



BUILDING A STRONGER EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE IN RHODE ISLAND:

DEFINING COMPETENCIES FOR EARLY
CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS AND
BUILDING A SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS



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INTRODUCTION

Teacher competencies and workforce initiatives that support effective teaching can positively impact child outcomes and the overall quality of early learning programs. As such, it is important for a state early learning system to define and measure the quality of its early childhood workforce by articulating a set of expectations for what early childhood professionals should know, understand, and be able to do, and evaluate the workforce against those expectations. At the same time, states must offer professional supports to enhance the workforce, which should include education, ongoing professional development, and supportive work environments. Through the state’s Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge (RTT–ELC) grant, Rhode Island is defining, supporting, and measuring the quality of its early childhood workforce through a series of initiatives, which include:

- 1) The development of Workforce Knowledge and Competency (WKC) Frameworks for key roles in the early childhood field, which chart a clear career pathway to higher levels of knowledge and skills.
- 2) Enhancing the state’s formal education programs, ongoing professional development, and technical assistance to help the state’s early childhood workforce acquire the knowledge and skills defined by the Frameworks.
- 3) Data-driven decision making using information collected about early childhood educator development, advancement, and retention through a state workforce study and the state’s workforce registry.

These initiatives have been guided by a set of principles defined by the state. The initiatives must:

- be grounded in research and aligned to what matters most to program quality and the school readiness of all of Rhode Island’s children, including those with developmental delays and disabilities, children who are dual language learners, and children in low-income families and communities,
- address all major areas that support young children in their development and learning: health, safety, and wellness; family engagement; physical, cognitive, and social–emotional development; curriculum; observation and assessment; and professionalism,
- align with Rhode Island’s continuum of program quality standards and the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards,

- hold the same expectations regardless of setting, including in community-based programs, public schools, family child care, and Head Start programs, and
- be regularly evaluated and updated to ensure that they reflect current knowledge of best practices and meet the needs of Rhode Island’s diverse early childhood workforce.

The state engaged in a rigorous and inclusive process to develop competencies and a system of supports to promote a highly qualified early childhood workforce. This paper describes the steps that were taken in developing and revising the WKC Frameworks and building Rhode Island’s system of supports for the continued growth and development of its early childhood professionals. The state’s approach was designed to ensure that the initiatives reflect current research about what matters most to improve school readiness, including in-depth knowledge of Rhode Island’s Early Learning and Development Standards. In addition, the process was designed to ensure that the WKC Frameworks are seen as credible and useful to early childhood stakeholders and that the supports facilitate the ongoing development of all early childhood professionals. The importance of a high-quality work-force and the steps taken to develop the Frameworks and professional supports, including the ways in which the state created a robust public input process, are described below.



The Importance of a Highly Qualified Early Childhood Workforce

Decades of research on child development and early learning have yielded a strong understanding of the teacher skills and knowledge that are most predictive of children’s later learning success. Research has also identified the types of early experiences that are most conducive to fostering school readiness. This research suggests that teacher–child interactions are the primary mechanism through which early care and education programs support positive child outcomes.^{1,2} Effective teachers engage in sensitive and responsive interactions with children, apply knowledge of child development and effective

¹Curby, T. W., Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., & Ponitz, C. C. (2009). Teacher–child interactions and children’s achievement trajectories across kindergarten and first grade. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 101, 912–925. doi:10.1037/a0016647

²Mashburn, A. J., Pianta, R. C., Hamre, B. K., Downer, J. T., Barbarin, O. A., Bryant, D., Howes, C. (2008). Measures of classroom quality in prekindergarten and children’s development of academic, language, and social skills. *Child Development*, 79(3), 732–749 doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2008.01154.x.



