

Rhode Island | Race to the Top

EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE GRANT

Informational Brief

Rhode Island's Effective, High-Quality Early Learning Workforce

Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Goals

Rhode Island's RTT-ELC grant seeks to support the early childhood workforce through the development of a professional development system that is based on 1) Workforce Knowledge and Competency (WKC) Frameworks for key roles in the early childhood education field, which include a clear career pathway for progressing to higher levels of knowledge and skills, 2) opportunities to acquire the requisite skills and knowledge within and across each level through both ongoing professional development and technical assistance, and the attainment of formal credentials, and 3) data-driven decision making based on information collected on early childhood educator development, advancement, and retention (through the Workforce Study and Workforce Registry). Building a statewide professional development system that is data informed and grounded in clear standards for the workforce will allow the state to create, nurture, support and retain an effective, high-quality early childhood workforce with the knowledge and skills to support young children's learning and development.

Research and Rationale

Numerous research studies have shown that the education levels and high-quality professional development experiences of educators positively impact both the quality of the early learning program and child outcomes¹. Therefore, a highly qualified workforce is a critical component of a high-quality early learning system. In order to support and sustain a highly-qualified workforce, Rhode Island has created a set of clear standards for early care and education providers and ensuring supports are in place to assist providers in achieving those standards an integral part of its Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge State Plan.

¹ For an overview of such research, see: Whitebook, M. and Ryan, S. (2011) Degrees in context: Asking the right questions about preparing skilled and effective teachers of young children. National Institute for Early Education Research. and Bueno, M., Darling-Hammond, L. and Gonzales, D. (2010) A matter of degrees: Preparing teachers for the pre-k classroom. The Pew Center on the States.

Rhode Island's Approach

The key components of Rhode Island's professional development system design, largely based on NAEYC's workforce design policy brief², include: a clearly delineated set of workforce knowledge and competencies, defined career pathways, access to financial and educational supports, and a means for continuously evaluating the status and needs of the workforce through a workforce registry. In order to support and sustain a highly-qualified workforce, Rhode Island is creating clear sets of standards for professionals, aligning supports to assist in attaining those standards, and creating a workforce registry to produce a high-quality statewide professional development (PD) system.

Workforce Knowledge and Competencies

The WKC Frameworks will serve as the foundation of the Professional Development System by defining a progression of knowledge and competencies for key positions in the early childhood workforce. Rhode Island's approach in WKC development is unique in that it will create different, yet interrelated, frameworks for key roles in the early childhood field. Workforce Knowledge and Competencies will be defined for teachers and teacher assistants, including an addendum for early childhood special education teachers and early intervention specialists; family childcare educators; professional development providers and higher education faculty and staff; and for administrators and education coordinators. WKC Frameworks for family childcare educators and for teachers and teacher assistants, including the addendum for special education teachers and early intervention specialists, will be finalized by July 2013. WKC Frameworks for professional development providers and higher education will be completed by December of 2013 and the Framework for administrators and education coordinators in 2014.

The final draft of the WKC Framework for teacher and teacher assistants was developed over a two year time period, during which substantial public input was collected and a final draft was released in December 2011. RTT-ELC provides additional resources to make revisions to this WKC Framework before finalization, including convening a panel of national experts to review the framework and a review by professors at the University of Rhode Island and Rhode Island College—these reviews will be conducted in May and June, respectively. Revisions to the original final draft are not expected to be substantial or to significantly impact the development of the WKC for family child care educators or the addendums for special education and early intervention providers. Because of the substantial public comment efforts during the original development in 2011, the teacher and teacher assistant competencies will not go through a second public comment period. The revisions to the final draft will be completed by July 2013.

² For the full brief, see: LeMoine, S. (2008) Workforce designs: A policy blueprint for state early childhood professional development systems. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Accessed at: http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/policy/ecwsi/Workforce_Designs.pdf

Public feedback opportunities for the addendum to the Teacher/Teacher Assistant Competencies for Special Education were conducted during the months of February and March 2013. Feedback for the Family Child Care Competencies will be collected through focus groups and online surveys throughout April - May 2013. In the event feedback collected on the aforementioned competencies has implications for the Teacher/Teacher Assistant WKC, the original development team will consider this feedback before the final draft is completed in July 2013.

