**Rhode Island Early Educator Higher Education Career Pathways – Challenges, Barriers, and Solutions**
**February 2022**

*This document summarizes the challenges, barriers, and proposed solutions in Rhode Island's postsecondary education, public higher education, and PK-Grade 2 teaching certificate process that have been identified by early educators over the past 20 years. We have shared a draft of this document with key stakeholders and incorporated their suggestions so it reflects current conditions and perspectives.*

*As long-time participants in many statewide policy discussions, we offer this information with hope that it will help the RI Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner and the RI Department of Education* ***take quick action to implement permanent solutions that resolve or address the challenges and barriers*** *that early educators face every day in attaining credentials, completing college degrees, and earning a family-supporting wage while doing the work they love. Highly-skilled, highly-qualified, and fairly-compensated early educators from diverse backgrounds are needed to meet the developmental and educational needs of young children in Rhode Island now and in the future.*

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| Challenge/Barrier | Proposed Solutions |
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| **1) Extremely low compensation of early educators is a major barrier for attracting, advancing, and retaining early educators. Employers struggle to recruit and retain staff with degrees and credentials as recommended by decades of research and needed for the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System. Employers also struggle to motivate current employees to earn degrees and credentials when resources do not allow them to offer better compensation. Some employers do not encourage staff to earn degrees and credentials because they are afraid staff will leave for better paying jobs.**<br>• Median wage for a child care educator in RI is $12.11/hour<br>• Median wage for a preschool educator in RI is $14.35/hour<br>• Many family child care providers struggle to earn even minimum wage with lower enrollment and long operating hours.<br>• About half of child care centers do not offer health insurance. Family child care educators are self-employed and most have access to health insurance only through Medicaid and Health Source RI<br>• Most employers offer very limited paid sick or vacation time.<br>• Most employers offer very limited retirement plans. | • **Publicly recognize that it is better for programs and children and families to keep skilled, qualified educators working in programs than to constantly try to attract and develop skilled and qualified educators who are willing to work for low-wages and limited benefits.** See the 2019 RI Task Force Report: Improving the Compensation of Effective Infant/Toddler Educators in Rhode Island and the recommendations endorsed by the Rhode Island Early Learning Council.<br><br>• **Actively support passage of the *RI Early Educator Investment Act* in 2022 (S-2235/H-7283) to establish a cross-departmental target wage scale for early educators in Rhode Island (across child care, Early Intervention, family home visiting, and RI Pre-K).** See the draft wage scale in the 2019 report above.<br><br>• **Allocate state and federal resources, including federal ARPA, PDG Birth to Five, and any future federal funds (e.g., Build Back Better) to implement a robust and tiered child care wage supplement program (like the national Child Care WAGE$ model) to provide substantial monthly payments to help keep skilled and qualified educators in child care programs.** This will enable programs to avoid tuition increases for private pay families which is currently the only way many providers can increase revenue so |

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| | they can improve compensation and benefits for educators.<br><br>• **Prioritize wage supplements for infant/toddler educators.** Note: at least 15 states offer tiered wage supplements tied to staff qualification to incentivize credential/degree attainment and to help employers retain their educators with credentials and degrees. The Governor's proposal to provide across the board retention bonuses for all staff will help during the pandemic but is not a strategic approach to incentivize credential/degree attainment or to retain skilled educators. |
| **2) Many early educators have great difficulty completing coursework due to scheduling challenges and limited availability of courses. Very few college courses are offered in the late afternoon, evenings or on the weekends.** | • **Increase flexible enrollment options and make the options permanent (not only when there is grant funding for a cohort of students) by offering more night and weekend courses, online coursework, and asynchronous learning opportunities for college coursework at state IHEs.**<br><br>• **Invest in substitute pools for family child care and child care centers so programs can access a skilled substitute educator when the provider/center-based educators are participating in daytime quality improvement activities, taking daytime college courses, and attend daytime medical appointments without sacrificing the availability of quality care for children.** |

