

# First 10 in Rhode Island: Evaluation Findings



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# Introduction

Beginning in spring 2021 and concluding in December 2023, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) partnered with Education Development Center (EDC) to implement EDC's First 10 approach to school-community partnerships focused on young children and their families. This initiative was funded by Rhode Island's Preschool Development Grant Birth through Grade 5 (PDG B-5) grant.<sup>1</sup> RIDE and EDC supported three communities—East Providence, Johnston, and Woonsocket—in developing and implementing First 10 plans. First 10 brings together elementary schools, school district leaders, and early childhood programs to improve the quality and coordination of early childhood education and care. EDC provided technical assistance and facilitation support to First 10 teams in each of these communities.

This report includes findings from the second year of implementation—summer 2022 through spring 2023 as well as key findings from the previous interim report that covered the initiative's first year. To inform these reports, the EDC evaluator conducted surveys and focus groups with each community and interviewed the First 10 Director, David Jacobson. The primary objectives driving this evaluation included the following:

- Assess each communities' progress toward their goals;
- Gather feedback on team collaboration and relationships;
- Understand sustainability plans; and
- Gather formative feedback to improve First 10 and RIDE support.

## Key Findings



**All three First 10 community partnerships made substantial progress toward their goals.** Each community successfully improved transition to kindergarten practices and strengthened partnerships with families through school-connected play and learn groups and community-wide parenting campaigns.



**All three community partnerships addressed each of the main three strategies in the First 10 model.** Over the course of EDC's support, each community implemented practices that align to one or more of First 10's core strategies, and over time these practices became institutionalized into the community's ongoing activities.



**Each community established strong cross-agency partnerships,** both internally within their teams and externally with agencies in their communities who are helping promote the First 10 initiative.

<sup>1</sup> This project is supported by the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG B-5), Grant Number 90TP0058-02-00, from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Child Care, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



**Institutionalizing First 10 practices will facilitate First 10 sustainability** beyond EDC's direct support.



The biggest challenges experienced by First 10 teams include **engaging community partners and time to meet and conduct the work.**



Factors that contributed to partnership success included having **administrator buy-in, cross-agency collaboration, and institutionalizing events and processes.**

## Overview

First 10 engages elementary schools, districts, early childhood programs, and community agencies in building systems of support for children and families. EDC helps these partnerships develop and carry out plans focused on the strategies shown in the First 10 theory of action below: **Collaborate to Improve Teaching and Learning, Coordinate Comprehensive Services, and Partner with Families.** Partnership teams implement activities—referred to as practices—to reach their goals. These evidence-based practices are aligned to at least one of the overarching First 10 strategies, and oftentimes are aligned to more than one strategy. Typical **First 10 practices** include providing play and learn groups linked to elementary schools, coordinating connections to health and social services, improving the quality of early childhood programs, coordinating the transition to kindergarten, conducting joint pre-K and kindergarten professional learning, improving early grades curriculum and instruction, and implementing awareness campaigns. EDC provides communities with a common set of practices and teams can choose which practices are most suitable for their needs and contexts. An example practice is The Basics™, which is a campaign to raise awareness about early childhood development and includes five evidence-based parenting and caregiving principles that support social, emotional, and cognitive development of children from birth to age three (or five, depending on community preference).





## Findings: Progress Toward First 10 Goals

When EDC began supporting the Rhode Island First 10 communities, one of the initial tasks for each partnership team was to articulate goals for their First 10 implementation.<sup>2</sup> Each team developed between 3-6 goals aligned to the three overarching strategies from the First 10 framework (see table 1). The goals serve as north stars to the teams to guide them toward implementing specific First 10 practices.

With the support of a First 10 facilitator, each community revisited their goals at least annually, to discuss their progress and whether the goals needed refining or if new goals were needed. For this evaluation's data collection in spring 2023, each community identified goals that they met, goals where progress was made, and goals that were not yet addressed. All three First 10 community partnerships made substantial progress toward their goals. Each community successfully improved transition to kindergarten practices and strengthened partnerships with families through school-connected play and learn groups and community-wide parenting campaigns.

**All three First 10 community partnerships made substantial progress toward their goals.** Each community successfully improved transition to kindergarten practices and strengthened partnerships with families through school-connected play and learn groups and community-wide parenting campaigns.

<sup>2</sup> EDC supported two of the three communities—East Providence and Woonsocket—prior to First 10, specifically on the transition to kindergarten. Through First 10, EDC continued to deepen and advance those efforts while adding new strategies.

