



Child's Play

Toddler, Nursery & Preschool

October 11, 2011

Commissioner Deborah Gist, RI Dept of Education
Elizabeth Burke Bryant, RI Kids Count
Co-Chairs, Rhode Island Early Learning Council

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Burke Bryant:

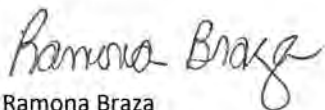
On behalf of Child's Play I am writing to express our strong support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge application.

Child's Play, a parent cooperative in the city of Providence, has been committed to quality early childhood education since our founding in 1979. We have blazed the trail for other cooperatives and programs for very young children. We have been NAEYC accredited since 2001 and are currently undergoing our second re-accreditation. We are also a BrightStars program currently holding a 4 star rating and anticipate earning our 5 star rating this year. We continually strive to challenge ourselves to the highest levels to be a model for others. We work closely with a variety of community people – we provide practicum placement URI students, act as mentors for MET school students, provide community service placement for local high school students and welcome visits from other early childhood programs. As a parent cooperative we are deeply committed to the family school connection. Our goal is always to provide the highest quality to our families.

We know that much has been done to improve the field of early childhood education over the past several years. However, we are also aware that much more is needed in order for programs to reach their full potential providing children and families with the quality they deserve. Funding is desperately needed for both individual and program quality improvement and we need more resources, higher level professional development, a better system to deliver a coordinated approach to quality, credentialing, assessment, licensing and approval. The Early Learning Challenge Fund would allow our state to improve several facets of our early childhood system that will directly benefit all children and families.

Child's Play is committed to continue its strive for excellence and challenging ourselves and other programs to be the best they can be; and we pledge our support to insure that our state meets or exceeds its ambitious goals. We will continue to implement quality strategies in our program and to work with others in the field to insure that our state meets or exceeds its ambitious goals.

Sincerely,



Ramona Braza
Head Teacher

c/o Central Congregational Church ♦ 296 Angell Street ♦ Providence, Rhode Island 02906
(401)331-8443 ♦ www.childsplayri.org



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TEL 401-421-4722
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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:

Federal Hill House Association is pleased to write this letter in support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application.

Federal Hill House Association (FHHA) is a culturally sensitive, socially responsible nonprofit agency that is at the heart of community life and plays a significant role in strengthening and sustaining communities. FHHA's client population live at or below poverty level and present with significant additional risk factors including low educational levels, limited English proficiency, and poor nutrition.

For over 100 years, FHHA has been committed to preparing its students to excel as young leaders of tomorrow. In 2008, FHHA initiated key improvements to its Early Learning Center and as a direct result of this work, in 2010, was awarded a 4-star rating for its programs through the State-recognized BrightStar rating system. To build on these accomplishments, in September 2011 FHHA introduced the State's first tri-lingual immersion Language Learning Curriculum, *Speak to Succeed*, in its Early Learning Center.

After 2 years of increasing staff credentials, staff expectations, and implementing a rigorous professional development program, our Early Learning Center continues to be the highest rating of all multi-service community centers in Rhode Island.

While FHHA recognizes the importance of creating high quality learning environments and believes investing in our City's youngest and most vulnerable children is the key to future success, the costs of maintaining high quality program comes at a premium -- often prohibiting centers from engaging in increasing their quality of service.

As a partnering member of the Providence Neighborhood Community Center Association (PNCCA), a nonprofit coalition comprised on 9 community centers strategically located in Providence's challenging neighborhoods, FHHA continues to encourage other centers to raise the standard of quality and professional expectation in their respective Early Learning Centers. With the capacity to serve over 500 high risk children below the age of 6 years, PNCCA has the ability to demonstrate how high quality early learning services could narrow the achievement gap for children living in poverty. However, the costs of creating and maintaining high quality programs have prevented many of the PNCCA partners to apply for the BrightStars quality rating system.

The Early Learning Challenge Grant would make it possible for our State to transform our Early Learning system and support the growth and development of high quality programs. FHHA looks forward to helping change the way we invest in Early Learning services and stands ready to receive/provide support and guidance in building high quality programs. We are excited to partner with Rhode Island Department of Education, KIDSCOUNT and BrightStars and commit to the following:

- ✓ FHHA will continue its participation in the BrightStars program and will work to improve our program until we achieve a 5-star rating;
- ✓ FHHA is poised to expand its Early Learning program and continue serving children with significant risk factors including poverty, low educational levels, limited English proficiency, and poor nutrition;
- ✓ FHHA is committed to working with the PNCCA members and support them in creating a high quality system of Early Learning Services for vulnerable children living in Providence, Rhode Island;
- ✓ FHHA is committed to creating, adopting and implementing the new State Early Learning Standards and share professional resources for others to adopt and implement the new standards;
- ✓ FHHA enthusiastically supports professional development of its staff and will accommodate staff needs to ensure their completion of higher education;
- ✓ FHHA is committed to using a common statewide child assessment system and welcomes any professional support around its implementation.

