

# READY TO LEARN PROVIDENCE

Winter 2004

## Survey Finds Capacity for Pre-K Population

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Findings from a recent survey by the R2LP Policy Committee reveal that early care and education providers in Providence will have enough space to absorb children ineligible for kindergarten this fall due to a new state law that changed the age for kindergarten entry.

The Providence Public School Department (PPSD) estimates that 400-600 children will be affected by the new law which now requires that children be five-years-old on or before September 1. Prior to the change, Rhode Island was only one of six states in which children had to be five by December 31. Most states use either the September 1 cut-off or earlier.

In December, R2LP sent surveys to all licensed center-based and family child care providers in Providence to help determine their capacity to serve the children affected by the law. The Committee also asked how many preschool vacancies each program currently had, how many children affected were currently enrolled in their programs, and whether providers would be able to continue to serve those children for another year.

Survey results indicate that the early care and education system is both willing and able to absorb the additional children. Four year olds were far more likely to be served in centers than in family child care homes.

## A Message From the Director

This issue of the newsletter highlights some of the work of the Ready to Learn Providence community. Evidence of our work together can also be found elsewhere in the city. Some is concrete and visible, some goes on behind the scenes.

At the Providence School Department, Paulajo Gaines Mays, our Transition to Kindergarten Advisory Team, and Department staff have designed family friendly Kindergarten Registration packets. City bus stops display posters about the change in kindergarten age of entry and invite families to the February 28th Elementary School Fair and the March 1-3 Open Schools Week hosted by all of

The survey data identified 352 of the children in the age group affected by the law (turning five between September and December 2004). Head Start is serving the largest share of this group (180). Ninety percent (90%) of respondents reported that their program had vacancies as of December 2003. The average vacancy rate of responding centers was 20%.

Representatives from R2LP met with Superintendent Melody Johnson in early January to share the survey results and discuss possible options. The group agreed that utilizing the existing early care and education system to absorb the affected children seemed to be the most logical approach to recommend to the R2LP Governing Board at its January meeting. The board concurred.

With the issue of capacity resolved, R2LP and the PPSD then turned their attention to working together to ensure that programs for this older age group - both in preschool settings and in public kindergarten - were high quality. To this end, the R2LP Governing Board has established a Professional Development Committee committed to working closely with PPSD. Look for more information on the good work coming out of these efforts in upcoming issues of the newsletter.

*- Submitted by Andrew Bramson. Special thanks to Andrew for preparing the survey and compiling results.*

the city's elementary schools for the first time this year. Spread the word to young families in your neighborhood.

At the Providence Public Library, new products for parents of young children - literacy tips, booklists, activity cards - have been designed and printed. Stacks of books, games and materials for bi-lingual and infant/toddler Learning and Reading Kits (now under construction) spill into the hallway outside the offices of Cheryl Space and Erica Wilder. Visit the library to learn more about these new resources.

*Continued on page 5*

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# A Neighborhood Assessment of Child Well Being

**How many kindergarten and 1st grade teachers are early childhood certified?**

**What are the earning levels of families with young children in the city?**

**How connected are parents to their neighbors and their community?**

**How many young children in Providence have an incarcerated parent?**

These are just a few of the many questions raised by members of the R2LP Early Learning Report Card advisory committee, a group of parents, providers, and policy makers working together to develop indicators of early childhood well being and school readiness.

The Early Learning Report Card will be completed by June of this year, and it will present measures of well being and school readiness for children in all of Providence's neighborhoods. We anticipate that this will be the first of several such reports so that the Providence community can monitor progress on priority issues in future years.

To date the committee has identified priority indicators in three broad areas: 1) Readiness of parents, caregivers and teachers, 2) Child development and well being, and 3) The child's environment.

Over the next several months, R2LP will collect and analyze data to help answer pressing questions, such as those presented above. The final report will present both quantitative and qualitative data on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis so that variations across the city can be better recognized and understood. Stay tuned for future updates and the final report rollout later this summer!