BUILDING A STRONGER EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE IN RHODE ISLAND

pedagogy in their teaching practices, construct an environment and activities that address individual children’s needs, prevent and redirect challenging behavior, and effectively communicate with and support families in linguistically and culturally appropriate ways.³ In order to engage in effective teaching, educators require robust content and pedagogical knowledge and the ability to apply key skills in the classroom.⁴ Teachers gain these competencies through high-quality professional development experiences including formal education, training, and on-the-job support. Therefore, the competencies of individuals who work with teachers—higher education faculty and staff, professional development providers, program administrators, and education coordinators—are also vitally important. Indeed, the competencies of these individuals predict their ability to engage in effective interactions with teachers, which in turn predicts teachers’ knowledge and skill levels.

In order to translate the research regarding workforce development, program quality, and child outcomes into practice, Rhode Island developed an interrelated set of standards that define goals for different aspects of the state’s early care and education system. For example, the state’s *early learning and development standards* identify the progression of skills that are the foundational building blocks for school readiness. The state has also developed a system of *program standards* including child care licensing regulations, the BrightStars Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS), and the Comprehensive Early Childhood Education (CECE) Program Approval standards. These standards define and measure indicators of program quality, including teacher qualifications, that are associated with child outcomes. The WKC Frameworks described in this paper interconnect with the state’s early learning standards and program quality standards. Higher levels of education (and other professional development experiences) provide teachers with opportunities to learn and develop the complex content and pedagogical knowledge associated with higher levels of the competencies. Embedded within all of the Frameworks is the importance of in-depth knowledge of Rhode Island’s Early Learning and Development Standards for all members of the early childhood workforce, as supporting these child outcomes is the ultimate goal of the state’s early care and education system.

³Bowman, B., Donovan, S., & Burns, S. (Eds.) (2001). *Eager to Learn: Educating our Preschoolers*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press

⁴Fukking, R. G., & Lont, A. (2007). Does training matter? A meta-analysis and review of caregiver training studies. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22, 294-311. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2007.04.005

What are the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Frameworks?

The WKC Frameworks articulate the essential skills and knowledge that educators and those who work with educators need to know, understand, and be able to do to promote young children’s healthy development and learning. The Frameworks 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. The competencies are organized into a series of progressions describing levels of increasing skill and knowledge in key areas. Early stages correspond with foundational knowledge and understanding in a particular area, and the more advanced stages progress from basic knowledge and understanding to the application of that knowledge and eventually analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

At the highest level of competency, professionals are critically reflecting on their knowledge, solving problems, mentoring, and advocating for change. Early childhood professionals develop and refine their skills to advance from one level to the next through a combination of formal education, experience, and professional development.



The Need for Multiple Frameworks

The state’s approach to developing competencies is unique in that it has created different—yet interrelated—frameworks for key roles in the early childhood field. Like many other states, Rhode Island has defined the knowledge and competencies needed to be successful for those professionals who work directly with children, such as teachers and teacher assistants, early childhood special education teachers and early intervention specialists, and family child care educators. However, few states have addressed the core competencies for those that provide the initial and ongoing education and support for educators. To meet this need, Rhode Island has also developed a WKC Framework for professional development providers (including higher education faculty and staff), and a Framework for administrators and education coordinators. These Frameworks define what those who support the early childhood workforce must know and be able to do in order to improve educators’ practice and, in turn, improve outcomes for children. Each Framework covers a set of domains relevant to key roles in the early childhood workforce. For example, for those professionals working directly with children, the domains include family engagement, curriculum, and assessment. For professional development



BUILDING A STRONGER EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE IN RHODE ISLAND

providers and higher education faculty and staff, a different set of content is covered, including domains such as supporting adult learners, building relationships, and evaluating outcomes.

The Rhode Island WKC Frameworks are intended to be used by a variety of stakeholders. They will:

- be used by Rhode Island’s early education leaders as a framework for developing a state-wide professional development system;
- help educators focus on critical areas of professional development and recognize their own areas of exceptional skill and expertise;
- assist educators with the creation and implementation of their own personalized professional development plans;
- guide institutes of higher education and professional development providers as they create coursework and other professional development modules for early childhood professionals;
- help families identify best practices and select high-quality programming for their children; and
- serve as a tool for advocates and policymakers to develop initiatives and communication strategies, as well as to allocate funding, based on what best supports early childhood professionals.