Federal Hill House Association enthusiastically supports the Rhode Island Department of Education's application for Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant. We look forward to working with you and other community leaders in making Rhode Island's Early Learning Education system a model for preparing all of our children for life success.

Sincerely,



Nina Pande
Executive Director



Heritage Park YMCA

333 Roosevelt Avenue
Pawtucket, RI 02860

telephone 401/727-7050
fax 401/727-7757

October 11, 2011

Commissioner Deborah Gist, RI Department of Education
Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director, RI Kids Count
Co-Chairs, Rhode Island Early Learning Council

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Burke Bryant,

On behalf of the children and staff of the Heritage Park YMCA, a branch of the YMCA of Pawtucket, I am pleased to write this letter of support to Rhode Island's Race to the Top, Early Learning Challenge grant proposal.

The Heritage Park YMCA serves the families of Pawtucket and Central Falls in programs that provide the early learning needs of infants, toddlers and preschoolers. Most of our families live below the Federal Poverty Level and all of our families receive financial support. At the same time our community is very diverse hosting many languages and cultures from five continents. To support the many learning needs of our children and families, Heritage Park has participated in various programs and collaborations since its inception in 1999. These partnerships have brought professional development to its staff and high quality programming to more than 200 hundred children a week. The Heritage Park YMCA is one of only three center programs in Pawtucket that is actively participating in the BrightStars QRIS, Rhode Island's quality rating system. Along with a partnership with Ready to Learn Providence, we have demonstrated how crucial early learning is for young children and how important professional development is for the staff, who as members of the local community, also struggle to find assessable higher education programs. The parents of the children that we serve have also seen how important a high quality program has been for their children.

Along with many of our colleagues, we know that the potential benefit of this challenge grant is enormous. The goal of developing infant and toddler standards and strengthening standards for preschoolers will ensure that children will enter Kindergarten ready to learn. And for children growing up in impoverished communities, it will mean a chance for an education that will see those children finish high school. The grant's goal of supporting the professional development of staff who are eager to learn and have not had the financial means and/or programs that have been aligned with their needs will reflect positively on the early childhood community as a whole. The other goals that outline alignment of early learning outcomes for all young children as well as statewide formative assessment can only move the field of early childhood forward.

The children, parents and staff of the Heritage Park YMCA truly hope that Rhode Island is successful in its Early Learning Challenge Grant proposal. It will provide much needed support to the early childhood community.

Sincerely,

Sharon Friedman
Executive Director



**FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

JOHN HOPE SETTLEMENT HOUSE

7 THOMAS P. WHITTEN WAY, PROVIDENCE, RI 02903-4046 TELEPHONE: (401) 421-6993-4-5 FAX: (401) 454-5619

"The Pulse of the Neighborhood"

October 12, 2011

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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 support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top-
Early Learning Challenge application.

The Jo-Ann Caffey McDowell Early Learning Center at John Hope Settlement
House is an early care and education program located in the West End of
Providence. We serve up to 94 students from ages eighteen months to
kindergarten. Our student population primarily consists of children of color with
low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Our center was created over 40 years ago to offer affordable child care for
working parents. Since then, we have worked diligently to provide a safe, healthy,
and educational environment for our children and families. Our teachers

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participate in professional development throughout the year, and many are working toward goals of higher education. We are concerned about the achievement gap that our students face and are working to close this gap by providing a curriculum rich in language and vocabulary.

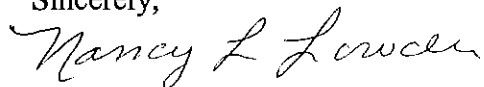
We believe that the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge is an exciting opportunity. Our teachers and colleagues have known that early childhood education is more than just babysitting and have been dedicated to ensure that our students are being challenged academically, socially, and physically. This grant would help us achieve our goal of making certain that each child is ready to enter school with an advantage.

The Jo-Ann Caffey McDowell Early Learning Center at John Hope Settlement House is committed to:

- Participating in BrightStars to ensure that we are continually improving our program
- Ensuring that our students and families with high needs have access to programs and services that will support their child's learning
- Accessing new higher education opportunities
- Using a common, statewide child assessment system

We look forward to this exciting opportunity.

