

Working Group on Early Childhood Governance
November 16, 2023
10:00AM EST
Executive Conference Room, 4th Floor
Department of Administration
1 Capitol Hill, Providence, 02908

Approved

A full recording of the meeting can be found at:

- <https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/o0NlCP7hm1y47Cm9Bkf9rEg4Yp6pmcRwcsQXMuvWLJYHhIPXM7azQbobo2wMTwGz.cvCw63Y8cgEmeDxb?startTime=1700147095000>
- Passcode: 1T=t!nvB

Members in Attendance

- RIDOH: Kristine Campagna
- RIDE: Krystafer Redden
- DHS: Director Kimberly Merolla-Brito
- RI KIDS COUNT: Leanne Barrett
- OPC: Commissioner Shannon Gilkey
- DOA: Director Brian Daniels

Welcome & Overview

- Attendees introduced themselves and their organizations around the table
- Kayla overviewed the agenda and noted that at the last meeting, the Working Group accepted the interim comprehensive report to submit to the Governor and General Assembly and began a conversation regarding recommendations. Since then, there have been robust conversations with feedback based on the report, and today the Working Group will be reviewing draft recommendations and providing feedback.

Vote on Adoption of Minutes

- The Working Group on Early Childhood Governance voted on adopting the minutes from the September 28, 2023 meeting
 - Leanne asked for an update to the name of the bill from 1998 to be the Starting Right (1998). The group assented to that change.
 - First: Director Merolla-Brito
 - Second: Kristine Campagna
 - All voted in favor and the minutes were accepted.

Presentation on Draft Recommendations

- Elliot Regenstein, Foresight Law + Policy, noted that there have been ongoing conversations and that there is general alignment across state government and in the community with what the challenges are for the early childhood system.
- There are different preferred strategies on how to address those challenges. From the outset, we have discussed that there are any number of ways to address the issues in early childhood and different people will weigh the benefits and considerations of options differently. Among

Working Group members, there was a strong orientation towards remaining in a coordinated model and building upon existing strengths. From a survey that the consultants conducted and from an Early Learning Council survey, there was more interest in the community for a created model.

- This summary of the recommendations addresses the area that was in the legislation as well as what was raised during the process. Draft recommendations here:
<http://kids.ri.gov/cabinet/documents/wg-meeting-materials/RI%20Early%20Childhood%20Governance%20Recommendations%20DRAFT%2011-14-23.pdf>
 - Remain in a coordinated framework
 - Data infrastructure improvement
 - Establishing role clarity across agencies
 - Coordinate budgeting across agencies and regularly look at holistic funding of the system
 - Set unified standards for quality and support providers to achieve quality
 - No wrong door for families to access services to improve family experience
 - Grow local leadership
 - More coordinated communications function
 - Ongoing capacity to support coordination
- Unanimity among the Working Group may not be the outcome in a final vote, and it may be worth acknowledging the variations in opinion.
- Throughout the process, we have seen leaders reflecting on why there are reasons to improve and change and it will be critical for the state to address those and be as concrete as possible. One area to potentially strengthen would be to be more specific about feedback loops and how communication will occur.
- These recommendations are a starting point and not an ending point, and welcome feedback about how to improve these.

Discussion of Draft Recommendations

- Ana Novais, EOHHS (joining remotely on Zoom) noted that she appreciated the framing of how to represent the variation in opinion within the report. We have done continuous engagement in this process and it is important to reflect that.
- Leanne Barrett, Kids Count, appreciates the systems analysis overall. For the proposed recommendation, I can live with this recommendation – thumbs sideways. I am in support of a new agency and I'm disappointed to see that is not where it landed. I would love in this report to include the actual statutory language and who was the decisionmakers for the report. Where it could be better is to add something in statute to require early childhood governance and coordination across agencies. We have been doing coordination because of federal grants, but not because the state requires it.
- Lisa Nugent, RIDE, agrees about the need for a statute clarity and put operational items -like the data systems – into statute. That will then make it a system.
- Leanne says that the Early Learning Council is not in statute and that should be discussed. Kids Count should not be responsible for keeping it going by themselves as that puts too much power and blame in one organization's hands. We need to clarify the role of the ELC. The idea is to have a body who can drive consensus rather than having random people raise their hands for stakeholder engagement.
- Ana Novais agrees that someone needs to be empowered to support the coordination, whether that is through Executive Order or other approach, it needs to be discussed. As an Administration,

