



THE COLLABORATIVE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVES

Strategic Plan 2019-2021

The goals and strategies outlined in this document are the result of a strategic planning process that began in the spring of 2018. Corey Gordon, of DeliverEd in Washington DC, facilitated the discussions with staff from the participating programs. DeliverEd also organized interviews and two focus groups – one in English and one in Spanish – that included families, educators, administrators and others from the community who have participated in programs conducted by Providence Talks or Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP). Leadership from Providence Talks, R2LP and Roger Williams University’s Division of Early Learning continued to meet to refine the strategic objectives, which were then reviewed and approved by the staff in December 2018, and approved by RWU’s University College in February 2019.

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Who We Are and What We Do

T*he Collaborative for Early Childhood Initiatives falls under the umbrella of University College at Roger Williams University. It unites and integrates the broad and deep work of four University College programs that support the well-being, development and learning outcomes of young children (birth to age 8). The four participating initiatives are Ready to Learn Providence, Providence Talks, the Division of Early Learning, and the ESL Teacher Certification Program.*

The Collaborative works with pre- and in-service educators, families, community members and children to achieve its goals. It offers experiential-based learning, dynamic child- and family-oriented content, and extensive opportunities for leadership development and excellence in education.

Learning pathways for educators include professional seminars, non-credit and credit-bearing coursework, specialized certificate programming in infant and toddler teaching and learning, and degrees in early childhood education. Each level of credited coursework can be stacked toward either an associate's or a bachelor's degree.

The University is also the sole Rhode Island Institution of Higher Education to offer a competency-based, job-embedded ESL Teacher Certification Program. It partners with school districts in Rhode Island to allow current teachers the opportunity to develop competencies aligned with the national Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) standards. Teachers in these partnering districts who possess a valid R.I. teaching certificate are eligible to apply to this program.



For families, there are learning series, home-visits, and playgroups. For children, there are playgroups and state-funded prekindergarten classrooms. An array of other important projects, such as child lead paint poisoning prevention, are conducted in concert with Housing Works RI, another University partner. Thanks to philanthropic, municipal, and state funding, the programs of Ready to Learn Providence and Providence Talks are offered at no cost.

Collectively, the Collaborative for Early Childhood Initiatives powerfully accelerates and magnifies positive outcomes for children, families and communities.

The Participating Initiatives

Providence Talks

Providence Talks is committed to changing the life trajectories of children by closing achievement gaps in learning and language development. Word gaps, defined as insufficient exposure to vocabulary and language, have profound negative impacts on the brain development of children and their learning. This is especially true for children from low-income households. The good news is early limitations can be reversed.

By capitalizing on the knowledge of families and educators, and the extraordinary power of interactions, Providence Talks strengthens the auditory and language environments of young children, ages birth to three years. Through playgroups, home visiting, professional development series for providers and collaborative curriculum interventions, children experience wide developmental growth and increased opportunities for school readiness and performance. Furthermore, evidence indicates that increased conversation leads to higher parental engagement and an improvement in the social and emotional well-being of young children.

Providence Talks takes advantage of innovative technology that records and reports the number of words heard by children and the amount of dialogue that occurs through conversational turns. Specialized digital language processors (DLPs) that function as “word pedometers” are used by families in their homes or by educators in classrooms. To protect privacy, words and conversations are unidentifiable to participants and Providence Talks staff.

The City of Providence developed Providence Talks in response to the Bloomberg Philanthropies’ Inaugural Mayors Challenge. The Mayors Challenge is a national competition that encourages cities to generate bold new ideas that solve urban challenges

and improve city life – and that have the potential to spread. As the 2013 grand prize winner of the challenge, Providence received \$5 million to implement the initiative.

Although originally developed as a program for families, Providence Talks is now also available to educators of infants and toddlers through a partnership with Ready to Learn Providence.

Since its debut, Providence Talks has had a positive impact on nearly 3,000 families, with 205 million more words heard. Providence Talks has been featured on the NBC Nightly News, in widely circulated newspapers and magazines such as *The New Yorker*, and at prestigious national conferences.

Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP)

Since 2003, Ready to Learn Providence has worked to close the achievement gap between low-income children and their more affluent peers. R2LP improves the educational outcomes of young children (birth to 8) chiefly by working with the adults who play the largest role in their lives – family members and early childhood educators – but it also works directly with children through three state-funded prekindergarten classrooms in Providence and Pawtucket.

Much of R2LP’s work focuses on the professional development of center- and home-based educators in Providence, Pawtucket and Central Falls. Since its inception it has trained more than 4,500 educators (in English and Spanish), and now offers many of its services statewide.