Sincerely,



Nancy Lowder

Director

Jo-Ann Caffey McDowell Early Learning Center

John Hope Settlement House



a learning community for children and their families

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:

As Director of the Mariposa Center, an innovative not for profit organization dedicated to creating high quality early learning experiences for young children and families in Providence and as a RI Early Learning Council member, I am writing to express my strong support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge application. Since 2007, The Mariposa Center has been an active contributor to Rhode Island's goals toward creating high quality early learning experiences for infants, toddlers and preschoolers. We engage Providence families in infant toddler parenting groups, develop and implement after school literacy programs in South Providence, and were honored to be one of seven high quality PreK classrooms in Rhode Island's PreK Demonstration Project. This year Mariposa continues to pursue its mission of creating innovative high quality early learning experiences for young children and their families as one of the first publically funded RIDE PreKindergarten Program classrooms. All of our work is focused on ensuring a generation of Providence children enter school ready to learn – knowing the joy of discovery, the warmth of a nourishing environment, and the confidence of their own creativity.

I have been working within Rhode Island's early care and learning field for many years involved in early intervention, early childhood special education, early care and education and in higher education. Over this time, I have been part of Rhode Island's long history of early childhood quality initiatives and projects devoted to improving early learning outcomes for infants, toddlers and preschoolers. I know birth to age five are critical years for children, a key time for developing important cognitive, language and socio-emotional skills that help lay the foundation for success in school.



a learning community for children and their families

For this reason, one of the goals of the Rhode Island strategic plan for transforming education is to “improve the quality and accessibility of early learning programs” across the state, and I believe that Race to the Top Challenge Funds will help Rhode Island move rapidly toward meeting that vital goal.

Please be assured that the Mariposa Center stands ready to support the implementation of the Early Learning Challenge reform strategies. Our organization, staff, and board of directors is ready to advocate for Rhode Island’s Children with High Needs and inform our larger Rhode Island community of the work we can all do to support brighter futures for every young child in our state. I am also eager to continue my work as an Early Learning Council member and Kindergarten Assessment work group member directly supporting and participating in building our Kindergarten Entry Assessment system.

On behalf of the Mariposa Center staff and board, I offer our 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 school readiness of Rhode Island’s young children and will advance student achievement in Rhode Island for many years to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristen Greene". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dr. Kristen Greene

Director of the Mariposa Center



Child Development Center

Commissioner Deborah Gist
Elizabeth Burke Bryant
Co-Chairs, RI Early Learning Council
255 Westminister Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Burke Bryant,

Pawtucket Day Child Development Center is pleased to provide this letter of support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top Early Childhood Challenge proposal.

As a center that serves primarily high-need children and families, we are excited by the opportunities for high quality professional development and increased access to higher education that would be afforded to our staff should this proposal be funded. While we are committed to providing high quality care and education to the children in our program, our current limited resources make it challenging for us to achieve higher ratings in BrightStars, the state's quality rating and improvement system.

Pawtucket Day has recently submitted the application packet to BrightStars. Our program would like to be able to provide professional development tuition assistance to our teaching staff, however our budget is currently being stretched thin.

There are many new quality initiatives in place in RI, and our center is eager to participate and create centers of early learning excellence. But we need resources. The Early Learning Challenge is a wonderful opportunity to support centers so that they can ensure that children are ready to enter school with all of the skills that they need to be successful.

Sincerely,

Evelyn St. George, October 11, 2011

Evelyn St. George

Acting Director / Education Coordinator

PERSPECTIVES
CORPORATION



Rhode Island Department of Education

Att. Deborah Gist, Commissioner

255 Westminster Street

Shepard Building

Providence, RI 02903

1130 Ten Rod Road
Building B · Suite 101
North Kingstown, RI 02852

Rhode Island Kids Count

Elizabeth Burke Bryant JD, Executive Director

TEL: 401-294-3990
FAX: 401-294-9879

One Union Station

Providence RI 02903

October 10, 2011

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms Bryant,

I am writing this letter to express my support for the attached *Rhode Island's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application*. This federal grant program will provide much needed assistance which will enable the state of Rhode Island to build more efficient and effective early learning systems for young children.

