

**ARRA – Head Start**

**State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care**

**Rhode Island Early Learning Council**

***Coordinated by:***

***Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education***

***Rhode Island KIDS COUNT***

**Proposal Submitted to:**

**Administration for Children and Families**

**U.S. Department of Health & Human Services**

**July 30, 2010**

## **Table of Contents**

- I. Introduction**
- II. Project Description**
  - a. Objectives and Need for Assistance**
  - b. Approach**
  - c. Staff and Position Data**
  - d. Organizational Profiles**
  - e. Third Party Agreements**
  - f. Budget and Budget Justification**

## **Appendices**

- Appendix A. Rhode Island Early Learning Council Members**
- Appendix B. Rhode Island Early Learning Council Work Group**
- Appendix C. Goals, Objectives and Timeline**
- Appendix D. Organizational Chart: RI Department of Education**
- Appendix E. Organizational Chart: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT**
- Appendix F. Governor’s Letter Designating Responsible Agency**
- Appendix G. Letter of Commitment from Rhode Island KIDS COUNT**

## **I . Introduction**

Studies show that at least half of the educational achievement gaps between poor and non-poor children already exist at kindergarten entry. Children from low-income families are more likely to start school with limited language skills, health problems and social and emotional problems that interfere with learning. The larger this “preparation gap” at school entry, the harder it is to close. If we want all children to develop to their full potential and to succeed in school, life and careers, then we must make wise investments in the early years.

Children will not enter school ready to succeed unless families, schools and communities provide the environments and experiences that support the physical, social, emotional, language, literacy and cognitive development of infants, toddlers and preschool children. Children will not be proficient in reading by the end of third grade unless their early childhood and early school experiences provide the social-emotional and language and literacy rich environments that children need to thrive. Research shows that experiences and environments that support social-emotional as well as cognitive development are critical throughout childhood. In particular, early childhood programs and K-3 programs that attend to all domains of child development (physical, social-emotional, language and literacy, approaches to learning, and cognitive development) produce better outcomes for children, in terms of behavior, social development and academic skills in reading and math.

Rhode Island has a long history of working to improve access, quality and affordability of early learning programs for young children from birth through the early school years. Beginning in 1998, our Starting Right program was widely regarded as a comprehensive initiative that included strong licensing regulations, an entitlement for child care subsidy provided to working families with incomes at or below 225% of the federal poverty level,

reimbursement rates set at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the market rate, health insurance subsidies for providers, and comprehensive services provided to the lowest income children. Rhode Island also has a history of investing state funds to enable more low-income children to access Head Start services. We have strong participation in Early Intervention (our IDEA, Part C program), particularly for infants under age 1, and in Early Head Start. In 2009, Rhode Island launched two major system improvements -- a statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System (BrightStars) and a Pre-K Demonstration Program providing high-quality early learning programs to 4-year olds in several urban communities. Both BrightStars and the Pre-K program feature nationally-recognized high-quality standards.

Rhode Island has been particularly hard hit with the economic recession. The state has been facing major budget deficits since 2004 and historically high unemployment rates, declining tax revenues, and a high number of home foreclosures. In recent years many of the Starting Right reforms have been repealed and funding for child care (including child care centers and family child care homes) and early learning programs has declined dramatically.

Rhode Island has set high-quality standards for programs, and a key goal of our work is to provide adequate support to help programs achieve high-quality standards including: adequate funding and rates of reimbursement tied to quality; high-quality professional development, coaching & technical assistance; and scholarships to access higher education. Another critical goal is to improve young children's access to high-quality programs across the entire early learning system, including: child care, Head Start, Early Head Start, public Pre-K, and early childhood special education (Early Intervention and special education preschool programs). As a state, we have a commitment to ensure access to high-quality early learning programs for all families who want to enroll their children. We are particularly interested in better understanding

the nature and scope of any gaps in access that might exist for children from lower income families, children with special education and special health care needs, children in the child welfare system, and children with a home language that is not English. We intend to build on the existing system of early care and education services for children from birth through the end of third grade, with the goal of developing a high-quality system that engages families, provides high-quality and evidence-based programs and services to children, and that has appropriate transitions as children move from one program to another throughout their early development.

The Rhode Island Early Learning Council was formed by Governor Carcieri in June 2010 structured according to the provisions of the federal *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007* with the goal of “ensuring that our children from birth to school entry have access to high-quality early education experiences in a variety of settings.” The Council is co-chaired by Commissioner Deborah A. Gist, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. The Council has met once in June 2010 and formed an Early Learning Council Work Group that provided input into this application and will meet regularly to identify needs and gaps in the field, identify opportunities, and contribute to the work that the Council is required to undertake to improve access to and the quality of early care and education programs across the state. In developing this strategic report, we have reviewed the goals and priorities of other associated planning groups, commissions, and task forces including: the Successful Start Early Childhood System Plan (Title V Early Childhood Comprehensive System plan), the Rhode Island Permanent Legislative Commission on Child Care, the Rhode Island Urban Education Task Force, and the Governor’s PK-16 Education Council. Strategic focus areas for the Rhode Island Early Learning Council’s work over the next three years include the following:

- 1. ACCESS:** 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 (including center-based and family child care homes), Head Start, Early Head Start, Pre-K and Full-Day Kindergarten. Consider strategies to build early learning opportunities for children in family, friend and neighbor care.
- 2. PROGRAM QUALITY:** Support program quality improvement. Continue to increase participation in BrightStars, Rhode Island’s evidence-based quality rating and improvement system. Provide support for programs striving to increase their BrightStars Quality rating, achieve NAEYC accreditation and/or meet the RIDE Pre-School Approval Standards. **Develop effective supports and strategies to help programs achieve high-quality standards** by providing financial incentives for participation in BrightStars and for program quality improvements tied to improving a program’s BrightStars rating and/or achieving RIDE Approval. **Ensure there are adequate resources and supports** for high-quality facilities, equipment and materials, and a qualified and stable workforce across all types of early learning programs, from birth to third grade.
- 3. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** Develop an **adequately-funded, evidence-based system of professional development** to prepare an effective and well-qualified workforce of early educators with appropriate levels of training, education, and credentials that build core knowledge and competencies. The workforce includes staff of child care centers, family child care homes, preschools and nursery schools, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, public Pre-K, and early childhood special education programs (Early Intervention and special education preschool classrooms). Support implementation of the **Rhode Island Early Learning Standards** in a variety of programs through professional development with college credit and

on-site technical assistance and coaching. Consider how to best align professional development opportunities and support teacher effectiveness across the birth through grade 3 workforce, including attention to working with children with special needs and/or children who are English Language Learners.

**4. HIGHER EDUCATION:** Expand access to higher education and ensure institutions have the capacity to effectively support the development of early childhood educators and K-3 educators. Ensure that higher education coursework builds core knowledge and competencies that translate into effective practice. Establish the **T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood workforce scholarship model** in Rhode Island, which has identified implementation of TEACH as a state priority since at least 2005. BrightStars, public Pre-K, Head Start Performance Standards, and NAEYC accreditation, and RIDE Preschool Standards all require that teachers and providers have post-secondary education and specialized training in early childhood education to be recognized as high-quality. Ensure that T.E.A.C.H. resources are distributed through a process that supports a diverse group of participants and focuses on programs that serve low-income children.

**5. EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS:** Participate in national planning and development of common core Early Learning Standards to include comprehensive learning guidelines across all domains of child development (physical, cognitive, social-emotional, language and literacy, and approaches to learning) for children birth to age three and children ages three and four.

**6. ALIGNMENT OF STANDARDS:** Ensure alignment of program quality standards and monitoring practices applied across all programs and settings, including local Rhode Island systems of child care licensing, BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System, and Department of Education preschool approval and the national quality systems of accreditation

(NAEYC and NAFCC), and Head Start. Ensure that standards address effective transitions between programs (including the transition to kindergarten). Consider the alignment between early childhood program and K-3 school standards.

**7. EARLY CHILDHOOD DATA SYSTEMS:** Using technical assistance from the National Governors Association’s Ready States Initiative, **plan and build a coordinated birth to age 8 data infrastructure** to collect essential information so we can track young children’s participation in early learning programs, including child care (center-based and family child care), Head Start, Early Head Start, special education, and Pre-K and understand the quality of programs that serve them. This system needs to include information on children, programs and workforce characteristics, begin at birth and needs to be linked to the K-12 data system through a unique student identifier.

**8. CHILDREN’S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT:** Enhance and expand methods and systems to monitor children’s learning and development across all domains of child development (physical, cognitive, approaches to learning, language and literacy, and social-emotional), from birth through third grade. Train providers on the use and interpretation of the data they collect to measure children’s progress. Explore best practices in other states to develop a **statewide kindergarten assessment system** that builds on the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards. Use the statewide kindergarten assessment to guide practice and policy and inform kindergarten teachers of children’s strengths and areas for growth as well as understand progress across groups of children. A Kindergarten assessment system is an essential building block to support alignment across the birth to Grade 3 continuum. Work to increase the percentage of children who are reading at grade level by third grade.

## **II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

### **(a) Objectives and Need for Assistance**

#### ***Why Early Learning Matters***

Participation in high-quality early learning programs builds a strong foundation that enables children to do better in school, be good problem-solvers, work well with others, and grow to become productive adults. Experiences during the first five years set the stage for a child's entire life. Science shows us that children's brains are constructed through an ongoing process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. Early experiences actually shape the basic architecture of the brain – creating the foundation for the development of language, cognition, behavior and social-emotional skills that are essential to success in school and in life. A strong foundation leads children to thrive; a weak foundation increases the odds of future difficulties.

There are four major types of early learning programs that comprise an effective, high-quality early learning system: child care (including center-based and family-based), Head Start and Early Head Start, state pre-kindergarten programs, and early childhood special education, including Early Intervention for children from birth to age 3 and preschool special education for children ages 3 to kindergarten entry. In addition, many families rely on care from family, friends and neighbors at some point during the year. In recent years, state and federal leaders have taken steps to improve access to high-quality early learning programs and to improve coordination across the system of early learning services.

There is increasing recognition that all young children benefit from the opportunity to participate in affordable, effective early learning programs before they enter kindergarten. Yet, many children still do not have access to high quality early learning services in their community.

Effective early learning programs provide positive, responsive relationships with caring adults and a wide variety of learning opportunities that shape the cognitive, social and emotional development of young children. Investments in early learning have a proven long-term payoff in better educational and economic outcomes for children, families and society.

A growing national movement calls for coordinating reforms in the early elementary school grades with reforms in the early learning field. A solid foundation for learning requires coordinated, enhanced learning opportunities every year from birth through Grade 3.

Effective educational strategies for children from birth to 8 are built on teachers' and caregivers' understanding of child development and knowledge of best practices in early childhood education, including strategies to support the development of early language and literacy, early math, and social-emotional skills.

### ***Child Care in Rhode Island***

Child care is a critical part of Rhode Island's early learning system, providing children opportunities to gain important social, emotional and cognitive skills. Families also need reliable, affordable child care in order to work at paid employment. Between 2006 and 2008, an estimated 68% of Rhode Island children under age 6 and 74% of children ages 6 to 17 had all parents in the workforce.

