



To: Kayla Rosen, Early Childhood Policy Director, Office of Governor Gina Raimondo

From: Leanne Barrett, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
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Date: November 30, 2020

Re: 2020-2023 Early Childhood Care and Education Strategic Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to review the updates to the Early Childhood Care and Education Strategic Plan that was adopted in February 2020 as a deliverable under the PDG B-5 federal grant.

As a community-based coalition focused on advancing state legislation and budget priorities that help families with young children, we look forward to collaborating with you to implement **Strategy 1 under Objective 4: “Drive an aligned advocacy effort to accomplish legislative and budgetary priorities, as well as increase community awareness of early childhood priorities and options.”**

Background and Guiding Principles

The guiding principles for the B-5 plan are excellent as they include a focus on vulnerable populations, inclusive and diverse engagement, a commitment to mixed delivery models, workforce advocacy and support, collaborative leadership, and alignment of funding with impact.

We suggest adding a **guiding principle to recognize that the early childhood field extends from prenatal/birth through age eight** (or third grade, as the plan includes 3rd grade reading as a goal). We suggest listing by name all the key programs that are managed/funded by the state and or federal government and that are part of the federal and state definition of early learning program

Suggested language (slightly modified) from the [Early Learning Council’s 2016-2020 Comprehensive Advisory Plan](#):

School readiness and continued success requires attention to children’s early learning and development across all developmental domains and settings, from birth through third grade. A seamless, comprehensive and coordinated system will support the learning and development of children from birth through age 8 – including public schools, licensed child care and early learning programs, the Child Care Assistance Program, Early Head Start and Head Start, RI Pre-K, Early Intervention, preschool special education, and family home visiting.

We suggest adding a **specific guiding principle on infants and toddlers** and the value of starting early (at birth or prenatally) to consistently meet the needs of vulnerable populations and to provide high-quality services that support healthy development and learning. Rhode Island is a *Think Babies* state and has adopted [policy priorities for infants and toddlers, including priorities to improve the compensation of infant toddler educators](#) that should be highlighted. The Early Learning Council has also included all [“infants and toddlers” in its definition of children with high needs.](#)

Infancy and the first few years of life are a window of opportunity to establish the brain architecture needed for healthy relationships and lifelong learning. Specific strategies are needed to ensure Rhode Island has an effective system of two-generation supports and programs that support healthy development and learning for infants and toddlers.

We suggest adding a specific guiding principle on **race equity**.

We suggest **adding the word “educating” into the Workforce principle** so it reads “caring for **and educating**” our youngest constituents.

Objectives

Because this plan is supposed to cover all ages Birth through 5 and has an entire objective devoted to 4-year-olds in preschool, we suggest broadening the language in Objective 1 to clearly state that quality early childhood programs cover children from birth through K entry and include both *public schools and community-based programs* as the state has been championing since 2011.

Objective 1:

*Rhode Island’s **community-based and public-school** early childhood programs **for children from birth through kindergarten entry** meet high-quality standards for care and education as defined by our Quality Rating and Improvement System.*

We strongly recommend adding a new overarching, cross-departmental objective on **Effective Early Educators** to reflect the plan’s guiding principle on early educator workforce advocacy and support. Both Objective 1: Program Quality and Objective 2: Equitable Access to Services are undermined by difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified and effective educators due to low compensation levels and inadequate staff benefits. Staffing crises are particularly acute for those with higher levels of education and competence. This objective should include strategies and action steps to support the child care, family home visiting, Early Intervention, and preschool (public and private – including Head Start) workforce. It could also include K-3 educators in a Birth to 8 plan.

Adding an Early Educator objective would require action strategies to address the very real needs of the family home visiting and Early Intervention workforce identified in the state’s Early Childhood [Workforce Needs Assessment completed in 2019](#) and the specific [recommendations on infant/toddler educator compensation](#) endorsed by the Rhode Island Early Learning Council in December 2019.

Suggested language for new Early Educator Objective:

Rhode Island’s early childhood development and learning programs are staffed with effective, well-prepared, well-supported, and adequately compensated early educators that reflect the diversity of the community.

Strategies

Strategy 3 under Objective 1 is worded well and the action steps could be moved **under the new Early Educator Objective: *Ensure the workforce of early childhood educators and care professionals are professionally prepared, fairly compensated and have meaningful pathways towards career advancement.*** The following Action Steps could also be added to this Early Educator Objective:

- Add a specific action step under the Educator Objective **to establish statewide goals and targets for early educator wages, linked to both education levels and effectiveness** as recommended and endorsed by the RI Early Learning Council in December 2019 – across all state departments RIDE, DOH, EOHHS, and DHS
- **Allocate \$500,000 (\$250,000 per year for 2 years and add a specific action step under the Educator Objective to invest PDG B-5 federal grant funding to implement the [Rhode Island Infant/Toddler Teacher Education and Retention Awards Demonstration Program](#)** that was designed by a public-private task force (see attached description), can be implemented statewide, supports members of the incumbent workforce who have already earned credentials and degrees (national experts strongly recommend that compensation strategies address all parts of the workforce, including people who have attained credentials and degrees), and includes family child care providers. This is a critical strategy that would likely gain national attention with a strong randomized control study led by an economist at Brown University who believes she can secure additional evaluation funding from the Arnold Foundation if there is federal or state funding allocated to this intervention. This demonstration project would complement the Department of Human Services' new apprenticeship program by reaching early educators who have already attained a credential or completed college coursework and degrees, including family child care providers.

As was included in the planning phase for the PDG Birth to 5 grant, add a specific Action Step to **create a staffed family child care network under Objective 1, Strategy 2** as a research-based activity known to improve quality of family child care and outcomes for children. A family child care network was also planned for the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant but was never implemented. Family child care provider leaders in Rhode Island have endorsed this strategy and are eager to participate.

- **Allocate PDG B-5 funding to implement at least one staffed family child care network**, using a national model like All Our Kin. A staffed family child care network would need approximately \$100,000 per year to serve 25 licensed family child care providers (about 150 children) with dedicated, expert coaching and wrap around support. Another \$10,000 is needed for start-up consultation from All Our Kin. A staffed network could be launched within 3 to 6 months, depending on the ability to hire qualified, experienced bilingual network staff. A staffed network could provide essential assistance/support to a family child care apprenticeship program by providing daily support from a qualified and skilled mentor. The SEIU Education and Support Fund has already been engaged in strategic planning with All Our Kin to create a vision for a staffed family child care network in Rhode Island. PDG Birth to 5 funding could be used to bring the vision to life since it is already under development