



Ready to Learn Providence Evaluation Report 2004

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Executive Summary

Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP) is an initiative to improve the early learning opportunities for all children in Providence (RI) while specifically focusing on the eight linguistically and culturally diverse neighborhoods exhibiting the greatest need in this vein. R2LP's goals and objectives are designed to support both existing and possible early learning opportunities available in Providence while supporting and expanding systems as they relate to ensuring that young children start kindergarten healthy and ready to learn.

In March 2004, R2LP contracted with The Education Alliance at Brown University to conduct an initial evaluation of R2LP's work. This evaluation (1) examined R2LP's efforts to establish a coalition infrastructure necessary to ensure the effort's long-term viability, (2) looked at ways selected R2LP-related programs and activities are aligned with its goals, and (3) considered emerging community changes and initial outcomes that can be attributed to R2LP's efforts. For these three areas, evaluators considered R2LP's activities during its first 17 months in the context of accepted qualities of successful coalitions and the stages of coalition development. To gather data for the report, evaluators held informal interviews with R2LP staff and selected partners, attended several committee meetings and R2LP-sponsored activities, reviewed documents produced by and/or relevant to R2LP and its partners, and administered a survey to Providence Public Library Children's Services staff.

Evaluators found that the infrastructure of the coalition is functioning well and at an impressive pace. R2LP is in the advanced stages of coalition development and is engaged in practices and activities that are likely to sustain it through the long-term. Its staffing structure and success at acquiring and distributing funds are consistent with the "maintenance" phase of coalition development, as are the complex relationships that have resulted in coalition activities and programs to date. R2LP shows consistent evidence of strong leadership; relevant expertise and diversity across initiatives; active, productive, and focused work; and the ability to respond to developing situations while remaining goal-oriented. Additionally, evaluators found that R2LP decisions around staffing and partnerships maximize the coalition's limited resources to (1) build on the pool of diverse expertise available to the coalition and its members and (2) capitalize on and support the resources available within existing systems.

Though its coalition structure is sound, evaluators found that R2LP often does not have the necessary resources, coalition-wide, to collect and/or manage data necessary to conduct R2LP-specific evaluation activities over time. R2LP staff recognized this challenge early on and is committed to developing data-related capacities. Pending grants include plans and related budgets intended to support members and partners in this regard.

R2LP has substantively contributed to the development, refinement, and/or expansion of programs related to early literacy. Specifically, evaluators focused on R2LP's programs within the Providence Public Library and the Providence Public School Department. Evaluators also considered the coalition's efforts to provide and facilitate professional development that would benefit early care and education providers in the targeted communities.

R2LP's partnership with the Providence Public Library (PPL) has been mutually beneficial. PPL Children's Services staff indicated that R2LP's financial support, professional development, and expertise have helped PPL to improve on and provide an early literacy focus within existing library programs, such as Cradle to Crayons (a nine-week parent-child workshop) and the Language and Reading Kits (LARKs). R2LP has also supported the addition of new capacities at the library, especially related to creating bilingual materials and resources and supporting staff. Much of PPL's direct work with R2LP's target community has been accomplished through the efforts of two bilingual outreach workers. Though the library already employed both of these staff members, R2LP's support significantly increased their time and helped to further demonstrate the importance and potential of their bilingual and cultural competencies. These individuals have engaged families from R2LP's target communities in PPL programs supported by R2LP. PPL's system is changing as a result of R2LP's influence: (1) PPL will fund both bilingual outreach positions in the future and (2) PPL staff have participated in literacy-related professional development beyond that offered by R2LP, indicating genuine 'buy-in' to the important role they can and will play in preparing young children (and their families) for kindergarten. PPL staff members are also active contributors to and participants in most of R2LP's committees and related activities.

R2LP invested considerable time and energy in creating and funding the new Facilitator for Early Childhood Education position housed within the Providence Public School Department (PPSD). Placement of this individual was key to R2LP's subsequent successful work toward establishing communication and understanding between PPSD's early elementary programs and the families, communities, and early care and education providers who prepare incoming PPSD students for kindergarten. R2LP-supported activities with PPSD include the first annual Kindergarten Open House, the first annual Open Schools Week, and active PPSD involvement in the majority of R2LP committees and activities. The most exciting products of R2LP's work with PPSD are (1) the institutionalization of the Facilitator for Early Childhood Education role, which will be funded through district Title I funds in 2004-2005, and (2) the expectation that the activities listed above should and will continue in the future because both the district and the community recognize their benefits.

Many of R2LP's committees and members engage in work that builds the professional capacity of the early care and education (EC&E) community. The Professional Development Committee works to encourage and build the necessary continuity across the EC&E system. Related to this, R2LP is involved in several efforts to provide quality professional development opportunities for its targeted EC&E providers. The majority of resources in this vein have gone toward supporting the *HeadsUp! Reading* (HUR)

professional development program. R2LP negotiated the rights to provide HUR in Providence. Over 130 early education providers have participated in this program to date. Consistent with R2LP's community focus, this program has been delivered via satellite (in voice-over Spanish in most instances) at community centers in R2LP's targeted neighborhoods. R2LP contracted for bilingual staff at Childspan to train as HUR facilitators. These individuals facilitated at each HUR session. In addition, HUR participants benefited from on-site technical assistance from these facilitators, who provided feedback on the early literacy environment in each participant's home- or center-based early education site.

Recommendations

R2LP's activities this year have highlighted the organization's ability to respond to emerging issues that are related to its goals. R2LP has managed its own resources well and, because of its exceptional coalition function, has capably leveraged the resources of many coalition members and partners. However, R2LP's infrastructure would benefit from additional resources to help inform policy related to EC&E at the city level, evaluate and communicate its successes, and provide technical support to partners as needed. Specifically, evaluators recommend that R2LP take the following steps.

Acquire and retain resources to ensure R2LP's in-house flexibility to react to emerging issues related to its work. During the brief period of this initial evaluation work, evaluators consistently witnessed careful and informed reflection about experiences and subsequent planning on the part of R2LP staff and members. Because of these habits of reflection and adaptation, evaluators found that, in all cases, R2LP had begun to address issues, even before they were pointed out to R2LP staff by an outside observer. However, R2LP's options to deal with identified concerns were, at times, limited by available financial and—as a consequence—staffing resources.

Build capacity across the coalition to integrate evaluation components (such as data collection, management, and analysis) into various partnerships and activities.

Though all partners were engaged in data collection activities specific to the work with R2LP, evaluators noted currently insufficient capacities supporting evaluation activities. Better access to relevant data from all partners can provide valuable information to R2LP's staff, members, and partners as they reflect on their collaborative work and respond to arising needs and opportunities.

Introduction

Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP) is an initiative to improve the early learning opportunities for all children in Providence, Rhode Island while specifically focusing on eight neighborhoods exhibiting the greatest need in this vein. These neighborhoods host predominantly poor populations where a majority of residents speak Spanish as their first language. R2LP's goals and objectives are designed to support both existing and possible early learning opportunities available in these communities while supporting and expanding systems as they relate to ensuring that young children throughout Providence start kindergarten healthy and ready to learn.

Over the past 17 months, with primary funding from the Early Learning Opportunities Act (ELOA) grant program, R2LP has supported and contracted for early literacy and learning-related programs while simultaneously laying ground work for important changes that will lead to the institutionalization of attitudes and activities that support early learning. This includes work within partner organizations, within neighborhoods, and throughout systems that provide and/or influence early care and education (EC&E) opportunities.

All children in Providence will enter school healthy and ready to learn. —R2LP Vision Statement

Specifically, R2LP's current program goals are to:

1. Enhance early childhood literacy through (a) the design, development, support, and/or expansion of family literacy programs at the Providence Public Library (PPL); and (b) the establishment and funding of the Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten Transition Facilitator position and related program within the Providence Public School Department (PPSD).
2. Improve the quality of early learning programs by providing high-quality professional development opportunities for the city's EC&E providers.
3. Build the collaborative capacity among community-based organizations (CBOs), PPSD, PPL, EC&E providers, families, and policymakers.
4. Facilitate appropriate, data-supported systemic changes in early care and early education at the micro and macro levels.

In March 2004, R2LP contracted with The Education Alliance at Brown University to conduct an initial evaluation of R2LP's work. The purposes of the evaluation were to document R2LP's major activities and accomplishments to date, comment on the

alignment of those activities with R2LP's goals, and provide recommendations to support the R2LP community as it sets future directions for R2LP.

This evaluation was intentionally exploratory and includes data from various sources. Though constraints on time and resources available for this initial evaluation made it impossible to consider all of R2LP's many relationships and activities, evaluators at The Education Alliance sought to include information about and from diverse interest groups and to initiate the relationships that will be necessary to engage R2LP's many stakeholders in more systematic evaluation work in subsequent years.