How the Competencies Relate to Formal Education

Workforce knowledge and competencies are measurable skills, levels of knowledge, and behavioral practices, whereas credentials are achieved through formal education and include certificates, diplomas, and degrees. Some of the Frameworks—those developed for early childhood teachers, teacher assistants, special education teachers, early intervention specialists, and family child care educators—include the formal education, experience, and professional development activities typically associated with educators at each level of the competencies. The career pathways articulated within the Frameworks for early childhood professionals include a range of levels of educational attainment, which reflects the diversity of education levels within the field as well as the progression of competency attainment across different levels of education. For example, attainment of an associate’s degree in early childhood education is included where appropriate. The state recognizes that an associate’s degree is a step in reaching educational and career goals, as well as creating a positive mindset for continuing education. The associate’s degree in early childhood is rec-



ognized in the Department of Children, Youth and Families’ (DCYF) licensing regulations, within the Department of Human Services’ (DHS) Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (BrightStars), and the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) Comprehensive Early Childhood Education approval program for teaching assistants. The inclusion of formal education in the career pathways is an important step in setting high expectations, with accompanying supports, for Rhode Island’s early childhood workforce.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORKFORCE KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCY FRAMEWORKS

Figure 1 provides relevant milestones in the development of Rhode Island’s WKC Frameworks beginning with their inception in 2003. The most recent revisions and adaptations that are the focus of this paper began in 2012. These activities include:

- revising the **WKC Framework for Early Childhood Teachers**;
- adding an **Addendum for Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE)**, which contains competencies relevant to EI/ECSE professionals included in the early childhood teacher Framework;
- separating out the teacher assistant section of the core knowledge and competencies in order to create a separate **WKC Framework for Early Childhood Teacher Assistants** to acknowledge the unique role of assistant teachers;
- creating a **WKC Framework for Family Child Care Educators** that is adapted from the center-based teacher WKC Framework to address the essential skills, knowledge, multiple roles, and unique environment relevant to family child care (FCC) educators;
- developing a **WKC Framework for Professional Development Providers**, which defines what those who support the early childhood workforce must know and be able to do in order to improve educators’ practice and, in turn, improve outcomes for children; and
- establishing a **WKC Framework for Administrators and Education Coordinators** that outlines core competencies and knowledge relevant to leadership roles in early care and education settings.



BUILDING A STRONGER EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE IN RHODE ISLAND

The timelines and specifics of the development process varied for each WKC Framework (see Figure 1 for details). Each Framework was developed by a workgroup with representation from a broad group of stakeholders including representatives from key state agencies, higher education, and members of the target practitioner audience (e.g., teachers, family child care educators, professional development pro-

viders, center directors). Opportunities for robust public input, including public forums, focus groups, and surveys were included in the development process for each Framework. The WKC Framework for early childhood teachers and the addendum for EI/ECSE were submitted to panels of national and local experts to ensure that they reflected the most current research and knowledge of best practices.

