

Association of Rhode Island Administrators of Special Education

October 13, 2011

Deborah Gist
Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Commissioner, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903

Elizabeth Burke Bryant
Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Executive Director, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
One Union Station
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Bryant:

I am writing to express the Association of Rhode Island Administrators of Special Education (ARIASE) strong support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application.

As educational leaders in Rhode Island, ARIASE represents the voice of special education on all state wide initiatives that influence policy, instruction, best practice and the dissemination of information for the 21st century learning to improve the quality of education in Rhode Island. Our membership has special education administrators from public schools, private school, charter schools and retirees. Our mission is to improve the outcomes of all children including young children with disabilities.

ARIASE is excited that lifelong outcomes for students could be improved through Rhode Island's proposed strategies to create a comprehensive and coherent early learning and development system. Ensuring that students with disabilities have access to high quality Early Learning and Development Programs is a goal we strongly support so that all students are ready to succeed in kindergarten

We are committed to supporting educational leadership to improve outcomes for students by: influencing the exchange of information, enhancing and fostering professional and community partnerships and providing professional development.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Pinto
President
ARIASE

ANGEL TAVERAS
Mayor

SUSAN F. LUSI, PH.D.
Superintendent



Providence Public School District
Office of the Superintendent
797 Westminister Street
Providence, RI 02903-4045
tel. 401.456.9211
fax 401.456.9252

October 12, 2011

Deborah Gist
Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Commissioner, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
255 Westminister Street
Providence, RI 02903

Elizabeth Burke Bryant
Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Executive Director, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
One Union Station
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Bryant:

On behalf of the Providence Schools, I am pleased to offer my enthusiastic support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge application. As an educator, I understand how important early learning opportunities are to reducing the achievement gap. I am fully committed to ensuring that every child in Rhode Island gets a high-quality education.

Equal access to high-quality early learning opportunities is the first step to making sure that every child has a chance to succeed in school. The Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge has a particular focus on expanding access for high-needs populations, including children living in poverty and English language learners. This focus is especially relevant to Providence, where 42.5% of children under age 6 live in poverty and 16% of the district's students are English Language Learners. This grant will help our state address the needs of those children by providing them with high-quality learning opportunities.

As an early childhood and special education administrator of Rhode Island's largest school district, I passionately support the goals and strategies expressed in this application and its potential to improve the lives and education of Rhode Island's children.

Sincerely,

Mindy B. Mertz
Early Childhood/Special Education Administrator

Robert M. O'Brien
Superintendent
Donald W. Holder
Assistant Superintendent
Craig J. Levis
Special Education Director

SMITHFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

49 Farnum Pike
Smithfield, Rhode Island 02917-3211
Administration 401-231-6606 FAX 401-232-0870
Special Education 401-231-6608 FAX 401-232-1580
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Providence, RI 02903

Elizabeth Burke Bryant
Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Executive Director, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
One Union Station
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Bryant,

I am writing to express my strong support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Application. I have been employed by the Smithfield Public School Department for the last fourteen years as their Child Outreach Coordinator. In my role as Coordinator, I organize all screening efforts, coordinate Early Intervention transitions, assess preschoolers with suspected disabilities, serve as the LEA for all preschoolers with disabilities, act as Teaching Strategies Gold Administrator, manage the Integrated Preschool as it relates to identification of typical peers, and serve as a contact for all Smithfield families and community organizations.

Our program has currently been accepted as a Candidate for National Association for the Education of Young Children's Accreditation process. We are excited to potentially hold the mark of high quality that will validate the exceptional work we provide to our preschool children and their families.

In addition, I have been fortunate to be a part of the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards Training Project, both as a consultant, and participant in the many professional development opportunities made available to early childhood professionals. As a consultant, it has been exciting and rewarding to educate participants in the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards. Our own program has also benefited from the excellent technical assistance offered by the Project. It is very stimulating to be amongst professionals, who not only value early childhood, but are agents of the positive change we see in our state.

I am committed to providing high quality early childhood programs to the children in our community and across Rhode Island. It is my desire to expand on the current programs that we offer to our preschool children, with and without disabilities. Continued availability for professional development in assessment, transition, and the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards will bring us closer to having Rhode Island's children entering school ready to learn.