The fact that this work occurred early in R2LP's existence also limited the evaluators' methodological choices for this evaluation (see Appendix A). To gather the information included in this report, evaluators held informal interviews with R2LP staff and selected partners and collaborators. They also attended several committee meetings and R2LP-sponsored activities, reviewed documents produced by and/or relevant to R2LP and its partners, and administered a survey to PPL Children's Services staff. Much of the relevant secondary data from R2LP's partners were not available at the time of this evaluation, though both R2LP and its individual partners took steps to ensure that these data will be available in the near future.

This evaluation focused on three main questions that borrow from Butterfoss and Francisco's (2004) framework for evaluating community partnerships. The evaluation questions are:

1. In what ways has R2LP established a coalition infrastructure, function, and process that will be necessary to ensure the effort's long-term viability?
2. In what ways has R2LP initiated, provided, or supported programs that are aligned with its goals?
3. What emerging community changes and initial outcomes can be attributed to R2LP's efforts?

To answer these questions, evaluators considered R2LP's activities during its first 17 months in the context both of accepted qualities of successful coalitions and the stages of coalition development. Section I of this document describes the coalition infrastructure that R2LP has created since its recent start and how that relates to its likely, long-term viability. Section II documents several major components of R2LP's and its partners' work to date and considers that work against both R2LP's goals and the qualities of successful coalitions. Section III addresses emerging community changes and initial outcomes attributable to R2LP. The final section summarizes findings and recommendations.

Section I: Coalition Infrastructure, Function, and Processes

Build the collaborative capacity among community-based organizations (CBOs), PPSD, PPL, EC&E providers, families, and policymakers.

— R2LP Goal

R2LP as a Coalition

Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP) is engaged in a complex effort to effect change at multiple levels and to address not only the specifics of early care and education (EC&E) provision in individual settings but also the social, cultural, and political context in which early care and education occurs (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1993). Because R2LP's goal is to support and expand *existing* opportunities within the EC&E system, the structure and function of a coalition provides a well-suited platform for R2LP's work.

The relationships within R2LP's structures are consistent with Brown's (1984) description of coalitions: "...diverse interest groups that combine their human and material resources to effect a specific change the members are unable to bring about independently." R2LP partners and affiliated parties (coalition members) include parents, home child care providers, childcare and preschool centers, Head Start centers, the Providence Public School Department (PPSD), the Providence Public Library (PPL), organizations that provide professional development such as Wheelock College, the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI), and Childspan, various community based organizations (CBOs) such as The Providence Plan, and many others. Coalition participants represent the interests of the four primary constituency categories whose needs R2LP is attempting to address:

1. Parents of preschool-age children (ages 0-5)
2. In-home early care and education (EC&E) providers
3. Center-based EC&E providers
4. Organizations functioning close to or at the EC&E system level.

Qualities of Successful Coalitions

Coalitions have been popular mechanisms for community-based initiatives like R2LP since the late 1980s. Over time, researchers have identified several qualities common to successful coalitions (Butterfoss, 2004; Fawcett, Francisco, Paine-Andrews, & Shultz, 2000; Kreuter, Lezin, & Young, 2000; Florin, Mitchell, & Stevenson, 1993; Wandersman & Alderman, 1993). Several of these characteristics are listed in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1. Characteristics of Successful Coalitions

- Establish processes that sustain and renew coalition infrastructure.
 - *Shared mission/goals*
 - *Strategic plan that specifies what features of the environment [physical and social] must change to achieve the desired outcomes*
 - *Distributed work and leadership within working committees*
 - *Paid staff*
 - *Community mobilizers*
- Focus on activities consistent with coalition goals.
- Strike an appropriate balance between “quick wins,” which build momentum early, and “hard fought wins,” which take longer to achieve, but ultimately get the coalition closer to its goals.
- Ensure that the benefits of coalition membership outweigh or balance with members’ cost of participation in terms of time and resources devoted.
- Establish mechanisms to document and evaluate activities, allowing for data-driven course corrections and technical assistance when needed.
- Attain and demonstrate community-based and systems-level outcomes.

Though the definitions of specific stages vary somewhat, research indicates that successful coalitions evolve through various stages, including pre-formation, formation, implementation/maintenance, and outcomes (Butterfoss & Francisco, 2004; Kreuter et al., 2000; Butterfoss et al., 1998; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1999; Florin et al., 1993). Formation occurs when a problem is identified (usually as a result of pre-formation activities), members are recruited, and missions are set. Implementation involves assessing needs, collecting and analyzing feedback data, and developing action plans. Maintenance occurs when the coalition initiates and monitors its selected activities and institutionalizes the coalitions’ processes so that the coalition itself can support member organizations. Outcome is the final phase, when coalitions accomplish goals or achieve intended results. Often, coalitions falter because they become stuck in any number of these stages and/or fail to complete activities crucial to a given stage. A coalition’s success depends on the creation of the infrastructure and processes necessary to propel the coalition and its members/partners through these stages.

R2LP's Infrastructure

Because R2LP is a very young coalition with outcome goals that will be measurable only after several years of focused effort, this evaluation considered whether R2LP is establishing, evolving, and sustaining the infrastructure necessary to support itself while pursuing its long-term goals. Components of R2LP's desired infrastructure include appropriate staffing at R2LP; appropriate partnerships; focused, working committees; mechanisms for evaluation and documentation; and mechanisms for demonstrating accomplishments.

Staff and Staff Activities

Consistent with the maintenance stage of coalition development, R2LP employs its own small, extremely qualified staff. R2LP employs two full-time staff—a director and a coordinator of education and evaluation—and two part-time staff members—a coordinator of special projects and a parent engagement consultant.

Both the director and the coordinator of education and evaluation bring a wealth of content knowledge around early learning and education to R2LP overall and its committees specifically. (The director and/or the coordinator of education and evaluation are active members of all R2LP committees). On multiple occasions and at the various meetings attended by evaluators, leaders of community-based agencies and organizations said that they valued the expertise of R2LP staff. R2LP members and community members regularly approach these individuals for advice or technical assistance related to EC&E. These two individuals are current on research and state and federal policy in the field of early childhood education. They actively lead R2LP's collaborative efforts to secure funding and other support for the coalition based upon both R2LP's goals and related needs identified and prioritized by committees and partners.

It is important for R2LP to develop tools that allow the coalition to gather and disseminate information about the status of children's school readiness. This is key to the systems- and policy-level changes R2LP hopes to effect. As a component of this, R2LP is developing an Early Learning Report Card (ELRC). The coordinator of special projects coordinates this effort for R2LP. This staff person worked with R2LP's ELRC committee to identify indicators to include in the ELRC. She and the committee are working intensively on identifying data relevant to these indicators, establishing the relationships necessary to acquire those data from 13 local and state agencies, and establishing a method of considering different data sets as a whole. The coordinator of special projects comes to R2LP from its fiscal agent for the ELOA grant—The Providence Plan (TPP). R2LP's offices are housed at TPP giving R2LP regular access to the relevant expertise and support of all TPP staff, as well as to extensive data management and other support specific to the ELRC project.

Support and acceptance of communities and families is key to most of R2LP's work and can translate into added resources, increased credibility, and greater sustainability for R2LP's work. The part-time parent engagement consultant (on loan from the Rhode Island Department of Health) works to nurture this support and has successfully engaged more than 300 linguistically and culturally diverse families from the R2LP target

communities in several committees and activities. These include the Kindergarten Fair, the International Family Fun Day, the Parents' Night Out reading event, the United Way Community Summit, and focus groups conducted with PPL and PPSD. As the chairperson of R2LP's Family Engagement committee, she ensures that the work of R2LP's management and that of this committee are well integrated.

The racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity represented among parents, care givers, and other community members who have participated in R2LP activities indicates success in engaging R2LP's diverse, targeted populations. Though, at the time of this evaluation, all of R2LP's in-house staff was monolingual English speakers, R2LP had consistently ensured that it involved non-English speaking community members in all high-stakes decisions and activities. The coalition accomplished this through Spanish and Khmer-language focus groups, creation of bilingual materials promoting R2LP-sponsored events and activities, translation at key meetings, and coordinated efforts with bilingual and bicultural professionals throughout the EC&E system and the targeted communities. R2LP used the funds acquired, in several instances, to support bilingual and culturally competent capacity within partner organizations—including two bilingual outreach workers for PPL, the facilitator for early childhood education at PPSD, and the *HeadsUp! Reading* coordinator and facilitators at Childspan. R2LP supported all of these bilingual individuals in ways intended to ensure and build their expertise related to EC&E.