Table 1. **First 10 Goals by First 10 Strategy and Community**

STRATEGY	East Providence	Johnston	Woonsocket
<p><b>Collaborate to Improve Teaching &amp; Learning</b></p>	<p>Improve school readiness and the transition for children and families from early childhood programs into kindergarten, drawing on all the resources of the community (including libraries).</p>	<p>Strengthen collaboration to enhance the transition activities that occur for children and families.</p>	<p>Identify and implement strategies to meet the wide range of academic and SEL needs of all students.</p>
	<p>Promote quality professional learning for all teachers across the early childhood-elementary school continuum.</p>	<p>For the families to have a smooth transition and feel comfortable with their child entering kindergarten, knowing that we know their child and his/her needs/strengths prior to the first day.</p>	<p>Refine and expand existing transition to kindergarten efforts, with a particular focus on special populations.</p>
<p><b>Coordinate Comprehensive Services</b></p>	<p>Develop smoother connections from early childcare programs and elementary schools to comprehensive services.</p>	<p>Access and coordination of community resources for social/emotional and health services.</p>	<p>Nurture collaboration among families, schools/providers, and health and social services to support the needs of all students.</p>
	<p>Establish a community school to create a hub for services for families and children.</p>	<p>Develop partnerships with community agencies and high school pathway programs.</p>	
<p><b>Deepen Partnerships with Families</b></p>	<p>Deepen partnerships with families beginning in the early years and continuing throughout their child's education, including by providing learning opportunities for families. Develop peer connections as part of this work.</p>	<p>Help families become more comfortable with the schools and programs and be informed about what they offer.</p> <p>For families to have a more active role in their child's education and to have programs/ partnerships with programs within the community.</p>	<p>Nurture collaboration among families, schools/providers, and health and social services to support the needs of all students.</p>



All three community partnerships addressed each of the main three strategies in the First 10 model. Over the course of EDC's support, each community implemented practices that align to one or more of First 10's core strategies, and over time these practices became institutionalized into the community's ongoing activities. As part of the First 10 model, communities can choose from a set of practices to implement to meet their goals, including transition to kindergarten activities (e.g., transition to kindergarten forms, book lists, videos, welcome to kindergarten events, and joint professional learning), The Basics campaign,<sup>3</sup> and school-connected play & learn groups. Through EDC's support, teams customize the practices to meet their unique contexts while retaining fundamental elements of each practice. Table 2 provides a snapshot of the practices implemented within each community.

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<sup>3</sup> [The Basics](#) is an evidence-based awareness campaign for parents and caregivers based on five principles that support social emotional and cognitive development of children from birth to age three.

Table 2. Snapshot of First 10 strategies and practices within each community

STRATEGY	PRACTICE	East Providence	Johnston	Woonsocket
Collaborate to Improve Teaching & Learning	Transition to Kindergarten Activities*	Transition to K forms used by state-funded PreK's; not yet used by all community-based providers, but team is making progress toward this goal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transition to K forms used by state-funded PreK's and community-based providers.</li> <li>Creating a "Welcome to K" book.</li> <li>Created book lists and a bookmark.</li> <li>Shared books with teachers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transition to K forms used by all community-based providers and Head Start programs.</li> <li>"Welcome to K" video.</li> </ul>
		"Popsicles in the Park" event each summer as part of an updated K orientation.	"On Your Way to K" event each June; meet and greet with families.	"Passport to K" series each spring.
		Joint professional learning sessions on social-emotional learning, early literacy, early mathematics.	Joint professional learning sessions on early math, social-emotional learning, literacy, The Basics, standards crosswalk.	Joint professional learning session on The Basics; held a session in December 2023 on special education.
Coordinate Comprehensive Services	School-connected Play & Learn Groups	Held 5 sessions per year.	Held 3-5 per year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2022-23 a pilot year.</li> <li>Planning for 3-5 in 2023-24.</li> </ul>
Deepen Partnerships with Families	The Basics Parenting Campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Underway: integrated into Play &amp; Learn groups.</li> <li>Launched Basics Insights.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Underway: integrated into Play &amp; Learn groups.</li> <li>Launched Basics Insights.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Part of every First 10 initiative.</li> <li>Launched Basics Insights.</li> </ul>

\* First 10 Transition to K activities typically include PreK-K joint professional learning, PreK-K child information forms, PreK-K common children's book lists, and a range of welcome to kindergarten activities, such as videos, books, and events.