Sincerely,

Colleen P. Poyton, M. Ed.
Child Outreach Coordinator
Smithfield Public Schools

The Smithfield Public Schools: A Partnership of Schools, Families and Community

The Smithfield Public Schools does not discriminate on the basis of age, sex, race, religion, national origin, color, sexual orientation or disability in accordance with applicable federal and state laws and regulations

South Kingston Inclusionary Preschool

153 School Street

Wakefield, Rhode Island 02879

October 12, 2011

Deborah Gist

Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council

Commissioner, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

255 Westminster Street

Providence, RI 02903

Elizabeth Burke Bryant

Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council

Executive Director, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

One Union Station

Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Bryant:

I am writing to express my strong support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application. I am a speech/language pathologist in the South Kingstown School Department in the inclusionary preschool program. I have worked with preschoolers with a wide variety of special needs for 28 years.

In the SKIP (South Kingstown Inclusionary Preschool) program I deliver therapy services to children with a continuum of service delivery which includes consultation, direct individual or small group therapy sessions, language groups in the classroom or at community daycares. We are an NAEYC accredited preschool and serve a wide range of children in our community from varied social, ethnic and educational backgrounds. We provide services to children with IEPs, community preschoolers, children at risk for academic problems and young English language learners.

The opportunity to participate in Race to the Top for young learners is exciting. I would love to expand our contacts with our families, provide more specialized and individualized services and assist in preparing these young children for kindergarten and their further learning. We are already using the Early Learning standards and are assessing and taking data with Teaching Strategies Gold. I would appreciate any professional development to expand my use and knowledge of these tools to provide equal and better education for young children in my community.

Sincerely,



Donna A Pensa M.S.CCC-SLP

THE
UNIVERSITY
OF RHODE ISLAND
COLLEGE OF
HUMAN SCIENCE
AND SERVICES

CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Department of Human Development and Family Studies, 10 Lower College Road, Kingston, RI 02881 USA

p: 401.874.2758 f: 401.874.4020 uri.edu/hss/hdf/cdc



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Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Commissioner, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903

Elizabeth Burke Bryant
Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Executive Director, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
One Union Station
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Bryant:

I am writing to express my strong support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application. As the director of the University of Rhode Island Child Development Center, a faculty member in the URI Department of Human Development and Family Studies, and a member of the Rhode Island Early Learning Council, I am deeply committed to improving the quality of early childhood programs throughout the state and increasing access to those programs for the most vulnerable children in the state.

As the laboratory school for the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, the Child Development Center serves as the practicum site for approximately 80 undergraduate students each year. Of these, 20-35 undergraduates are working towards early childhood certification while the rest will enter careers working with children and their families in another capacity. Additionally, the Child Development Center serves as a mentor classroom for the early childhood workforce throughout the state to learn about high quality early childhood care and education practices. The professional staff members of the Child Development Center are also actively involved in providing a variety of professional development opportunities to many early childhood care and education professionals in the state.

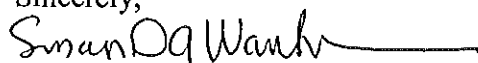
As a representative of the University, I serve on many of the statewide committees and boards associated with the early childhood field including the Early Learning Council, the Early Learning Work Group, the T.E.A.C.H Advisory Board, the Workforce Knowledge and Competencies Workgroup, the committee to rewrite the Rhode Island Department of Education Approval process, among others. Additionally, I teach two of the early childhood curriculum courses that are part of the URI early childhood certification program. As active participants in many early childhood initiatives, the Child Development Center staff and I are well-positioned to continue to play a collaborative role in Rhode Island's next steps.

Birth to age five are critical years for children, a key time for developing important cognitive, language, physical, social, and emotional skills that help lay the foundation for success in school and in life. The educational attainment, knowledge base, skill level, and quality of interactions of the teacher in an early childhood classroom play a critical role in the quality of the classroom environment, which has a direct impact on child outcomes. Consequently, programs for young children must have well trained teachers who understand the importance of the early childhood years. For this reason, one of the goals of the Rhode Island strategic plan for transforming education is to "create a great early childhood workforce" across the state, and I believe that Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Funds will help Rhode Island move rapidly toward meeting that vital goal.