R2LP currently partners with the Providence Public School Department to bring *Mind in the Making* to

some 2,500 family members and staff at the city's elementary schools. *Mind in the Making* is an eight-session class that covers the essential life skills – often called executive function skills – that children need to succeed in school. This initiative is funded with an Investment in Innovation grant through the U.S. Department of Education coupled with matching grants from local and national foundations and businesses.

With data gathered from its largest professional development programs, R2LP has shown that with training and mentoring, early-care providers become more effective teachers, and poverty need not prevent a child from starting school healthy and ready to learn.

UC Division of Early Learning

The certificate and degree programs in Early Childhood Education (ECE) at University College at Roger Williams University provide pre- and in-service educators maximum opportunity to weave meaningful theory into applied best practice for intentional and reflective teaching. Each course is competency- and practice-based. Courses give students extensive options to gain foundational skills as well as experience in creating continuums of learning for children ages birth through 8. Students are also equipped to understand and support families and the communities they represent.

All early childhood coursework at RWU aligns with state and national standards, including the National Association of Young Children (NAEYC), Zero to Three, Rhode Island's Early Childhood Workforce Knowledge and Competencies, and the RI Early Learning and Development Standards. Educational coursework is generally offered in the evening to accommodate working professionals. Other University Core Courses are offered throughout the day and evenings.

RWU Early Learning students may work as community center-based teachers and assistant teachers; child-care directors; assistant teachers in public or private schools; and as home care licensed business owners. Based on the level of a certificate or a degree, RWU graduates may also be employed as community-based parent educators, literary coaches, playgroup facilitators, home visitors and screening and outreach specialists, as well as social work and human service paraprofessionals. Careers can also be built in residential care or as library assistants, research assistants, fundraisers and sales professionals.

The Division of Early Learning offers a 16-credit Certificate in Infant-Toddler Teaching and an associate's degree in Early Childhood Education. Options for bachelor's degrees are also available.

UC English as a Second Language Certification Program

The ESL Teacher Certification Program is a competency-based program that prepares educators to be culturally and linguistically responsive teachers of English Language Learners. All content in the program aligns with the National Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) standards.

Over a 12-month period running from July to June, teachers engage in readings, lectures, learning activities, workshops, analyses of videos of their own teaching practice, and a range of meetings. Assignments are designed to be practical, job-embedded, and highly associated with classroom learning.

Upon demonstrating evidence of meeting the TESOL competencies and completing all program requirements, teachers are eligible to apply for ESL Teacher Certification through the Rhode Island Department of Education.

VISION OF THE COLLABORATIVE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVES

Caring, knowledgeable and empowered family members and educators will have the skills and education to support and strengthen the growth and development of young children.

CORE PURPOSE

To provide training and educational opportunities to support children's growth and development.

THEORY OF CHANGE

With the knowledge and skills related to early childhood development and learning, adults can transform the educational and developmental trajectories of children.

CORE VALUES

WE ARE COMMUNITY-FOCUSED: Our work is responsive to the geographic and professional communities in which we work. We listen to the needs of the community; we advocate for the community; and we are culturally responsive.

WE ARE CHILD-FOCUSED: The child is at the center of everything we do. We look at data and research to determine the value of a potential project. Our understanding of early childhood development, based on the latest research, drives our work.

WE ARE FLEXIBLE: We adjust to changing needs and conditions. We find innovative and creative ways to adapt.

WE ARE LIFE-LONG LEARNERS: We recognize our staff as our greatest asset and we support their professional growth and well-being.

WE BUILD ON THE STRENGTHS OF THOSE WE SERVE: We value the skills and experiences adults and children bring to our programs and we build on those.

WE ARE INCLUSIVE: We welcome and value all expressions of diversity and identity, and we help families and educators prepare young children to thrive in a culturally diverse society.

Our values align with those of the University: "A Roger Williams University education is **transformative, engaged, experiential, inclusive and innovative.**"

The Context for Our Work with Young Children and with the Adults Who Support and Nurture Them