Figure 1. Milestones in the Development of Rhode Island’s WKC Frameworks

Dates	WKC Framework Milestones	Involved Stakeholders
2003	First draft version of RI's core competencies created as a result of a comprehensive, grassroots effort, with broad representation from all areas of early childhood and youth development.	DHS, RIDE, higher education, DCYF, RI Department of Health, RIAEYC, early care and education providers including center-based and family child care, Head Start, Early Intervention, BrightStars, representatives from the after-school and youth development field
2007	Committee brought together by DHS/Childspan to revise 2003 draft in light of changes in the field such as new trends, new regulations, and ongoing development of state initiatives.	DHS, RIDE, higher education, DCYF, RI Department of Health, early care and education providers including center-based and family child care, BrightStars, representatives from the afterschool and youth development field
2010	DHS received Child Care and Development Block Grant funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which it allocated to completing the core knowledge and competencies for teachers and teacher assistants. Additionally, ARRA funds allocated to the RI Early Learning Council were used to secure national experts for the review panel. This process was led by RIDE.	RIDE, state agency leaders, professional development providers, higher education providers, and early childhood educators
2011	RI is awarded an RTT-ELC challenge grant, which provides additional funding to support the completion of core workforce knowledge and competencies for family child care providers, professional development providers, higher education providers, special educators, and administrators.	
September 2012 – April 2013	Addendum for EI/ECSE developed through process of initial survey to gather community input, feedback from national experts/TA providers, and public forums and focus groups.	State agency leaders from EOHHS (Part C) and RIDE (Part B 619), professional development providers, higher education, the Sherlock Center, RI Parent Information Network, Interagency Coordinating Council, preschool special educators, Early Intervention special educators and administrators from private and public schools, with facilitation provided by a Senior Program Associate from WestEd/Northeast Regional Resource Center
October 2012 – April 2013	FCC WKC Framework developed, including input from public forums and focus groups (in English and Spanish).	DHS, RIDE, DCYF, RIAEYC, BrightStars, Ready to Learn Providence, The Providence Center Early Childhood Institute, family child care educators
February 2013 – September 2013	WKC Framework for Early Childhood Teachers revised using feedback from FCC and EI/ECSE development processes, Rhode Island's newly revised Early Learning and Development Standards, and input from the Curriculum Team. As part of process, the team decided to extract teacher assistant competencies to create a separate document for the WKC Framework for Teacher Assistants . An expert panel, including national experts and local experts from higher education, convened to review the competencies.	DHS, RIDE, higher education, DCYF, RI Department of Health, RIAEYC, early care and education providers including center-based and family child care, Head Start, BrightStars, representatives from the afterschool and youth development field



Figure 1 continued

November 2013 – March 2014	WKC Framework for Professional Development Providers and Higher Education Faculty/Staff developed through collaborative process involving consultants and local experts, with opportunities for public input and feedback from professional development providers across the state.	RIDE, Early Childhood Associates, RI Department of Health, Rhode Island College, the University of Rhode Island, the Center for Early Learning Professionals
September 2014 – May 2015	WKC Framework for Administrators and Education Coordinators developed by a team of early childhood professionals, led by a facilitator to draft the domains, subdomains, and indicators for these roles. The draft document will be released for public comment in late winter of 2015 and will be sent to national experts for feedback. The development team will then reconvene to consider feedback and produce the final framework.	Early childhood principals, center administrators, education coordinators, PD and TA experts from the Center for Early Learning Professionals, RIDE staff

HOW THE STATE IS SUPPORTING ITS EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS

The overall impact of Rhode Island’s WKC Frameworks will depend in large part on the opportunities that early childhood professionals have to develop and refine their knowledge and skills. The state is currently working on multiple strategies to use the Frameworks to guide and support the professional development of the early childhood workforce. These include:

- a process to ensure that professional development opportunities and higher education programs are aligned with the knowledge and competencies articulated by the Frameworks;
- expanding access to learning opportunities through:
 - o the provision of financial supports for tuition and books in associate’s and bachelor’s degree programs;
 - o piloting the Institute for Early Childhood Teaching and Learning, a program designed to advance the educational attainment of teachers already in the workforce;
 - o increasing the capacity of certificate programs aligned with the WKC Frameworks;
 - o establishing the Center for Early Learning Professionals to offer high-quality professional development and technical assistance at no cost to early educators; and
- engaging in data collection efforts through a workforce study and workforce registry to better understand the characteristics

and needs of Rhode Island’s early childhood workforce and to inform the development of effective statewide policies, programs, and initiatives to support individuals working in early learning programs.

Each of these initiatives is described in greater detail below.

Alignment of WKC Frameworks to Higher Education Curricula and Professional Development

Higher Education Curricula

In order to better understand the early childhood higher education opportunities available to Rhode Island’s early learning workforce, the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) at the University of California, Berkeley conducted a study using the Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory.⁵ This inventory describes the early childhood degree programs offered in the state, focusing on variation in program content, age-group focus, student field-based learning, and faculty characteristics. The data gathered through this study allowed the state and other stakeholders to establish baseline descriptions of higher education offerings for early care and education practitioners, identify gaps and opportunities in the available offerings, assess variation in higher education early childhood programs, and assess changes in the capacity of the higher education system over time.