The Child Development Center staff and I are committed to support the implementation of the Early Learning Challenge reform strategies in a variety of ways. We will continue to contribute to statewide professional development initiatives, we will participate in the process of aligning the URI early childhood curriculum to the new Workforce Knowledge and Competencies framework, we will welcome new early childhood students to the URI early childhood certification program, and we will continue to serve as mentors for the early childhood workforce. Faculty and staff of the Child Development Center will maintain the high level of participation, collaboration, and contribution to the work of the State's early childhood community. The Child Development Center professionals are excited about the opportunity to contribute to the work of the Early Learning Challenge.

I offer my enthusiastic support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge application. Rhode Island's Early Learning Plan set forth in this application will substantially increase the quality of early childhood care and education programs in Rhode Island, improve outcomes for Rhode Island's young children and their families, and advance student achievement in Rhode Island for many years to come.

Sincerely,



Susan D. G. Warford

Director

October 11, 2011

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in support of Rhode Island's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application. In my role as Assistant Professor of early childhood education and Faculty Advisor to the AA degree T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program at the Community College of Rhode Island; I am committed to the need for expanding access to higher education.

Section A-2 of the grant application highlights the fact that "the most important factor in quality early learning is having an effective educator in every setting every day." The goal to achieve this is also highlighted in Section A-2 which reads, "Expand provider access to higher education by expanding the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program to serve more early childhood educators seeking AA and BA degrees and by expanding the Community College of Rhode Island's Early Childhood Education Specialists program." I have had the opportunity to have T.E.A.C.H. scholarship students in my college classroom and know the benefits are invaluable. I support the expansion of T.E.A.C.H. to BA degree candidates as well. Many of my students continue their education upon completion of their AA degree. The opportunity for a BA scholarship would open doors for many students who would otherwise be unable to continue their education. I fully commit to being an integral component of the T.E.A.C.H. program and its connection to the Community College of Rhode Island.

Section A-2 of the application references two goals related to the state's Workforce Knowledge and Competencies. The first goal is to "Expand access to high-quality, effective professional development and increase the number of Early Childhood Educators with higher education credentials aligned with the state's Workforce Knowledge and Competencies." The second goal is to "Align higher education coursework and professional development opportunities to the Workforce Knowledge and Competencies." These goals are necessary and are an integral component of having an effective educator in every class. By meeting these two goals and aligning coursework, I will be able to coordinate and collaborate with faculty and the RI Department of Education to best meet the needs of the CCRI early childhood students who in turn will be Rhode Island's future early childhood educators. This coordinated effort will ensure that other people in the workforce will have the ability to move up a career lattice and receive higher education credits for training and education.

I thank you in advance for reading this letter of support and for your consideration in choosing Rhode Island to be a recipient of the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant.

Sincerely,

Carol A. Patnaude

Assistant Professor

Community College of Rhode Island

October 12, 2011

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Britni Dilorio and I am writing in support of Rhode Island's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant application.

The key area that I am very excited about in this grant is the expansion of the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program. Having worked as an assistant teacher and now a lead teacher in an early care and education center in North Kingstown, Rhode Island for the past 5 years, I have seen how the standard for qualifications in this field have increased. I began my education in the RI State Apprenticeship Program and received my Early Childhood Education Specialists certificate along with attaining my CDA at the Community College of RI. I am now an active participant in the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program continuing to take classes to earn my Associate's Degree in Early Childhood. If this program was not available to me, I would not be able to go forward in my goals of furthering my secondary education in this field. Many of us, who have chosen this career, absolutely need financial support and assistance to complete our education and this grant could make that happen. It is my goal as an early care and education teacher, to assist in moving the Early Learning and Development agenda forward by staying current in my education in this field. I will do this by implementing the skills that I am learning and providing high quality care and education for young children.

My absolute dream is to complete my bachelor's degree in Early Care and Education. The financial support that the Race to the Top grant could generate would help my dreams come to fruition. The agency that I work for will commit to support Rhode Island's reform strategies by strengthening and expanding on our staff's educational growth. Highly educated, specialized teachers provide better outcomes for young children's learning. I will be committed to help move this Early Learning and Development agenda forward by continuing on my path to further my education and to be an advocate for young children.