- In 2016, 17% of all children under age 18 in Rhode Island lived in poverty. That's the 2nd highest rate in New England.¹
- Between 2012 and 2016, 64% of children living in poverty lived in Rhode Island's four Core Cities (Providence, Central Falls, Pawtucket and Woonsocket). 48% of Rhode Island's poor children were Hispanic.²
- In Rhode Island between 2012 and 2016, 34% of all infants were born to mothers with a high school diploma or less, and 37% were born to fathers with a high school diploma or less. In the four Core Cities, 21% of all infants were born to mothers with *less* than a high school diploma.³
- Of the 633 early learning programs (based in centers, child-care homes or public schools) with a Bright Stars rating in 2018, 501 had two stars or less (out of a possible five). An additional 211 programs had no rating at all. Bright Stars is Rhode Island's Quality Rating and Improvement System. A 2016 evaluation found that the star levels effectively differentiate quality and are linked to child outcomes.⁴
- Of the 84% of licensed family child care homes in the four Core Cities participating in Bright Stars in January 2018, only 1% had a high-quality rating (four or five stars).⁵
- 44% of R.I. family child-care providers in 2014 reported speaking Spanish only.⁶
- In 2017, only 12% of third-grade English Language Learners met or exceeded expectations on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers on the English language arts assessment, and just 20% on the math assessment.⁷
- In 2017 the R.I. median wage for all child-care workers was \$11.82. For preschool teachers the median wage was \$14.57, and for preschool or child-care center directors, the median wage was \$27.21.⁸
- One-quarter of R.I. early childhood center-based **teachers** have some college credits; another quarter have an associate's degree; 31% have a bachelor's degree; 8% have a master's degree; 8% have a high school diploma; and 3% have a CDA.⁹
- One quarter of R.I. center-based **assistant teachers** have a high school diploma as their highest earned level of education.¹⁰
- According to center directors, hardships impacting their programs include stagnant salaries and difficulty finding qualified staff.¹¹

Collecting Stakeholder Input

DeliverEd conducted a set of focus groups and interviews in June 2018 with key stakeholders, including partners and providers, to gather feedback to further refine the strategic plan. The focus groups with early childhood educators were conducted in both English and Spanish, allowing for maximum participation. More than 20 child-care providers who had participated in programs offered by Ready to Learn Providence and Providence Talks took part in the conversations.

Questions included:

1. How have you been involved with Ready to Learn Providence or Providence Talks? What has gone well and what could be improved?
2. What are the professional development needs of your staff and how well are they being met by the current professional development opportunities available in the state?
3. How could a collaborative between Ready to Learn Providence, Providence Talks and University College fill gaps to effectively serve the early childhood community, including both the workforce and families?

The key themes that emerged during the conversation included:

Strengths

- **Sense of Community:** bringing together the immigrant community and the community of family child-care providers
- **Language:** access to college credits in Spanish
- **Flexibility:** availability of different schedules for trainings; responsiveness to the needs of providers
- **Respect:** for early childhood providers and an understanding of non-traditional learners
- **Expertise and Professionalism**
- **Innovation:** they respect and embrace innovation

Opportunities for Growth

- **Broaden service and expand offerings:** offer additional classes that expand on topics covered in introductory courses, including social and emotional development, supporting family engagement, and working with children from difficult backgrounds
- **Refine professional development classes:** ensure that classes not try to cover too much content in a limited time, and allow for sufficient practice

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- **Clarify offerings:** establish which offerings are for credit and which are not
- **Consider all children:** investigate how to reach all children, even those not being touched by current programming

Leadership from Ready to Learn Providence, Providence Talks, the Division of Early Learning and the ESL Teacher Certification Program used the information gathered in these conversations to further develop the core values and shared goals of the Collaborative for Early Childhood Initiatives.



“Caring, knowledgeable and empowered family members and educators will have the skills and education to support and strengthen the growth and development of young children.”

Sources for Data on Page 7

¹*2018 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* (Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, Providence, R.I.), 36.

²*Ibid.*, 37.

³*Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁴*Ibid.*, 124.

⁵*Ibid.*, 126.

⁶*Ibid.*, 126.

⁷*Ibid.*, 140

⁸*Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018 Rhode Island* (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, Calif.).

⁹*RI Early Childhood Workforce Study (2014)*.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

GOAL 1: Provide and expand high-quality, impactful professional learning opportunities for the pre- and in-service early childhood education workforce, including English language learners

Description

Through University non-credit and credit-bearing professional learning opportunities, the Collaborative for Early Childhood Initiatives enables pre- and in-service educators to achieve the skills and competencies articulated in state workforce knowledge and competency frameworks, as well as NAEYC and Zero to Three standards. The acquisition of these skills increases the teaching practice, credentials and employment opportunities for individual educators and helps early learning programs advance along Quality Rating and Improvement continuums.

Strategies/Areas of Work

Strategies

- Maintain, refine and expand professional learning to meet the needs of the pre-service and in-service ECE workforce.