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| | • **Ensure hourly pay for substitutes aligns with the statewide wage scale and is not higher than we pay full-time providers and center-based educators.** |
| **3) There are no immediate, permanent college credits awarded in Rhode Island for a Child Development Associate (CDA), a competency- based national credential for early educators.**<br>• The CDA requires 120 clock hours of professional training (including at least 10 clock hours in each competency area) and 480 clock hours of experience working with young children.<br>• It can take up to three years to earn a CDA credential and it is recognized and sought after by Early Head Start and Head Start programs nationwide.<br>• The CDA credential training and exam is available to Spanish speakers.<br>• The Department of Human Services fully funds and supports a CDA Training program at CCRI and the CDA is valued and recognized in BrightStars.<br>• The CDA credential must be renewed every 3 years and should be better coordinated so that participants make continued progress toward earning a permanent degree.<br>• In 2017-2018, a RI Task Force developed recommendations for a state Infant/Toddler Educator credential with college credits, but that report was shelved in favor of funding the CDA (with no college credits). Many states have a state-administered infant/toddler educator credential with college credits. | • **Authorize immediate, permanent, fully transferable college credits retroactively and proactively to everyone in Rhode Island who has earned a CDA credential.** The CDA should not be a dead-end credential which qualifies individuals only for a low-wage job but should be seamlessly integrated into both AA and BA programs where earning potential is greater.<br><br>• **Award 12 college credits for the CDA. CCRI previously awarded 12 credits, but then reduced the number of college credits to 3 credits.**<br><br>• **Award permanent, transferrable credits for the CDA to everyone, including those who are not matriculated into a degree program.** College credits are routinely awarded to high school students who are not enrolled in a degree program. |
| **4) There are no immediate, permanent college credits awarded for high-quality, community-based professional development** | • **Authorize immediate, permanent, fully transferable college credits retroactively and proactively to** |

**required under licensing regulations, to earn a BrightStars rating or to receive RI Pre-K funding.**

- The state has offered high-quality professional development coursework on the RI Early Learning and Development Standards for many years to child care, Head Start, public school, and RI Pre-K educators. Professional development was originally coordinated by the RI Department of Education and is now coordinated by the Center for Early Learning Professionals through the PDTA Hub contract from the Department of Human Services.
- The Center for Early Learning Professionals, operated by the Education Development Center, is responsible for reviewing, vetting, and approving community-based professional development that aligns with the Rhode Island Early Childhood Workforce Knowledge and Competencies and the RI Early Learning and Development Standards for children from birth through K entry. The Center offers many options of "RI-approved" professional development opportunities that are designed to meet the needs of the field and immediately improve practices of educators.
- The SEIU Education & Support Fund manages the collectively bargained training fund benefit for family child care providers which includes a robust portfolio of professional development courses designed to improve the quality of care and sustainability of family child care businesses. These PD offerings are offered in Spanish and English by trainers who are skilled in culturally responsive. adult learning techniques.

**everyone in Rhode Island who has completed the RI Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) trainings.**

- **Award 3 college credits for the RIELDS training that previously were awarded by URI prior to a decision to reduce the number of college credits to 1 credit.** Anecdotal reports indicate that very few, if any, people who have completed the RIELDS training in recent years are following through to get any college credits.

- **Review professional development offerings of the Center for Early Learning Professionals, the SEIU Education & Support Fund, and the RI Association for the Education of Young Children/BrightStars to determine the number of college credits that can be awarded to participants.** Ensure credits are permanent and fully-transferable across IHEs. These trainings are designed to build skills needed by employers in the early care and education.

- **Approved community-based training should easily stack towards permanent and fully transferrable college credit hours towards a degree.**

- **Provide high school Early Childhood Career and Technical Education (CTE) students access to the approved community based professional development courses, offering dual credit toward a high school diploma and college credits.**