R2LP has been awarded an AmeriCorps grant to place 30 AmeriCorps members in R2LP's partner organizations in Providence. One purpose of these placements will be to further increase R2LP's bilingual capacities in the community. Other funds will allow R2LP to hire a bilingual staff person to work in-house beginning June 2004. While placing bilingual expertise within the community will continue to be R2LP's priority, having one bilingual individual as part of R2LP's small, in-house staff will further R2LP's efforts to ensure that English language learners have optimal access to participation in all of R2LP's efforts, at all levels.

Partners

During the maintenance phase of development, in addition to hiring staff to move work forward, a coalition must have funding to support its work. Consistent with this phase of coalition development, R2LP received \$850,000 from the Early Learning Opportunities Act grant program to begin its initiatives. Subsequently, R2LP staff has led collaborative efforts to secure additional funds from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Brown-Rudnick Charitable Foundation, Hasbro Charitable Trust, Health and Education Leadership for Providence (HELP), the Rhode Island Department of Health, and the United Way of Rhode Island. Decisions to apply for these additional funds were based primarily on R2LP's experience and responsiveness to issues emerging during the initial months of its existence.

Some partnerships (like those with The Providence Plan and the Rhode Island Department of Health) have allowed R2LP to leverage more staffing and other related support for in-house work while allowing them to conserve granted funds. Currently pending grant applications maintain this focus on leveraging existing resources while

acknowledging the need to retain a larger portion of funds to maintain adequate in-house capacity and expertise for coalition members and the community.

In the interest of supporting components of the existing EC&E and related systems, R2LP contracted out the vast majority of its direct services to existing organizations, thus distributing most of its granted funds within the target communities. Because of R2LP's emphasis on redistributing awarded funds, some coalition members are also funded partners of R2LP. PPL, PPSD, and Childspan are the partners who received the bulk of R2LP's funds this year. Through the partnership with PPL, R2LP increased the capacity of this citywide organization to provide language-appropriate, early-literacy materials, programs, and expertise. The partnership with PPSD has initiated programs and activities that will coordinate district, EC&E provider, community, and family efforts to prepare children for kindergarten. In both of these cases, the partners have secured funding for future support of the work that R2LP's funds helped initiate. Finally, the partnership with Childspan provided the staff to coordinate and facilitate the *HeadsUp! Reading* professional development series for English and Spanish speaking EC&E providers in the targeted communities. The specific activities supported by these partnerships are discussed in more detail in Section II.

With respect to partner relationships, evaluators found that in all cases R2LP staff had engaged in extensive efforts (1) to clarify R2LP's expectations with relation to the partnerships, (2) to provide partners with additional resources, expertise, and training to meet these expectations, and (3) to remain engaged with partners and their R2LP-related programs. All three partners stated to evaluators that their organizations had benefited from their relationships with R2LP, even as they described their involvement with R2LP as "time intensive" and "demanding." One partner staff member stated that meeting attendance and committee participation was demanding in terms of both time and energy, but that this "legwork" was necessary for building relationships with other partners, building capacity, and ultimately effecting systemic change. Though evaluators noted that many R2LP members and partners collaborate regularly with one another and with other R2LP committee members, partners were not equally involved across the coalition. During meeting and activity observations, evaluators noted instances where the absence of one partner's participation lead to missed opportunities to make connections among related work across the coalition.

R2LP continues to reflect on existing partnerships and seek out new ones as appropriate. For example, in May 2004 R2LP submitted a proposal to the Annie E. Casey Foundation to support a strategic partnership with Making Connections/Providence. Both projects share a commitment to building on existing efforts and engaging community residents in targeted neighborhoods and beyond. R2LP sees this partnership as a mechanism to more fully engage parents in R2LP-related activities and to elevate the issue of school readiness among residents of Providence. Funding for this partnership will support an R2LP School Readiness Coach position and the development of a cohort of 15 to 20 residents who will provide information to families about school readiness and help families become active participants in advancing the school readiness agenda.

Committees

Establishing functioning committees with mutually understood goals and procedures is a crucial component of the infrastructure necessary to sustain a coalition over the long term. Generally, R2LP's committees function well. Most committees have established procedures for producing detailed minutes that facilitate organizational memory. Evaluators observed meetings that were well organized, focused, and well attended. Participants addressed substantive issues, vetted ideas, selected priorities, and assigned work. Document review and observation of R2LP meetings and activities indicate that coalition members understand and are dedicated to the goals and work of R2LP. Evaluators found no instances where activities and decisions undertaken by committees and R2LP were not clearly consistent with R2LP's stated goals. R2LP staff participates in all committees thus ensuring continuity between individual committee projects/activities and larger R2LP initiatives.

Committees' memberships appropriately reflect the diverse expertise, interests, and access to resources that facilitate R2LP's ability to intelligently react to challenges and opportunities as they present themselves. Several members of most committees are bicultural and/or bilingual in Spanish and English. Committee meetings are conducted in English, though R2LP arranges for translators when needed.

Currently, R2LP has a governing board and five subcommittees that focus on areas salient to the goals of the coalition. These committees are: the Parent Engagement Committee, the Transition to Kindergarten Advisory Committee, the Professional Development Committee, the Policy Committee, and the Early Learning Report Card Committee.

The R2LP Governing Board, established in November 2003, serves several purposes that are designed to shape how R2LP functions and to address broad strategic issues including funding, relationship building, and strategic planning. Most Governing Board members are part of other committees, so their time commitment to R2LP activities is high. This board consists primarily of professionals whose work is applicable to R2LP's goals. Leaders and directors of R2LP's partner organizations serve on the Governing Board. R2LP's **Local Council** meetings are also held on a regular basis. These meetings are open to anyone in the R2LP community with the goal of sharing progress and gaining feedback from community members. Through this mechanism, R2LP partners can provide updates on their work, discuss future plans, share recommendations, and gain insights and ideas from R2LP stakeholders.

The Parent Engagement Committee's activities are intended to engage families in preparing children for kindergarten and provide them with resources and information to help fulfill that role. This committee is chaired by the parent engagement consultant and made up of representatives from local organizations that work with parents and families (such as Providence Head Start, the Rhode Island Parent Information Network [RIPIN], Dorcas Place, Children's Network, and the state facilitator for early childhood education). Additionally, parents act both as members of the committee and as volunteers and participants in events sponsored or supported by the committee.

The Transition to Kindergarten Advisory Committee's goal is to identify current practices and areas of need as they relate to successful transition to kindergarten for preschoolers. In addition, committee members advise, recommend, and carry out activities to facilitate this transition for children. Currently, there are 15 members on the T2K Advisory Committee, including R2LP's T2K facilitator for early childhood education, representatives from community, city, and state agencies, EC&E providers, PPSD teachers and administrators, and representatives from city government. Each member is committed to a 10-month series of meetings.

The Professional Development Committee works to improve the quality of EC&E by improving and increasing opportunities for providers to enhance their expertise. The committee also works to create an environment that supports and integrates providers' efforts across the EC&E system. To date, the committee (now with more than 25 members) has begun the alignment of Rhode Island Early Learning Standards¹ with PPSD's Scope and Sequence² for kindergarten, reviewing childcare regulations, and collecting information about curricula and assessments appropriate to EC&E.

The Early Learning Report Card (ELRC) Committee includes R2LP's part-time coordinator of special projects, parents, community representatives, and data and service providers. Recognizing the need for city and neighborhood level data to inform policy and R2LP's efforts, this committee worked for several months to identify early learning indicators in three categories: readiness of parents, caregivers, and teachers in Providence; child development and well being in Providence; and child's environment in Providence. The first report card will be printed in June 2004 and will include 26 indicators to which the Governing Board agreed in March 2004.

The Policy Committee was an ad hoc group, without R2LP staff support, formed in response to concerns over how the change in the kindergarten age of entry for the fall of 2004 would impact the EC&E community. Though R2LP did not receive funds to support this activity, the coalition agreed that it was necessary to conduct a survey to determine the capacity of the EC&E system in Providence and if there was a need for a pre-K program in PPSD. Policy Committee members designed, administered, and analyzed the survey in December 2003 and January 2004. Based on survey data in the context of what was already known about the EC&E system, the committee concluded that there is available child care capacity in Providence and that most demand for pre-K

¹ The Rhode Island Early Learning Standards were developed with input from the Rhode Island Departments of Education, Health, and Human Services; representatives from the EC&E community, Head Start, public school systems, and parents. These standards "provide guidance to families, teachers and administrators on what children should know and be able to do as they enter kindergarten." (Rhode Island Early Learning Standards, 2003).