Areas of Work

- Conduct periodic needs-assessments to determine present and potential learning needs of the early childhood workforce.
- Develop and provide credit-bearing courses and certificates that stack into degrees that meet the needs of pre- and in-service educators, including supports for Spanish speakers.
- Provide non-credit professional development opportunities in English and Spanish.
- Support pathways for credit documentation and prior learning assessment that translate into University course credits.
- Conduct outreach and recruitment to high schools and licensed early learning programs to generate enrollment.
- Create a viable pathway to higher education in ECE for high school students through the Advanced Course Network and Gateway.
- Expand enrollment in all of RWU's early learning initiatives.
- Develop Ready to Learn Providence prekindergarten classrooms as a resource for professional learning.
- Expand geography for service delivery.

Measures of Success

- Number of existing and new initiatives
- Number of participants enrolled and completing an initiative
- Number of participants tracked by city and town
- Percent of participants enrolling in multiple programs across the collaborative

Definition of Success

More early childhood educators will have the competencies and credentials that align with workforce knowledge and competencies in Rhode Island and other states, enabling more early learning programs to advance along the BrightStars quality continuum (or the equivalent in other states).

GOAL 2: Engage families in their children’s learning and development

Description

Provide a variety of programs to support families with children from birth to age eight so they can effectively advocate for and engage with their children’s learning and development in order to enhance current experiences and learning, and improve educational outcomes

Strategies/Areas of Work

Strategies

- Refine and expand high-quality home visiting and playgroup services through Providence Talks.
- Continue to offer high-quality PreK services to families.
- Expand school programming for K-3 families.
- Explore opportunities to partner with the R.I. Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) to serve families engaged with the Department.
- Leverage other University College programs and initiatives to increase family participation in early learning initiatives.

Areas of Work

- Sustain Providence Talks programming.
- Sustain state-funded Pre-K classrooms.
- Sustain *Mind in the Making* in Providence Schools.
- Introduce *Mind in the Making* to other school districts in Rhode Island.
- Reach out to DCYF to ascertain needs of families as they engage in Department services. Identify gaps in programming for families.
- Explore other evidence-based parenting programs, such as *Opening Doors* and *Parents as Teachers*.
- Develop plan for cross-departmental recruitment of families within University College at Roger Williams University.

Measures of Success

- Percent of Providence Talks families who demonstrate increases in language usage and conversation turn-taking
- Number of families that participate in programmatic initiatives
- Number of families participating in programs who report satisfaction
- Percent of families who self-report changes in parenting effectiveness and engagement

Definition of Success

Families will employ new strategies to engage with their children and will feel empowered to advocate for them.

GOAL 3: Brand the Collaborative as a champion and resource for children, families, and the early childhood education (ECE) workforce

Strategies/Areas of Work

Strategies

- Build awareness and visibility of the Collaborative for Early Childhood Initiatives and its associated members.
- Advocate for policies that benefit children, the ECE workforce and families.

Areas of Work

- Build a home page for the Collaborative on University College's website with links to all initiatives that comprise the Collaborative.
- Create talking points and marketing materials for the program offerings of each member of the Collaborative.
- Work with state and municipal partners and other community stakeholders around legislation and policy.
- Convene early childhood providers to discuss topics that are not addressed elsewhere.
- Serve on statewide committees that address issues that impact children, families and the ECE workforce.
- Use the existing social media platforms of the separate initiatives to promote the Collaborative.

Definition of Success

The Collaborative for Early Childhood Initiatives is recognized as a valuable training hub and resource by families, early childhood educators and policymakers in Rhode Island and surrounding communities.

GOAL 4: Secure financial stability and sustainability for the programmatic initiatives that comprise the Collaborative of Early Childhood Initiatives

Strategies/Areas of Work	Measures of Success	Definition of Success
<p>Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit and leverage existing funding from current stakeholders to clarify their vision for funding commitments in the immediate and distant future. • Explore additional funding sources/develop a funding strategy (NGOs, large and small family foundations, corporate foundations, United Way, state and federal departments, the City of Providence, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood RI). • Explore the establishment of a development position for the Collaborative for Early Childhood Initiatives and potential intersection with other programs at University College. • Create mechanisms to support a private donor network (leverage office of institutional advancement at RWU). • Explore innovative funding for course-taking for incumbent workforce (RWU). <p>Areas of Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with local funders to increase awareness. • Respond to RFP solicitations from the State of Rhode Island and the federal government that pertain to early childhood education. • Continue to advocate for T.E.A.C.H. funding from RI Department of Human Services and RI Association for the Education of Young Children. • Research and solicit national funders. • Enter into community partnership agreements for the purpose of providing reduced tuition for participants. • Meet with personnel from the Office of Institutional Advancement at RWU to develop a donor strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants received • Contracts renewed • New contracts • Students enrolled in credit-bearing courses and non-credit professional development options • Donations solicited 	<p>The initiatives that comprise the Collaborative for Early Childhood Initiatives will be financially sustainable.</p>