In addition to developing the WKC, the RTT-ELC activities will support the alignment of the WKC to both higher education and professional development opportunities. The State's three public institutions of higher education – Rhode Island College (RIC), the University Of Rhode Island (URI), and the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI)—are currently working to identify strengths in their relevant coursework's alignment to the WKC Framework and to find areas in which alignment needs to be strengthened. URI and RIC will complete this alignment with the guidance of a RIDE developed template, while CCRI will complete this process through their NAEYC Accreditation Self-Study. This work will continue throughout the duration of 2013 and the accreditation process for CCRI will be completed in 2014.

The Professional Development/Technical Assistance Center will be responsible for ensuring statewide professional development and technical assistance provided is aligned to, and addresses all domains outlined in, all WKC Frameworks and for each role they pertain to.

Emerging considerations and questions from the Field Regarding the Workforce Knowledge and Competencies:

Clarification for Credentials vs. Competencies: Workforce knowledge and competencies are measurable skills, levels of knowledge, and behavioral practices, while credentials are "paper" qualifications, such as certificates, diplomas, and degrees. The WKC are not designed to be a credentialing system, but rather to provide a clear, research and evidence-based pathway that allows professionals in the field to assess their own knowledge and skill level and to chart a course for their own development, as well as to provide the state with a clear picture of the early learning workforce.

Inclusion of the CDA: The State recognizes that Child Development Associate (CDA) is a potential step in reaching educational and career goals, as well as creating a positive mindset for continuing education. The CDA is recognized in DCYF licensing regulations, within DHS' Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (BrighStars), and RIDE CECE approval program for teaching assistants. The CDA is also included in the Rhode Island career pathways, where appropriate, as an option.

The Professional Development/Technical Assistance Center created by the State will be responsible for determining the best array of professional development supports to offer in order to meet the needs of Rhode Island's workforce. This will include using RI's 2013 Workforce Study and, in an ongoing manner, the workforce registry to determine workforce needs, identify and provide effective, high-

quality professional development supports aligned with the WKC's, and monitor the provisions of those supports to ensure high quality implementation. If the CDA credential best meets the criteria outlined above, then the Professional Development/Technical Assistance Center will provide supports for CDA attainment.

What supports are currently or will be made available to programs and early childhood providers to increase knowledge and competencies?

Providers and educators will be able to access a number of supports including increased access to professional development and technical assistance, program improvement grants and access to low/no cost higher education. See Informational Brief on RTT-ELC Supports for details on each of these supports.

1) Professional Development/Technical Assistance

2) RI Early Learning Standards PD (RIELDS)

3) Child Assessment PD

4) Access to formal education credentials

Emerging considerations and questions from the field regarding access to formal education credentials:

The field has posed several questions regarding the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Project® primarily focused on the BA scholarship component, regarding recruitment, the Praxis I exam, student teaching requirements, and teacher mobility. Each point is described below.

- *B.A. Recruitment:* Though the initial TEACH B.A. recruitment garnered a great deal of interest, only a small number of potential students were determined to be eligible for an approved teacher preparation program (e.g., with requisite GPA and passing scores in required core courses) and able to secure the required commitment from their employer. At this time, it is not clear if this small number is indicative of the workforce on the whole or just this initial group, though the workforce study is expected to answer this concern. Additionally, recruitment for a second cohort for the BA component was difficult. At this time the BA scholarship program for T.E.A.C.H. is available for individuals, but not as a cohort model.
- *Praxis I:* Rhode Island teacher preparation programs require prospective students to take the Praxis I exam prior to entering into an approved teacher preparation program. This requirement ensures that the student has a baseline level of math and literacy competency, as well as ensures that the student is likely to be successful while in the program. Although RI's required Praxis scores are well within average performance ranges nationwide, there are community concerns regarding the ability of the current workforce to pass the required Praxis I.

However, the current cohort has yet to take the test. At this time, the students are being given a preparatory course prior to taking the Praxis I and all students in the cohort are scheduled to take the PRAXIS this summer. The current cohort will be advised on an individual level depending on the results of their individual Praxis I score.