² Scope and Sequence is a standards-based learning framework designed to provide a solid and consistent structure for teaching and learning in all subject areas and for every grade level that will ensure equity of access to learning excellence for every Providence student. The framework consists of five essential components: standards, content, teacher instruction, student work, and assessment. (Source: Kindergarten Scope and Sequence, Providence Public Schools, Revised July 2003)

services would result from issues of quality rather than lack of capacity. This prompted the recommendation that R2LP establish the Professional Development Committee (discussed above).

Mechanisms for Evaluation and Documentation

Coalitions need to develop the capacity to perform assessments and evaluation that will inform their planning and implementation (Butterfoss, 1998). Successful coalitions often incorporate technical assistance based upon systematic documentation and feedback (Butterfoss & Francisco, 2004). Such activities can also inform course corrections for coalitions as a whole, for committees within coalitions, and/or for individual members/organizations that participate in the coalition. Evaluation and documentation present common challenges during the implementation and maintenance stage because these tasks require skills and resources that are not readily available in many coalitions (Kreuter et al., 2000).

Because of its complexity, R2LP faces challenges related to data collection and evaluation. R2LP intended to rely heavily on the data collection and management capacities of its major partners to inform its evaluation work. However, R2LP and many of its members and partners do not have the necessary resources, coalition-wide, to collect and manage the data necessary to conduct R2LP-specific evaluation activities over time. In addition, evaluators found evidence that R2LP's definition of "data" and "access to data" was different from that of one coalition partner.

In some instances, lack of access to useful data led to missed opportunities for R2LP members to fully reflect on coalition efforts. R2LP staff recognized this challenge early on and is committed to developing data-related capacities. Although R2LP did not initially budget to hire or contract technical support to systematically address data collection and consideration across the coalition, pending grants include budgets intended to support members and partners in this regard.

Mechanisms for Demonstrating Accomplishments

Healthy coalitions have mechanisms of information exchange to ensure that community change attributable to the coalitions' work is appropriately noted and fosters support for other work by that coalition (Kreuter et al., 2000). R2LP is currently developing mechanisms for sharing information about its efforts, accomplishments, and policy agenda supporting EC&E in Providence. The ELRC will provide an annual picture of early learning in Providence that, in the long run, should begin to reflect R2LP's efforts. R2LP has also established a Web site, newsletter, and listserv. Though the capacity of current staff to manage these communication vehicles is limited, R2LP now includes the need for these and related capacities in its staffing plans. The addition of the bilingual staff person in June 2004 will allow R2LP to begin to make more of its resources available in Spanish. With proper support, these tools will provide regular updates on R2LP's work and information regarding opportunities to interested parties.

Conclusion

R2LP has established relationships, infrastructures, and processes that are likely to sustain the coalition over the long term. The coalition has strong and knowledgeable leadership (in general and within committees) that drives the healthy pace of R2LP's work. Committees are active and productive, and members have a shared understanding of the work that is needed to achieve R2LP goals. In addition, R2LP staff and members have demonstrated skill in responding to both emerging opportunities and challenges while remaining focused on their goals. R2LP's unique consideration of issues and policy from a city perspective informs its work and has helped promote coordination and avoid duplicating services within Providence's EC&E system.

R2LP's decisions around staffing and partnerships maximize limited resources to (1) build on the pool of diverse expertise available to the coalition and its members, and (2) capitalize on and support existing relationships with partners. However, R2LP would benefit from additional resources to enhance its capacity to generate, manage, and share data and documentation in ways that benefit the coalition.

Section II: Coalition Programs and Activities

Enhance early childhood literacy through (1) the design, development, support, and/or expansion of family literacy programs at the Providence Public Library and (2) the establishment and funding of the Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten Transition Facilitator position and related program within the Providence Public School Department.

Improve the quality of early learning programs by providing high-quality professional development (PD) opportunities for the city's early care and education (EC&E) providers.

—R2LP Goals

R2LP's coalition structure supported many programs and activities during the early stages of the coalition's work. Evaluators had time to carefully consider a limited number of key activities for this report. This section considers several activities undertaken with the Providence Public Library (PPL) and the Providence Public School Department (PPSD). It also discusses R2LP's activities intended to address professional development needs of early care and education (EC&E) providers across the system.

Family Literacy Programs at the Providence Public Library

R2LP partnership with PPL was in place at the time of the Early Learning Opportunities grant proposal. Early on, R2LP recognized that PPL was well positioned to provide services that address the early literacy needs of both families and EC&E providers—especially those who are home-based and therefore do not have access to the quantity and diversity of resources and materials that many EC&E centers enjoy. PPL also had resources (material, programmatic, and human) to build on with R2LP's assistance and support.

R2LP increased the bilingual and culturally competent capacities within PPL and steered the library staff and programs toward an emphasis in early literacy by refining existing programs and materials in ways that (1) focused on early literacy, (2) better accommodated speakers of languages other than English, and (3) engaged R2LP's target community populations who tend to use the library infrequently. Additionally, R2LP provided customized professional development to PPL staff, which developed PPL's internal capacities in relation to early literacy and parent engagement.

Fifty-seven percent of public school kindergartners in Providence are Hispanic. A majority of these children come to the public school system from Spanish-speaking

households and/or family care facilities (Ready to Learn Providence, 2002). PPL’s two bilingual outreach workers worked to successfully refine, promote, and deliver PPL’s early literacy resources and programs to Spanish-speaking families and caregivers. Though both of these individuals were already part of PPL’s staff as part-time employees, R2LP provided funding to support their full-time work with PPL. Because of their cultural and linguistic competencies, these two staff members successfully engaged in media-based, door to door, and print-based outreach for PPL’s R2LP-related programs in the communities; engaged community members through participation in R2LP’s events and focus groups; and assisted in the design and delivery of PPL’s R2LP-related programs. R2LP staff and other coalition members’ early literacy expertise supported the development of materials to accompany PPL’s programs and the addition of bilingual and non-English materials to the library’s collections. The bilingual outreach workers helped translate, adapt, and develop many of these materials.

R2LP funded the construction and assisted in the development of 80 new Language and Reading Kits (LARKs, of which 60 are bilingual in Spanish) to accommodate demand from early child care providers for LARKs in Spanish (see Table 1). These resources provide books, props, and simple literacy-building activities appropriate for pre-kindergarten-age children. LARKs have been available in English and have become increasingly popular (circulation has more than doubled in the past three years from 115 instances to 300). These additional resources for EC&E providers will be in circulation in the summer of 2004.

Table 1. LARKs Constructed with R2LP Support

Bilingual Spanish Language LARKs	30 distinct LARKs (2 copies each)
Toddler LARKs (not language specific)	20 distinct LARKs

In a similar effort to increase the availability of relevant materials for circulation, R2LP’s staff and members also contributed to (1) the development of Spanish-language materials to accompany Cradle to Crayons (C2C) workshops on early literacy promotion for parents, (2) the selection and purchase of bilingual materials for the Children’s and Adult’s Collections, and (3) development of materials that increased the expertise of Children’s Services staff regarding literacy promotion (e.g., Beginning With Mother Goose (BMG) materials and other print resources for general use in Children’s Rooms). The time taken by PPL and R2LP to solicit and incorporate expert advice on activities and resources included in LARKs, BMG, and C2C and the additional time devoted to translating the materials contributes to their quality and appropriateness.

Cradle to Crayons

R2LP and PPL recognized the potential of PPL’s existing Cradle to Crayons (C2C) program to address R2LP’s goals related to engaging families and home-based childcare providers in early literacy development. C2C is a nine-week, parent-child workshop that

incorporates information and activities related to child development, art, various community resources, and other topics. R2LP worked with PPL to incorporate an early literacy focus in all C2C activities. The expanded capacity of the bilingual outreach workers coupled with the collaborative contacts and expertise of R2LP also helped the library to increase its outreach to potential C2C participants in R2LP’s neighborhoods, offer C2C in Spanish, and establish satellite locations for C2C.

PPL has been collecting data on C2C participants since the summer of 2003. At the same time, PPL began constructing a data management system to house this data and to allow C2C data to be merged with other library data (such as library card usage records, LARKs usage, and BMG participation) and considered together. This data, once accessible, will help inform PPL’s and R2LP’s decisions about programs, materials, and staffing that will best engage the communities R2LP intends to serve. Evaluators were not able to consider the complete data set for this report, though PPL produced several summary reports that provided some information on program participation. C2C summaries are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Cradle to Crayons Participation

Session 1	76 children 62 parents (23 children and 20 parents in R2LP target neighborhoods)
Session 2	Approximately 80 families
Session 3	Approximately 70 families
Total	Over 220 families

Professional Development for PPL Staff

Recognizing a need to support PPL staff’s expertise and confidence in promoting early literacy through R2LP-supported programs such as C2C, R2LP’s coordinator of education and evaluation provided a series of professional development opportunities for all PPL Children’s Services staff—including the bilingual outreach workers. Evaluators administered a Web-based survey (see Appendix B) to collect data on the quality of this professional development in terms of (1) helping staff meet community needs, (2) the impact of the professional development on staff awareness and knowledge, (3) changes in staff attitude and professional practice, and (4) perceived changes in library usage.