Sincerely,
Britni Dilorio

October 11, 2011

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in support of Rhode Island's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application. I am a student in the Early Childhood Education program at the Community College of Rhode Island and a recipient of the T.E.A.C.H Scholarship. This has been a great opportunity for me. I am a single parent of three children and this has helped me a great deal in being able to return to school to finish my degree in Early Childhood Education. Having this scholarship has made me work harder for my education and has also allowed me to work full-time. Without the help of this scholarship I don't think it would be possible for me to be able to go back to school and continue to do what I love.

In section A-2 of Rhode Island's Race to the Top application a goal is to "Expand provider access to higher education by expanding the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program to serve more early childhood educators seeking AA and BA degrees and by expanding the Community College of Rhode Island's Early Childhood Education Specialists program."

With this program I would be able to continue my education. I would receive my BA in Early Childhood Education and be able to not only educate young children to the best of my ability but also be able to support my children. I will be having one child going off to college in only a few years. This is a wonderful opportunity for all individuals whom enjoy working in the field of Early Childhood Education.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for reading this letter of support.

Sincerely,

Christine Miguel

October 11, 2011

To whom it may concern:

I am writing in support of Rhode Island's Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge application. I am a part-time student at the Community College of Rhode Island and a recipient of the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship. I currently work in a Head Start program as a Teacher Assistant, and was so excited to find out that I could receive funds to complete my education in Early Childhood Education. It is mandated that Teacher Assistants have an Associates Degree by 2013 in order to stay employed. Without this opportunity, I could not have taken the courses needed to get my degree, and I would have had to leave the agency. More importantly, throughout the state, any job for a Teacher Assistant requires an Associates Degree in Early Childhood Ed.

In today's economy, I would most definitely not be able to find any employment in my field, even though I have had over ten years experience. In section A-2 in Rhode Island's Race to the Top application, a goal is to expand provider access to higher education by expanding the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program to serve more early childhood educators seeking their AA and BA degrees and by expanding the Community College of Rhode Island's Early Childhood Education Specialist's program.

For me, being able to continue my education to earn a BA has always been my dream, with the only thing in my way is finding the funds to complete my education. This would allow me to not only fulfill my dream of being a Classroom Lead Teacher, but would also allow me to earn a higher income, and still stay where I have worked all these years. I feel this is the only job that has allowed me to make a difference in the lives of young children and their family.

I thank you for your considering the Rhode Island's Race to the Top application, and for taking the time to read this letter to fully appreciate the positive impact this program has had for me.

Sincerely,

Frances Pepin



John Bucci
Chairperson
Board of Directors

Joanne McGunagle
Executive Director

October 7, 2011

Ms. Deborah Gist
Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Commissioner, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903

Ms. Elizabeth Burke Bryant
Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Executive Director, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
One Union Station
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Bryant:

It is with great pleasure that I offer this letter of support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application.

As you know, Comprehensive Community Action (CCAP) has operated the Cranston Head Start Program for 206 children since its inception. We also have 20 children in Early Head Start. To complement Head Start, CCAP also operates a full day child care program for 60 children ages birth through five. Extended day care is also offered for the 226 Head Start children. In addition, CCAP has operated a certified full day kindergarten program from Cranston children. The majority of our children are low income with 21% of our children on TANF. Approximately 10% have a disability. Over 34% of our children consider English as a second language. Our child care programs have received the BrightStars certification. In addition, our child care programs are accredited under the Joint Commission.

High quality, accountable programming is key in delivering lasting outcomes in child care. CCAP looks forward to participating in a child care system that promotes new strategies including early learning, professional development, expanded screenings for children, and program improvement funding.

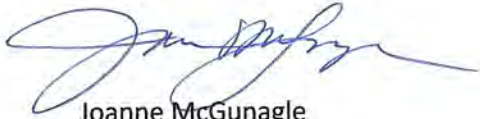
CCAP supports the key reform strategies in the Early Learning Challenge. As an agency we are currently participating in BrightStars. We continue to offer staff development opportunities to our teachers and child care staff to further their education and training in early childhood development/education. We have the ability to expand our services to more children with high needs including low income children, ESL, children with developmental disabilities, and children in the child welfare system. Currently duplication exists in so many areas. We would embrace one statewide child assessment system along with one Early Learning Data System.



