

Working Group on Early Childhood Governance
July 27, 2023
Executive Conference Room, 4th Floor
Department of Administration
1 Capitol Hill, Providence, 02908

Approved 8-22-23

A full recording of the meeting can be found at:

- Link: https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/component-page?action=viewdetailpage&sharelevel=meeting&useWhichPasswd=meeting&clusterId=us02&componentName=need-password&meetingId=D6fr9QpIDjudz7eXmwc4IFpaRzNcZjdeOyGBQ_6d8zl47PDOqKhdTYNy5kB1NyRY.FdCOT67IHPtnOjuy&originRequestUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fus02web.zoom.us%2Frec%2Fshare%2F1Tame8qc_IXKkm_OK46rl-dvj6boLsH5xG5AA9Nyg5tSatcrl-I2gG9sGCqLX3R.NwPrly-suRkKVmPB%3FstartTime%3D1690470435000
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Members in Attendance

- RIDOH: Kristine Campagna
- RIDE: Lisa Odom-Villella
- DHS: Kim Brito
- RI KIDS COUNT: Leanne Barrett
- DOA: Libby Kimzey

Welcome & Overview

- Attendees introduced themselves and their organizations around the table
- Kayla overviewed the agenda

Vote on Adoption of Minutes

- The Working Group on Early Childhood Governance voted on adopting the minutes from the May 4, 2023 meeting
 - First: Lisa Odom-Villella
 - Second: Director Brito
 - All voted in favor and the minutes were accepted.
 - Absent: EOHHS/Children's Cabinet, OPC

Overview of Project

- Kayla reviewed the work of the Working Group to date, including the adoption of a mission and vision; stakeholder engagement; and the procurement of a consulting team, Foresight Law + Policy (FLP) / Watershed Advisors, through a Request for Proposals process.
- Since then, the vendor team has conducted a thorough landscape analysis process and will be presenting the draft today.

Upcoming Schedule

- Nasha Patel, Watershed Advisors, presented on the upcoming schedule for the project including that the landscape analysis would be revised in August and reviewed at the August 22 Working Group meeting
- Late August to September will focus on development of recommendations and financial analysis, with a comprehensive interim report being submitted October 1 and further refinement of the report occurring in later 2023

Landscape Analysis Overview

- Nasha provided an overview of the landscape analysis, including a description of the process for developing the analysis and the components of the analysis
- The full draft analysis can be found here: <http://kids.ri.gov/cabinet/documents/wg-meeting-materials/Early%20Childhood%20Governance%20Overview%20of%20Current%20Status%20Draft%20Report.pdf>
- The process included talking with more than 70 individuals, including in one-on-one conversations, groups meetings, and open forums for any interested party to attend
- The scope of the analysis was to understand current systems of governance, challenges, and opportunities, with a focus on the core programs identified by the Working Group's scope

Landscape Analysis Key Takeaways

- Elliot Regenstein, FLP, presented on the key takeaways from the landscape analysis including:
 - There isn't actually an overarching state vision for early childhood services that guides the day-to-day work of state agencies.
 - Rhode Island's current governance structure leverages agency expertise, and the agencies have strong relationships.
 - But the full-time early childhood staff in each agency are not always empowered to be leaders, and the senior leaders who are empowered have many other demands on their time.
 - Rhode Island's small size leads to deep engagement between the state and providers, which has built strong relationship –but the lack of local infrastructure means that providers are not insulated from fragmented state government.
 - There is real concern that changing governance structures will not actually make things better
- Key Elements of the State's Administration
 - Gubernatorial Leadership
 - The transition in governors created staff turnover that has been hard to navigate
 - Strong leadership will be needed from the governor to strengthen the system
 - Legislative Connections
 - To date the administration has not had a coherent early childhood agenda with the legislature
 - Advocates have helped spearhead important changes, but also may have room for growth
 - Agency Capacity
 - Agencies have struggled to hire staff
 - Numerous agencies use contractors –but those have also been fragmented
 - Interagency Collaboration
 - The Children's Cabinet has been a useful information-sharing venue but is not charged with driving an agenda