Families use a variety of child care arrangements for children at different times of the year and for different age children. For Rhode Island children receiving a child care subsidy, licensed center-based care is the most common arrangement regardless of the age of the child -- 68% of all children are enrolled in a center-based program. Center-based care is a more popular choice for families with preschool age children (74%) than it is for infants and toddlers (64%).

As of December 2009, there were 338 state licensed or approved center-based programs for young children and 705 family child care homes in Rhode Island.

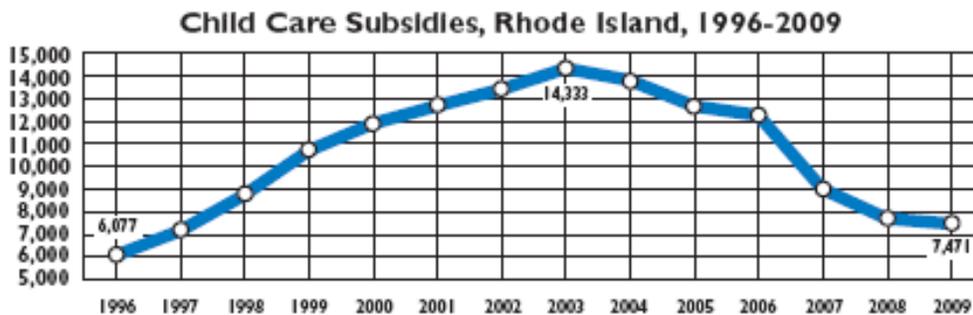
Child care subsidies help children, families and communities prosper. By helping families who work at low-wage jobs afford reliable child care, state child care assistance programs enable parents to have the child care they need to maintain employment and to support their children's learning. Children benefit when they are enrolled in a high-quality early learning program with a consistent provider. In 2009 in Rhode Island, the average annual cost for full-time child care was \$11,374 for an infant in a center. \$9,119 for a preschooler in a center, and \$8,303 for a preschooler in a family child care home. Using a federal affordability guideline that families should spend no more than 10% of their gross income on child care, a Rhode Island family would need to make at least \$91,000 per year to afford the average cost of full-time child care for one preschooler in a licensed center.

The federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) provides funds to states to support child care subsidies for low-income working families. These funds are matched with state dollars and frequently supplemented with funds from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Family (TANF) Block Grant. CCDF funds can be used to provide child care financial assistance to children ages birth through 12 with parents who are working or in an education or training program. States set their own income eligibility criteria, establish a sliding fee scale for families, and work to ensure payment rates are set at levels sufficient to ensure equal access for eligible children. Federal guidance recommends that states set payment rates for providers at the 75th percentile of current market rates, but this is not a requirement.

Currently in Rhode Island, all income-eligible working families with children ages birth to 12 and incomes up to 180% of the federal poverty guidelines (\$32,958 for a family of three in

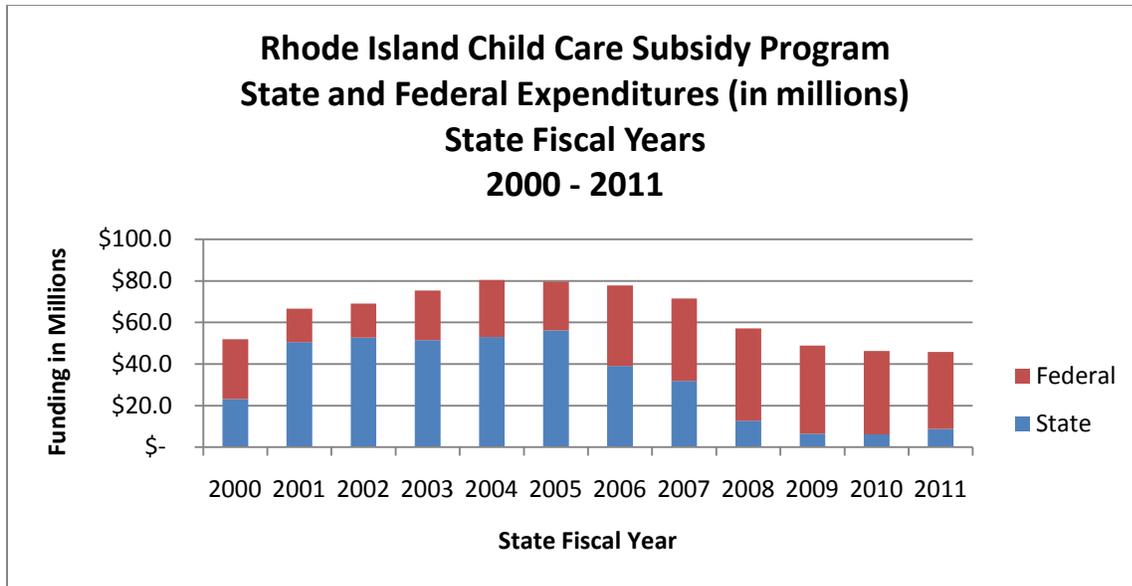
2009) are eligible for a child care subsidy. Parents with incomes above the federal poverty guidelines make co-payments directly to their child care provider to cover a portion of the weekly tuition. Co-payments currently range from \$7 to \$51 per week for a family of three. Reimbursement rates for child care providers serving low-income children are currently set at the 75th percentile of the average of the 2002 and 2004 market rates, and are approximately 15% to 21% below the 75th percentile of the 2009 market rates.

In recent years, Rhode Island’s investment in child care subsidies dramatically increased and then declined. Starting Right legislation passed in 1998 as part of welfare reform expanded child care eligibility up to 225% of the federal poverty guidelines and required rates to be updated biennially to the 75th percentile of current market rates to keep pace with the cost of providing care. These policies helped many families access child care subsidies that enabled them to work. Then beginning in 2004, new administrative policies reduced child care subsidies – including increasing family co-payments, redefining part-time care, requiring families to participate in child support enforcement, and freezing provider rates. In 2007 and 2008 many of the Starting Right reforms were repealed: eligibility was reduced from 225% to 180% of the federal poverty guidelines and the language requiring biennial rate adjustments was eliminated.



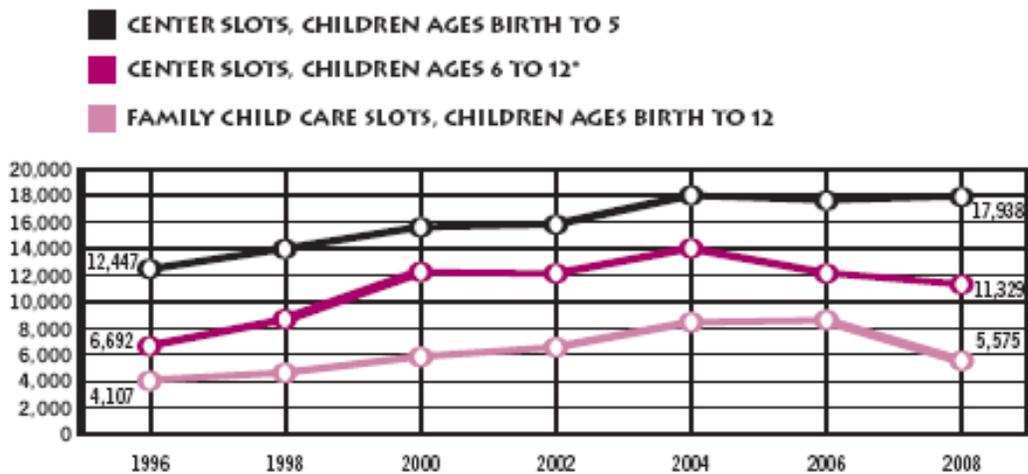
Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, December 1996 – December 2009.

Rhode Island uses a mixture of state and federal funding to finance the child care subsidy program. The exact mix changes from year to year, but in general, state funding increased from FY98 to FY05, and has been declining since FY05 while federal resources used for child care have been increasing to fill the gap.



The number of licensed slots for young children (birth to age 5) in centers increased significantly from 1996 to 2004 and has since leveled off. The number of licensed slots for school-age children began declining after a peak in 2004. The number of slots in licensed family child care homes has declined significantly since 2006. Rhode Island families receiving child care subsidies are much more likely to choose licensed care than un-licensed care. Researchers have found that unregulated child care is often low quality. When the availability of child care is sufficient to meet demand and child care subsidies are accessible and tied to market rates, families have more options and can make enrollment decisions based on the quality of the care.

## LICENSED CHILD CARE CAPACITY, RHODE ISLAND, 1996-2008



### *Head Start & Early Head Start*

Head Start and Early Head Start are federally-funded programs designed to improve the school readiness of children in low-income families. Children receive comprehensive services that provide for the education, health and emotional growth of the child. Head Start serves low-income children ages three to five and their families, and Early Head Start serves low-income pregnant women and children from birth to age 3. Both programs offer a wide range of services to low-income children and their families. Services provided include education, health, dental health, mental health, and nutrition. In addition, the programs provide services for families including intensive social services, parent education programs, housing assistance, and adult education. Both Head Start and Early Head Start focus on the entire family, not just the child. A minimum of 10% of placements in Early Head Start and Head Start are reserved for children with disabilities.

Infants and toddlers enrolled in Early Head Start make significant cognitive and language development gains compared to similar children who are not enrolled.<sup>32</sup> Preschool children who participate in Head Start show improved literacy skills, reduced behavior problems, less grade

retention, reduced special education enrollment, and increased high school graduation rates. Head Start and Early Head Start programs can be either primarily home-based or center-based. Home-based programs use weekly home visits to support child development. Center-based programs serve children in center-based early learning programs. In Rhode Island in 2008, almost all preschool Head Start children were enrolled in a center-based program while 54% of Early Head Start children were served through a home-based program.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provides funding directly to the 8 Head Start and Early Head Start agencies in Rhode Island and monitors agency compliance with the Program Performance Standards. Nationally and in Rhode Island, there are not enough funded Head Start or Early Head Start spaces to serve all eligible children. In Rhode Island in 2009, approximately 40% of the preschool children eligible for Head Start were enrolled and only 4% of infants and toddlers eligible for Early Head Start were enrolled. In federal fiscal year 2007, Rhode Island Head Start and Early Head Start agencies received \$22.1 million in funding to serve 2,793 children. The average cost per child per year for Head Start across the U.S. was \$7,326 in federal fiscal year 2007. Rhode Island supplements federal funding with state funds so that more children can participate in the preschool Head Start program. In state fiscal year 2010, there are 156 state-funded Head Start seats.

### ***Enrollment in Preschool***

The percentage of children ages 3 and 4 participating in preschool in the United States has increased steadily for many decades. Data from the U.S. Census show that in 1965, only 5 percent of 3-year-olds and 16 percent of 4-year-olds were enrolled in “school” (as reported by their parents). In 2005, more than 40 percent of 3-year olds and nearly 70 percent of 4-year olds attended preschool. The growth in preschool program enrollment has occurred steadily for

children with both employed and non-employed mothers. During this same time period, policymakers and the general public have become increasingly aware of research findings that show high-quality preschool education can enhance a child's learning and development. Several rigorous studies have shown that high-quality preschool education has the power to increase educational attainment, increase employment and earnings, and prevent delinquency and crime. High-quality preschool programs improve all children's learning and development. They produce especially dramatic gains for low-income children.