- *Student Teaching:* In order to complete an approved teacher preparation program, a student must complete student teaching in an approved setting. For students who need to work full-time, this requirement can be a barrier to successful completion of a program. RIDE will work with the T.E.A.C.H. program, and students in the program, to strategize on how to best meet the goals of student teaching while eliminating barriers for completion of a BA.
- *Teachers leaving to work in public schools:* Some concern has been raised pertaining to preschool teachers leaving early childhood settings to work in public schools once they achieve certification. Teachers with an ECE certification are eligible to teach K-2. General education preschool classrooms are rare and the existing preschool special education classrooms require special education certification. Elementary certification covers grades 1-6. A workforce study and registry will allow Rhode Island to determine the extent of this issue and the various reasons and rationale for teachers leaving to work in public school. The Workforce Core team will identify approaches for retaining certified teachers in early childhood classrooms once more information is collected on the scope of this issue.
- *Alternate use of T.E.A.C.H. scholarship funds:* A new program of study was developed after RTT-ELC application writing, the Concentration in Community Programs track under RIC's Early Childhood Education bachelor's program. Questions have been posed about whether T.E.A.C.H. funds could be used to support this new program of study. At the current time, RTT-ELC is supporting approved bachelor's level teacher preparation programs (NCATE/NAEYC accredited and RIDE Approved) through URI and RIC, which meet the goals outlined in the original RTT-ELC application. These programs currently offer teachers the most flexibility in their professional options, presenting the opportunity to earn a BA as well as eligibility to apply for certification. The questions posed will be addressed by the RTT-ELC Coordinating Team and will depend in part on the results of the workforce study scheduled to be completed in September 2013. At that time, the State will have more information on the needs of the workforce and can determine the best use of funds to support students wishing to participate in the T.E.A.C.H. BA scholarship program. Then, the Workforce Core Team co-leads will work within the Coordinating Team's guidelines to determine the best approach to supporting teachers' attainment of the BA credential specific to accessing T.E.A.C.H. Scholarships.

Workforce Study

In March 2013, the state selected a vendor to develop and implement a study of the existing early learning workforce. The purpose of the workforce study is to:

- provide baseline data to better understand our current workforce's education, credentials, experiences, and compensation
- help define where supports should be targeted to assist early childhood professionals along a career pathway towards improving their knowledge, competences, and skills
- frame the professional development and technical assistance offerings and supports that would be made available through the Professional Development/Technical Assistance Center
- determine how to improve access to higher education for those early care and education providers currently working in early learning programs

Broad foci for the workforce study were created by the Workforce Core Team and input was solicited from members of the Workforce Subcommittee and stakeholders in September 2012 and February 2013. Contract negotiation with a vendor is currently in process. The vendor will utilize the suggested questions to draft and disseminate a survey. Providers will receive the survey in May 2013 and analysis will begin in July 2013. The workforce study's final report is expected to be complete in September 2013.

In the fall of 2013, the RTT-ELC Workforce Core Team will work to develop input and feedback opportunities regarding the findings of the study and their implications for the work moving forward. Particular attention will be given to including broad representation from key stakeholders in the early childhood workforce in any proposed changes to the current State Plan and/or Scope of Work, including additional activities (e.g., trainings or counseling) to help support the workforce based on the results of the workforce study. In addition, the Core Team will continue to solicit input from the Early Learning Council Workforce Subcommittee and other key stakeholders regarding policy decisions informed by the workforce study.

Workforce Registry

A workforce registry will be created as part of the state's Early Learning Data System project. The system requirements, security and privacy policies have been gathered by the Data Core Team. The design of the system will take place between June and August 2013. The database structure and application interface will be built by April 2014, testing throughout 2014 with full implementation by January 2015.

The purpose of the workforce registry is to:

- provide demographic data and information on the current early care and education workforce,

- track the usage of state funded supports for improving the current workforce and measure the impact and effectiveness of these supports on increasing the skills and knowledge of the current workforce,
- build a highly qualified and effective early care and education workforce, assist the State in identifying the appropriate supports needed to increase the capacity and build a highly qualified and effective early care an education workforce.

Emerging considerations and questions from the field regarding the workforce registry:

Who controls the data in the workforce registry and how will it be used?

To learn more about the governance of the data system, please see the informational brief on Data Governance.

How will the State collect data on the early care and education workforce?

Data on the early education workforce will be collected and verified through the PD/TA Center and directly through early learning programs and educators. More detailed information will be sent to all participants in the workforce registry as the system is further developed, including what data will be collected and how it will be used when this system is developed.

Additional questions regarding the Professional Development and Technical Assistance Center may be directed to Karen Beese at the Department of Human Services at KBeese@dhs.ri.gov or (401) 462 – 1390 or Sara Mickelson at Sara.Mickelson@ride.ri.gov or (401) 222 –8460