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| • The RI Association for the Education of Young Children/BrightStars offers professional development related to improving program practices using research-based program observation tools required in the Quality Rating and Improvement System and for RI Pre-K and Head Start. | |
| **5) College credits awarded by Rhode Island Institutes of Higher Education in Rhode Island expire after 10 years and must be repeated to retain credit. However, college degrees do not expire. This is inequitable and an example of educational injustice.**<br>• It can take more than 10 years for many individuals who work full-time in low-wage child care and early education jobs to earn a degree. Many are demoralized when completed coursework expires.<br>• More students are earning college credits while in high school (as early as 9th grade). These credits may also expire or be non-transferable.<br>• Roger Williams University offered dual enrollment in an infant/toddler early education class through the Rhode Island All Course Network. Are these credits permanent, and applicable to a degree at CCRI, RIC and URI?<br>• In January 2022, Patricia O'Brien, Senior Vice President at the New England Commission of Higher Education verified that the Commission's standards are silent on the issue of coursework "expiring." She said the only relevant standard on this topic is the Commission expects that each institution will have clearly defined policies on transfer credit. | • **Make all college credits earned from Rhode Island Institutes of Higher Education permanent, just like degrees are permanent.** This is educational justice.<br><br>• **Clarify whether New England Higher Education accreditation standards are a barrier to awarding permanent credits and, if needed, engage with community stakeholders to lobby the accrediting bodies to reconsider these standards.** At several meetings, we have heard that accreditation standards for the New England Commission of Higher Education are a barrier for Rhode Island Institutes of Higher Education awarding permanent credits, but this is not clearly stated as an accreditation standard. |

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| **6) Students have difficulty transferring college coursework and degrees from out-of-state, out-of-country, and from in-state colleges toward a degree at CCRI, Rhode Island College, and the University of Rhode Island. Students also have problems transferring credits across the in-state public higher education system. Credits att CCRI, RIC, and URI are not automatically recognized by other public IHEs in Rhode Island and often do not apply toward the major.**<br><br>• Lack of transferability of degrees and coursework across institutions and the need to re-take (and re-pay-for) courses when transferring has been identified as an example of structural racism.<br>• Many Rhode Island early educators earn credits and degrees at Dean College in Franklin, MA. Other regional and national private IHEs also recruit and serve Rhode Island students working to earn a degree in early education and ultimately Rhode Island PK-Grade 2 teacher certification.<br>• Charter Oak State College, in Connecticut, is a nearby, accredited public college option that provides 100% online early childhood degree programs, awards 6 permanent credits for a CDA, awards credits for community-based learning, and accepts transfer credits from many institutions. | • **Improve articulation across institutions to ensure coursework and associate degrees at CCRI are 100% stackable toward a bachelor's degree at RI College and the University of Rhode Island and count towards graduation requirements (general education and major requirements) and vice versa (credits attained at RIC and URI count toward a degree at RIC.**<br><br>• **Improve and clarify information about which coursework taken at private and public IHEs locally, in the region (and nationally) is transferrable and applicable to a degree in Rhode Island and PK-Grade 2 certification.** Detailed information should be clearly posted on a public website so that early educators do not waste time and money taking coursework and earning degrees that are not transferrable and do not mee PK-Grade 2 certification requirements.<br><br>• **Do not require students to take the SAT when transferring with a degree from CCRI to RI College or the University of Rhode Island.** |
| **7) The process to attain PK-Grade 2 Teacher Certification is confusing and overwhelming for many early educators. As reported by educators and program leaders, the process to earn** | • **RIDE should maintain authority and responsibility for determining coursework, demonstrated competence, and experience needed for individuals** |

**a PK-Grade 2 teacher certification has become significantly more confusing and difficult since transcript and credential review was moved from RIDE to Rhode Island College/University of RI.**

- Information available on various state and college websites is confusing and contradictory. It is important to clarify what is required for certification by the state vs. what is required by various individual IHEs to earn specific degrees so students can have options. Are URI and RIC using the same rubric to review transcripts and qualification and providing similar flexibility with student teaching requirements? If an educator runs into a roadblock at one institution, can they easily transfer to the other to ensure they are able to qualify for a PK-Grade 2 certificate?
- Some students who have a bachelor's degree in elementary education have been told that they must enroll in and complete another bachelor's degree to qualify for a PK-Grade 2 certificate. In the past, only a few specific courses and student teaching experiences were needed for individuals who already had an elementary education degree.
- RIDE has stated that individuals are not required to take or pass a PRAXIS basic skills test to earn a PK-Grade 2 Teacher Certification, yet RI College routinely requires students achieve certain scores on the PRAXIS. The PRAXIS basic skills test has derailed many early educators' efforts to earn a PK-Grade 2 teaching certificate, despite evidence they are highly skilled early educators.
- RIDE has stated that individuals are not required to complete full-time, in-person student teaching in a K-2 setting and that other field work opportunities would be

**who have already earned bachelor's or master's degrees to earn a Pre-K to Grade 2 certifications.** Colleges have a strong financial incentive to require students to take more courses.

