

Children's Cabinet  
Monday May 21, 2018  
DOA Conference- Room A  
10:00am – 11:30am  
Meeting Minutes  
*Approved July 26, 2018*

**Cabinet Members in Attendance:**

- Director Alexander-Scott
- Director Boss
- Commissioner Dann-Messier
- Director DiBiase
- Child Advocate Jennifer Griffith
- Director Hawkins
- Director Jensen
- Director Piccola
- Commissioner Wagner
- Lisa Vura-Weis, Governor Raimondo's Designee

**Commissioner Wagner** calls the meeting to order and asks for a motion to accept the minutes from the April 30<sup>th</sup> meeting. The motion is seconded and the minutes are approved.

**Commissioner Wagner** congratulated Foster Forward for their national recognition for the Works Wonder program.

*Governor Raimondo's Executive Order on Mental Health Parity: Kayla Rosen, Policy Director, Children's Cabinet*

- EO signed on May 4, 2018 to reaffirm and commit to supporting Rhode Islanders with substance use disorders and mental health issues. The focus is on parity and access.
- Children's Cabinet will help focus on children's behavioral health and support the community conversations.
- **Director Alexander-Scott:** as the co-chair of the opioid task force, she is highly supportive of the EO as it is the flip side of the opioid crisis. We will be rolling out a "change direction" campaign to support the community dialogue, and will keep the Cabinet informed.
- **Lisa Vura-Weis:** The EO calls for a strategic approach to children's behavioral health services. Many parents and advocates have noted how the system has posed challenges to access and care. We will use the CC as a forum for discussion and feedback on this strategic planning.

*Third Grade Reading Action Plan Updates:*

- **Joe Carr, DCYF:** DCYF's focus is on promoting and facilitating access to high quality early childhood education for children in care. DCYF is working to increase the number of children in care who are enrolled in the lottery for state pre-K. About 73 children in the DCYF population are eligible for pre-K (age, community, etc) and the goal is to increase the enrollment. DCYF wants to also make sure that they are also focusing on Headstart, as more kids are eligible for that program as well. DCYF thinks there are opportunities for increased enrollment.
  - Commissioner Wagner notes that state pre-K will not have federal funding starting in FY20, so will need additional state funds to continue.
- **Blythe Berger, RIDOH:** RIDOH will launch a pilot to conduct lead screening at WIC sites over the summer. Based on the success of this pilot, it may be rolled out to all WIC sites. The dental

team has surpassed their goals for rate of youth dental visits, in large part due to a grant they received.

- **Kirtley Fisher, RIDE:** Many Cabinet members have visited kindergarten classrooms over the last few weeks.
  - **Commissioner Wagner** notes that the Boston Public Schools curriculum is garnering grassroots support among teachers and educators. This is because the curriculum engages kids in the curriculum and context.
- **Director Alexander Scott** notes that the Cabinet's focus is to increase the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency rate. What was just described was updates on the various categories we are targeting to increase 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading. We want to continue to hear from everyone to hear how well we are taking steps. The goal was to share what we are doing and we hope that the audience will provide feedback to refine and improve our steps to get towards the 2025 goal.

*BrightStars and Think Tank Presentations: Director Hawkins, DHS; Cara Harrison, Governor's Office; and Caitlin Molina, DHS Assistant Director for Childcare*

Introduction – Director Hawkins:

- Why early childhood? We know that if kids do not have access to high quality early childhood experiences (ECE) at ages 0-3, the chances they will read on grade level in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade is slim
- Youth who are not accessing high quality ECE are disproportionately kids of color and kids from low-income communities
- DHS's part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading goal is to dig into the childcare work
- 10,000 kids are enrolled in the state's CCAP program every month – CCAP is a voucher program that families can use to pay for ECE (if they work for 20 hours or more)
- There is a quality rating system for the child care programs launched in 2009
- CCAP families do not have access to high quality care because the CCAP program does not have rates that support quality – currently, the vouchers pay at approximately the 13<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Families often cannot find providers who will take a CCAP voucher because it is not financially feasible for providers to take the rate of pay
- This is literally the definition of inequity: low income, working family cannot afford the quality care that more affluent families can access
- We are aiming to change this dynamic with Tiered Reimbursement because if we want quality, we need to pay for it. For example, higher quality comes with people who are better trained, but those employees demand a higher wage, which cannot be paid at the current CCAP rates.
- CCAP is also the program to pay for kids in DCYF care, which means our DCYF kids are not accessing quality.

Background:

- The quality rating system – BrightStars – was launched in 2009 and is managed by RIAEYC
- BrightStars is both a rating system and a workforce system
- A national study validated that BrightStars does reliably assess quality in a program
- Tiered reimbursement is the tool to move the system towards quality. If you want quality, you have to incentivize quality. RI is the only New England state that does not pay based on its quality system, and one of 12 in the nation that does not pay based on quality.
- Many advocates – such as KIDS COUNT – have focused on this issue for many years. This year, Governor Raimondo proposes \$1.5M for tiered reimbursement. This would bring rates for 5-star providers to the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile and then scaffolds down for programs with 1-4 stars.
- In the states that have tiered reimbursement, there are more low-income kids of color in high quality ECE settings.