## What do the Numbers Look Like?

### A Snapshot of the Early Care and Education System in Providence

Number of Licensed Child Care Centers (including Head Start).....**81**

Number of Certified Family Child Care Providers.....**674**

Total Capacity for Infants, Toddlers and Pre-K at Licensed Child Care Centers.....**3,343**

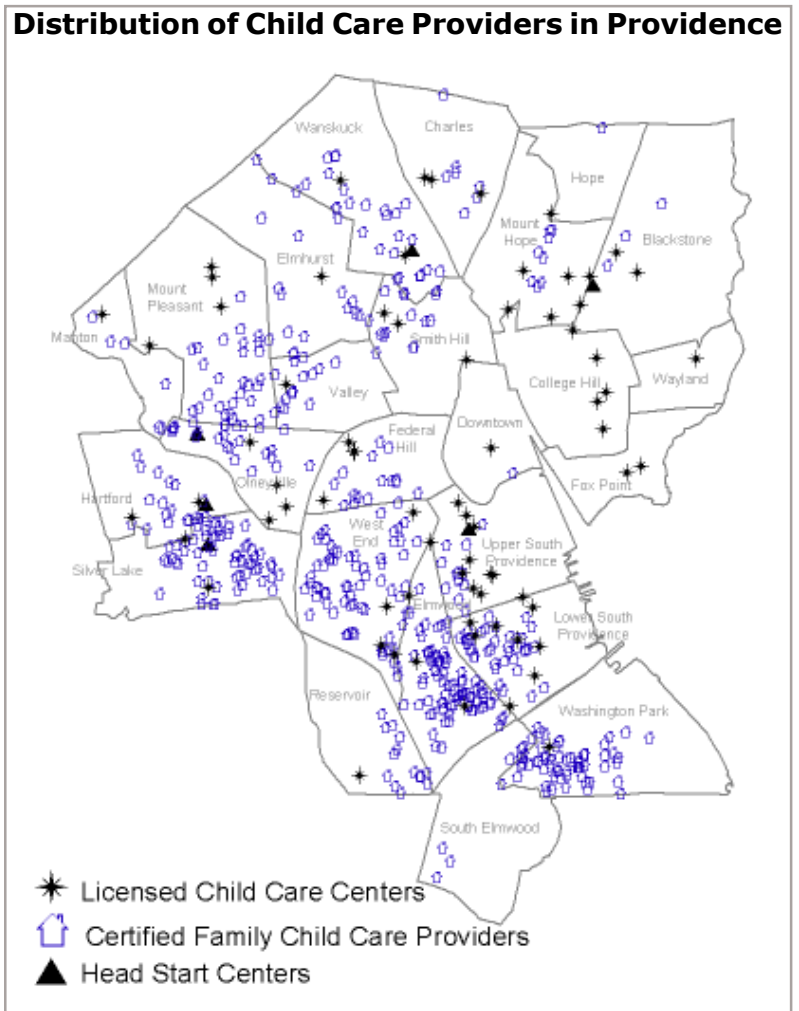
Total Capacity at Certified Family Child Care Providers.....**4,292**

Children Enrolled in Kindergarten in the Providence Public Schools.....**2,113**

Child Population under Age 6 in Providence.....**15,210**

*Data: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families, 2003; Providence Public School Department, 2003; US Census Bureau, 2000*

*Map Data: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families, 2003; Rhode Island Geographic Information System (RIGIS)*



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# R2LP in the Community

## R2LP Awards 13 Grants to Local Child Care Providers

Over the next several months Ready to Learn Providence will be granting a total of \$40,000 in Early Learning Grants to licensed child care providers for professional development and to enhance their child care programs. Two rounds of grants - one just completed this month, and another in April - are being awarded by the R2LP Early Learning Grants Committee. Family child care providers and child care centers are able to apply for one of four themed "packages" valued from \$1,000 to \$2,500 each. Packages vary in content and include learning opportunities such as membership in the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children, attendance at a professional early education conference, literacy classes and science classes. A children's library collection and bookshelves are the centerpiece of every package.