### ***Publicly Funded Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K)***

Advocates and policymakers recognize that pre-k participation is highly unequal, with many children starting out behind before they begin kindergarten because they lack access to high quality pre-k. This preparation gap contributes to long range educational inequality, achievement gaps, and long-term income inequality across different socio-economic groups, races and ethnicities. A national group of economists and business leaders recommend investing public funds to expand access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs, stating that high-quality pre-k has the potential to:

- Generate societal benefits that far outweigh program costs by improving the later education, employment, earnings, and crime outcomes of students who attend preschool.
- Improve the fiscal position of states and the nation by reducing education and criminal justice costs, while boosting income-tax revenues.
- Contribute to long-term economic growth and development for states and the nation.

The projected economic benefits of improving access to high-quality preschool education has led many states to establish and expand public pre-k programs. As of the 2007-2008 school year, more than 1.1 million children ages 3 and 4 attended state-funded preschool education. In

Oklahoma nearly 90 percent of the 4-year-olds receive a free public education and in eight other states, more than half of 4-year-olds attend a public preschool program of some kind.

Up until September 2009, Rhode Island was one of only 12 states in the country without a recognized state-funded pre-k program. With classes that began on September 16, 2009, Rhode Island launched a Pre-K Demonstration Program serving 126 children in seven classrooms in four urban communities. The Pre-K Demonstration Program sites are located in: Central Falls (Progreso Latino/Central Falls School District); Providence (Beautiful Beginnings, Highlander Charter School/Mariposa, and Ready to Learn Providence); Warwick (Imagine Preschool and Westbay Children's Center); and Woonsocket (Woonsocket Head Start). The Demonstration Program was built on two years of planning work involving committees with diverse stakeholders including school superintendents, leaders from higher education, early childhood educators, business leaders, policymakers and advocates.

Rhode Island's Pre-K Demonstration Program incorporates high-quality standards, including requirements that the lead classroom teacher have a bachelor's degree and early childhood teacher certification, that teaching assistants have a Child Development Associate certificate, and that no more than 18 children are in the class. Funding for the program, at approximately \$9,300 per child, is enough to enable programs to meet these high quality standards and pay teachers competitive wages. The Rhode Island Pre-K Program takes advantage of our existing community-based infrastructure of programs for young children – one of the demonstration classrooms is operated by a public charter school, one is operated by a Head Start program, and the remainder are operated by private child care and preschool providers. The National Institute for Early Education Research is evaluating the impact of this program on children's academic and social development. Funding for Rhode Island's Pre-K Demonstration

Program is a combination of state funds and federal Title I funds through participating local school districts. With the passage of an education funding formula to distribute state aid to school districts, pre-k using a mixed delivery system will be expanded to additional children in high-need communities over ten years beginning in 2012.

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

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) is a federal law that governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to children with disabilities from birth to age 21. Infants and toddlers with disabilities (birth to age 3) and their families receive early intervention services under IDEA Part C. Children and youth (ages 3 to 21) receive special education and related services under IDEA Part B. Most relevant here, the special education law is the mechanism that schools use to provide preschool to children ages 3 and 4 who have a disability or developmental delay. Very often these preschool classrooms also serve typically developing children.

Rhode Island's Early Intervention program provides special education services to children from birth to age 3. Children eligible for Rhode Island's Early Intervention program include children with a "single established condition," a diagnosed medical disorder bearing relatively well-known expectancy for developmental delay, and children exhibiting or who have been professionally determined to have a "significant developmental delay" in one or more areas of development (cognitive, physical, communication, social-emotional, and adaptive). In addition, children in Rhode Island may be eligible for Early Intervention through a "multiple established conditions" category, which includes children with a history of biological and environmental issues that could negatively impact the developing nervous system and/or early

life experiences that indicate a high probability for atypical or delayed development. In 2009 in Rhode Island, 3,795 children received Early Intervention services, which represents 10% of the 37,775 Rhode Island children under age 3. Early Intervention is managed by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services and is delivered by 10 certified Early Intervention providers (Children's Friend & Service, Easter Seals RI, Family Resources Community Action, Family Service, Hasbro Children's Hospital, Homestead, Looking Upwards, James I. Maher Center, Meeting Street, and the Trudeau Memorial Center).

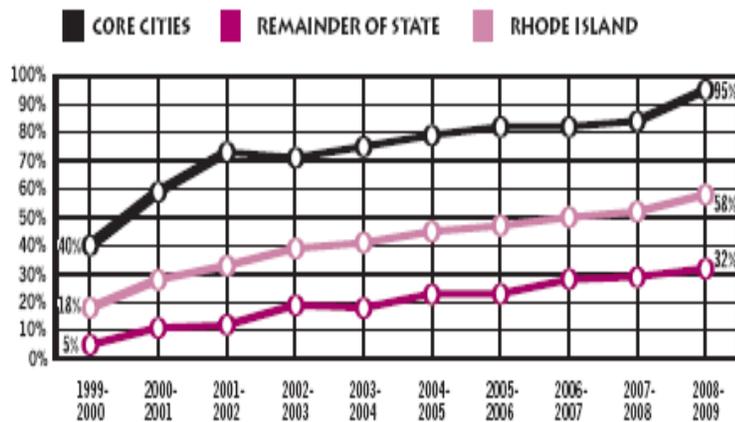
Beginning at age 3, IDEA regulations specify that children are eligible for special education through their local school district if they have a specific disability including mental retardation, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance, an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, another health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities. IDEA also specifies that children ages 3 to 9 may be eligible if they are experiencing developmental delays as defined by the state and as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures. During the 2008-2009 school year in Rhode Island, there were 2,635 preschool-age children (ages 3 to 5 and not eligible for kindergarten) who received special education services. Of these children, 46% had a speech or language delay or disability, 40% had a developmental delay, 7% had an autism spectrum disorder, and 7% had other disabilities. U.S. Department of Education formula funding for preschool special education (referred to as Section 619 of Part B of the IDEA) flows through the state Department of Education to local school districts. In federal fiscal year 2008, Part B Section 619 formula funding totaled \$1.6 million for Rhode Island. Local school districts supplement this

funding with local education and Medicaid dollars to pay for services.

### Full-Day Kindergarten

Nationally, enrollment in full-day kindergarten has been increasing steadily over the past 25 years. In 1979, 25% of kindergartners were in full-day programs. In 2006, 72% of public school kindergartners and 74% of private school kindergartners across the U.S. were enrolled in full-day programs. In Rhode Island, 60% of public school kindergartners were enrolled in full-day programs in the 2009-2010 school year, a significant increase from the 1999-2000 school year when only 18% of Rhode Island kindergartners were in a full-day program.

#### CHILDREN IN FULL-DAY PUBLIC KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS, RHODE ISLAND, 2000 - 2009



Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, October 1999 - October 2008

Children in full-day kindergarten are more likely to be ready for first grade than children in half-day kindergarten programs. Teachers in full-day programs have more time to provide meaningful learning opportunities that encourage cognitive, physical and social-emotional growth. On average, the learning gains that students make in full-day kindergarten programs

translate to a month of additional schooling over the course of a school year. Full-day kindergarten programs can be especially beneficial to low-income and minority children and can contribute significantly to closing academic achievement gaps. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 68% of full-day kindergarten classes spend more than one hour per day on reading instruction compared to 37% of half-day classes. Full-day kindergarten classes are more likely than half-day classes to spend time every day on math (90% and 73%, respectively), social studies (30% and 18%, respectively), and science (24% and 10%, respectively). Nationally, children in full-day kindergarten classes make greater academic gains in both reading and mathematics compared to those in half-day classes, even after adjusting for differences associated with race/ethnicity, poverty status, fall achievement level, gender and class size.

### ***Rhode Island's Quality Assurance System for Early Learning Programs***

The quality of early learning programs is important for children's health, safety, development and learning. High quality early learning programs provide a language-rich environment, offer frequent intentional learning opportunities for children, and have a positive climate characterized by warm, responsive interactions between staff and children. High-quality programs have highly skilled staff with post-secondary education and coursework in child development and early childhood education, small numbers of children in classrooms or groups, and low numbers of children per educator.

Licensing is the foundation of quality. In Rhode Island, licensing is managed by the Department of Children, Youth and Families. In 2009, the National Child Care Resource and Referral Association ranked Rhode Island among the top 10 states in the country for child care regulations but in the bottom 10 for oversight (monitoring and enforcement). During the design

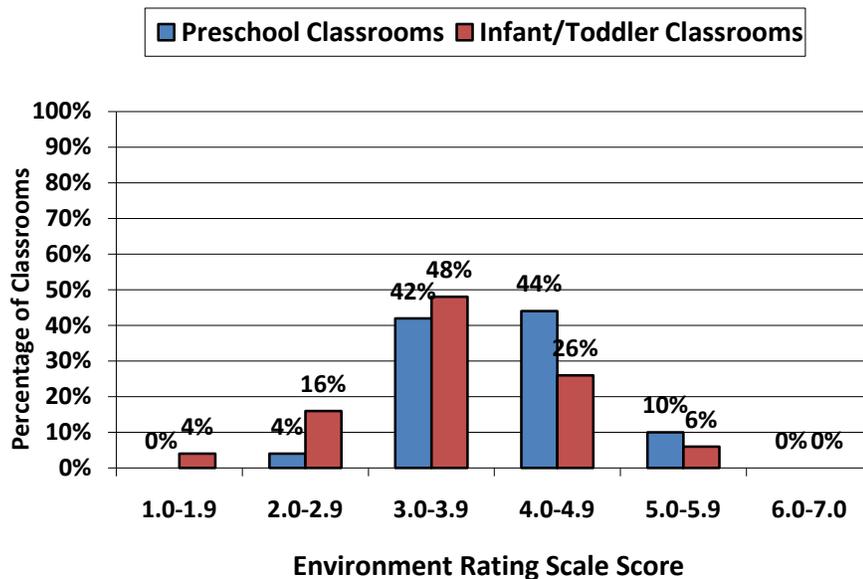
phase for Rhode Island's Quality Rating and Improvement System, the National Association of Regulatory Administrators worked with Rhode Island licensing to identify those licensing regulations that were most critical for children's health and safety and to improve the monitoring system so that those "critical violations" were more clearly recorded and communicated to the program. This system was needed in order to ensure that programs participating in the QRIS were in compliance with critical licensing regulations (a requirement for levels one through five in the QRIS). Key next steps in Rhode Island include updating our center-based regulations from 1993, adopting best practices from other states for monitoring and enforcement, and improving systems to provide licensing compliance information to families.