- The early childhood staff collaborate and work well together
 - Their collaboration is seen as being on specific issues and projects, rather than on a broader agenda
 - Outside partners still experience state government as operating in silos
 - Local Collaboration
 - There are no real structures for regional or local collaboration
 - The relationship between state agencies and providers is much closer than in many larger states
 - Many school districts are not actively engaged in early childhood work
- Specific Policy Issues
 - Workforce development
 - Like every state, Rhode Island is struggling to attract and retain early childhood professionals
 - There is no overarching state vision for addressing this issue
 - Some talent leaves for K-12
 - Professional Development and Technical Assistance
 - The Center for Early Learning Professionals provides TA under two separate contracts, which creates some discontinuity in implementation
 - To date the higher education system has not been actively engaged in professional development
 - Quality Evaluation and Improvement
 - The BrightStars system is seen as having improved in recent years
 - But it still may not be fully aligned with pre-k
 - Data Systems
 - There are a number of promising initiatives to integrate data and approve analytics –but even these efforts are siloed
 - The underlying data infrastructure in early education and care is weak in many respects
- Early Council Conversation
 - The Early Learning Council has discussed a number of potential priorities, although it has not finalized its recommendations. Topics discussed to date include:
 - Workforce development
 - Improving screening –and inclusion –for children with special needs
 - integrating the mixed delivery system
 - Supporting home-based providers
 - Engagement
 - Integrating data systems
- Additional Observations
 - Governance changes typically are designed to shift burdens off of providers and families and onto state government –so it is understandable that state government leaders are concerned about that, especially given recent turnover and current capacity challenges
 - Pre-k and child care are always at the heart of these conversations, and at the moment neither RIDE nor DHS is attempting to take over leadership of the entire system
- Next Steps
 - Foresight and Watershed will collect feedback and reflections on the landscape analysis.
 - This is very important as we move to developing recommendations, that we are doing so based on the consensus understanding of the real challenges and needs of the RI context.

- Foresight and Watershed will then begin drafting recommendations in August.

Feedback on the Draft Landscape Analysis

- Libby Kimzey, DOA, asked about if other governments have a good way of addressing changes when administrations change.
 - Elliot: This is a common experience across governments. The bigger issue is the issue of senior leadership. Many other states have tried to solve this by creating a standalone early childhood agency – the goal is to have a Cabinet level leader who can speak at early childhood issues and negotiate with other agencies as a peer and as an early childhood leader. Regardless of structure, it is important to have strong division leads, but it is different to have a politically appointed leader who is tight with the Governor and legislature who can lead the work. That is something RI currently does not have and there are segments of the RI community that want to see that, and there are others who think that the cost-benefit of making that change is worth it. That’s an issue we will get into more deeply in the coming months. On the transition issues, that’s something that every state does in its own way.
- Elliot encouraged everyone to reach out to them individually to give feedback so they can use it to revise the draft, and understand if people are not comfortable speaking at a public forum.
- Leanne Barrett, RI Kids Count, followed up on the leadership question. We have not had a leadership structure that has empowered people with responsibility, accountability, and authority to lead for young children. Many people may think about governance as just moving programs around – such as what we did with EI. Sometimes we move things around for administrative reasons, but that’s different than leadership. Can you please elevate the word leadership in this? Also, worth highlighting the need for school district engagement and that is something a leader could help with.
 - Elliot: In the landscape analysis, we were trying to be descriptive of what is happening now- the facts as we saw them. In looking at what the options are going forward, what kind of leadership you are going to get is an essential part of the conversation and that will be highlighted more in future rounds. It is worth noting also that – in programs that have moved – that there is some anchor idea for why something is where it is. RI is like every other state: child care is a human service with a particular type of reimbursement to parents. As these programs grew, it was logical to put them in a human services agency. Similarly pre-k programs have been pitched around the country as an educational service, and for that reason, totally logical to put them in an education agency. Those reasons remain powerful and valid. What some states are thinking about is perhaps what’s most important is that there is a complex ecosystem of child care, pre-k, and Head Start, and what we want is an entity thinking about that holistically. There are places where that has become the primary driver and it is worth it to them to make that change. As we get into the next set of conversations, what that’s going to force is a weighing of values where there are legitimate values on both sides of the equation and it is a question of what you think is most important.
- Leanne Barrett, RI Kids Count, noted that powerpoint slides are very helpful to simplify things. The word children is not on here in the slides. Particularly with the ongoing issues around developmental delays, the Early Learning Council, has worked to identify children with high needs who cross departments. Maybe we should have this in the summary of the landscape analysis- the challenges for families.
 - Elliot: Point well taken and will make updates, which is why this revision period is so critical. We welcome all this feedback so we can ensure it is a clear picture.

- Kayla encouraged everyone to take time to review the draft and provide feedback to Elliot and Nasha so that the landscape is as accurate as possible so we can use it to drive recommendations that are right for Rhode Island.
- Elliot followed-up to emphasize that if RI was going to oversimplify the strengths and challenges; a lot of strengths focused on the people and a lot of the challenges focused on the system. That's a better place to be than the other way around. The spirit of this is that there is something potentially better possible. This is a critique of the system, not the people in the system.
- Lisa Odom-Villella asked if it will be possible to get the final draft a week or so before the meeting on August 22, or will we get the update live at the next session.
 - Elliot: We will try to it to you as far in advance as possible. We are closing the comment period August 11. We will provide a track changes version so you can easily see the changes.
- Kayla noted that the draft is posted online and Kayla will send out via the listserv. We welcome all comments and feedback through August 11- feel free to reach out to Elliot and Nasha directly with thoughts and feedback. Next meeting, we will vote on the landscape analysis and beginning to think about national best practices that we can build upon as we develop recommendations.

Public Comment

- No public comment

Adjournment

- Motion to adjourn
 - First: Leanne Barrett
 - Second: Kristine Campagna
 - All voted in favor
- The meeting adjourned at 11:49AM.