To assist providers in the application process, R2LP sponsored grant writing workshops in January at Nickerson Community Center and Knight Memorial Library. Over sixty people learned more about how to write an effective grant application from R2LP staff and volunteers including Leanne Barrett of the United Way. Special efforts were made to reach Spanish speaking providers in the city. Workshops were offered in both English and Spanish and R2LP is accepting grant applications in both languages.

## R2LP Sponsors New Trainings for Providence Child Care Providers

### ESL Classes

Ready to Learn Providence, the Community College of Rhode Island's Division of Lifelong Learning, and the Daycare Justice Co-Op have teamed up to provide English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to family child care providers. CCRI and the Co-Op began ESL training last spring, but funding constraints limited the program to three months. The new partnership will provide another new session.

Leslie Gell, Director of Adult Basic Education at CCRI, says that the ESL curriculum "will be tailored to the participants needs. CCRI will work closely with the Co-Op and providers to ensure that the classes give them the language skills they want." For example, some providers may wish to improve their telephone skills, while others are looking to enhance their reading skills in order to provide better English literacy instruction to the children in their care.

Currently there is capacity for 20 students. Classes will begin in February and be conducted by a CCRI ESL instructor at the Co-Op offices. Classes and textbooks are free. The class is jointly funded by the Rhode Island Human Resource Investment Council and R2LP. For more information contact Gail Washington at the Day Care Justice Co-Op at 454-0575.

Twenty-six applications were submitted for this first round of funding. About half were submitted in Spanish. The Committee was impressed by the quality of the proposals. Applicants noted how much this kind of support – training, books, professional membership – is essential to helping them grow professionally and to help children be ready to learn. Applications were reviewed and scored by a R2LP selection committee and graduates of *Heads Up! Reading* earned bonus points.

Thirteen grants were awarded by the committee in February. Of the awardees, eleven are family child care providers and two are child care centers. Nine were participants in *HeadsUp! Reading*. We look forward to reporting on how the grantees are using the grants to benefit the children they serve. Applications for the second round of funding are due April 16. For an application form please contact Marcia Moon at 455-8880.

**CONGRATULATIONS** to the following grant award recipients: Family Child Care Providers: Alenzo Arevalo, Maritza Donis, Thelma Jimenez, Rosa Moyano, Virginia Najarro, Minerva Osorio, Altigracia Polanco, Hilda Serrano, Celeste Thomason, Julie Triggs and Caligna Vinas. Centers: Carter Day Child Care Center, Silver Lake Community Center  
*- Submitted by Marcia Moon*

### Books and Babies - A New Seminar Series

A partnership with Wheelock College professor Bobbi Rosenquest, Ph.D. has provided R2LP a unique opportunity to offer a new literacy series. The R2LP Infant Toddler Literacy Seminars focus on the development of language and literacy curriculum for children from 3 months to 36 months of age. Genesis Center is hosting the six month series which began in January and will continue through June. Twenty teachers from Providence child care centers are enrolled. Bobbi has donated her time to conduct the seminars and R2LP is supplying books, stipends, and other resources to support the participating centers.

Designed to be highly participatory, all providers are expected to carry out activities covered at each session in their centers. Storybook reading provides the context for designing classroom activities that participants later put into practice. Participating centers were expected to send teams of at least two participants to each of the six sessions in the seminar series. The teams work together on implementation and then report on their experiences in the following month's session.

Lessons from the seminars will reach an audience well beyond Providence. Bobbi will use the feedback, experiences, and insight gained from the seminars to publish a curriculum guide for infant and toddler teachers across the country. R2LP hopes to secure funding to continue the series for family child care providers in the Fall.

# What's Up with *HeadsUp! Reading*?

## *HeadsUp! Reading* Celebration, January 13, 2004

More than 100 people joined R2LP and Childspan at Casey Family Services to honor the efforts and commitment of 62 child care providers from Providence who graduated from the 15-week *HeadsUp! Reading* early childhood literacy training. Many thanks to the graduates, facilitators, host sites and Childspan staff who helped to make the Fall *HeadsUp! Reading* in Providence program a great success.