Of the 23 PPL Children’s Services staff, 18 completed the survey. Most respondents agreed that R2LP professional development activities were “excellent” or “good” in terms of helping staff meet the needs of children, families, and childcare providers. Also, 16 of the 18 respondents felt that the professional development offered was “excellent” or “good” in terms of meeting their own needs related to early literacy. A vast majority of staff responded that the early literacy professional development activities increased their

awareness and knowledge, informed their decision making and planning, improved the way early learning activities were integrated into their daily work, and enhanced their professional practice “somewhat” or “to a great extent”.

With respect to the open-ended question asking respondents about the impact of professional development on their work, respondents cited positive changes in: (1) comfort levels when talking to caregivers about early literacy and helping caregivers apply early literacy strategies, (2) ability to integrate new activities into programs that stress early literacy, and (3) thinking relative to program focus—most staff are now convinced that early literacy activities are appropriate components of their work.

I have gained a greater depth of knowledge about: how to more effectively use the resources within the library; understanding developmental stages; how to successfully engage families in the promotion of literacy within their own family circle; how to develop a collection geared toward early childhood literacy in both English and Spanish; how to promote the programs we offer by thinking of innovative strategies.

–PPL Children’s Services staff person

Regarding perceptions of library usage, an overwhelming majority of staff stated that overall library usage by families, childcare providers, and other targeted community members increased as a result of activities supported by R2LP. Respondents cited the following reasons: outreach efforts of Spanish-speaking staff, additional programs for bilingual families (e.g., Pequeños Lectores Bilingües—a bilingual storytelling and activity program), focus groups, increased access to Hispanic and multicultural resources, BMG sessions offered in Spanish, and better promotion of services (e.g., updated Spanish books collection, LARKs).

When asked how PPL benefited from its involvement with R2LP, respondents cited formation of new relationships with community agencies, increased staff awareness and knowledge around early literacy through on-the-job training, PPL’s improved “image” in the community due to increased outreach efforts, new ideas and tools for staff, expansion of resources for patrons, the practical early literacy focus of existing programs such as C2C, funding for the two bilingual outreach workers, and other resources.

When asked about challenges related to R2LP’s initiatives at PPL, respondents indicated the need for additional training and support to help them prioritize early literacy-related interventions.

R2LP’s professional development activities have helped to infuse early literacy concepts into PPL’s programs and practices. Staff view early literacy as a focus of the C2C program. This new focus and expertise provides a solid foundation for the application of bilingual and culturally appropriate materials and programs developed with the support of R2LP. As mentioned in Section I, PPL is collecting data that will allow it to match staff perceptions discussed here with documented trends in usage of library services and

materials. Taken together, these data will provide a clear indication of the impact of PPL's and R2LP's collaborative efforts.

Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten Transition Program

Unlike efforts with PPL that generally involved the expansion and refinement of existing literacy programs, efforts with the Providence Public School District (PPSD) entailed the development and implementation of a new Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten Program. Recognizing that transition from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten represents a critical time in a child's development, and the need to help families and EC&E providers understand and learn about the best ways to prepare children for school, R2LP and PPSD began discussing a partnership during R2LP's pre-formation phase, prior to the ELOA application.

This partnership was intended to increase the collaboration and communication between EC&E providers and PPSD's kindergarten teachers and program planners in terms of developing curricula, sharing information and resources, developing a kindergarten orientation program, and identifying areas of disconnect between Rhode Island's Early Learning Standards (RIELS) and PPSD's expectations for children entering kindergarten. R2LP staff invested significant time in a relationship-building process that resulted in the creation of the Facilitator of Early Childhood Education position in July 2003. R2LP funded this position while PPSD provided a "home" for the position and related administrative support.

Initial tasks of the R2LP's facilitator of early childhood education included building partnerships with the EC&E community and families and helping to establish the Transition to Kindergarten (T2K) Advisory Committee. She engaged these stakeholders in the manner needed to develop the infrastructure, build relationships that would move the T2K work forward, and ensure involvement of diverse, informed opinions in the planning and implementation of the T2K Committee's programs.

The facilitator of early childhood education worked with the T2K Committee to identify the most appropriate ways to address current practices and challenges related to transitioning children to kindergarten. The team examined and discussed national best practices, practices of states and localities relating to successful kindergarten transition, and current practices in Providence. The team is actively applying this research and knowledge in the formulation of a strategic plan for T2K that will be ready in the summer of 2004.

While in the process of developing a strategic plan outlining a sustained systemic process, the T2K team recognized the immediate need for very basic communication with families regarding how to prepare and register their children for kindergarten. Under the leadership of the facilitator of early childhood education, the T2K Committee developed and implemented two useful activities to communicate with parents and engage them in preparing their children for kindergarten—a community-wide Kindergarten Fair and an Open Schools Week. Both were intended to share information regarding the kindergarten registration and school readiness. The T2K team developed materials that included tips

for successful transition, registration requirements, and district information regarding schools. The director of PPSD's Registration Center and PPSD's communications specialist provided advice and support on registration procedures and community-wide engagement to publicize the fair. The district provided financial and material resources to assist with the production and dissemination of the T2K information packet and other materials related to this activity.

In addition to distributing printed, bilingual information through R2LP member organizations, and taking out advertisements on bus shelters in neighborhoods with high kindergarten enrollment, R2LP's director and the facilitator of early childhood education participated in a bilingual radio program. During the show they discussed R2LP, the change in kindergarten age-of-entry for fall 2004, kindergarten registration, the Kindergarten Fair, and the Open Schools Week.

The Kindergarten Fair was held in February 2004. Over 200 adults and 60 enrolling kindergartners attended. Community agencies such as the PPL, Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Family Advocacy Program, and Providence Head Start participated and distributed information to families. PPSD provided school registration information and math coaches who gave parents ideas and activities to increase math skills for young children. Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) gave information regarding the RIELS and offered family engagement packets. Child Outreach Screenings³ were offered for four- and five-year-old children. The Open Schools Week was held the following week. EC&E providers responded positively to these events, and principals expressed enthusiasm for their future potential.

The committee debriefed shortly after the two T2K events and used the meeting as an opportunity to both celebrate their "quick win" and discuss lessons learned. The lessons taken from this activity, coupled with previously identified needs and a short, informal survey that the facilitator of early childhood education administered to principals regarding their Open Schools experience, have informed aspects of T2K's soon-to-be-released strategic plan. R2LP also plans to extend the T2K program to include mechanisms for (1) caregivers and kindergarten teachers to share information about preschoolers throughout the year, (2) visits by preschool teachers and students to kindergarten classrooms, (3) extending Open Schools Week for a full school week, and (4) translating materials into Khmer.

While R2LP staff, members, and partners provide crucial connections and expertise, the facilitator for early childhood education role demands participation in many of the committees and significant time devoted to the relationship building necessary to implement this new program. She is responsible for ensuring that the T2K Committee's

³ Child Outreach Screening is a statewide developmental screening program offered through PPSD. It is available to all children ages three through five. Children are screened in areas of motor, language, cognition, behavior and socialization, speech, and vision and hearing. Initial results may call for more in-depth evaluations and subsequent eligibility for Early Intervention and/or special education services.

activities are consistent with R2LP goals. The facilitator of early childhood education was actively engaged in all of the R2LP activities that evaluators observed.

Professional Development for EC&E Providers

As a major component of its initial implementation, R2LP identified the need for professional development that addressed providers' often limited English abilities, accommodated center-based and home-based providers, included rigorous content, and was available in the neighborhoods where providers live. R2LP's major professional development-related activities during its first 17 months included:

1. Implementing *HeadsUp! Reading* (HUR)
2. Awarding the first two rounds of the Early Learning Grants (ELG) and providing related grant-writing trainings
3. Supporting and facilitating several other professional development activities related to increasing continuity and quality across the EC&E system.

HeadsUp! Reading

HeadsUp! Reading (HUR) is a 15-week professional development course, operated by the National Head Start Association, that trains childcare providers in research-based early literacy practices. This course is delivered nationwide via satellite in English and voice-over Spanish. R2LP negotiated rights to offer HUR to Providence providers. HUR is currently the only college-level course in early literacy available in the state of Rhode Island. Moreover, it represents one of the most substantive training opportunities available to non-English proficient EC&E providers in Providence.