In 2005, Rhode Island began developing a statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System – now known as BrightStars -- to help guide and support quality improvement (see [www.BrightStars.org](http://www.BrightStars.org)) for child care and early learning programs. The design process was funded by the United Way of Rhode Island and led by a 30-member Steering Committee that included for-profit and non-profit providers, advocates, professional development consultants, and higher education. Expert consultation was provided by the National Child Care Information Center (Anne Mitchell, Peggy Ball, and Valerie Krajec) and 9 regional family focus groups were held, including two focus groups for Spanish speaking families and one for families speaking Southeast Asian languages (primarily Khmer). In 2008, the FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina was brought in to help field test the BrightStars quality standards and criteria in 75 randomly selected programs (25 center-based, 25 family child care, and 25 school-age child care) before the rating system was finalized. FPG also worked with the new BrightStars implementing agency to build state capacity to measure program quality and is conducting baseline studies of the quality of programs in Rhode Island (centers/preschools,

family child care, and school-age child care). The child care center/preschool baseline quality study, released in April 2010 showed that:

- 6% of infant/toddler classrooms and 10% of preschool classrooms were providing high-quality experiences for young children (rated 5.0 and above on the ITERS-R or ECERS-R),
- 74% of infant/toddler classrooms and 86% of preschool classrooms were providing medium-quality experiences for young children (rated between 3.0 and 4.9 on the ITERS-R or ECERS-R), and
- 20% of infant/toddler classrooms and 4% of preschool classrooms were providing low-quality experiences (rated below a 3.0 on the ITERS-R or ECERS-R).

### Quality of Center-Based Early Learning Programs Rhode Island, 2009



Recommendations from the FPG report for Rhode Island include developing and implementing strategies to help programs move from a medium level of quality to a high level (focusing on expanding access to relevant higher education) and strengthening the quality of infant-toddler care to ensure no programs are low quality (by focusing on health and safety practices and social-emotional development needs of children). The report also recommended that Rhode Island use BrightStars to provide an overarching framework for organizing and aligning various aspects of the early childhood education system, including professional development. As of July 2010, eighteen early learning centers and thirty-nine family child care homes (approximately 5% of licensed programs) were participating in BrightStars. Robust financial incentives and supports are needed to expand participation in BrightStars and to support program improvement.

In 2010, the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) released new standards for nursery schools, preschools and kindergartens, updating the original standards from 1968. The new *Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Standards* for RIDE preschool approvals are based on national Pre-K benchmarks (National Institute for Early Education Research), research, and evidence-based practice shown to improve educational and developmental outcomes for children. Preschool and kindergarten classroom lead teachers are required to have a B.A. and early childhood teacher certification and assistant teachers are required to have a CDA or 12 college credit hours in early childhood education for RIDE approval – with currently approved programs having 5 years for staff to achieve these educational qualifications. Classroom size is capped at 18 children (with a 1:9 ratio) for preschoolers and 24 children (with a 1:12 ratio) for kindergartners. RIDE approved preschool and kindergarten programs will need an average ECERS score of 5.0. The standards also

incorporate a framework for providing high-quality educational services based on RI Early Learning Standards professional development.

The new standards are part of a continuum that links DCYF Licensing to Bright Stars Quality Improvement to RIDE Approval and provides a clear path for programs to be recognized for quality improvement. Now all (part-day and full-day) community-based early learning programs in the state must first be licensed by the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families and all early childhood classrooms operated by the public schools must be in compliance with the state's Basic Education Program regulations (BEP). The new preschool approval standards are voluntary for most preschools, but are required for the funded Pre-K Demonstration classrooms run by both community-based programs and public schools. Community-based kindergarten classrooms are required to meet these standards by July 2011 to retain RIDE approval.

### ***Rhode Island's Early Learning Standards***

In 2003, Rhode Island established a set of early learning standards to provide guidance to families, teachers, and administrators on what children should know and be able to do as they enter kindergarten. The Rhode Island Early Learning Standards are organized into eight domains with defined learning goals and expectations that reflect a shared understanding of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that children gain through high quality early childhood experiences. The eight domains are: approaches to learning, social and emotional development, language development and communication, literacy, mathematics, science, creativity, and physical health and development. The standards are intended to be used by early care and education practitioners, families, schools, community members and legislators to design and

support a comprehensive system of high quality early childhood education programs for young children in Rhode Island leading to success in school.

The Rhode Island Early Learning Standards (RIELS) were piloted by a partnership of early childhood providers in five communities to ensure that the Learning Goals and Expectations were appropriate for the target preschool population. A series of professional development sessions and mentoring was provided to these communities to support the implementation of the Early Learning Standards in their programs. Feedback from the pilot participants was used to refine the standards and to design professional development to be implemented statewide.

Currently, the RIELS Project at the Department of Education provides 4 strands of professional development and a series of Next Steps workshops to meet the training needs of RI's diverse early childhood workforce. These training opportunities are designed to prepare programs to implement a high-quality Standards-Based Program.

The *Introduction* course is the preferred training option for many center-based teacher assistants and family childcare providers interested in gaining knowledge and skills in using the Standards to design learning activities. Participants in this fifteen-hour, 5-session training learn about the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards, create activities that help children learn skills associated with school success and find new ways to encourage families to help children learn using *Fun Family Activities for Preschoolers*, a companion document designed for families.

*Level I: Using the RI Early Learning Standards as a Framework for Curriculum Development* is a 30-hour, 10-session training, currently under development, which will focus on strategies to enhance curriculum in all domains and learning goals addressed in the Standards.

Participants will explore the four components of a quality curriculum, content, process, teaching and facilitating, and context and take a critical look at their current teaching practice in each of these areas. Teachers will focus on curriculum development and implementation and effective, intentional teaching strategies to improve outcomes for children.

*Level II: Implementing a Standards-based Program* is an intensive, competency-based training for lead teachers and experienced early childhood professionals designed to improve teaching practice by implementing a quality curriculum aligned with the Standards, engaging in authentic assessment, using a variety of teaching strategies that build upon children's interests, learning styles, and developmental levels, and engaging families in their child's education. Participants in this training develop a Practitioner Portfolio to establish professional development goals and document their progress in implementing Standards-based practices in the area of curriculum, assessment, differentiated teaching and learning, and family engagement.

*Level III: The Administrator's Role in Implementing a Standards-based Program* is an intensive training for administrators of early care and education programs that builds upon the core elements of *Implementing a Standards-Based Program* and focuses on program-wide implementation, policy and management issues, supporting teaching staff, and the dynamics of systems change. Administrators participating in this training develop a Program Portfolio to document their progress in implementing a Standards-based program. Participants who successfully complete 30 hours of training receive a Level III Certificate of Achievement through the RI Department of Education. Participants who complete 30 hours of core training plus 15 hours in the Saturday Next Steps series are eligible to receive three graduate or undergraduate credits through the University of Rhode Island.

*Next Steps Sessions* include 12 three -hour sessions that occur either on Tuesday evenings or Saturday mornings. The menu of three-hour sessions is designed to extend the learning of administrators and practitioners engaged in Level I, Level II, and Level III training plus TA Initiative participants.

The RIELS Project also includes a *Technical Assistance Initiative*. RIELS T/TA Initiative Consultants are engaged in providing technical assistance services at both the program and classroom levels. Lead consultants meet regularly with program leadership teams to support them in engaging in a program assessment, updating program improvement plans, prioritizing goals, and selecting goals that will be the focus of T/TA services. The RIELS project has developed and updated a set of four program assessment tools that focus on curriculum, child assessment systems, differentiated teaching and learning, and family engagement that are used to support this process. In addition, lead consultants have regular meetings with classroom teachers to assist them in identifying and prioritizing individual professional development goals. They utilize classroom observations and individual meetings with teachers to accomplish this task. The RIELS project has developed a set of teacher self-assessment tools that focus on teaching practice in the areas of classroom curriculum, child assessment, differentiated teaching and learning practices, and family engagement that are used to support this process. Consultants then provide follow-up T/TA sessions and assist them to access outside resources to support them in achieving their goals.

The RIELS Technical Assistance Initiative has also identified a cadre of mentor teachers and mentor classrooms throughout the state to support early childhood administrators and practitioners in their continuous improvement efforts. Mentor teachers/mentor classrooms

are recognized by the Rhode Island Department of Education, RI Early Learning Standards Project as having met specific criteria to ensure:

- classroom practices represent high quality in all areas of a Standards-based program
- mentor teachers demonstrate the qualities of an independent, self-directed learner who continuously pursues improvement towards best practices.

The primary purpose of the mentor classroom visit is to provide early childhood professionals the opportunity to meet and observe colleagues from other programs who have worked to improve their practice in one or more components of a Standards-based program.

Over the next three years, it is anticipated that the RI Early Learning Standards will undergo some revision. The RI Department of Education (RIDE) has adopted the Common Core Standards for K-12 and is currently in the process of aligning RI's existing Grade Level Expectations with the Common Core Standards. Once this work is completed, a logical next step would be to realign the RI Early Learning Standards with the Grade Level Expectations for Kindergarten. RIDE has also agreed to design a process for developing early learning standards for the birth to three population by December 2012. However, at a recent national meeting for State Early Childhood Specialists, a proposed project to develop national core standards for the birth to five population was discussed. The project, proposed by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governor's Association, would develop comprehensive standards in all domains of learning and would align with the Common K-12 Core Standards. RIDE will be following the progress of this project closely to determine whether the proposed activities related to the development of early learning standards for birth to three and revisions to the existing standards should build upon the proposed CCSSO/NGA standards work

### ***Rhode Island's Early Educator Workforce***

Data on the people working in Rhode Island early learning programs is fairly sparse. Rhode Island has not conducted a Workforce Study and does not have a Workforce Registry. Data on the education levels for lead teachers in a random sample of child care centers and preschools from the 2009 baseline quality study are below:

<b>Degree</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
High School Diploma/GED	<b>17%</b>
CDA	<b>10%</b>
Some College	<b>18%</b>
Associate's Degree	<b>20%</b>
Bachelor's Degree or Above	<b>35%</b>

Data from the Center for Law and Social Policy's analysis of Rhode Island Head Start program's 2007 federal Program Improvement Report (PIR) data show:

<b>Degree</b>	<b>Percentage of Classroom Teachers</b>	<b>Percentage of Home Visitors</b>
High School Diploma/GED	<b>5%</b>	<b>3%</b>
CDA	<b>24%</b>	<b>8%</b>
Associate's Degree	<b>41%</b>	<b>11%</b>
Bachelor's Degree	<b>29%</b>	<b>79%</b>

Increasing the educational qualifications of the early childhood workforce is challenging because of the low prevailing wages in the field. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average wage of a child care worker in Rhode Island was \$21,690 while the

average wage for a kindergarten teacher was \$62,930 in May 2008. Rhode Island Head Start data from the 2007 PIR indicates that the average wage for a classroom teacher was \$27,018 and \$32,352 for a home visitor.

Planning groups in Rhode Island have identified the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood scholarship model as an important strategy 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. In states across the country, T.E.A.C.H. participants are steadily accumulating college credits, earning degrees, and increasing their earnings while staying in the field.

***Rhode Island's Professional Development & Higher Education System  
for Early Childhood Educators***

A high-quality professional development system for the early learning field has the following components: core knowledge/competencies, access to professional development that builds core competencies and core knowledge, quality approval and assurance system for trainings and trainers, incentives for professional development and career paths, recognized qualifications and credentials tracked ideally through a workforce registry, professional development system coordination, and governance. Recent research indicates that some of the most effective professional development is intensive, sequenced, multi-session training focused on improving practices. Professional development that is paired with on-site, individualized consultation, coaching and support is particularly helpful at improving educator practices that can be sustained over time.