*At right, a view of the many attendees and their family and friends. Below right, graduates display their certificates of completion. View more photos from the event at [www.provplan.org](http://www.provplan.org).*



## Jerlean Daniel Coming to Providence on April 27th

Although Jerlean Daniel lives in Pennsylvania, she's a familiar figure to participants in the *HeadsUp! Reading* program in Providence. On the faculty of the School of Education at the University of Pittsburg, Professor Daniel co-hosts the live HUR broadcasts viewed by participants each week. Her professionalism, warmth and good humor have made her very popular. So, when Patricia Nolin of Rhode Island College sought R2LP's recommendations for speakers at an upcoming scholars week at the College that will be open to the general public, we suggested Professor Daniel.

So - mark your calendars for the afternoon of April 27th and spread the word! Watch for more details.



## Thank You to the Brown Rudnick Charitable Foundation!

Ready to Learn Providence was recently awarded a grant of \$25,000 from the Brown Rudnick Charitable Foundation to support *HeadsUp! Reading*. The funding will support two additional classes this fall and will help reduce the long waiting list of early care and education providers eager to participate in *HeadsUp! Reading* in Providence.

In addition to the Brown Rudnick sponsored classes, plans are underway to offer a summer *HeadsUp! Reading* session in partnership with the Providence School Department.

## Monitoring Outcomes of *HeadsUp! Reading*

A new session of *HeadsUp! Reading* began in January with 85 participants. As with the Fall session, three classes are delivered in Spanish and two in English. Participants are excited to begin this satellite course and are eagerly awaiting a visit from either a *HeadsUp!* facilitator or a Childspan staff member for a pre-assessment of their early childhood program.

Childspan staff and consultants are using the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) tool to perform the assessments. This environmental rating scale has proven to be a very effective means of identifying areas needing improvement in early child-

hood settings. The areas addressed in the ELLCO include interactions, activities, space design, and literacy materials, among others. After reviewing rating scores, providers are given suggestions and technical assistance to help them make program improvements.

While many of the pre-assessment scores were low when the last session of *HeadsUp! Reading* began, the post-assessment scores showed tremendous improvement. All Childspan staff and *HeadsUp! Reading* facilitators are confident that the same improvements will be evident at the end of the second session.

- Submitted by Shevaun Keogh-Walker

## HeadsUp! Reading Night at the Providence Public Library

Twenty-one enthusiastic graduates from the fall 2003 session of *HeadsUp! Reading* braved the cold and sleet to visit the Mount Pleasant and Knight Memorial Branch Libraries for open houses on February 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. Library staff signed everyone up for agency cards (agency cards allow providers to borrow 60 books at a time!), led tours of the library, introduced materials from the library's extensive teacher collection, highlighted new children's books in English and Spanish, and presented the LARKs, which are thematic kits filled to the brim with books, puppets, music, games and more. Carolina Briones and Paola Benitez, bilingual outreach aides sponsored by R2LP funding, presented the information in Spanish.

Participants made sock puppets and learned about their use with reading, conversation, and storytelling techniques from Nancy Lynner, Children's Specialist from the Mount Pleasant Branch. Her snail puppet made everyone smile as he eagerly answered questions about the story and illustrations. Reach Out and Read



*HeadsUp! Reading graduates show off their sock puppets.*

and R2LP provided three free books for each provider who attended, a nice addition to each center's personal library. The Children's Services staff is eager to collaborate with this group of providers to help them find materials to support their literacy efforts.

*- Submitted by Erica Wilder and Cheryl Space*

## Implementing the RI Early Learning Standards



*Above, trainers Christie Chiacu-Forsyth and Paulajo Gaines Mays at a session.*

R2LP and the Rhode Island Department of Education recently completed a joint sponsorship to pilot the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards in Providence. The eight-month training series took place at Dorcas Place and the fifteen participants included family child care and center-based providers, Providence Head Start, as well as parents and public school teachers.