In its ELOA application, R2LP identified Childspan as its logical partner for delivering HUR, although R2LP had not yet established this relationship at that time. Childspan receives funds from the Rhode Island Department of Human Services and the Rhode Island Department of Health "to enhance the professional development of all those individuals serving children birth through age 16 to ensure availability of high-quality care and education services for Rhode Island children, youth, and their families." R2LP viewed a partnership with Childspan as consistent with its goals related to both professional development for EC&E providers and supporting and expanding the capacity of existing systems. R2LP encouraged Childspan to respond to its request for qualifications to provide HUR service in the targeted communities.

Independent consultants from Providence and Childspan staff members trained as HUR facilitators and delivered HUR at the sites of five neighborhood-based organizations located in R2LP's targeted communities. The facilitators delivered three series in Spanish and two in English.

HUR has been overwhelming popular. Over 130 providers have completed the course and approximately 90 are on the waiting list for a subsequent session. Available HUR data are represented in the table below. In part because registration was conducted on a

“first come, first served” basis, home-based providers were overrepresented among HUR participants.

Data on HUR Participation					
Note: Approximately 90 providers are on waiting lists for Round 3 of HUR.					
	Total # of participants	Spanish speakers	Home-based	Center-based	Receiving college credit
Round 1	62	45	53	9	9
Round 2	74	50	59	15	42
Total	136	95	112	24	51

In the interest of collecting and using data to inform R2LP’s efforts, the HUR contract with Childspan required that Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observations (ELLCO)⁴ be conducted with HUR participants. The ELLCO is the only available, validated assessment tool designed to collect data on the literacy and early learning environments where it is applied. Additionally, the tool collects limited demographic data on the childcare providers and the children in their care. In the first round of HUR, nine participants were pre-tested using the ELLCO and all participants were post-tested. In subsequent rounds all participants received both pre- and post-assessments using the ELLCO tool.

HUR facilitators found that the ELLCO tool was often a less-than-perfect fit for the home-based provider settings of HUR participants. Also, this tool was very time consuming to administer. On the other hand, facilitators also found that the act of administering the ELLCO tool became a useful form of personalized technical assistance. HUR participants were eager to know how they had scored on the ELLCO and to hear specific suggestions for improving their score. Because of this experience, during the second round of HUR, in addition to pre-assessing all participants, HUR facilitators began to provide technical assistance by way of a Task and Timeline form, which provides simple, site-specific objectives, activities, and timelines related to improving the early learning environment of each early care setting. The Task and Timeline form serves as a homework assignment for HUR participants, who can apply ideas in the HUR workshop series to meet their personal objectives by the time an ELLCO post-test is administered at the conclusion of the series.

In addition to adding the Task and Timeline form to the HUR activities, HUR facilitators assembled selected, picture-based and limited-text materials that illustrate some of the basic concepts related to promoting early literacy and school readiness. These materials illustrate concepts such as “activity- or theme-based centers” and the importance of

⁴ ELLCO is a validated early literacy assessment developed by the Education Development Center in Newton, Massachusetts (Smith, Dickinson, Sangeorge, & Anastasopoulos, 2002).

organization and categorization in early learning. They also suggest a variety of activities and illustrate basic lesson planning and daily scheduling.

The enthusiasm and performance evidenced in HUR's registration, wait list, and college credit recipient numbers indicate that this program is well received and beneficial. Disparities in participants' formal education attainment, literacy levels, and provider sites (i.e. home-based versus centers) meant that HUR benefited participants differently. R2LP is currently considering changes in how HUR is advertised, how participants register, requirements for participation, and composition of HUR participant groups (i.e. center-based providers at one HUR site and home-based providers at another). These considerations will help ensure that the EC&E providers who stand to gain the most from this program are given priority. Related to this, both R2LP staff and HUR facilitators expressed concern that many HUR participants would be better served with more basic skills courses, such as adult literacy and English as a second language. By being more selective with HUR participants, R2LP can free up some of its limited resources for the purpose of diversifying the professional development choices it funds in order to better meet the range of need within the community.

This evaluation was written during the second round of HUR. Facilitators had completed ELLCO pre-assessments and Task and Timeline forms on all second-round participants. The ELLCO data collected were not entered into any database. Without the ability to exclude or separately examine individual variables that might be inappropriate to a given provider site, the meaning of the ELLCO total scores is extremely difficult to determine.

HUR facilitators, other Childspan staff, and R2LP staff expressed an interest modifying the ELLCO tool (written for early childcare center environments) to make it a better fit for family childcare providers who are participating in HUR. The ability to sort and examine current ELLCO data would help with efforts to modify it to better fit R2LP's needs. In addition, the ability to consider certain demographic characteristics (such as educational attainment and English language ability) in conjunction with individual ELLCO items and/or overall scores could inform decisions about the appropriateness of HUR and possible changes needed for this and other professional development efforts undertaken by R2LP. Finally, the detailed data in the ELLCO could also inform further collaborative efforts between Childspan and other R2LP partners (e.g., PPL could target its outreach to HUR participants based upon materials and subject areas found to be missing or lacking in that cohort's ELLCO assessments).

Early Learning Grants

The Early Learning Grant (ELG) program supplements R2LP's professional development efforts to date. In addition to three events designed to develop potential applicants' awareness related to identifying and applying for a grant, this program provided \$18,800 in books, equipment, and memberships in professional organizations to 13 of the 26 applicants during the first round. Twenty-four thousand dollars was distributed among 15 of the 31 applicants during the second round. In all, nine centers and 19 home-based providers have benefited from this program. Thirteen awardees are located within R2LP's targeted neighborhoods. R2LP considered and awarded applications written in

Spanish and English, and the awarded proposals varied greatly and reflected the disparities in professional sophistication of the community's EC&E providers. The ELG, as implemented thus far, addresses several of R2LP's goals by: (1) focusing on providers that are located in or serve the targeted communities, (2) providing high-quality professional support while accommodating for differences in formal educational attainment, professional experience, and language dominance, and (3) by building capacity and expertise within the EC&E system.

As the ELG program matures and grantees generate end-of-grant reports, R2LP will be in a position to examine and comment on the impact of this activity. This report was completed prior to the end of the first ELG period. Those reports are due from grantees on August 31, 2004.

Other Professional Development Activities Relating to Continuity Across the EC&E System

Continuity across the EC&E system in Providence is the key strategic question being addressed by the discussions and work of R2LP's Professional Development Committee. That group works to align PPSD's Scope and Sequence for Kindergarten and RIELS as a first step in identifying opportunities for this continuity. Several other R2LP activities should contribute to this as well.

R2LP supported the participation of 17 center-based early care providers in six seminars on language and literacy for infants and toddlers at Wheelock College. This series both piloted and contributed to the ongoing design guidelines for promoting language and literacy in infants and toddlers. R2LP's involvement with this project provided quality professional development to providers in the targeted communities and contributed to its efforts to create mechanisms that facilitate continuity across the EC&E system.

To foster the ability of early care providers to identify and apply activities likely to produce literacy and numeracy awareness in children entering kindergarten, R2LP and RIDE partnered to pilot the RIELS in Providence. RIELS are guidelines intended to establish common understandings and expectations of what four-year-old children should know and be able to do. Fifteen participants (including family childcare and center-based providers, Providence Head Start staff, and parents and school teachers) took part in the eight-month training series. A professor from Wheelock College and a consultant conducted the trainings, which gave participants the opportunity to implement standards in a supportive setting. Participants are now able to apply these standards in their programs.

Conclusion

The activities described in this section indicate that R2LP's partnerships have resulted in activities that address R2LP's goals related to ensuring both community access to early literacy resources and programs and provider access to early literacy professional development.

In the case of PPL, evaluators found that R2LP's involvement has increased cultural and bilingual competencies within the PPL system and has facilitated access to related materials. PPL has also supported and expanded existing programs in order to address R2LP's goals. Data on PPL's R2LP-related programs is being collected and managed, but were not yet available for analysis at the time of this evaluation.

R2LP staff and members worked with PPSD to fund and create the Facilitator of Early Childhood Education position and subsequently supported her efforts to begin establishing a comprehensive, system-wide framework for transitioning children from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten. In the process, the T2K Committee implemented finite events that provided important information to the community while building awareness of what "school readiness" entails. In addition, work thus far has informed the development of T2K's strategic plan. Data that will speak to the impact of the T2K program will be available to PPSD and R2LP in future years.

R2LP, with its Professional Development Committee, has engaged in several activities that contribute to the availability and continuity of professional development across the EC&E system. To date, R2LP has invested the majority of professional development funds in the popular and rigorous *HeadsUp! Reading* program. Access to data on this program would provide valuable insights into R2LP's pending decisions about the content and types of professional development it should provide or facilitate to serve the diverse population of EC&E providers in its communities.

