



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

Embargoed for Release until 12:01 a.m., Thursday, April 15, 2010

Contact: Raymonde Charles, Communications Coordinator
(401) 351-9400, Ext. 22

***New Report Highlights the
Quality of Child Care Centers and Preschools in Rhode Island***

Study conducted by a national research institute documents the range of quality among child care centers and preschools serving Rhode Island infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

PROVIDENCE, RI, April 15, 2010 – More than 50 community leaders gathered to celebrate the national Week of the Young Child, an annual event designed to focus public attention on young children and their families and to recognize quality early childhood programs. A policy roundtable was held on **Thursday, April 15, 2010 from 12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m. at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT**, One Union Station, Providence, RI. The roundtable featured the release of a study of early childhood program quality in Rhode Island. The *Rhode Island Child Care and Preschool Quality Study* was conducted by the nationally-recognized FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children and Rhode Island KIDS COUNT sponsored the event.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, opened the meeting by stating, “The Week of the Young Child is a time to focus on the fact that it is during the early years that the child’s developing brain is being built. It is a time to recognize that early experiences – beginning at birth and continuing through the preschool years – determine whether a child’s brain architecture will provide a strong or a weak foundation for all future learning, behavior and health. It is a time to recommit ourselves to the goal that each and every child will have the benefit of early experiences that promote their healthy development and learning.”

Kelly Maxwell, Ph.D., Associate Director of the FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and primary author of the report, presented the study findings including data from classroom observations in 50 randomly selected preschool classrooms and 50 randomly selected infant/toddler classrooms in Rhode Island licensed child care centers and preschools.

Maxwell stated, "Rhode Island is to be commended for seeking to understand the quality of child care and early learning programs that are serving children. It is important to understand the current level of quality so you can design and implement effective strategies to improve programs for young children. The Rhode Island findings follow a pattern we have seen in other states: few programs are providing the highest level of quality, which means that most programs need additional support (including professional development) to provide the level of quality needed to promote child development and learning. Like other states, the quality of care for infants and toddlers in Rhode Island is lower than that for preschoolers. Knowing the importance of early brain development, it is particularly important to strengthen infant/toddler care."

Data from the *Rhode Island Child Care Center and Preschool Quality Study*, based on observed classroom quality using standardized rating tools, indicate that 86% of classrooms serving preschool-age children (ages 3 to 5) and 74% of classrooms serving infants and toddlers (children ages birth to 3) were providing "medium quality" care. According to the report, "medium" quality is generally characterized by a fundamentally safe environment with access to good quality materials, although activities and interactions could be more enriching and purposeful to support children's development and learning. Only 10% of preschool classrooms and 6% of infant-toddler classrooms were providing "high quality" programs that would be expected to improve child development and promote early learning. Another 4% of preschool classrooms and 20% of infant-toddler classrooms were found to be providing "low quality" care which may have a negative impact on child development and learning.

The study provides a critical base of information for BrightStars, the state's new Quality Rating and Improvement System for child care and early learning programs. Tammy Camillo, Director of the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children and BrightStars, stated, "The release of the *Rhode Island Child Care Center and Preschool Quality Study* tells us that most Rhode Island children in licensed, center-based settings are receiving safe, adequate care. However, there is work to be done to ensure that all children receive the high-quality programming and early experiences that set the foundation for all future learning. Today we know more than ever before about the importance of children's earliest years. When we start children on a strong trajectory, we build a solid foundation for them and our state's future." She acknowledged the partnership with Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and government and private funders including the United Way of Rhode Island, CVS Caremark Charitable Trust, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, the Rhode Island Foundation and the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, in bringing in a nationally-recognized research institute to help lay the ground work for BrightStars implementation and to better understand the current quality of programs.

The report released today notes that there is room for improvement in the quality of center-based care and education for young children in Rhode Island. Anna Cano-Morales, Associate Vice President at The Rhode Island Foundation which funded the study, explained, “The Rhode Island Foundation enthusiastically supported this study because the research that early learning experiences matter is indisputable. As a state, we now have the information that can support data-driven change and that enables us to target improvement efforts where they are most needed and will do the most good.”

Key recommendations from the report include:

- Quality of center-based care and education in Rhode Island could be improved by **expanding efforts to move programs from “medium quality” to “high quality”**. Moving programs from medium to high quality requires focused strategies that help programs provide more purposeful, enriching and engaging activities for children and enhance teacher-child interactions so that they better support learning.
- **Strengthening the quality of care for infants and toddlers** is important so that the youngest children in Rhode Island have the high quality care and education needed to support positive development and later school success.
- **Continued education and professional development are key strategies** for improving the quality of early care and learning in Rhode Island. Moving program to higher levels of quality will require a broad array of strategies including access to higher education and professional development opportunities tailored to particular needs. Research suggests that effective professional development is focused on specific content, actively engages participants, and is of sufficient duration.
- **Multiple strategies are necessary** to support and sustain high quality early care and learning programs in Rhode Island. Strategies to strengthen the quality of center-based care may include **continued education and professional development for teachers and administrators, on-site technical assistance, teacher compensation initiatives, and program incentives for quality improvement**.
- Rhode Island leaders should **use BrightStars as an overarching quality framework** to organize and align various aspects of the early childhood education system, including professional development.

Anthony Maione, President and CEO of United Way of Rhode Island and a primary sponsor of BrightStars, stated, “The research clearly indicates that quality rating systems can have a major impact on program quality and on child outcomes. Our investment in BrightStars, which is made possible by the CVS Caremark Charitable Trust, demonstrates our commitment to high-quality standards and measurable results. Rhode Island is a national leader in the area of developing a child care quality rating system that measures program quality and helps parents make informed decisions regarding the care of their children.” BrightStars, launched in 2009, is Rhode Island’s Quality Rating and Improvement System for child care and early learning programs. Rhode Island is one of 21 states

across the country that has developed a child care quality rating and improvement system. Nationally, many quality rating and improvement systems use a star rating system. All programs participating in BrightStars meet critical state licensing requirements and receive a rating based on six quality domains 1) child's daily experience, 2) teaching and learning, 3) staff-child ratio and group size, 4) family communication and engagement, 5) staff qualifications, and 6) program management.

Camillo noted that new funds are available to help Rhode Island early care and education programs to improve quality. She stated, "As part of the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Brightstars has received a grant from the RI Department of Human Services to award quality improvement funds to programs participating in BrightStars. Programs will be able to use these funds to make focused improvements based on the program's BrightStars assessment and quality improvement plan. The amount of bonus funds programs are eligible to receive is based upon their total DCYF licensed capacity, and range from \$750 for small programs to \$2,500 for programs with over 100 children."

BrightStars, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, and the FPG Child Development Institute are collaborating to finalize two additional studies: one that describes quality in licensed family child care and the other on the quality of school-age child care in Rhode Island. The family child care report will be released late in 2010 and the school-age child care report will be released in 2011.

###

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, education, safety and development of Rhode Island children.

FPG Child Development Institute is a multi-disciplinary institute based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. FPG scientists study important issues facing young children and their families and use this information to enhance policy and improve practice.

The BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System was developed by a team of local early childhood and school-age care professionals and is based on national research on what constitutes quality in child care and early learning programs.

BrightStars is managed by the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children (RIAEYC), a non-profit organization and the state affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Visit www.BrightStars.org for more information.