Rhode Island is working to develop a high-quality professional development system. The Rhode Island Department of Education is currently leading the process to complete the core competencies and career lattice for early childhood classroom teachers and teacher assistants working with children ages birth to 5 working in center-based early learning programs. Core competencies for family child care providers are still to be developed. In April 2010, the Rhode Island Department of Human Service's Child Care Office re-bid the state contract for professional development and is seeking to establish a new resource center providing "a sequenced system of evidence-based, culturally-appropriate professional development opportunities designed around the core competencies and career lattice levels and leading to credentials and endorsements." The state is seeking to "tie all professional development opportunities to recognized standards for professionals, programs, and/or children" and to ensure there is a quality assurance system for trainers and trainings. As of July 2010, the state has not yet awarded this contract.

Rhode Island does have a core base of trainings upon which to build a comprehensive professional development system including the on-going Rhode Island Early Learning Standards Professional Development effort, the expertise of Ready to Learn Providence and the Education Development Center's Rhode Island Training and Technical Assistance Center, BrightStars trainings (e.g. on how to use the Environment Rating Scales for self-assessment), and expertise at CHILDSPAN.

There are currently 4 institutions of higher education in the state that are preparing early childhood educators: the Community College of Rhode Island (18 credit hour certificate and AA degree in Child Development and Early Childhood Education), Rhode Island College (B.A. and M.Ed. in Early Childhood Education and PK-2 Early Childhood Teacher Certification), the

University of Rhode Island (B.A. in Human Development and Family Studies and PK-2 Early Childhood Teacher Certification), and Salve Regina University (B.A. in Early Childhood Education and PK-2 Early Childhood Teacher Certification). In addition to expanding access to higher education through the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood program and the existing Early Childhood Specialists program at the Community College of Rhode Island, it will be important to review and improve articulation agreements and work to ensure that state educator preparation programs are building the skills and knowledge necessary for early learning teachers to work with a diverse population of children and support young children's learning and development. One key area to focus on would be to ensure that teachers are trained to work with and use best practices with young English Language Learners. Another key area is to ensure that professionals who work with infants and toddlers have appropriate coursework available to them.

### ***Rhode Island's Early Childhood Data Systems***

In April 2010, Rhode Island was selected to be one of six states to participate in the National Governors Association's *Ready States* Initiative. This technical assistance effort is designed to help states develop key components of state early childhood data infrastructure. Through this effort, a cross-departmental, public-private team from Rhode Island is working to develop an action plan to build a comprehensive early childhood data system, starting with attention to early care and education. The team has been working to understand the existing data systems in Rhode Island that contain important data on young children and early learning programs. Rhode Island has two very strong data systems tracking children that could potentially be linked together: KIDSNET managed by the Rhode Island Department of Health (which has a unique identifier for each child beginning at birth) and the Rhode Island

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's State Assigned Student ID (SASID) data system (with a unique identifier as soon as the child is enrolled in the K-12 system). The team is also reviewing data maintained outside of these two important child-level databases: the child care licensing data managed by the Department of Children Youth and Families, program quality rating data (including accreditation status) managed by BrightStars/Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children, the child care subsidy program data and Early Intervention data managed by the Department of Human Services. Head Start and Early Head Start data is maintained at the program level and is not currently in an easily accessible state database – however, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT has worked for many years with programs across the state to track annual Head Start/Early Head Start enrollment by child residence at the city/town level. Rhode Island does not have a Workforce Registry or system to gather data on the early childhood workforce (other than preschool special education). Rhode Island also does not have a statewide system to track children's development or learning.

The team anticipates developing an action plan by December 2010. As of July 2010, we have developed and refined our key policy questions and we are now working to identify the critical data elements needed to answer these questions and beginning to map where these data elements, what does not exist yet, and how best to make linkages happen. Our key policy questions are:

- How many/what percentage of children are on track to succeed, during the early childhood years, at school entry, and beyond?
- How many unduplicated children are in various early care and education settings (by type, location, and quality)?

- How many/what percentage of children, birth to age 5, are enrolled in high-quality early care and education programs?
- How much high-quality early care and education programming are children receiving? (attendance)
- How many different programs do children attend before entering kindergarten? (stability)
- How many/what percentage of children, birth to age 5, are receiving health and developmental services? (comprehensive services)
- How many/what percentage of early care and education programs are high quality?
- Does program quality improve over time?
- How many/what percentage of the early childhood workforce are qualified by meeting specific standards established to effectively prepare children, birth to age 5, to succeed at school entry (e.g. core competencies/career lattice education levels)?
- What are workforce characteristics and patterns (turnover, compensation, diversity, education, etc.)?

## **(b) Approach**

### ***Need for Collaboration and Coordination Among Early Childhood Programs and Services***

Rhode Island has a history of working across the early care and education community to improve outcomes for young children. All parts of the early learning system need to communicate regularly and work together in order to meet the needs of children and families and to ensure that public and private resources are adequate to support quality, affordability and access across all communities in Rhode Island. Currently, key parts of the early learning system are managed by separate state agencies and offices including:

- Child care licensing is managed by the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. Licensed programs include child care centers, Head Start programs, community-based preschools and nursery schools, and family child care homes with more than 3 children,
- The child care subsidy program and child care quality projects are managed by the Rhode Island Department of Human services through the Office of Individual and Family Support in coordination with the Rhode Island Works Program/TANF.
- The Rhode Island Early Intervention Program for infants and toddlers with special needs (Part C of IDEA) is managed by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services through the Center for Child and Family Health.
- The Head Start Collaboration Office is housed at the Rhode Island Department of Human Services.
- The Rhode Island Department of Health administers *Successful Start*, the Rhode Island State Early Childhood Comprehensive System (ECCS) grant. The Department of Health also manages the Child Care Support Network, a focused quality improvement program for child care and early learning programs and *Project LAUNCH* and *Watch Me Grow* which focus on improving developmental screening systems and children's access to appropriate interventions to support development and learning.
- The Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education oversees special education services for preschool-age children (ages 3 to K entry), manages the Pre-K Demonstration Program (including sites at community-based child care and Head Start programs) and manages a quality review and approval process for early

learning programs serving preschoolers and kindergarteners. The Department also manages the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards and Professional Development/Technical Assistance effort.

- The BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System is managed by the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children, an independent non-profit agency. BrightStars is funded with both public and private dollars.

In June 2010, Rhode Island Governor Donald L. Carcieri appointed the Rhode Island Early Learning Council pursuant to the *Head Start Reauthorization Act of 2007*. The 24-member Council consists of community leaders representing every institution or function required by the *Head Start Reauthorization Act* as well as representatives from philanthropy, academia, and the early childhood community. See Appendix A for a list of Early Learning Council members, including name and affiliation. Education Commissioner Deborah A. Gist and Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT were appointed co-chairs of the Council.

The Rhode Island Early Learning Council will facilitate the development or enhancement of high-quality systems of early childhood education and care, from birth to age 8, with the goal of improving school readiness and success in school. **The Council will develop a state plan that will seek to align resources to support high quality early care and education services and to improve coordination and collaboration among multiple agencies, organizations, and programs.** The Early Learning Council will meet quarterly and will build on the work of the Successful Start Early Childhood System Plan (Rhode Island's ECCS plan). The Early Learning Council will provide periodic updates to the key coordinating and planning bodies

including: the Successful Start Steering Committee, the Governor's Pre-K to 16 Council, the Permanent Legislative Committee on Child Care, the Early Intervention's Interagency Coordinating Council, and Rhode Island Department of Education's Early Childhood Interagency Task Force.

The Early Learning Council's co-chairs have appointed a Work Group to assist the Council with its work. The co-chairs are Leanne Barrett of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, Michele Palermo, Rhode Island Department of Education, and Larry Pucciarelli, Rhode Island Head Start Collaboration Director. (See Appendix B for a list of Work Group members). The Early Learning Council Work Group will meet nine times per year to help the Council identify needs and gaps in the field, identify opportunities, and contribute to the work that the Council is required to undertake to improve access to and the quality of early care and education programs across the state. The first meeting of the Early Learning Council Work Group was held on Thursday, July 22, 2010 to gain input into this application and to develop a work plan. All meetings are open to the public. The Rhode Island Early Learning Council held a Public Hearing on July 29, 2010 to obtain input on Rhode Island's application for federal funds made available through the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009*(ARRA)(P.L.111-5) to improve coordination and collaboration among early childhood education and care programs and services.

### ***Opportunities for and Barriers to Coordination and Collaboration***

The Rhode Island Early Learning Council membership includes all of the state agencies, philanthropic leaders, and leaders from the early childhood field that will be necessary for the kind of collaboration that will be required to execute Rhode Island's Strategic Report. Through

the work of the Early Learning Council and Work Group we have the opportunity to build on our solid track record of collaboration to achieve the goals set forth in this proposal. We have had a very strong collaboration for our Successful Start Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Planning and Implementation process. This group will continue to be engaged in this work and the plan that has emerged in this proposal builds on the strong foundation laid during the Successful Start planning process. The challenges for collaboration include the ongoing need to break down existing barriers between early childhood programs and between the early childhood and K-12 systems. We believe we have the leadership in place to take on that challenge with the goal of improving child development and educational outcomes for Rhode Island's young children.

### ***Work of the Council***

The Rhode Island Early Learning Council will assume all of the responsibilities outlined in the federal Head Start Reauthorization Act. The following are the goals, objectives, activities and timelines for accomplishing each responsibility of the Early Learning Council. The details for each of these activities will be affirmed and more detail will be developed by the Early Learning Council with the assistance of the Early Learning Council Work Group. See Appendix C for a chart highlighting goals, objectives and timeline for the three years of the grant.

### **FOCUS AREA ONE: ACCESS**

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, Head Start, Early Head Start, Pre-K and Full-Day Kindergarten. Consider opportunities to build early learning opportunities for children in family, friend and neighbor care.

**Goal 1. Conduct periodic statewide needs assessments on the quality and availability of early childhood education and development programs and services from birth to school entry.**

*Objective 1-1. Use currently available administrative data as well as create new data capacity to regularly describe the quality and availability of early learning programs and services from birth to school entry.*

**Activity 1-1.A.** Rhode Island KIDS COUNT regularly collects administrative data from the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, the Rhode Island Department of Health, and the Rhode Island Department of Education, Head Start programs, the BrightStars Quality Rating and Information System, and several other sources (including child care resource & referral) for analysis and publication in the annual *Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook*, including data for the state and for each of Rhode Island's 39 cities and towns for the following indicators: Early Intervention, Early Head Start, infant and preschool child care, child care subsidies, infant and preschool child care, quality early care and education, children enrolled in Head Start, children in full-day kindergarten, and children enrolled in special education.

*Timeline: Years 1, 2, and 3*

**Activity 1-1-B.** Review findings and recommendations from *Rhode Island's 2009 Child Care Center and Preschool Quality Study* released in April 2010. This report was a joint effort of the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children (implementing agency for the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System), Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, and the FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina. A baseline study of family child care programs is scheduled to be released later in 2010 and will also provide critical

information to the Early Learning Council. A baseline study of school-age child care is currently being conducted.