Section III: Emerging Systemic Changes and Initial Outcomes

Facilitate appropriate, data-supported systemic changes in early care and early education at the micro and macro levels.

—R2LP Goal

Systemic changes across communities do not occur quickly. They represent coalitions’ “hard fought wins” (Butterfoss & Francisco, 2004) that require significant commitment of effort over time. As the activities described in Sections I and II illustrate, Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP) has assembled a diverse coalition of very committed individuals and organizations who are in the initial stages of very ambitious work. Therefore, it is too early to evaluate outcomes such as systems change. However, evaluators did consider how current efforts are contributing to anticipated, system-level changes.

R2LP’s activities thus far (including those described in Section II) include an appropriate balance of “quick wins” and work toward long-term goals (Butterfoss & Francisco, 2004). The “quick wins,” such as the Policy Committee’s survey and subsequent success in demonstrating capacity within Providence’s early education system, the Parent Engagement Committee’s International Family Fun Day, and the T2K Committee’s Kindergarten Fair, help to build support for and sustain the momentum of a coalition. When these wins are closely aligned with the coalition’s goals—as is the case for R2LP—they also contribute to the work needed to accomplish the “hard fought” systemic changes being pursued.

For the purposes of considering emerging systemic changes attributable to R2LP at this very early juncture, evaluators considered the question: “If R2LP were to disappear today, what vestiges of its efforts would likely remain a year later?” This section considers this question in relation to some of the partnerships and activities R2LP has engaged in thus far. Evaluators found that R2LP has created and/or facilitated the development of materials and capacities that, if proven to be sustainable, will fall under the “hard fought wins” category and represent systems changes.

R2LP’s investments in the Providence Public School Department (PPSD) have created a foundation for both the infrastructure and the expectation that the district, the early care and education (EC&E) community, and families will engage one another in preparing children for kindergarten. R2LP funded and invested significant time and energy with PPSD to create the Facilitator for Early Childhood Education position. The individual hired in this position brings content-based expertise to her role. Her subsequent leadership in activities such as the Kindergarten Fair, the Open Schools Week, the

Transition to Kindergarten Committee, PPSD's involvement with many other R2LP member organizations' activities, and subsequent reflection on all of those activities (via surveys and committee discussions) have yielded *de facto* models for repeating and building on all of these activities into the future. In many cases these activities required the creation of accompanying materials that represent resources for future use. The activities for which the facilitator of early childhood education was responsible also involved the collaborative efforts of most, if not all, R2LP members as well as many PPSD early education staff, EC&E providers, community members, and families. This demonstrates the potential of these activities to span many levels and creates a system-level expectation that these activities should and will continue in the future. PPSD's decision to take the responsibility for internally funding the Facilitator for Early Childhood Education position for the 2004-2005 school year indicates R2LP's success in demonstrating the value of this role to PPSD, as well as PPSD's emerging commitment to R2LP-related goals.

R2LP's efforts have also created changes within the Providence Public Library (PPL) system, which impact the overall EC&E system. The library system's ability to serve the R2LP target community into the future has improved in terms of the materials available to circulate to families and EC&E providers. Spanish-language and bilingual materials, including children's books, the Language and Reading Kits (LARKs), and the materials that support and accompany the Cradle to Crayons (C2C) and Beginning with Mother Goose (BMG) programs, are all resources developed with the technical and/or financial support of R2LP staff and members and will remain available to the community into the future.

The survey of PPL Children's Services staff (discussed in Section II) indicated that these professionals gained new and expanded capacities and confidence to engage families in early literacy activities as a result of their involvement with R2LP. Though initial professional development to support these outcomes was provided by and/or funded by R2LP, the library has taken early literacy training on independently, sending staff to national literacy-related professional development events in Baltimore, Chicago and otherwise continuing to develop staff expertise.

PPL's capacity and confidence to engage all R2LP communities has also increased and been institutionalized. Much of PPL's direct work with R2LP's target communities to date has been accomplished through the efforts of two bilingual outreach workers. Though the library already employed both of these staff members, R2LP's support significantly increased their time and helped to demonstrate the importance and potential of their bilingual and cultural competencies. These individuals have facilitated Spanish-language C2C and BMG sessions, made impressive efforts at recruiting participants to PPL programs and to R2LP-sponsored focus groups, and participated in events sponsored by other R2LP partners. The library intends to fully fund these two positions in the future and partnered with R2LP in the successful application for AmeriCorps volunteers to provide "legs to their [early literacy] programs" and increase PPL's presence in R2LP communities.

Additionally, PPL demonstrates an increased commitment to engaging the communities it serves on their terms. The library partnered with community-based organizations, such as Children’s Friend and Service, the Southside Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs, and The Providence Housing Authority, to bring C2C into the R2LP communities. Although these sessions were often not well attended, they illustrate a level of collaboration among R2LP-associated organizations that is new.

R2LP selected all the professional development activities described in Section II with the intention of building capacity within the EC&E communities of the coalition’s targeted neighborhoods. R2LP’s involvement with Wheelock College provided for direct professional training for 17 center-based providers of infant and toddler care in Providence. Perhaps more significantly in the long run, this activity also established a relationship with a Wheelock researcher who is crafting a language and literacy curriculum for infants and toddlers. Because R2LP-related providers were part of the pilot, this curriculum will address issues particular to Providence and may help address some of the systemic issues that the Professional Development and Transition to Kindergarten Committees are considering, including increasing continuity across the EC&E system by way of mechanisms such as a common curricula.

The *HeadsUp! Reading* (HUR) program has created a cohort of over 130 EC&E providers who are at least familiar with (if not adept in, as is the case for many) basic early literacy principles and who have had the benefit of on-site technical assistance related to improving the early literacy environment of their homes or EC&E centers. Offering HUR revealed a high demand for professional development offered in Spanish and in the communities where EC&E providers live. It also created an expectation that such services should and will be available to the targeted communities in the future. R2LP ensured that HUR facilitators were trained to deliver HUR and to administer the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) tool. These facilitators—several of whom are residents (or family) of R2LP’s targeted communities—represent new, bilingual, and culturally competent early literacy resources available within the R2LP communities.

Conclusion

R2LP’s strategically goal-driven work over the last 17 months has contributed to emerging systems changes. Materials, expertise, programs, and expectations built or supported by R2LP would remain as tangible outcomes even if R2LP’s work were to end prematurely.

Summary Findings and Recommendations

This initial evaluation (1) examined Ready to Learn Providence's (R2LP) efforts to establish a coalition infrastructure necessary to ensure the effort's long-term viability, (2) looked at ways selected R2LP-related programs and activities are aligned with its goals, and (3) considered emerging community changes and initial outcomes that can be attributed to R2LP's efforts. Evaluators placed findings in the context of research-based qualities of successful coalitions and stages of coalition development.

Evaluators found that the infrastructure of the coalition is functioning well and at an impressive pace. Factors that contributed to this conclusion include: strong leadership; relevant expertise and diversity across R2LP; active, productive and focused work; and the ability to respond intelligently to unexpected developments while remaining goal-oriented. Additionally, evaluators found that decisions around staffing and partnerships maximized limited resources to build on the pool of diverse expertise available to the coalition and its members and to capitalize on and support the resources available within existing systems.

R2LP has substantively contributed to the development, refinement, and expansion of programs related to early literacy. The programs and interventions of R2LP are strategically goal-driven and have contributed to emerging changes within the micro-systems of the Providence Public School Department (PPSD) and the Providence Public Library (PPL) specifically. R2LP's focused efforts on professional development increased the number of opportunities available both to meet the needs of early care and education (EC&E) providers and to build continuity across the EC&E system.

R2LP is in the advanced stages of coalition development and is engaged in practices and activities that are likely to sustain it through the long-term. Its staffing structure and success at acquiring and distributing funds are consistent with the "maintenance" phase of coalition development, as are the complex relationships that have resulted in coalition activities and programs to date. Characteristics of R2LP's coalition function are summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Characteristics of R2LP's Coalition Function

- R2LP has established processes that will sustain and renew its infrastructure.
 - *Shared mission/goals articulated and understood by committees and most partners.*
 - *Contracts with partners, the Early Learning Report Card, goals, and other documents clearly articulate the features of the R2LP communities [physical and social] that must change to achieve the desired outcomes.*
 - *Distributed work and leadership within R2LP committees*
 - *Expert, culturally competent, paid staff*
 - *Community members engaged in high-stakes decisions, hired as R2LP partner staff, and participate in committees and in planning activities. This engagement contributes to community mobilization.*
- All R2LP activities are clearly aligned with the coalition's goals.
- R2LP has engaged in activities that allowed for "quick wins," which build momentum early. All activities, because of their relation to R2LP's long-term goals are expected to contribute to "hard fought wins." R2LP membership is demanding, but often provides opportunities such as...
 - *Access to other R2LP members' resources (funds, expertise, staff)*
 - *Making connections between work of R2LP members*
 - *Access to communities*
 - *Influence over policy and systems*
- R2LP is establishing mechanisms to document and evaluate activities that allow for data-driven course corrections and technical assistance when needed. These capacities are being built both in-house and within partner organizations.
- Changes within R2LP's partner organizations point to future community-based and systems-level outcomes.