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401.467.9610
Fax: 401.467.9030
www.comcap.org

Again, we wholeheartedly offer our support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge. We look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Joanne McGunagle', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Joanne McGunagle
Executive Director



C.H.I.L.D., Inc.



160 Draper Avenue, Warwick, R.I. 02889
(401) 732-5200

The Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary of Education

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary of Health and Human Services

October 12, 2011

Dear Secretaries Duncan and Sebelius:

It is with a great deal of enthusiasm and optimism that the CHILD, Inc. Board of Directors and Policy Council offer their unconditional support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge application.

As a Head Start and Early Head Start grantee, and provider of extended day child care to low-income families, CHILD, Inc. has actively participated in both the triumphs of state funded Head Start and Starting RIGHT legislation, as well as the painful dismantling of services to children during our recent economic crises. At no other time in our state's early care and education history have so many and varied stake holders mobilized in support of such an important opportunity!

It is particularly noteworthy that both the Head Start and greater child care communities were afforded considerable opportunity and indeed greatly influenced this final application. We are certain of Rhode Island's ability to fully meet the Early Learning Challenge and look forward to your favorable response.

Sincerely,

Lynda Dickinson
Chief Executive Officer



Children's FRIEND

Making a difference...
one child at a time.



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David Caprio

CONTACT

153 Summer Street
Providence, RI 02903

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childrenfriendri.org



October 11, 2011

Ms. Deborah Gist
Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Commissioner, RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903

Ms. Elizabeth Burke Bryant
Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Executive Director, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
One Union Station
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Ms. Gist and Ms. Bryant:

I am writing to express my strong support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application. Children's Friend is Rhode Island's first child-serving nonprofit agency, providing services for children and families in need for 177 years. We provide a range of services for Rhode Island's most vulnerable, and youngest, children. Our services include foster care, adoption, Early Intervention, Nurse Family Partnership, and a number of programs promoting maternal and child health, as well as family preservation. We are the largest provider of early childhood services in the state. Over 1300 children participate in our Head Start, Early Head Start, and child care programs. We have supported family child care providers for 30 years. Over 300 family child care providers are participating in our Child and Adult Care Food Program, and are receiving support for providing nutritious meals to children in their care, as well as training and support from our bilingual staff.

We are excited about Rhode Island's application for Race to the Top funding. We have long been an advocate of the need to improve the quality of Rhode Island's early childhood programs, and feel that the proposed approach is multi-faceted and addresses the components necessary to ensure that Rhode Island is a leader in providing high quality early education. Our children will reap the benefits with improved outcomes not only when they enter school, but throughout their life journey.

We are committed to support the implementation of the Early Learning Challenge strategies. This includes ensuring that our Head Start and child care sites receive BrightStars ratings, and working towards achieving the highest rating available. Access to professional development opportunities,



Making a difference... one child at a time.

and particularly expanded opportunities for higher education, will help our workforce meet those standards that are known to result in high quality early learning programs. Our work with family child care homes can be helpful as additional supports and services become available for this population of early care providers. We will continue to be a partner in advocating for the provision of high quality early care and education programs for our most at-risk young children.

Children's Friend wishes Rhode Island success in this funding request, and looks forward to our continued partnership in working towards improving outcomes for Rhode Island's most vulnerable children.

Sincerely,

David Caprio
President and Chief Executive Officer



east bay community action program
THE BRIDGE to SELF-RELIANCE

DENNIS ROY
Chief Executive Officer

HEAD START, EARLY
HEAD START & CHILD CARE

Joel Peckham School
654 Green End Avenue
Middletown, RI 02842
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October 11, 2011

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255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903

Elizabeth Burke Bryant
Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Executive Director, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
One Union Station
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Bryant:

I am writing to express my agency's strong support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application.

For over four decades, East Bay Community Action Program (EBCAP) Head Start has provided comprehensive child development services to families living in Newport County, Warren, Bristol, Barrington, and East Providence, Rhode Island. We serve 468 high risk children from birth to age five and their families annually, with the goal of enhancing their cognitive, social and physical development in order to prepare them to enter kindergarten ready to learn and succeed. Our comprehensive services include developmentally appropriate pre-school programs, child care, health, nutrition and mental health services, and family engagement activities that support school readiness. We have a long history of cooperation and collaboration with other early learning agencies, and we are gratified that these relationships have been formalized through the Rhode Island Early Learning Council and its subcommittees.