*Timeline: Year 1*

**Activity 1-1-C.** Seek and obtain funding for a Rhode Island Workforce Study that will capture the current status of the early care and education workforce in order to inform professional development and education infrastructure needs in Rhode Island. Consider whether or not the development of a sustainable Workforce Registry would be a better use of funds.

*Timeline: Year 2*

**Goal 2. Identify opportunities for and barriers to collaboration and coordination.**

**Objective 2-1: Improve affordability, access and quality of the early care and education system.**

Activity 2-1. The Early Learning Council will be a vehicle for regular seeking input on opportunities and barriers to collaboration. In addition, there will be regular two-way communication between the Successful Start Steering Committee, the Governors' PK-16 Council, the Permanent Legislative Commission on Child Care and the Early Learning Council.

*Timeline: Years 1, 2 and 3*

**Goal 3. Develop recommendations on increasing participation in high-quality child care, Pre-K, Head Start, early childhood special education programs, and full-day kindergarten including outreach to underrepresented and special populations.**

**Objective 3-1. Develop shared understanding of goals, structure and financing of each aspect of the early learning system, including gaps in access, quality and affordability.**

Activity 3-1-1. Present information to the Early Learning Council and identify gaps in access, quality and affordability with special attention to underrepresented and special populations, particularly English Language Learners.

*Timeline: Year 1*

Activity 3-1-2 Plan for ten year phased-in expansion of Rhode Island Pre-K with funding included in the new Rhode Island School Funding Formula. Work to build a diverse system of high-quality Pre-K providers (child care, Head Start, and public schools) using learnings from the National Institute for Early Education Research's evaluation of the Pre-K Demonstration Program.

Activity 3-1-3. Identify current financing structure for early learning services in Rhode Island and develop financing options that will leverage quality access and affordability and increase the number of children enrolled in high quality early learning programs.

*Timeline: Year 2-3*

## **FOCUS AREA TWO: PROGRAM QUALITY**

Support program quality improvement. Continue expansion of participation in BrightStars, Rhode Island's evidence-based quality rating and improvement system, and support for programs striving to achieve NAEYC accreditation. **Develop effective supports and strategies to help programs achieve high-quality standards** by providing financial incentives for participation in BrightStars and for program quality improvements tied to improving a program's BrightStars rating and/or achieving RIDE Approval. **Ensure there are adequate resources and supports** for high-quality facilities, equipment and materials, and a qualified and stable workforce across all types of early learning programs, from birth to third grade.

**Goal 4. Facilitate the development or enhancement of high-quality early learning systems to improve school readiness.**

**Objective 4-1. Support and sustain the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System and increase program participation through incentives for program participation and financial supports for quality improvements tied to improving a BrightStars rating and/or achieving RIDE Approval.**

**Activity 4-1.** Ensure that the administrative/program costs to operate and sustain BrightStars continues to be supported through a public-private funding partnership and that participation in BrightStars is encouraged, rewarded, and recognized by all parts of the early learning system.

**Activity 4-2-1.** Review tiered reimbursement systems, quality bonuses, and financial incentives developed by 29 other states to support program quality improvement and develop recommendations for implementing in Rhode Island.

*Timeline: Year 1*

**FOCUS AREA THREE: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Develop an **adequately-funded, evidence-based system of professional development** to prepare an effective and well-qualified workforce of early educators with appropriate levels of training, education, and credentials that build core knowledge and competencies. The workforce includes staff of child care centers, preschools, Head Start programs, public Pre-K, and early childhood special education programs and family child care providers. Support implementation of the **Rhode Island Early Learning Standards** in a variety of programs through professional development with college credit and on-site technical assistance and coaching.

**Goal 5. Develop recommendations on statewide professional development and career advancement plans for early childhood educators.**

**Objective 5-1. Ensure that the professional development infrastructure uses best practice models and provides career advancement opportunities in the field.**

Activity 5-1-A. Design a professional development system that builds on the current assets in the state and best practice in the field. Consider hiring a consultant with experience in other states to assess current reality in RI and develop a phased in plan to get to a high-quality professional development system for early learning.

Activity 5-1-B. Develop specific recommendations to meet the needs in infant-toddler care.

*Timeline: Year 2*

**FOCUS AREA FOUR: HIGHER EDUCATION**

Expand access to higher education and ensure institutions have the capacity to effectively support the development of early childhood educators. Ensure that higher education coursework builds core knowledge and competencies. Establish the **T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood workforce scholarship model** in the state which has been an identified state priority since at least 2005. BrightStars, state Pre-K, Head Start Performance Standards, and NAEYC accreditation all require that teachers and providers have post-secondary education and specialized training in early childhood education to be recognized as high-quality.

**Goal 6. Assess the capacity and effectiveness of the institutes of higher education to support the development of early childhood educators and build core knowledge and competencies.**

**Objective 6-1: Support professional development, recruitment and retention initiatives for early childhood educators.**

**Activity 6-1.** Implement TEACH statewide in Rhode Island and secure public and private funding for scholarships for the current workforce, including both center-based and family child care providers.

*Timeline: Years 1, 2 and 3*

**Activity 6-2.** Map the capacity of the institutes of higher education in the development of early educators and assess effectiveness in meeting needs of the early childhood workforce and building core knowledge and competencies. This will be most effective if it is done after a workforce study or the implementation of a workforce registry.

*Timeline: Year 3*

## **FOCUS AREA FIVE: EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS**

Participate in national planning and development of common core Early Learning Standards to include comprehensive learning guidelines across all domains of child development (physical, cognitive, social emotional, language and literacy, and approaches to learning) for children birth to age three and children ages three and four.

**Goal 7. Make recommendations for improvements in state early learning standards and undertake efforts to develop high-quality comprehensive early learning standards, as appropriate.**

**Objective 7-1. Early learning standards are comprehensive and tailored to the developmental needs of infants and toddlers and preschoolers, lead to school readiness across all domains of child development (physical, cognitive, social-emotional, language and literacy, and approaches to learning), are aligned with K-3 standards, and are used**

**across the whole system (child care, Pre-K, Head Start, and early childhood special education).**

Activity 7-1-A. Continue to support the RI Early Learning Standards training for early learning providers serving preschool-age children.

Activity 7-1-B. Work with the Council of Chief State School Officers to provide input into the common core standards for early learning for preschoolers and infants/toddlers.

Activity 7-1-C. Review and consider adopting Infant-Toddler Early Learning Standards developed by another state as an interim strategy to guide the development of high-quality professional development opportunities for infant-toddler educators in Rhode Island..

*Timeline Years 1,2,3*

## **FOCUS AREA SIX: ALIGNMENT OF STANDARDS**

Ensure alignment of program quality standards and monitoring practices applied across all programs and settings, including local Rhode Island systems of child care licensing, BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System, and Department of Education preschool approval and the national quality systems of accreditation (NAEYC and NAFCC) and Head Start.

**Goal 8: Ensure alignment of program quality standards and monitoring practices applied across all programs and settings.**

**Objective 8-1. Improve community understanding and alignment of standards for early learning programs including child care licensing, Preschool Approval Standards, BrightStars Quality Criteria, Publicly Funded Pre-K Standards, and Special Education Preschool Standards.**

Activity 8-1-1. Update DCYF child care center licensing regulations (last updated in 1993), monitoring procedures, and licensing data system to incorporate best practices from other states.

*Year 1*

Activity 8-1-2. Conduct a review of all elements of the various standards and identify any inconsistencies. Discuss possible modifications that improve alignment. Share findings with providers and develop educational materials to explain alignment.

*Timeline: Years 2 and 3*

### **FOCUS AREA SEVEN: EARLY CHILDHOOD DATA SYSTEMS**

Using technical assistance from the National Governors Association’s Ready States Initiative, **plan and build a coordinated birth to age 8 data infrastructure** to collect essential information so we can track young children’s participation in early learning programs, including child care (center-based and family child care), Head Start, special education, Pre-K, and full-day kindergarten and understand the quality of programs that serve them. This system needs to include information on children, programs and workforce characteristics, begin at birth and be linked to the K-12 data system through a unique student identifier.

#### **Goal 9. Develop recommendations on the development of a unified data collection system for public early childhood programs and services.**

**Objective 9-1. Develop a coordinated birth to age 8 data infrastructure to collect essential information on where young children spend their time and the effectiveness of programs that serve them. This system needs to include information on children, programs and workforce characteristics, begin at birth and be linked to the K-12 data system.**

**Activity 9-1-A.** Rhode Island is participating in the NGA Ready States group to work across state agencies to develop a detailed plan (including implementation steps and costs) for obtaining

child, program and workforce data from birth to K that will be linked to the unique student identifier. This work will continue in Year 2 and 3 as a funded part of this proposal.

*Timeline: Years 1, 2 and 3*

## **FOCUS AREA EIGHT: CHILDREN’S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

Enhance and expand methods and systems to track children’s learning and development.

Explore best practices in other states and develop a **statewide kindergarten assessment system** that builds on the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards and is used to guide practice and policy and inform kindergarten teachers of children’s strengths and areas for growth. A kindergarten assessment system is an essential building block to support alignment across the birth to Grade 3 continuum. Work to increase the percentage of children who are reading at grade level by third grade.

**Goal 10. Use data to understand and track children’s learning and development so that transitions between early learning programs and systems will improve and resources can be better focused to improve outcomes.**

**Objective 10-1. Have credible data that can show progress in improving children’s school readiness across all domains of child development (physical, cognitive, language and literacy, social-emotional and approaches to learning).**

**Activity 10-1-1.** Review kindergarten assessment systems in other states and develop a kindergarten assessment system for Rhode Island. Ensure that the system addresses all domains of child development, uses data from multiple sources (e.g. gathering data from early learning programs and families as well as kindergarten teachers), and uses best child assessment practices.

**Activity 10-1-2.** Regularly update and track Rhode Island’s community-based School Readiness Indicators.

**Objective 10-2 Improve young children’s transitions into kindergarten and among early learning programs and systems.**

Activity 10-2-1 Develop systems so that data on young children (e.g. developmental screening data, program participation data) can be shared across programs and systems while protecting child and family privacy.

*Timeline: Year 1,2,3*

**Objective 10-3 Increase the percentage of children reading on grade level by the end of third grade while also ensuring that children’s learning across all developmental domains receives equal attention.**

**Activity 10-3-1.** Expand early childhood educators’ access to high-quality professional development in curriculum , assessment, and differentiated teaching.