- **RIDE should clarify the standards and flexible options for individuals to earn a Pre-K to Grade 2 certification, including the cut scores for PRAXIS basic skills and opportunities to complete student teaching and fieldwork that does not require an individual to quit or take an unpaid leave of absence from their full-time job in an early childhood program.**

- **RIDE should include evidence of demonstrated high-quality education practices in early childhood settings by achieving a high-quality score on an independent, reliable, research-based observation tool (such as the ITERS, ECERS, FCCERS, or CLASS) in pathways to a Pre-K to Grade 2 certification.**

- **RIDE should include evidence of competence in languages other than English and evidence of lived experiences (refugee experience, etc.) in pathways to a Pre-K to Grade 2 certification.** This recognition values skills and experiences that help early educators establish strong relationships with a variety of children and families and provide high-quality learning opportunities.

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| sufficient. However, RI College requires full-time classroom student teaching in grades K-2. This means that many individuals who work in community-based child care and Pre-K settings must quit their job or take an unpaid leave of absence to complete this student teaching requirement which is not possible for many non-traditional students who need to earn money. Some quit their jobs and attain a paid teaching position in a private/parochial school which fulfills this RI College requirement.<br>• Individuals who work in a K-2 public education setting are not required to quit their full-time jobs to teach in a child care setting. Why are child care professionals required to quit their jobs to get a K-2 job in a private/parochial school setting to earn a Pre-K to Grade 2 certificate. | |
| **8) There are very limited college courses consistently available in Spanish and there are no pathways to earn an associate or bachelor's degree for Spanish-speaking early educators in Rhode Island yet college coursework and degrees are required to achieve higher BrightStars quality ratings, receive higher payment rates, and qualify for new, better- funded opportunities.**<br>• CCRI provides some support to Spanish speakers but has not offered any classes that are taught only in Spanish.<br>• RI College has developed and offered 5 courses taught in Spanish to Spanish speaking family child care providers as an RI-BEST model using grant-funding, but only 1 of these courses is accepted by CCRI toward degree requirements.<br>• The CDA training at CCRI is offered in Spanish but not for college credit. | • **CCRI should offer at least 18 permanent, transferrable credits taught in Spanish for early educators that would count toward an associate degree.** These credits could be awarded based on demonstrated competencies, completion of the Spanish early childhood courses offered by RI College, completion of a Spanish-language CDA, or community-based, high-quality professional development that was delivered in Spanish.<br><br>• **Clarify whether accreditation standards are a barrier to delivering coursework in languages other than English and awarding degrees to individuals who earned credits through coursework that was delivered in languages other than English.** At several |

- Approximately 70% of licensed family child care providers in Rhode Island speak Spanish as their primary or preferred language.
- Many teaching assistants in licensed child care centers speak Spanish as their primary or preferred language.
- Based on national research findings, BrightStars quality standards for licensed programs in Rhode Island require specific number of college credits in child development and early education and AA and BA degrees for early educators in both family child care and centers. Coursework and degrees do not have to be earned in English and can be from IHEs outside of the United States.
- Research has shown that high-quality early education can be delivered in any language.
- Many families seek out early educators and early education programs where their home language is valued and their children can learn and develop their home language.
- Some families seek out immersive or dual language learning experiences for their children to learn a non-English language in an early childhood program (e.g., French American School of RI)
- In January 2022, Patricia O'Brien, Senior Vice President at the New England Commission of Higher Education, verified that the Commission's standards require that graduates of a degree program from a NECHE-accredited institution will "demonstrate collegiate-level skills in the English language" and "demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English." They do not say that students could not take a small number of courses out of a 60-credit associate degree or a 120-credit baccalaureate degree in a language other than English. They simply communicate the

meetings, we have heard that accreditation standards for the New England Commission of Higher Education are a barrier for Rhode Island Institutes of Higher Education delivering courses in Spanish.