⁵ Austin, L.J.E., Kipnis, F., Sakai, L., Whitebook, M., & Ryan, S. (2013). *The State of Early Childhood Higher Education in Rhode Island: The Rhode Island Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California at Berkeley.



BUILDING A STRONGER EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE IN RHODE ISLAND

During fall 2012–winter 2013, CSCCE collected data from the University of Rhode Island (URI), Rhode Island College (RIC), Salve Regina, and the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI). These four institutions offered one associate degree, four bachelor’s degree, and two master’s degree programs in early childhood. Data were collected from all seven degree programs. Based on their findings, CSCCE offered the following recommendations to strengthen the early childhood offerings in Rhode Island’s higher education system:

- have more consistent focus on infants and toddlers across degree programs
- develop and apply rigorous criteria for the selection of field sites for practica and student teaching
- expand program content related to early childhood administration and leadership
- provide targeted professional development for faculty to support their work with diverse student populations (children and adult learners)
- include faculty in the Rhode Island Workforce Registry
- align course content with Rhode Island WKC Frameworks

Consistent with these recommendations, the state’s three public institutions of higher education (RIC, URI, and CCRI) engaged in a process to identify alignment in their relevant coursework to the WKC Frameworks and to find areas in which alignment needed to be strengthened. URI and RIC completed the alignment with the guidance of a template developed by RIDE, whereas CCRI completed the process through their National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Self-Study. Through this process, early childhood faculty and adjunct faculty collaborated to examine each course and compare it to the WKC Framework grid. To provide evidence for the alignment, the faculty examined textbooks, course requirements, lecture information, assignments, tests, and presentations. Each institution was also asked to develop a plan for increasing alignment in needed areas. RIC and URI are currently working to align identified coursework to the Frameworks, with an estimated completion date in 2015.

Professional Development

The state also developed a process to ensure that teachers’ ongoing professional development experiences align with the WKC Frameworks. To ensure the quality of professional development opportunities, the Center for Early Learning Professionals (discussed below), in

partnership with RIDE, DHS, and DCYF, is implementing a professional development approval process. As of June 1, 2014, all professional development activities must meet certain criteria in order to qualify under the state’s requirements for ongoing professional development. The approval system ensures that professional development offered across the state will:

- articulate learning objectives and content aligned with WKC domains and career levels,
- include references that demonstrate ties to research, theory, and best practice,
- establish a learning atmosphere that encourages participants to share their knowledge and experiences and apply learning to their practice,
- demonstrate appreciation of and respect for the unique needs and characteristics of the participants, and



- be delivered by individuals who demonstrate deep content knowledge of the topic and understanding of adult learning principles.

The approved professional development list will include information about approved content. This list will be widely promoted to ensure statewide use and incorporation into each educator’s Individualized Professional Development Plans. These Plans are developed to reflect each educator’s personal and professional aspirations and are required for BrightStars and RIDE Approval as well as DCYF licensing as a means of promoting continued growth and improvement through high-quality professional development. The list of approved professional development will also be used to identify gaps in the current delivery system.

Improving Access to Professional Development and Formal Education

Expansion of T.E.A.C.H. program

Financial assistance is one of the most important supports for helping educators access the college coursework aligned with the Frameworks. In 2010, Rhode Island established the T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) Early Childhood Project through funding from the Rhode Island Foundation and the Rhode Island Early Learning Council’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grant. T.E.A.C.H. is a proven workforce development model operating in nearly two dozen states that improves access to higher education,



BUILDING A STRONGER EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE IN RHODE ISLAND

addresses compensation disparities, and reduces turnover of current early learning educators. The T.E.A.C.H. program in Rhode Island has provided scholarships for students pursuing associate's degrees in early childhood education and for individuals with a bachelor's degree in a field unrelated to early childhood who are pursuing post-baccalaureate early childhood education coursework at the CCRI.