Rhode Island has shown great leadership in the development of its early learning infrastructure with the design and implementation of a quality rating system and the newly revised Early Learning Standards. Over the past two years, EBCAP Head Start has responded by committing to the use of Teaching Strategies GOLD as our child assessment system, providing staff and administrator training in the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards, and preparing for participation in the

BrightStars quality rating system as part of our ongoing efforts to improve the quality of our early learning program.

I am very excited by the prospect of building a comprehensive and seamlessly aligned early learning and development system that will increase the quality of all of the state's early learning programs, and pledge my full support to and participation in this vitally important project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara Schermack". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'B' and a long, sweeping underline.

Barbara Schermack
Head Start Director



Meeting Street

October 12, 2011

Deborah Gist, Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Commissioner, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Executive Director, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
One Union Station
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Bryant:

Meeting Street, a leading provider of services for young children since 1946, is pleased to support Rhode Island's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application.

As you may know, Meeting Street is Rhode Island's largest and oldest provider of Early Intervention services, having provided these services since the 1970s. In fact, Meeting Street helped write the federal legislation that transformed Early Intervention into a federally mandated program. Meeting Street is also a provider of Early Head Start services in Providence and operates a Bright Stars and NAEYC accredited early learning center. In fact, Meeting Street was the first fully inclusive early learning center to earn national accreditation from NAEYC. In all, nearly 80% of the 3,000 children we serve annually are under the age of six. As such, we are fully invested in and committed to preparing each child we work with to enter school healthy and ready to learn.

Meeting Street representatives have attended Early Learning Council meetings and provided input in the development of this application. As such, we are excited by the prospects of developing a unified licensing/accrediting system for child care providers, early learning standards for infants and toddlers, and a comprehensive workforce development effort, all of which will support our work with high need and high risk children. Standardizing assessment tools and expanding developmental screenings, combined with an integrated and longitudinal data system, will enable all of us working with young children to document, celebrate, and promote our success.

Meeting Street will continue to commit staff time to serve on grant-related committees as well as offer itself as a pilot demonstration site for the State to test new models and strategies to helping our most vulnerable and at risk children succeed.

I look forward to working with you on this important initiative and wish you success with this application.

Sincerely,



John M. Kelly
President



South County
Community Action Agency
Helping people. Changing lives.

Joseph R. DeSantis
Chief Executive Officer

**Serving the
Towns of:**
Charlestown
Exeter
Hopkinton
Narragansett
New Shoreham
North Kingstown
Richmond
South Kingstown
Westerly
West Greenwich

October 12, 2011

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Elizabeth Burke Bryant
Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Executive Director, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
One Union Station
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms Bryant:

I am writing to express my strong and enthusiastic support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application.

South County Community Action Agency provides Head Start services to 152 low-income children and their families residing in the towns of Charlestown, Exeter, Hopkinton, Narragansett, New Shoreham, North Kingstown, Richmond, South Kingstown and Westerly. Head Start provides comprehensive educational, special education, health, nutrition and social services to the families enrolled in the program. Ten percent of the Head Start enrollment is comprised of children with diagnosed disabilities. Enrollment criteria for the Head Start program includes categorical eligibility for children involved in the state foster care system as well as children whose families are experiencing homelessness. The Head Start program at South County maintains a commitment to excellence as evidenced in the four locations that are licensed by the RI Dept. of Children, Youth and Families as well as the RI Dept. of Education. The program follows the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards.

South County Community Action Agency also operates a quality child care program – Joyful Learning Child Academy providing up to 82 child care slots. The center is open year round, provides care to infants and children from 6 weeks to 5 years and accepts DHS reimbursement payments. JLCA is also licensed by DCYF and RIDE and follows the Rhode Island Early Learning Standard.

South County Community Action Agency is committed to supporting the implementation of the Early Learning Challenge strategies by participating in the Bright Stars quality rating and improvement system; striving for the Rhode Island Department of Education preschool program approval; advocating for increased access to high quality Early Learning and Development programs for Rhode Island's children with high needs; supporting the statewide use of a statewide assessment system in Teaching Strategies GOLD; taking full advantage of the professional development opportunities offered, and by using a shared Early Learning Data System when it becomes available.