- **An associate degree pathway for mono-lingual Spanish speaking early educators at CCRI should be developed, implemented, and sustained.** If this is not possible, Rhode Island leaders should consider helping early educators earn an associate degree in early education through online platforms at accredited IHEs in other states or countries. Becoming fluent in English at the college level should not be a prerequisite for developing skills and knowledge in early childhood development and other topics.

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| expectation that, by the time the students are graduated, they will be able to demonstrate collegiate-level fluency in written and spoken English. | |
| **9) There are limited opportunities to earn college credits in child development and early education while enrolled in high school.** | • **Develop more high school Career & Technical Education (CTE) pathways and All Course Network (ACN) offerings in early education that provide dual enrollment opportunities and permanent transferrable credit so high school students can earn college credits toward a degree.**<br><br>• **Consider offering the CDA credential at the high school level and the CDA should count for 12 permanent, transferrable college credits at all IHEs in Rhode Island** |

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| **10) Efforts to improve pathways for early educators in Rhode Island are often disconnected from national efforts and do not build on previous work.** | • **Engage national experts to provide support and advice to help remove barriers and improve higher education coursework, degree attainment, and PK-Grade 2 certification pathways for early educators in Rhode Island.**<br><br>• **Before conducting a new mapping project, provide updates to the Early Learning Council on the progress the state has made in improving the higher education system and implementing recommendations from a previous mapping project.** The State of Early Childhood Higher Education in Rhode Island: The Rhode Island Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory (2013).<br><br>• **Rhode Island should adopt the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Power to the Profession framework and recommendations.** Power to the Profession is a national collaboration that defines the early childhood education profession and has established a Unifying Framework of recommendations on educator roles and responsibilities, aligned preparation and pathways, profession compensation, and a supportive infrastructure with shared accountability.<br><br>• **Access resources and support from the EarlyEdU Alliance, based at the University of Washington.** They are a nationally recognized resource that helps states bring together higher education faculty and |

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| | policymakers to expand high-quality early learning opportunities for young children by transforming teacher preparation and professional development.<br><br>• The federal government has funded EarlyEdU and faculty at the University of Washington to develop high-quality early care and education credit-bearing coursework and help colleges across the country implement the courses to increase the number of Head Start early educators nationwide who have college degrees. **These free, high-quality courses should be considered for implementation in Rhode Island.** EarlyEdU courses are free to all member faculty affiliated with an IHE after completion of The EarlyEdU Approach. Faculty access to courses is available on a custom contract basis to ensure courses are credit-bearing. |
| **11) There are limited resources for the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Workforce Development Model in Rhode Island**<br>• The T.E.A.C.H. model is a proven national strategy to advance the skills and qualifications of child care and early education professionals.<br>• Bringing T.E.A.C.H. to Rhode Island has been a state priority since the late 1990s (when Starting Right was passed) and was finally implemented in Rhode Island in 2010 and has been sustained and expanded over time.<br>• The Rhode Island T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood model provides one-on-one help (in English and in Spanish) for all participating early childhood scholars to | • **Ensure the OPC tuition waiver and support program for early educators is closely coordinated with the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Workforce Development model.** We do not believe Rhode Island needs two very similar, competing models that provide scholarships and support to early educators.<br><br>• **Support the Governor's allocation of $2M ARPA funding to the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Workforce Development Model in his proposed FY23 Budget.** |

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| navigate the higher education experience (from entry to transfers to completion). The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood national model helps train and requires state affiliates to demonstrate competence in supporting and advising adult learners, first-generation-college students, immigrants, parents, and speakers of languages other than English. | |
| **12) Early childhood faculty at IHEs in Rhode Island do not reflect the diversity of Rhode Island's early educators or young children and families.** | • **Recruit and retain tenure track faculty at CCRI, RIC, and URI that reflect the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of early educators and young children in Rhode Island.** Ensure adjunct and part-time lecture positions in early childhood field are adequately compensated since they are more likely to have direct and current experience teaching in early childhood classrooms and to be fluent in Spanish. It is very important that IHE faculty and staff are able to mentor diverse early educators currently working in the field. |