Recommendations

R2LP's activities this year have highlighted the organization's ability to respond to emerging issues that are related to its goals. R2LP has managed its own resources well and, because of its exceptional coalition function, has capably leveraged the resources of many coalition members and partners. However, R2LP's infrastructure would benefit from additional resources to help inform policy related to EC&E at the city level, evaluate and communicate its successes, and provide technical support to partners as needed. Specifically, evaluators recommend that R2LP take the following steps.

Acquire and retain resources to ensure R2LP's in-house flexibility to react to emerging issues related to its work.

During the brief period of this initial evaluation work, evaluators consistently witnessed careful and informed reflection on experiences and subsequent planning on the part of R2LP staff and members. Because of these habits of reflection and adaptation, evaluators found that, in all cases, R2LP had begun to address issues, even before they were pointed out to R2LP staff by an outside observer. However, R2LP's options to deal with identified concerns were, at times, limited by available financial and—as a consequence—staffing resources.

Build capacity across the coalition to integrate evaluation components (such as data collection, management, and analysis) into various partnerships and activities.

Research shows that evaluation components are necessary to coalitions, but that finite resources often lead coalitions to neglect activities such as data collection, management, and analysis (Kreuter et al., 2000). Though all partners were engaged in data collection activities specific to the work with R2LP, evaluators noted currently insufficient capacities supporting evaluation activities. Better access to relevant data from all partners can provide valuable information to R2LP's staff, members, and partners as they reflect on their collaborative work and respond to arising needs and opportunities. Specifically, improved evaluation mechanisms could inform R2LP's (1) existing habits of reflecting on and improving its programs and interventions, (2) needs assessment with respect to professional development and other areas, and (3) ability to look at the impact of programs and interventions.

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Appendix A – Methodology

This initial evaluation was intentionally exploratory and includes data from various sources. Though the tight timeline and available resources for this initial evaluation made it impossible to thoroughly consider all of R2LP's many relationships and activities, evaluators at The Education Alliance sought to ensure that information about and from diverse interest groups could be included here. Additionally, and consistent with R2LP's structure, evaluators wanted to initiate the relationships that will be necessary to engage R2LP's many stakeholders in more systematic evaluation work in subsequent years.

The tight timeline for generating this evaluation report and the fact that this work occurred early in R2LP's existence limited the evaluators' methodological choices. To gather the information included in this report, evaluators held informal interviews with R2LP staff and selected partners and collaborators. They also attended several committee meetings and R2LP-sponsored activities, reviewed documents produced by and/or relevant to R2LP and its partners, and administered a survey. Much of R2LP partners' relevant, secondary data were not available at the time of this evaluation, though R2LP and its individual partners took steps to ensure that these data would be available in the near future.

Interviews

Conversational interviews provided a wealth of information necessary to assess R2LP's coalition function and to gather information regarding emerging changes within the community. Evaluators met with and communicated with R2LP's executive director and coordinator of education and evaluation on several occasions. In addition, evaluators met with R2LP's family engagement coordinator and several staff at R2LP's three principal partners—Providence Public School Department (PPSD), Providence Public Library (PPL), and Childspan.

Observation

Evaluators attended R2LP meetings including: the Board of Governors meeting, Local Council meeting, Family Engagement Committee meeting, and Transition to Kindergarten Advisory Committee meeting. Evaluators completed meeting effectiveness inventories (Butterfoss, 2004) for each meeting and used them to assess the functions and foci of the committees. Evaluators attended the Family Engagement Committee-sponsored International Family Fun Day and observed a *HeadsUp! Reading* session delivered in Spanish. Evaluators considered these events in the context of R2LP's goals related to engaging families or supporting appropriate, high-quality professional development.

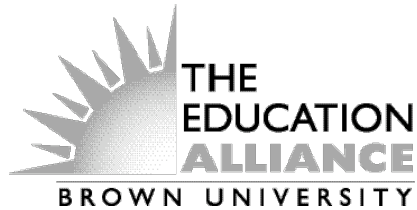
Document Review

Evaluators relied heavily on analysis of documents from R2LP and its partners. These data included meeting minutes, quarterly reports, grant reports, newsletters, brochures, e-

mail communications, and other materials. Evaluators reviewed these materials for evidence of healthy coalition function (including diverse participation; established goals, processes, and functions; and diffusion of information across stakeholders and the community [see Figure 1 for additional criteria]). They also reviewed the documents for evidence that R2LP's activities were consistent with its written and stated goals.

Survey

The evaluators designed and administered a Web-based survey to the children's services staff at the Providence Public Library (PPL) in order to collect data on the impact and quality of early literacy professional development activities provided by R2LP.



**Providence Public Library Children's Services Staff Survey
Ready to Learn Evaluation, Spring 2004**

Dear Children's Services Staff:

Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP) has contracted with The Education Alliance at Brown University to conduct an initial evaluation of its activities. Given the key role that the Providence Public Library has played in R2LP's efforts, your input is very important to this evaluation process.

Please take a few minutes to complete this survey and submit your responses by Thursday, April 8. Your responses will be kept confidential and survey results will be reported in summary form only. If you have any questions or comments about this survey or the evaluation, please contact us at The Education Alliance.

Thank you, in advance, for your participation.

Susan Bockrath and Ivana Zuliani
274-9548 x230 or 274-9548 x321
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Professional Development

1. Which of the following professional development activities have you participated in? *(Please mark all that apply.)*

- Beginning With Mother Goose, Vermont Center for the Book (June 2003)
 Early Literacy: Listening, Rhyming & Phonological Awareness, Marcia Moon (July 11, 2003)
 Cradle to Crayons Objectives & Environment, Marcia Moon (August 1, 2003)
 Early Literacy: Alphabet, Marcia Moon (August 15, 2003)
 Developing Spanish Language/Bilingual Collections, Marcia Moon (August 27, 2003)
 Cradles to Crayons Regional Story Time Planning Sessions, Marcia Moon (September 2003)
 Early Literacy (1 day review), Marcia Moon (December 5, 2003)
 Other activity (please specify): _____

2. Reflecting on the professional development activities above, rate how these activities have helped you meet the following needs:	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Very Poor</i>	<i>Not Applicable to My Work</i>
a. Helping you meet the needs of the <i>children</i> you serve?	A	B	C	D	E	NA
b. Helping you meet the needs of the <i>families</i> you serve?	A	B	C	D	E	NA
c. Helping you meet the need of <i>childcare providers</i> you serve?	A	B	C	D	E	NA
d. Relevance to your own professional development needs related to early literacy?	A	B	C	D	E	NA

Comments _____

3. To what extent did the professional development activities listed in question #1:	<i>To a Great Extent</i>	_____	_____	_____	<i>Not at All</i>	<i>Not Applicable to My Work</i>
a. Increase your awareness and knowledge regarding early literacy?	A	B	C	D	E	NA
b. Inform your own decision making and planning of early literacy related activities at the library?	A	B	C	D	E	NA
c. Change the way you integrate activities and practices that promote early literacy into your daily work?	A	B	C	D	E	NA
d. Enhance your professional practice as a librarian?	A	B	C	D	E	NA

Comments _____

Professional Practice

4. Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Not Applicable to My Work</i>
a. I feel knowledgeable about factors that influence early childhood literacy.	SA	A	D	SD	NA
b. I feel comfortable with my ability to promote early childhood literacy.	SA	A	D	SD	NA
c. I feel comfortable engaging parents in discussions related to early childhood literacy.	SA	A	D	SD	NA
d. I feel comfortable engaging childcare providers in discussions related to early childhood literacy.	SA	A	D	SD	NA

5. Describe how you feel your own practice has changed due to R2LP’s involvement with the library.

Library Usage

6. Describe any ways you see that *families’* usage of the library has changed due to activities supported by R2LP.

7. Describe any ways you see that *childcare providers’* usage of the library has changed due to activities supported by R2LP.

8. Describe any ways you see the *community’s* usage of the library has changed due to activities supported by R2LP.

General Comments

9. Describe ways that the library, overall, has benefited from its involvement with R2LP.

10. Describe any challenges related to R2LP's initiatives at the library.

Thank you for completing this survey.