**Activity 10-3-2** 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 given to English Language Learners.

**Activity 10-3-3** Review K-3 curriculum, teaching strategies, and assessment practices in Rhode Island and best practices in other states. Recommend strategies to build children’s language and literacy skills and to ensure that children’s development in other critical domains (e.g. social-emotional) is strengthened in early elementary school

*Timeline: Year 2,3*

### *Factors that might Accelerate or Decelerate the Work*

The most critical challenge facing the Rhode Island early learning field is the ongoing economic crisis and the reduction in both public and private resources to accomplish this work and improve access to and the quality of early learning programs. In order to accomplish key goals and objectives in this grant application , (e.g. launch the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood scholarship model, conduct a Workforce Study, build a comprehensive early childhood data system, provide financial incentives for quality improvement, etc.) we will need to leverage funding from both public and private sources. Work is well underway to identify funding for these efforts and Rhode Island has a strong history of putting together public-private partnerships to achieve our goals. For example, the Quality Rating and Improvement System research and design phase was funded by United Way of Rhode Island and United Way remains a core funder for operating the QRIS. Two private funders (the Rhode Island Foundation and the Nellie Mae Education Foundation) have provided the bulk of the funding for our QRIS field test and the 3 baseline quality studies (centers/preschools, family child care, and school-age child care). The Rhode Island Child Care Facilities Fund, operated by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, has operated for nine years with funding from both public and private sources. ARRA funding from the Administration for Children and Families to support the work of the Rhode Island Early Learning Council will help to jump-start the state's next set of system reforms.

Another important early challenge will be the transition to a new Governor and potentially new state administrators participating on the Early Learning Council. Governor Carcieri's 8-year term ends in January 2011 when we will see a new Governor sworn into office. There are often changes in state department administrative positions at this time and we anticipate the need to orient new leaders to the work of the Early Learning Council.

### ***Plan for Conducting the Required Needs Assessment***

The Rhode Island Early Learning Council will make use of data collected annually by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT tracking children's access to and enrollment in early learning programs for all 39 cities and towns and 36 school districts in Rhode Island. This data includes child care subsidy program participation by age and type of care as well as enrollment in Head Start and Early Head Start programs, publicly funded Pre-K, Early Intervention, and Preschool Special Education. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT also tracks program participation in BrightStars and NAEYC and NAFCC accreditation status on an annual basis. As part of its core work, the Rhode Island Early Learning Council will be reviewing enhancements and linkages that can be made with state managed data so we can answer more specific questions including: the total number of unduplicated children enrolled in all early learning programs (including families who do not receive any government subsidy or support to enroll their children) and if the most vulnerable children (e.g. children from low income families, children in foster care, children of teen mothers, etc.) are enrolled in high-quality programs.

A recent baseline study of center-based early learning program quality was just completed in Rhode Island and a baseline study of family child care quality is expected to be complete by the end of 2010. The findings from these studies will be reviewed by the Early Learning Council in order to better understand the existing quality of programs. As part of the state's efforts to establish a high-quality, evidence-based Quality Rating and Improvement System for child care and early learning programs, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT contracted with FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina to work in partnership with the local implementing QRIS implementing agency, the Rhode Island Association for the

Education of Young Children, to conduct these studies. Data was collected from a random sample of licensed programs in the state (including child care centers, Head Start programs, approved preschools, and family child care homes) so we would have a picture of quality and not just data on programs that were early participants in BrightStars. Data was collected for all BrightStars Standards and Criteria (e.g. staff formal education and credits in the field, ratios, group sizes, curriculum, child assessment practices, etc.) and classroom/program observations were conducted by staff trained to national reliability standards on the appropriate Environment Rating Scales. The findings and recommendations from these studies are critical components of our needs assessment.

Rhode Island does not have comprehensive data available on the early childhood workforce. Several community-agencies, including BrightStars and Ready to Learn Providence, have collected data on a portion of the workforce which has been helpful. However, the state has never conducted a comprehensive workforce study and a workforce registry does not exist. The state child care licensing office collects information on staff qualifications, but these data are used for compliance purposes and are not entered into a database. The Rhode Island Early Learning Council will review the feasibility of conducting a baseline workforce study using best practices from other states to help inform the overall development of a high-quality early learning system. The Rhode Island Department of Education is interested in surveying individuals with an Early Childhood teaching certificate to gather information on their current employment status and experiences. The Council will also examine the feasibility of establishing a Workforce Registry to maintain up-to-date information on the workforce.

***Plan for Council Meetings and Public Hearings***

The Rhode Island Early Learning Council will meet four times per year and the Rhode Island Early Learning Council Work Group will meet nine times per year for the next three years. A professional facilitator has been hired to help plan and document the meetings as well as guide the input process and support collaborative decision-making. All of the Early Learning Council and Early Learning Council Work Group meetings are open to the public and there will be an opportunity for community members to provide input at all of these meetings. The schedule of meetings will be circulated and posted on Secretary of State’s website as well as the Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and Rhode Island Department of Education’s websites. Because Rhode Island is a very small state (37 miles wide by 48 miles tall) we anticipate participation from all regions and sectors of Rhode Island’s early learning field at all meetings. Council and Work Group leaders will also provide updates and gather input at meetings of other committees across the state (e.g. Rhode Island Head Start Association, BrightStars Steering Committee, etc.). In addition, the Council leaders plan to post important documents (presentations, draft plans, draft recommendations, final documents, etc.) on a publicly accessible website to facilitate information sharing and the community input process. A formal public hearing on this application for federal funding was held on June 29, 2010. Additional public hearings will be held in the future as needed.

***List of Key Organizations, Cooperating Entities, and Consultants***

<b>Organization/Individual</b>	<b>Role/Contribution</b>
<b>Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education</b>	<b>Leadership of Council and Work Group – preschool special education, Pre-K, Rhode Island Early Learning Standards</b>
<b>Rhode Island KIDS COUNT</b>	<b>Leadership of Council and Work Group –</b>

<b>Organization/Individual</b>	<b>Role/Contribution</b>
	<b>policy, planning and advocacy organization</b>
<b>Rhode Island Head Start Collaboration Office</b>	<b>Leadership of Work Group – Head Start</b>
<b>Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services</b>	<b>Participation on Council – child care subsidy and Early Intervention systems</b>
<b>Rhode Island Department of Health</b>	<b>Participation on Council – link with Successful Start Early Childhood System Plan</b>
<b>Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families</b>	<b>Participation on Council – child care licensing</b>
<b>United Way of Rhode Island</b>	<b>Participation on Council – private funder</b>
<b>Rhode Island Foundation</b>	<b>Participation on Council – private funder</b>
<b>Rhode Island Head Start Association</b>	<b>Participation on Council and Work Group – Head Start/Early Head Start programs</b>
<b>Family Child Care Homes of Rhode Island</b>	<b>Participation on Council and Work Group – family child care</b>
<b>Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children</b>	<b>Participation on Council and Work Group – BrightStars, membership organization for early educators</b>
<b>Ready to Learn Providence</b>	<b>Participant on Council and Work Group – urban core and professional development planning</b>
<b>Kristin Lehoullier</b>	<b>Meeting planner, facilitator</b>
<b>TBD</b>	<b>Consultants for planning purposes (e.g. to develop a financial incentive plan for BrightStars, for a Workforce study, licensing update, professional development system building, etc.)</b>

### *Sustainability*

The work of the Rhode Island Early Learning Council will be sustained beyond the three year ARRA grant period because each government agency, organization and individual involved is committed to making improvements in the early learning system to improve children’s outcomes. The co-chairs of the Council, Deborah Gist and Elizabeth Burke Bryant, will work together to ensure that the work of the Council is visible, relevant, and sustained over time. Also,

Rhode Island has a long history of public-private investments and partnerships that have enabled us to make progress in strengthening the early learning system even in a difficult economy. Both the United Way of Rhode Island and the Rhode Island Foundation are members of the Rhode Island Early Learning Council.

**(c) Staff and Position Data**

**Deborah A. Gist**, Rhode Island's Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, co-chairs the Rhode Island Early Learning Council with Elizabeth Burke Bryant.

Previously, she served as State Superintendent of Education in the District of Columbia, beginning in June 2007. As the first state superintendent of education in the District, she was responsible for transitioning all state-level education functions to the newly formed office of the state superintendent of education and for putting into effect the accountability systems of the federal No Child Left Behind education law. As state superintendent of education, Gist created new, progressive educator-certification policies for teachers and school administrators, allowing school districts and nonprofit organizations to apply to certify educators, and she enacted new standards for teacher-preparation programs to improve quality, expand opportunity, and encourage innovation. Gist worked with the first state board of education in the District to transition its role to that of a policy-setting body during its first year of existence, and she developed many important state-level education policies, including standards for health and physical education, world languages, arts education, and early-childhood learning.

Before taking on the role as State Superintendent, Gist served for three years as the state education officer in the District. In that role, she restored the confidence of Congress in the Tuition Assistance Grants program, resulting in a federal funding increase of more than 100 percent for a program that now serves more than 5,000 college students in the District each year.

She also oversaw dramatic improvements in much-maligned child-nutrition programs in the District, including the Summer Food Service program, which was subsequently named the best-performing summer-food program in America for four consecutive years.

Gist began her career in education 21 years ago, as a teacher in the Ft. Worth, Texas, elementary schools, where she focused on literacy education and applied learning. She later taught in Tampa, Florida, where she founded and directed a center on environmental education and later conceived, designed, and initiated Hillsborough Reads, which served families in 108 elementary schools in Hillsborough County. She won “Teacher of the Year” honors at her schools in both Ft. Worth and Tampa.

In addition to spending 10 years serving directly in schools, Gist was a senior policy analyst at the U.S. Department of Education. She advised the secretary and deputy secretary on top issues, analyzed proposed policy initiatives, and conducted research and feasibility studies. Gist also served as the marketing and development director of the Discovery Creek Children’s Museum, in Washington, and she later worked for the Office of the Mayor, in Washington, as the executive director of the office on volunteerism and service programs, Serve DC. While in Washington, Gist served as a volunteer mentor and a board member for Mentors, Inc.

Gist earned a master’s degree in public administration from the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, where she was also selected as a Kennedy Fellow and received the Littauer Fellowship for academic excellence and community service. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in early-childhood education from the University of Oklahoma and a Master of Arts in elementary education, with an emphasis in curriculum, from the University of South Florida. Gist became a certified public manager, following successful completion of a joint program with the District of Columbia government and the George Washington University. In

2008, she completed a fellowship with the Broad Academy for Superintendents, which prepares talented leaders to take on executive leadership roles in urban education.

**Elizabeth Burke Bryant** co-chairs the Early Learning Council with Commissioner Gist. She is the Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, a children's policy and research organization that provides information on child well-being, stimulates dialogue on children's issues, and promotes accountability and action. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT provides policy makers, community leaders, and the news media with the best available data and information in order to improve children's health, education, safety, economic security and development. The organization produces a quarterly *Issue Brief Series*, hosts a monthly cable television program, and publishes the annual *Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook* that monitors progress on more than 60 indicators of child well-being. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT coordinated the *National School Readiness Indicators Initiative: Making Progress for Young Children*, a 17-state initiative that created a set of measurable indicators related to and defining school readiness that can be tracked at the state and local levels to improve school readiness and ensure early school success. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT continues to have a national leadership role on early childhood issues as a grantee of the Birth to Five Policy Alliance and as an ACF grantee for evidence-based home visiting.

Elizabeth is also an Adjunct Lecturer in Public Policy at Brown University's A. Alfred Taubman Center for Public Policy and American Institutions where she teaches Strategic Communication. A native of Providence, Rhode Island, she received a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Vermont (BA in Political Science 1979) and a law degree from the George Washington University Law School (JD 1985). Previous positions include Policy Director for the City of Providence, Housing Court prosecutor, and consultant to the Rhode

Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation, The Rhode Island Foundation, and the Women's Prison Mentoring Project.