- This is not just about rates: DHS is implementing a strategic plan around workforce to ensure that they have access to the PD and training they need to improve practice. We also want to invest in providers and align DHS's system with DCYF's licensing system to make it easier for providers. We also want to make sure our quality system is the best possible, which Cara and Caitlin will speak about.

#### Current BrightStars Model – Cara Harrison

- 6 quality domains, which each can garner 1-5 stars – learning environment, enrollment and staffing, program leadership, family engagement, staff qualifications, early learning & development
- Criteria are differentiated by age level of kids being served and setting

#### ThinkTank and Recommendations

- Four meetings between January and April, which included many stakeholders – community, practitioners, providers, intermediaries, advocates, state agencies, and more
- Goal of the meetings was to review the current BrightStars system and consider opportunities to improve and enhance, as well as to discuss how to support continuous improvement
- Recommendations were provided to Director Hawkins this month
- 20 recommendations on the standards and implementation of standards– improvement to facilitation to the environment rating scale, increase clarity around licensing regulations, changes to staff qualifications and PD requirements, and improved supports for reaching quality
- Recommendations on the rating model – ThinkTank recommends a hybrid rating model that mandates certain criteria to achieve a star level, but would also have flexibility on other criteria to achieve a higher quality rating
- Recommends a continual advisory group to continue discussing BrightStars and to support implementation

Commissioner Wagner asks about the research behind hybrid models and to what extent these models contribute to quality. Cara notes that each state's approach is a little different, so RI would need to go through a study to understand the linkage. Caitlin Molina notes that the process will begin by prioritizing changes to the standards as a starting place, rather than redeveloping the system and rating structure, and then going back and making minute changes. There is not a gold standard of a hybrid model. Each state has done it differently. The work with Kids Count is to engage national partners to discuss opportunities and collaborate with the community. We have not properly communicated the importance of the block model and why it is important.

#### Caitlin Molina – Next Steps:

- Convene an ongoing advisory committee to discuss BrightStars
- Over the course over the next 6 months to a year, DHS will convene more partners to discuss
- It is not enough to have recommendations – the community must understand it and the implementation must be strong
- We need to assess quality and invest to support providers in reaching quality
- In addition to the listening tour and advisory committee, DHS will continue to have conversations and meaningful engagement opportunities to increase involvement
- Committed to making sure everyone feels that they understand the system and can implement it

Commissioner Dann-Messier notes her support for this work and offers the institutions of higher education to support the workforce piece.

Commissioner Wagner notes that the discussion of the pathways for early childhood educators is a challenge that is owned by many members of the Children's Cabinet.

Director Hawkins notes that as the K-12 system looks to increase teacher diversity, the ECE workforce can be a pipeline into K-12 and of diverse candidates.

Commissioner Wagner notes the work in Alabama to create those pathways from ECE to K-12, and that they have a pay parity statute to ensure that ECE teachers are paid the same as K-12 teachers.

#### Community Conversation:

- As changes are made to the quality system, it is important to ensure that a study is conducted to ensure its ongoing validity to creating better outcomes
- Tiered Reimbursement is key to Pre-K expansion, as the Pre-K program is also in BrightStars. It is important to note that if we are aiming to have all 4-year olds in Pre-K, there is a pipeline of programs to make it possible. Funding childcare is vital because the years before a kid turns 4 are key to later reading. Often, providers feel stuck on a certain rating level and do not have the resources to fund improvements, and are tempted to want an easier rating system – instead we need to make sure that we are investing to make quality possible.
- What is the timeline for implementation?
  - Caitlin: over the next 2 weeks, Director Hawkins and I will be meeting to determine the plan. We plan to continue the listening tour, and to use the recommendations to inform quality reimbursements in the coming year. Some recommendations are more easily implemented than others. We also need to assess the budget implications.
- Rhode Island College would love to help support pathways for the ECE workforce
  - Commissioner Wagner notes that, unlike K-12 workforce, the ECE workforce has a less clear route for prep and for who should set workforce standards
  - Director Hawkins notes that the goal is to increase rates, in order to increase wages, which will attract and retain quality workforce
- How will we know if wages are increasing, apart from anecdotally?
  - Director Hawkins: we will first know through the rating scale, because teachers need higher qualifications for a program to get a higher rating. This is something we need to consider in our market rate survey work to make sure that incomes are increasing. Most of us believe that will happen but we need to see it.
- Making ECE a career pathway to K-12 may hurt the ECE community. We do not want to say that the goal is to reach K-12, rather than retaining good ECE staff.
  - Director Hawkins: it does not need to be either-or, it can be both-and. I want to help K-12 diversify its workforce, and I want quality teachers in the ECE space. We can support the pathway for those who want to move to K-12, and we can support the person who wants to stay with ECE forever.
- Can we extract income data from the Exceed site?
  - Lisa Nugent notes that right now the workforce information is voluntarily entered, so it is not reliable or consistent.
- As we think about wages increasing, we also want to think about the quality of facilities as an important piece of supporting kids and retaining workforce.
  - Commissioner Wagner notes the K-12 school construction bond, but something related is that RIDE is trying to make it easier to invest in shared use facilities. Another piece to consider is that sometimes some of the aspirational space requirements can have unintended consequences.

