part C of IDEA .

**Early Learning and Development Standards** - A set of expectations, guidelines, or developmental milestones that:

- Describe what all children from birth to kindergarten entry should know and be able to do and their disposition toward learning;
- Are appropriate for each age group (*e.g.*, infants, toddlers, and preschoolers); for English learners; and for children with disabilities or developmental delays;
- Cover all Essential Domains of School Readiness; and
- Are universally designed and developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate.

**Early Intervention** – A comprehensive educational program for young children birth to age 3 who are at risk or who have been identified as having a disability or a developmental delay.

**Evidence-Based Professional Development** - Professional development that is based on theory and research about effective practices which support teachers to learn and master new and evidence-based practices.

**Early Head Start and Head Start** - A federally-funded program targeting low-income children ages birth-5 and providing a variety of services, including preschool education, family support, and nutrition and medical services.

**KIDSNET** - A confidential, computerized child health information system managed by the Rhode Island Department of Health that serves families, pediatric providers, and public health programs with the goal of facilitating the collection and appropriate sharing of health data with healthcare providers, parents, maternal and child health programs, and other child service providers for the provision of timely and appropriate preventive health services and follow up.

**Kindergarten Entry Assessment** - An assessment that:

- Is administered to children during the first few months of their admission into kindergarten;
- Covers all Essential Domains of School Readiness;

- Conforms with the recommendations of the National Research Council reports on early childhood; and
- Is valid and reliable for its intended purposes and for the target populations and aligned to the Early Learning and Development Standards. Results of the assessment should be used to inform efforts to close the school readiness gap at kindergarten entry and to inform instruction in the early elementary school grades. This assessment should not be used to prevent children’s entry into kindergarten.

**Program Quality Improvement Contracts** - A program intended to help early learning programs, who are seeking to make improvements in their program, to move up one or more levels within BrightStars. Programs participating in BrightStars would be eligible for a program-improvement contract for one to two years at each level to support improvements necessary to achieve quality benchmarks at the next level. Budgets for contracts would be aligned with the Program Quality Improvement Plan.

**State-funded Pre-K** - A state Pre-K program administered by the Rhode Island Department of Education and designed to meet nationally recognized high quality standards. State Pre-K in Rhode Island is designed as a free, voluntary program for four-year-olds delivered in a mixed delivery system that includes community-based child care, Head Start and public schools. During the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years, the state Pre-K Demonstration Program has provided high-quality preschool for 126 four-year-olds in seven classrooms. In 2012-2013, 144 children in eight classrooms will receive high-quality preschool. State Pre-K is included in the state education funding formula and will gradually expand capacity over the next ten years.

**Statewide Longitudinal Data System** - The State’s longitudinal education data system that collects and maintains detailed, high-quality, student- and staff-level data that are linked across entities and that over time will provide a complete academic and performance history for each student.

**T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood RI** – An national early childhood workforce development model that is being implemented in Rhode Island. T.E.A.C.H. is designed to improve the educational qualifications of the workforce and to help address staff compensation and turnover issues. The T.E.A.C.H. model is operating in 22 states and provides scholarships to early childhood educators to complete coursework in higher education, to pursue college degrees, and to receive increased compensation.

**Teaching Strategies GOLD** - An authentic observation-based assessment system for children from birth through kindergarten. The system may be implemented with any developmentally appropriate curriculum. It blends ongoing observational assessment for all areas of development and learning with performance tasks for selected predictors of school success in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Teaching Strategies GOLD can be used to assess all children, including English-language learners, children with disabilities, and children who demonstrate competencies beyond typical developmental expectations.

**Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS)** - A system through which the State uses a set of progressively higher Program Standards to evaluate the quality of an Early Learning and Development Program and to support program improvement. A Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System consists of four components: (a) tiered Program Standards with multiple rating categories that clearly and meaningfully differentiate program quality levels; (b) monitoring to evaluate program quality based on the Program Standards; (c) supports to help programs meet progressively higher standards (e.g., through training, technical assistance, financial support); and (d) program quality ratings that are publically available; and includes a process for validating the system.

**Tiered Quality Incentive Payment System** – A system of incentives intended to provide some financial supports for programs to improve and maintain quality. Through Race to the Top- Early Learning Challenge.

**Workforce Core Knowledge and Competencies (WCKC)** - The essential skills and knowledge that educators who work with young children in an early learning program need to know, understand, and be able to do to promote young children's healthy development and learning.