With Rhode Island's RTT-ELC funding, the state was able to expand the T.E.A.C.H. program, supporting approved bachelor's-level teacher preparation programs (NCATE/NAEYC accredited and RIDE approved) through URI and RIC. These programs offer teachers the opportunity to earn a bachelor's degree as well as eligibility to apply for certification. In order to help students overcome the challenges of completing student teaching placements while simultaneously working full-time in an early learning program, RIDE agreed that, through the Institute for Early Childhood Teaching and Learning, T.E.A.C.H. scholars working in preschool classrooms will be able to complete their student teaching within their current classroom settings with the assistance of a mentor teacher, as well as supports such as videotaping lessons for feedback. The financial and professional support offered through the T.E.A.C.H. program will allow center-based educators, administrators, and family child care educators to access high-quality degree programs that are focused on helping early childhood professionals develop the skills and knowledge articulated in the WKC Frameworks.

Creation of the Institute for Early Childhood Teaching and Learning

The RTT-ELC grant was amended to include the creation of the Institute for Early Childhood Teaching and Learning at Rhode Island College. This is a pilot program aimed at the current workforce and offers different core coursework. The degrees currently being offered will continue; however, what is learned through this new program will inform the pre-service program for non-traditional students currently in the early childhood workforce. This new program can take advantage of the fact that those already in the workforce can practice techniques in their classrooms on a more regular basis. Teachers enrolled in the Institute would be eligible for T.E.A.C.H. funds and would participate in a cohort model as this is a key strategy in college completion.⁶

⁶Kipnis, F., Whitebook, M., Almaraz, M., Sakai, L., & Austin, L. J. E. (2012). Learning together: A study of six B.A. completion cohort programs in early care and education. Year 4. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

The goals of the Institute for Early Childhood Teaching and Learning are to meet the needs of the current workforce and fill gaps in alignment. For example, in response to findings reported in the Rhode Island Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory and the Early Learning Workforce Study, this new program of study will offer more coursework specifically for infant/toddler educators so they will have an option for higher education other than a Pre-K to 2 certification program. Those being certified Pre-K to 2 can also take these courses so they can better understand the full continuum of early childhood education. In response to some community concerns regarding potential challenges the current workforce faces in passing the required Praxis I exam in order to attain teacher licensure, there also will be academic supports (e.g., tutoring) which address math and literacy skills in order to ensure that the workforce has a college-level understanding of math, reading, and writing. As the pilot program is implemented, the state will

consider how the Institute will connect with other pieces of the professional development system. For example, collaboration could occur with the Center for Early Learning Professionals such that approved high-quality professional development offered by highly qualified developers in the community could become credit-bearing so the workforce does not have to take both professional development and separate credit-bearing courses to earn an associate's or bachelor's degree.

Expansion of Early Childhood Education and Training Program at CCRI

Using RTT-ELC funding, the state has also expanded the Early Childhood Education and Training Program offered through CCRI. This program was designed to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills articulated in Level 1 of the competencies. The 12-credit-hour program uses a cohort model, coupled with intensive mentoring to assist students in achieving academic success and allows students to take six additional credits in math and writing to further their foundational academic skills (for a total of 18-credits). This program has been expanded to serve 70 additional students per year, twice the previous program capacity. Furthermore, CCRI has been actively recruiting and mentoring Spanish-speaking family child care educators to participate in the program and has hired a bilingual career advisor to meet the needs of this population. By expanding the capacity of this program, more educators will have access to this high-quality program that combines the content of the WKC Frameworks with features of effective training experiences for adult learners.





Creation of the Center for Early Learning Professionals

In order for educators to take advantage of high-quality professional development opportunities, they must know that these opportunities are available. The newly established Center for Early Learning Professionals serves as a clearinghouse for high-quality, aligned professional development resources and opportunities and provides career advising to early childhood professionals. The Center offers a wide range of innovative, flexible, and research-based professional development experiences that help early childhood teachers, center and school leaders, and family child care providers enhance their skills and advance their careers. Professional development offered through the Center is aligned to the WKC Frameworks and the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards and includes:

- intensive, multi-session training series;
- a hybrid approach that blends traditional face-to-face sessions with technology-based learning;
- activities and strategies designed for adult learners;
- individual and small-group coaching by session instructors; and
- sessions for supervisors so they understand what their staff are learning and how they can support them in their work.