- Is the motivation for the hybrid model to have flexibility with the standard or with the funding? It may be helpful to think about de-linking the funding piece and dig into the indicators to get from one level to the next, and then provide that incentive up front rather than after it is achieved.
  - Director Hawkins: We want to make sure we are incentivizing the right thing. We have to be clear about our communications about why and how things get rated, and how people move up. That will be the starting point, and then go from there based on what we learn.

K-12 Educator Regulations: Commissioner Wagner

- Requests the Cabinet's or individual director's support for proposed K-12 educator regulations
- Three key buckets: preparation, hiring, and ongoing professional learning
- Includes superintendents, principals, teams, as well as teachers
- Trying to bring similar themes to RIDE staff as well

Preparation:

- Teachers often do not have the hands-on practice they need to be ready on day 1 of the job
- Best practice is to have substantial hands-on learning along with theory
- RIDE is proposing a year-long residency placement requirement – propose a three-year phase in
- Working with RIC; considering opportunities for innovative models as discussions continue
- Some have noted an equity issue: this might present a hardship for students by denying them an opportunity to work while in school; another equity issue is that we are training teachers for positions that do not exist (i.e. subjects with a surplus of teachers). We need to tackle both issues, and are looking for a research partner to help in projecting teacher demand.

Employment:

- More flexibility for schools in hiring and placing educators
- In the shortage areas -- world languages, ELL, secondary science, math, and special education teachers – we already have specific pathways in order to increase supply
- Currently, RI has special pathways that allow schools to have candidates apply for year-long emergency certifications that can be extended up to seven years. For career education, RIDE allows schools to hire people for a 7-year certification with a plan for getting them fully certified during those seven years. This happened because schools were cancelling courses like electrical engineering because they could not find the teachers.
- RIDE is also introducing the idea of cultural competence as a shortage area. How can we measure this fairly and accurately? RIDE is engaging with national partners to identify measures.
- Teachers need to have the content area, teaching skills, and cultural competence
- We must increase the diversity of our workforce to better serve our communities and to better the workforce community itself
- Proposing to include school business officials as a shortage area, as schools are finding it difficult to identify individuals who know both the education side and business side of schools. RIDE will also propose school nurse teachers as a shortage area because they need to both be a teacher and a certified nurse, and will propose two routes: one as a nurse teacher and one as a nurse that is focused on clinical work.

Ongoing Learning Pathway

- We need to develop multiple learning pathways to engage and prepare teachers, as they have different needs, skills, and experiences.
- SurveyWorks results showed that only 30% of teachers believe the PD offered last year was worth their time

- We need to shift to what DLT is doing – move to an ecosystem of providers with mixed-model delivery
- RIDE plans to reintroduce ongoing teacher professional development requirements, but with a higher quality, more targeted network of learning opportunities and education providers. These could include our professional associations, teacher unions, higher education institutes, and more.
- RIDE will also add endorsements for teachers, starting with English Language Learning among other key areas.

Commissioner Dann-Messier asks about what the requirements for ongoing learning will entail.

Commissioner Wagner says they are anticipating asking for “30 units” per year, and there are many different aspects to consider about how a unit would be measured. RIDE does not want to reward seat time. However, wanted to ground it in the number 30 as that is what Massachusetts uses.

Regarding cost, Commissioner Wagner notes that it is dependent on the model of the learning – it can range from the cost in time to the cost of paying an outside provider. The key markers within the system are 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading, 5<sup>th</sup> grade fractions, and pathways in the upper middle and high school. These will not happen without a comprehensive strategy about professional learning. These policies will be out for public comment in September, and will go forward for approval in October or November.

Director DiBiase commends the proposal because teacher quality is a perennial and difficult topic, and RIDE deserves credit for taking a thoughtful, comprehensive approach.

Director Hawkins notes that people still believe teaching is something at anyone can do, but it is like being a surgeon. There is no way that four years of college would prepare you to conduct open heart surgery. It goes back to women’s work being undervalued. But this is a skill that deserves the recognition and support just like other professions.

Commissioner Wagner notes that the core of this proposal is about teachers teaching teachers.

Director Alexander Scott notes that it may be worthwhile for Commissioner Wagner to unpack each of these components during future agendas.

An audience member notes that the yearlong residency poses a challenge for ECE educators who want to be on a career pathway, and as departments build these proposals, that should be a part of the discussion.