

Legislators read to youngsters in early learning programs

Nineteen Rhode Island legislators recently visited early learning programs across Rhode Island to read to children as part of "Rhode Island Reads: The Campaign for 3rd Grade Reading," led by United Way of Rhode Island and Rhode Island KIDS COUNT in association with Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children. The legislators who participated over the course of three days in April and May included:

- Rep. Julie A. Casimiro (D-Dist. 31, North Kingstown, Exeter) at Hidden Hills Early Learning Center, Exeter.
- Rep. Deborah Ruggiero (D-Dist. 74, Jamestown, Middletown) at Sandpipers Early Learning Center (Child & Family Services) Middletown.
- Rep. Teresa A. Tanzi (D-Dist. 34, South Kingstown, Narragansett) at Joyful Learning Child Academy—TriCounty Community Action, South Kingstown.

Also participating as readers were Education Commissioner Ken Wagner; Rhode Island Department of Human Services Administrator for Family and Children's Services Karen Beese; members of the United Way of Rhode Island's Women's Leadership Council; and employees from Hasbro Inc.

The event was held during the Week of the Young Child, which is an annual celebration hosted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children celebrating early learning, young children, their teachers and families. The Week of the Young Child helps to focus on the importance of high quality early learning programs for school readiness, and that investments in high quality early learning programs yield high returns for student success.

"What better way to hit home the importance of early learning opportunities for Rhode Island's young children than

to have legislators and other community leaders visit early childhood classrooms and see children fully engaged and thriving. We were excited to promote the importance of early literacy through this special reading opportunity that connected legislators and other community leaders with some of our state's youngest students," said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, executive director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

"All young children need and deserve high quality early learning experiences that will prepare them for life," said Lisa Hildebrand, executive director of Rhode Island AEYC. "Week of the Young Child is a time for Rhode Island to celebrate our youngest learners and we are excited to be a part of that."