Professional development opportunities are available in English and Spanish and are free to the state’s early learning programs and providers, with priority given to staff from programs that have a BrightStars rating or are in the process of applying for a BrightStars rating.

The Center for Early Learning Professionals also provides technical assistance to early childhood program leaders in individual and small-group settings (also available in English and Spanish). This process is customized to build on a program’s strengths and respond to its unique needs with the ultimate goal of improving quality and outcomes for children. Technical assistance specialists work with program leaders to improve their Quality Program Improvement Plan to include action steps and resources; design systems of support for program staff to build skills and knowledge related to the WKC Frameworks; create internal self-assessment and professional development systems that produce valuable data to guide decision-making; and engage in long- and short-term plan-



ning to support continuous quality improvement efforts. The Center is also developing various tools to help individuals self-assess their WKC levels and understand how to use the WKC Frameworks, as well as sessions for administrators on incorporating the competencies into practice.

Programs participating in technical assistance services also learn how they can link their accomplishments in these areas to the Quality Improvement Grant application process, which is also issued through the Center for Early Learning Professionals. These grants can be used to increase a program’s BrightStars rating, earn Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Approval, support staff in understanding and meeting the standards outlined in the WKC Frameworks, advance teaching practices, create richer learning environments, and/or assist staff in achieving professional development goals.

Data on the Professional Development System

Early Learning Workforce Study

In order to better understand the current education, credentials, experiences, and compensation of the state’s early childhood workforce, DHS commissioned the Early Learning Workforce Study. The state gathered data by mailing surveys (in English and Spanish) to all licensed child care centers and family child care homes. A range of early childhood professionals participated in the study including 217 family child care educators, 178 child care center administrators, and 1,042 child care center staff (including teachers, teacher assistants, education coordinators, and assistant directors). Ultimately, data from this study provided an initial look at information needed to help define where supports should be targeted to assist early childhood professionals along a career pathway towards improving their knowledge, competencies, and skills; frame the professional development and technical assistance supports offered through the Center for Early Learning Professionals; and determine how to improve access to higher education for those early care and education providers currently working in early learning programs.

Early Childhood Workforce Registry

In order to build upon the baseline data collection efforts through the Early Learning Workforce Study, Rhode Island is developing an Early Childhood Workforce Registry, which will allow for ongoing, state-wide, longitudinal data collection. The creation of the Workforce Reg-



istry will ensure that periodic needs assessments can be conducted; educators can identify individual training needs; and that state programs can access data to aid in licensing, monitoring, and technical assistance. The availability of aggregate data about the workforce will also allow the state to track the usage of state and federally funded supports for improving the current workforce and measure the impact and effectiveness of these supports on increasing the skills and knowledge of the workforce. For example, workforce registry data will be compared with baseline measures to capture the increasing number of educators who are receiving professional development and credentials that are aligned with the WKC Frameworks. The Workforce Registry will also provide critical information about how many Spanish speakers are in Rhode Island’s early childhood workforce so that the state can develop and offer coursework to meet the needs of this important group of early childhood professionals. The Workforce Registry will include all levels of early childhood professionals, including trainers and higher education staff, and will include policies and incentives that will require and/or reward participation in the registry. The design of the system—including system requirements, security and privacy policies, database structure, and application interface—was completed in spring 2014, and testing of the system continued through 2014, with full implementation in 2015.



CONCLUSION

Through a rigorous and inclusive approach, Rhode Island has created a comprehensive, coordinated system of competencies and supports to develop and sustain a highly qualified early childhood workforce. The WKC Frameworks developed through this process are unique in that they are inclusive of a range of roles and positions within the workforce and that there is a robust system of supports to facilitate early childhood professionals’ continued growth and development across the competencies. Building a statewide professional development system that is data-informed and grounded in clear expectations 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.