As the president of Perspectives Corporation, I am committed to supporting the tenets of this grant. I have been a resident and business owner in RI for over 35 years. Perspectives Corporation serves adults and children with developmental disabilities and autism spectrum disorders throughout the state and employs over 800 people. As one of the largest human service providers in Rhode Island, we recognize the need for a highly trained, specialized work force. We understand that the ability to hire and retain outstanding employees begins with a strong foundation built in the early childhood years. Elizabeth Burke Bryant has stated it so well "Our state's economic future depends on high quality education and it begins with high quality early learning and development opportunities for young children." (Providence Journal10/5/11)

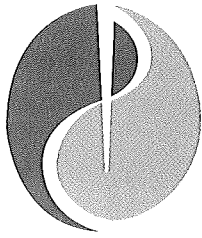
It is my understanding that with awarding of this grant, programs will be developed and enhanced that will serve children with high needs and better prepare them for school success. We applaud the efforts of the Rhode Island Early Learning Council and wish them continued success in all their endeavors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David C. Ruppell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'D' and 'R'.

David C. Ruppell, CEO and President

Perspectives Corporation



The
Providence
Center

October 12, 2011

Mental health
and substance
use care and
treatment services
for adults, children,
adolescents
and families

Commissioner Deborah Gist, RI Department of Education &
Elizabeth Burke Bryant, RI Kids Count
Co-Chairs, Rhode Island Early Learning Council
c/o RI Department of Education
255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Burke Bryant:

On behalf of The Providence Center and Imagine Preschool I am pleased to offer my support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund application. As a member of the Successful Start Steering Committee I am convinced that the state's plan will transform the early childhood landscape in our state.

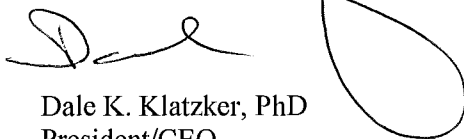
Since The Providence Center launched Imagine Preschool in 2007, we have been committed to providing our students with a comprehensive learning experience. Imagine is one of the highest rated pre-schools in the state, with a level 4 Bright Stars rating and has not only allowed young children to take their first steps in the education process within a supportive, high quality environment but it has also served as a training program for future teachers.

The Early Learning Challenge Fund would allow our state to extend the benefits of quality early childhood education to a wider audience. The benefits of quality pre-kindergarten programs are both well documented and long-lasting. They include:

- Increased high school graduation rates
- Improved results on standardized tests
- Reduced grade repetition
- Reduced criminal justice involvement and teen pregnancy rates later in life
- Higher rates of employment and compensation as adults

The Providence Center Imagine Preschool supports the Early Learning Challenge Fund application and is excited to support the state in moving the early childhood community toward a high quality approach to early childhood education.

Sincerely,



Dale K. Klatzker, PhD
President/CEO

Roger Williams Day Care Center

P.O. Box 2089
64 Applegate Lane
Providence, RI 02905
Tel: 785-9330 • Fax: 785-0027

October 7, 2011

Commissioner Deborah Gist
Elizabeth Burke Bryant
Co-Chairs, RI Early Learning Council
255 Westminster St.
Providence, RI 02903

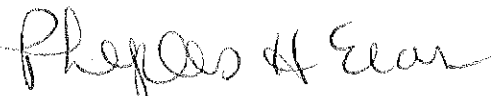
Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Burke Bryant:

Roger Williams Day Care Center is pleased to provide this letter of support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top Early Childhood Challenge proposal.

As a center that serves primarily high-need children and families, we are excited by the opportunities for high quality professional development and increased access to higher education that would be afforded to our staff should this proposal be funded. While we are committed to providing high quality care and education to the children in our program, our current limited resources make it challenging for us to participate in BrightStars and to achieve the higher ratings of the state's quality rating and improvement system.

There are many new quality initiatives in place in Rhode Island, and our center is eager to participate and create a center of early learning excellence. However, we need resources. The Early Learning Challenge is a wonderful opportunity to support centers so that they can ensure that children are ready to enter school with all of the skills that they need to be successful.

Sincerely,



Phyllis H. Evans
Executive Director



October 7, 2011

Commissioner Deborah Gist
Elizabeth Burke Bryant
Co-Chairs, RI Early Learning Council
255 Westminster St.
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Burke Bryant:

Smith Hill Early Childhood Learning Center is pleased to provide this letter of support for Rhode Island's Race to the Top Early Childhood Challenge proposal.

As a center that serves primarily high-need children and families, we are excited by the opportunities for high quality professional development and increased access to higher education that would be afforded to our staff should this proposal be funded. While we are committed to providing high quality care and education to the children in our program, our current limited resources make it challenging for us to achieve higher ratings in BrightStars, the state's quality rating and improvement system.

All my staff is committed to providing high quality care and education and is striving to continue their educational pursuits. However with limited resources this goal is often difficult to achieve. We are all working to increase our rating in BrightStars and therefore increase our quality but this is proving even more difficult in today's economy. We are extremely excited by the prospect that increased access to professional development and education could be a reality if this proposal is funded. We want to provide the children and families we serve with the highest quality of education that will give them the foundation that will best allow them to be successful in the future educational endeavors.