We wholeheartedly support The Race to the Top Application by the Rhode Island Department of Education which promises to bring educational excellence to our State. If I may be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Joseph R. DeSantis
Chief Executive Officer



Tri-Town Community Action Agency

Helping people. Changing lives.

October 12, 2011

Joseph R. DeSantis
Chief Executive Officer

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Deborah Gist
Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Commissioner, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903

Elizabeth Burke Bryant
Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Executive Director, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
One Union Station
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Bryant:

I am writing to express my strong and enthusiastic support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application.

Tri-Town Community Action Agency provides Head Start services to 205 low-income children and their families residing in the towns of North Providence, Johnston, Smithfield, North Smithfield, Scituate, Burrillville, Foster and Glocester. Head Start provides comprehensive educational, special education, health, nutrition and social services to the families enrolled in the program. Ten percent of the Head Start enrollment is comprised of children with diagnosed disabilities. Enrollment criteria for the Head Start program includes categorical eligibility for children involved in the state foster care system as well as children whose families are experiencing homelessness. The Head Start program at Tri-Town maintains a commitment to excellence as evidenced in the four locations that are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The program follows the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards. Tri-Town has implemented a standardized best-practice curriculum (Opening the World of Learning) and assessment system (Teaching Strategies GOLD) that is used to promote optimal high quality early childhood educational teaching strategies.

Tri-Town Community Action Agency is committed to supporting the implementation of the Early Learning Challenge strategies by participating in the Bright Stars quality rating and improvement system; striving for the Rhode Island Department of Education preschool program approval; advocating for increased access to high quality Early Learning and Development programs for Rhode Island's children with high needs; supporting the statewide use of a statewide assessment system in Teaching Strategies GOLD; taking full advantage of the professional development opportunities offered, and by using a shared Early Learning Data System when it becomes available.

We wholeheartedly support The Race to the Top Application by the Rhode Island Department of Education which promises to bring educational excellence to our State. If I may be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Joseph R. DeSantis
Chief Executive Officer
Tri-Town Community Action Agency



WOONSOCKET HEAD START CHILD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION, INC.

204 WARWICK STREET
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October 12, 2011

Deborah Gist
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Commissioner, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903

Elizabeth Burke Bryant
Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
Executive Director, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
One Union Station
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Bryant:

I am writing to express my strong support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application. As the Executive Director of the Woonsocket Head Start Child Development Association Inc., the success of this challenge application is extremely important to me since it focuses on increasing the quality of early learning and development programs for children with high needs.

As professionals in the early childhood field, my colleagues and I feel strongly that now is the time to increase awareness of the rising population of early childhood families in need. We know firsthand that quality education and comprehensive services do make a difference in shaping the lives of children. Testimonials from some of our board members, such as the father of a former head start child who has achieved his PHD, and the mother who was a former head start participant who is now a professor at a local college, give proof to this fact.

In addition, although our Head Start families are the neediest of the needy today, they continue to be a part of making a change for the better. How empowering! Every day they play an integral part in determining our policies, volunteer in the classrooms, and constantly strive to support our goal of increasing the level of education and care for their children.



Tomorrow
Better
A
For
Today
Building



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In fact, over the last few years, our Policy Council played a key role in supporting our pursuit of Bright Stars, NAEYC accreditation and Rhode Island Department of Education approval for all 4 of our Head Start/Child Care Program Centers. This has enhanced our services and created the opportunity to better serve our expanding population of children who may have developmental delays, are dual language learners or homeless.

The Woonsocket Head Start Child Development Association is committed to continuing on our journey of advocating for young children by expanding our services, increasing the education of our teachers, using a statewide common assessment system, and fully implementing the new early learning standards in all of our classrooms.

With this said, we know we cannot do it alone, It is only through partnership, collaboration and a shared vision that our state will break down the barriers that these dire economic times have brought. Today, more than ever, it is our duty to educate and support young children and families in our neediest communities. The Race to the Top Challenge provides the perfect opportunity to build a seamless educational process for our youngest learners as they move from early childhood education into our elementary schools.

Sincerely,

Mary Varr

Executive Director

Woonsocket Head Start Child Development Association, Inc.



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