we chose to apply for the grant and identified our needs, and that let us support our work. RI is very good at getting federal funding to invest in the work that needs to get done and we choose to embrace the mandate.

- Shannon Gilkey, OPC, notes that for any model of coordination, a strong data infrastructure is important. I would plan to integrate into the RILDS from the outset. For coordination, in higher education, there is a healthy tension between the state level goals for higher education and what is in the best interests of the institutions. The big levers in higher education is tuition and outcomes tied to scholarship funding. You need to have the right levers to manage the tension and ensure healthy tensions in coordination.
- Brian Daniels, OMB, notes that it is important in the discussion of the ELC that there is clarity about advisory bodies versus a policy-making body. Leanne noted agreement that it is an advisory body.
- Leanne asks how we want to handle the Early Learning Council providing an official recommendation as advice to the Working Group. Elliot noted that the final report could have a placeholder for the ELC's recommendation, and then if the ELC approves the recommendation, then it would be incorporated into the report.
- Leanne notes that the ELC did a temperature check and the majority of respondents were in favor of a created model, which members of the Working Group could take into consideration for their final vote.
- Shannon Gilkey asks for clarification of the role of the ELC. Kayla notes that the ELC is an advisory body to the Working Group, but the Working Group is the body responsible for making recommendations to the General Assembly and Governor.
- Kayla notes that at the next meeting, Working Group members will be asked to vote on a final report including a recommendation section. The goal of today's meeting is to give feedback on the draft recommendations, so that the consulting team can update the recommendations and the final version can be incorporated into the draft to be voted on December 13.

Next Steps

- Next meeting is December 13, 2023 where we will vote on a final report
- Elliot will use the input from today and the feedback at the special session of the Early Learning Council tomorrow to insert a conclusion section to the report. In addition, Afton Partners is working on an updated financial analysis and a cost analysis of what each model would potentially cost, which will also be woven into the report. Finally, the consulting team is planning to keep the language of the interim comprehensive report the same unless they receive changes. They have received some changes from Leanne about including Head Start funding into the graphs and tables about the funding for early childhood. Wanted to get group feedback on that today:
 - Leanne noted that Head Start is one of the largest buckets of funding and only including state managed funds is not reflective of the actual early childhood system.
 - Shannon notes that leveraging the various inputs of resources is an important opportunity for the strategic plan and how you can best use your state investment to leverage the others.
 - Kayla recommends that it be clear that is not funding that the state government manages, since it would be a substantially different type of funding than any other stream being included.
 - Brian Daniels notes that Head Start may not be the only one not included, so it would be good to include a note about what is and is not included for clarity.

- Elliot will circulate a fully updated report to the Working Group and the public in advance of the final meeting to ensure there is an opportunity for everyone to review in advance of the final meeting.

Public Comment

- Khadija Lewis-Khan notes that including Head Start is an important addition, so as long as it can be incorporated in some way, that would be helpful. For the draft recommendations, how do we ensure that the funding affects different parts of the system? For example, the infant-toddler set aside in pre-K. How is that represented in this model?
 - Lisa Nugent notes that it is in the second bullet which is developing a holistic budget and coordinated ask across agencies.
 - Elliot notes that including language about looking at the impact of the budget would be a great addition, and not just looking at the total funding amounts.

Adjournment

- Motion to adjourn
 - First: Director Brian Daniels
 - Second: Director Kimberly Merolla-Brito
 - All voted in favor
- The meeting adjourned at 10:56AM EST