The Early Learning Standards are guidelines intended to establish common understandings and expectations of what four-year-old children should know and be able to do. The training focused on using the Early Learning Standards

to enhance quality in early childhood programs and to support children coming to school with the skills they need to be successful in kindergarten. Training sessions were conducted by Paulajo Gaines Mays of the Providence Public School Department and Christie Chiacu-Forsyth of Wheelock College. The training series gave participants the opportunity to implement the standards while getting supportive feedback monthly from the group. Participants are now using the standards in their programs.

R2LP congratulates the following individuals who successfully completed the training: Kelly Weeden, Parent; Kathleen Severian, Providence Public Schools Pre-K teacher; Melida Brito, Family Child Care provider; Tracy Braz, Rita Tavares-Burk, Rhonda Cornwell and Kimberly Pettaway, Providence Head Start; Wendy Alarie and Jennifer Jasmin, Carter Day Child Care; Erin Pellegrino, Federal Hill House; Linda Reich, West End Community Center; Angella Hart and Iranis Suarez, Genesis Center; Chantal Duncan, Dorcas Place; and, Araminta McIntosh, Home Away from Home Family Child Care.

*- Submitted by Paulajo Gaines Mays*

### From the Director *continued from page 1*

Behind the scenes, at the Education Alliance at Brown University, Deborah Collins put together the fine team of Susan Bochrath, Ivana Zuliani and Ben Gerhardstein to help us develop a logic model and evaluate R2LP's progress over the next several months. And data collection for the Early Learning Report Card has Jim Vandermillen of The Providence Plan hard at work on data agreements with several state agency partners. Likewise, people like Julie Valadares at Options for Working Parents and Mike Sorum at the PPSD are helping to prepare data to inform this work.

Finally we acknowledge Stan Kuziel, chair of both the R2LP Governing Board and the Policy Committee, and the scores of R2LP community members who actively serve on the board and our many committees. Working together, we have conducted surveys, crafted recommendations on kindergarten age of entry, organized parent focus groups, recruited families, designed early learning grants, met with city leaders, written proposals, and so much more. On behalf of the children and families of Providence who benefit from these efforts, we thank you.

## Spotlight: Marcia Moon

If there's a single word that one would use to describe Marcia Moon, it's "passionate." She is passionate about her work, about children, about families, about literacy, about learning, and about books.

Marcia is the Coordinator of Education and Evaluation for R2LP. She brings over 30 years of consulting experience in early childhood and early elementary literacy and educational strategies to the position. Her experiences varied – from elementary teaching, curriculum development and teacher training in Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island, to GED instruction for Marines stationed in Japan, to operating a nursery school in Indiana.

Prior to arriving in Rhode Island in 2001, Marcia spent 13 years with the Children's Literacy Initiative in Philadelphia. Marcia was co-founder and co-director of this national early literacy organization, which provided training and quality book collections to school districts and Head Start organizations around the country. One of her favorite experiences at the Initiative was developing a national radio program called "Mrs. Bush's Story Time." The program, broadcast for 10 weeks annually and designed to bring families together for reading time, featured celebrities and cartoon characters. (Ask her about the time she met Mel Gibson!)

As for Marcia's philosophy on early childhood literacy, "it begins with the scientific truth that all children are intelligent," she says. To that, add quality books that are the essence of helping to inspire reading and writing in children. "When we hold high expectations for children, and for ourselves, we enable children to have successful school experiences."



Marcia appreciates her work with R2LP because of the many opportunities she has to help children in the city. Marcia has devoted incredible energy to our partnership with the Providence Public Library, to our Early Learning Grants program, and parent engagement activities. As much as Marcia is pleased to be part of this initiative, R2LP is fortunate to have her on our team lending insight and passion to our work.

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### SAVE THE DATE

Upcoming R2LP Local Council Meeting - April 22, 2004  
10:00 AM at Casey Family Services