There are many new quality initiatives in place in Rhode Island, and our center is eager to participate and create centers of early learning excellence. But we need resources. The Early Learning Challenge is a wonderful opportunity to support centers so that they can ensure that children are ready to enter school with all of the skills that they need to be successful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Debbie Durant".

Debbie Durant
Director

Smith Hill Center:
▪ Emergency Services
▪ Casework Services
▪ Before/After School Program
▪ Summer Enrichment Program
110 Ruggles Street
Providence, RI 02908
401-455-3880

Smith Hill Early Childhood Learning Center
25 Danforth Street
Providence, RI 02908
401-455-3890

Lillian Feinstein Senior Center
1085 Chalkstone Avenue
Providence, RI 02908
455-3888



Westbay Community Action
Helping People, Changing Lives

October 7, 2011

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

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

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Bryant:

As a member of Rhode Island's Early Learning Council and the director of an early learning center, I am happy to submit this letter of support for R.I.'s Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant. The process around which this grant was written was exemplary; inclusive of key stakeholders in the R.I. early learning community and open for public review and comment. Helping to shape the future development of quality early learning opportunities for our state has created a sense of excitement for the possibilities our Challenge Grant holds for R.I.'s children.

Westbay Children's Center is a quality early learning program serving children whose families struggle daily trying to manage everyday life. Our mission of supporting them and their young children has led us to provide the very best early care and education services we can. We have participated in all the state quality initiatives and are proud of the success we have achieved. This Early Learning Challenge Grant however, will dramatically improve many areas of our state's early learning system and will assist many more programs in our state to achieve and maintain quality for all children in R.I.

Jeanne M. Gattegno
President/CEO

Administrative Offices
Westbay Food Services
Westbay Housing Division
224 Buttonwoods Ave
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www.westbaycap.org
info@westbaycap.org

Elder & Family Services
205 Buttonwoods Ave
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TDD: 401 738 8673

Westbay Children's Services
Kids Connect
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401 463 6620
Fax: 463 0107

Westbay Working Wardrobe
212 Buttonwoods Ave
Warwick, RI 02886
401 737 6334
Fax: 737 2051

Westbay Adult Education Academy
RSVP
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401 732-4666 x 120
RSVP x 154
Fax for both offices: 737 2051

Westbay Kidz Kioset
210 Buttonwoods Ave
Warwick, RI 02886
401 732 7870
Fax: 732 6965

Many of us have read and commented on the drafts of this application. I am proud to have personally participated in developing the concepts around which this grant was written. It is an excellent, comprehensive plan that will support many early care and education providers – both center based and family home care providers. It will assist us in supporting and advancing the education of our workforce and the monitoring system of all programs statewide. Perhaps most exciting is the development of a statewide data system which will allow us to track child outcomes and trends in our workforce development.

R.I. is fortunate to have many leaders who are committed to enhancing the quality of our early care and education system. Together, we have work hard and long over the years to create the system we have in place and are very cognizant of the gaps and strides we still need to make. We all stand ready to move the concepts within this application into reality when our application is funded. This Challenge grant will allow us to enhance the quality and the infrastructure of our system which will directly benefit the children and families of our great state.

Sincerely,



Maryann Finamore-Allmark
Director
Westbay Children's Services

Jeanne M. Gattegno
President/CEO

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October 7, 2011

Deborah Gist
Commissioner, RI Department of Education
Co-Chair, Rhode Island Early Learning Council

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

Dear Commissioner Gist and Ms. Bryant:

Westbay Community Action is please to write this letter in support of Rhode Island's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant application. Our agency is a strong supporter of the quality early learning initiatives that are taking place in our state and is proud of the quality benchmarks our early learning program has achieved to date. Our Children's Center is a United Way funded program, a four-star RI Bright Stars program (our state's QRIS) and has received state Department of Education funding to operate a pre-kindergarten demonstration classroom.

There is still work to be done in our state in delivering the very best education and care for our youngest and most vulnerable children. As a Community Action agency, we see first hand the need in our community and in our state and are proud to add our name in support of this opportunity. This Challenge grant will allow our state to continue the fine work we have started and help support early learning programs reach the quality standards our children deserve.

Sincerely,



Jeanne M. Gattegno
President/CEO

Jeanne M. Gattegno
President/CEO

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Warwick, RI 02886
401 732-4666 x 120
RSVP x 154
Fax for both offices: 737 2051

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