Elizabeth has been actively involved in several organizations including Voices for America's Children, the United Way of Rhode Island, the Local Initiative Support Corporation and the Rhode Island Foundation. She is the recipient of numerous awards including the 2007 National Florette Angel Child Advocate of the Year Award, the Rhode Island Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Coalition Silver Rattle Award, the Classical High School Distinguished Alumni Award, and the John Hope Settlement House Sterrett Award.

**Leanne Barrett** co-chairs the Early Learning Council Work Group and manages the day-to-day work of the Rhode Island Early Learning Council and Early Learning Council Work Group. She is the Policy Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT with core responsibility for early learning and early childhood development policy. She is a leader in the early learning field and spearheaded the development of BrightStars, the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System, staffed the state's Pre-K Exploration and Design Committees, is currently the Project Director for the Rhode Island Nurse-Family Partnership Initiative (funded by ACF through the Evidence Based Home Visiting grant program) and serves on the state's Child Care Commission and Successful Start Steering Committee (our state's ECCS initiative). Prior to joining Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, Leanne was Vice President and Director of Community Initiatives at United Way of Rhode Island and, prior to that, she was a national program manager for the American Business Collaboration for Quality Dependent Care at Work/Family Directions, Inc. She has a bachelor's degree in developmental psychology from Brown University and a master's degree in child and family policy from Tufts University.

**Michele Palermo** co-chairs the Early Learning Work Group. She coordinates early childhood programs at the Rhode Island Department of Education and is the lead staff person for the new Rhode Island Pre-K Demonstration Project (being evaluated by the National Institute for Early Education Research using a randomized control group design). Michele managed the recently completed effort to update the Rhode Island Department of Education's approval standards for preschool programs to reflect current, national best practice. She oversees the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards Project, which includes four levels of professional development tied to college credit and annual technical assistance to a select number of programs. Michele also coordinates the work to develop a comprehensive child outcome assessment system, beginning with preschool children with disabilities. Additionally, she leads the process to develop early learning standards for infants and toddlers and core competencies for the early learning workforce. Prior to joining the Rhode Island Department of Education, Michele worked for a community mental health agency and provided professional development and site-specific consultation to a wide variety of early childhood programs across the state; including child care centers, Head Start, and public preschools. Michele began her career in education 18 years ago, and spent five years as a kindergarten teacher in a community based kindergarten program in Warwick, RI, and later as a kindergarten and preschool teacher in Providence, RI. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in early-childhood education from the University of Rhode Island and a Master of Science in early childhood/elementary special education, with an emphasis on inclusion of children with disabilities, from Wheelock College.

**Lawrence Pucciarelli** is on the Early Learning Council and is a co-chair of the Early Learning Council Work Group. He is the state's Head Start Collaboration Director and participates on many state committees including Successful Start, the Child Care Commission,

the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System Steering Committee, and the Rhode Island Head Start Director's Association. Larry manages the state supplemental investment in Head Start and works closely with the Rhode Island Head Start Training & Technical Assistance Center, a project of the Education Development Center. Larry directed Head Start programs in Massachusetts and Rhode Island for 21 years, and is a past chairperson of the New England Head Start Association, and has served as Treasurer of the National Head Start Association. He holds B.S. and M.A. degrees from New York University, School of Education.

**Kristin Lehoullier** is the professional facilitator hired to support the work of the Early Learning Council and Early Learning Council Work Group by working with leaders to plan, facilitate and document the meetings. She has over eighteen years management and operations experience in for-profit, non-profit and governmental organizations with significant experience in facilitation, strategic planning, organizational capacity building, and operational assessment. She is often recruited to help organizations undergoing growth and/or turnaround and has excellent communication, leadership and problem-solving skills combined with strong analytical ability and results focus. Kristin has worked as a Medicaid and Medicare consultant with Medimetrix Consulting and as Executive Director of City Year Rhode Island. An independent consultant for the past five years, Kristin has worked for RI KIDS COUNT, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE), Providence After School Alliance (PASA), Swearer Center for Public Service at Brown University, Providence Children's Museum, Serve Rhode Island, Rhode Island After School Plus Alliance (RIASPA), CVS/Highlander Charter School, Woodlawn Community Development Corporation, Paul Cuffee Charter School, Rhode Island Campus Compact, CVS/Pharmacy Charitable Trust, Wolf School, United Way of Rhode Island and the City of Providence. Her work has included

strategic planning, facilitation, capacity building, operational assessment, program evaluation, board development and training. Kristin holds a Master of Science degree in non-profit management and public policy from Carnegie Mellon University. She is also a trained facilitator and coach.

#### **(d) Organizational Profiles**

In Rhode Island, The Board of Regents is the chief policy-setting body overseeing elementary and secondary education in Rhode Island. Through its designated powers and duties, the Board helps shape the course of public education to ensure that all of the state's children receive the best possible education.

In April 2009, the Board of Regents selected as Education Commissioner Deborah Gist, a dynamic and transformative leader whose vision and commitment to dramatically improving student achievement created a new energy and enthusiasm for education reform in Rhode Island. Since assuming responsibility on July 1, 2009, Commissioner Gist created, with significant input from all relevant stakeholder groups (parents, teachers, students, community leaders), the *RIDE Strategic Plan*. Commissioner Gist then established an Executive Leadership Team—made up of leaders of each division, the Chief of Staff, and the Commissioner herself—to oversee the *RIDE Strategic Plan*. The Executive Leadership Team designed and implemented a new organizational structure within RIDE that went into effect January 2010.

This new organizational structure (see Appendix D. for Organizational Chart) ensures the sustainability and integration of the *RIDE Strategic Plan* implementation efforts by embedding key initiatives into the work of RIDE's newly reorganized divisions:

- *Commissioner's Office*: Headed by Commissioner Deborah A. Gist, this office has eight professional staff, and is responsible for the oversight and management of *RIDE Strategic*

*Plan.* Using an Executive Management Team, comprised of the leaders of each division described below, and the Chief of Staff, the Commissioner will ensure that all policy aspects of our application are communicated and understood by all Rhode Islanders.

- *Division of Accountability and Quality Assurance:* Headed by the Deputy Commissioner of Education, David V. Abbott, this newly structured division with 16 professional staff brings together Legal, Data and Analysis, and Transformation Offices. This division will drive the synthesis of indicators that the Department must examine to diagnose specific LEA support needs. Once identified, these targeted direct supports will be managed and delivered through this division, project teams consisting of personnel from other RIDE offices, or through partners or outside experts. The Transformation Office, headed by the new Chief of Transformation, will have direct responsibility for working with LEAs to ensure that school reform plans are implemented. The Knowledge Officer, with the support of the Data and Analysis team, will be responsible for helping LEAs to implement effective data tools that inform instructional decision-making and accelerate student achievement.
- *Division of Educator Effectiveness and Instructional Improvement:* Headed by a senior educational leader with over 25 years of experience in assessment and accountability, Mary Ann Snider, is a newly structured division with 21 professional staff. There are two offices (The Office of Educator Quality & Certification and The Office on Instruction, Assessment, and Curriculum) within this division. These two offices work together closely in order to ensure that the integration of educator evaluation and the connections to student learning are well articulated and coordinated. The Early Childhood Coordinator works in this division in the Office of Instruction, Assessment and Curriculum.

- *Division of Accelerating School Performance:* Headed by a newly hired educational leader, Andrea Castaneda, with significant background in urban reform and closing achievement gaps, this division, with 27 professional staff, has direct responsibility for supporting LEAs in the creation of student, community and academic supports and assuring access and opportunity for all students to multiple learning pathways. This division works with diverse learners, secondary schools including career and technical centers, adult education providers, and higher education to secure horizontal and vertical integration of learning opportunities for all students.
- *Division of Fiscal Integrity and Efficiencies:* Headed by a senior leader, Carolyn Dias, with over 25 years of experience in state fiscal systems and efficiencies, this division, with 26 professionals, oversees the Office of Finance, the Offices of Network and Information Systems, Human Resources, and a new Office of Statewide Efficiencies that includes the work of statewide efficiencies such as the Uniform Chart of Accounts, school construction, transportation, health care and other statewide commodity procurements.

**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT** is a statewide children’s policy organization dedicated to improving the health, education, economic well-being, safety and development of Rhode Island’s children. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT uses facts, consensus building, a sophisticated communications strategy, and advocacy to create the political will to bring about public policy changes that benefit children and families. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT collects and disseminates data on the well-being of Rhode Island’s children and advocates for and facilitates the development of responsive policies and programs. By framing the issues, stressing their impact on children and communities, enlisting media coverage, and collaborating with key

partners, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT sets the stage for policies that effectively address the needs of children and families.

In its sixteen-year history, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT has built the credibility and relationships necessary to influence change for the children at the state and community levels. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT plays a unique role in Rhode Island by combining credible information and analysis with the ability to bring together all sectors to solve problems and make change. The mission of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is to improve the health, education, safety, and economic security of Rhode Island's children. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT accomplishes its mission by working collaboratively with a broad range of stakeholders and by building strong relationships with members of the executive branch and legislature, child advocates, community leaders, and academic institutions. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT uses five major strategies to advance the children's agenda in Rhode Island: publishing data and information on the health, education, safety, and economic security of Rhode Island children; testifying on children's issues before the legislature and local government bodies; leading or participating in government committees and commissions involving children's issues; using a media and communications strategy to raise public awareness; and organizing a wide range of people and organizations to advocate for children. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT has 10 staff members comprised of the Executive Director, Deputy Director, Finance Director, Research Analyst, Policy Analysts, Communications Coordinator, Executive Assistant/Office Manager, and Administrative Assistant. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT's organizational chart is attached as Appendix E.

### **(e) Third Party Agreements**

The Governor has designated the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) as the government agency responsible for the management of the Rhode Island Early Learning Council and this grant. The Governor also designated Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, a statewide non-profit children's research and policy organization, to manage the day-to-day activities of the Council. RIDE will subcontract with Rhode Island KIDS COUNT to work with the Early Learning Council to execute the state plan that will be developed by the Council and to implement all aspects of this proposal according to the goals, objectives, timelines and budget narrative that are part of this application. The individual designated to coordinate the activities of the Council is Leanne Barrett, Policy Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. A memo of understanding will be developed between the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, specifying the roles and responsibilities of each party based on this proposal and the Governor's designations as indicated above and the three year plan for the work. A significant portion of the budget has been reserved for focused systems and data projects that support the responsibilities of the Council and that enable Rhode Island to accomplish the plan as described in this proposal total of \$180,000 over three years will be contracted to independent consultants and organizations to conduct work for the Rhode Island Early Learning Council. The Early Learning Council Work Group will design the specific projects, including scope and cost, in keeping with the overall goals and strategic plan of the Early Learning Council. Funds would support 6 projects @ approx. \$30,000 each. Project costs would vary and could range from \$5K - \$50K depending on goals and scope. Individuals and organizations will be selected based on qualifications and experience with similar efforts and with the capacity to deliver a high quality product in the desired timeframe.