The following section describes each community's efforts around each of these practices in more detail.

## Transition to Kindergarten Activities

Several practices fall under this category, including the use of a transition to kindergarten form, book lists, videos, and welcome to kindergarten events (and the latter is also aligned to the strategy *Deepen Partnerships with Families*). A Transition to kindergarten form is used to share information from the sending preschool program to the elementary school so that the kindergarten classroom teacher and supporting educators can better understand developmental information for each child. In Johnston there is widespread use of the form, with each state-funded prekindergarten program and community-based provider using it. Similarly, in Woonsocket, all the community-based providers and the Head Start programs are using the form. On the other hand, buy-in with community-based providers using the form has been slower in East Providence, though in fall 2023 the team connected with several providers and plans to pilot the form with them in spring 2024. Johnston has also focused on creating book lists and providing books to teachers. The team created a list of high-quality books for 4-year-olds and provided these books for all teachers of 4-year-olds. Similarly, they created a list of welcome to kindergarten books and shared these books with all kindergarten teachers. As of October 2023, the team has created a bookmark with these lists and will be distributing them soon. Woonsocket has also created a Welcome to Kindergarten video featuring children from its schools. The video is used in prekindergarten classrooms to orient children to their new kindergarten classroom and school.

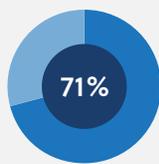
**Each team established at least one annual Welcome to Kindergarten event to support the transition between preschool (or informal care) and kindergarten.** EDC's First 10 support initially focused on establishing these events and over the past two years the events became institutionalized. That is, they are routine events that have come to be common practice for

### Utilizing First 10 Strategies

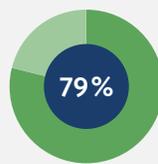
A survey conducted in Spring 2022 assessed teams' perceptions of the First 10 strategies effectiveness in helping make progress toward their First 10 goals. For each strategy, over 70% of respondents believed the strategy would help them a great deal in reaching their First 10 goals.



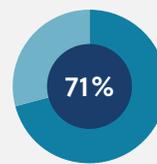
Transition to K Activities



Joint Professional Learning



Play & Learns



The Basics

the schools and expected by the families. Across the communities the events have unique characteristics but share many commonalities and the same goal of orienting children and families to their new school and allowing teachers the opportunity to meet their incoming students. In Woonsocket their initial one-day event has become a series that includes partnering with preschool programs and other agencies, such as the YWCA. In East Providence the events now coincide with kindergarten orientation.

**Common joint professional learning topics included social-emotional learning, early mathematics, and The Basics.** The Johnston team engaged in multiple EDC-led joint professional learning opportunities, which were open to staff from the school district, state prekindergarten programs, community-based prekindergarten providers, and local Head Start programs in Johnston. Topics included early mathematics, social-emotional learning, literacy, The Basics, and crosswalking early childhood, kindergarten, and grade 1 standards. The Johnston First 10 team also led a community of practice on the Heggerty Phonemic Awareness Curriculum with approximately six community-based preschools. In East Providence joint professional learning engaged Head Start, community-based preschool providers, and kindergarten educators on topics including social-emotional learning, early literacy, and early mathematics. Woonsocket conducted joint professional learning on The Basics and has other learning opportunities planned.

## School-connected Play & Learn Groups

**Each community implemented multiple play and learn groups, which follow a similar structure from community to community: they are free events for children aged 4 or younger and their parents/guardians.** Children and parents engage in child-led play activities for the majority of the 90-minute session, with 20 minutes reserved for the parents to participate in informal learning. In East Providence a family navigator<sup>4</sup> runs these sessions, sometimes at the local library and sometimes at a school. Woonsocket considered the 2022-23 school year as their pilot year for the play & learn groups as they focused on “getting the model up and running.” They intend to offer 3-4 events during the 2023-24 school year. In Johnston the play & learn groups are co-organized with the Health Equity Zone (HEZ) staff. They are held on Saturdays at the same time as their incoming kindergartener child screenings, which is helpful for cross-referrals, and after the half-day prekindergarten at the state-run program. All communities share information about The Basics at the events through an introductory video, discussion, and materials.

## The Basics

**The Basics parenting campaign took a strong hold in each community’s second year of First 10 implementation, with information being shared through multiple channels, including through healthcare partners, play and learn groups, and classroom teachers.** Woonsocket fully integrated The Basics model into every aspect of their First 10 efforts, including the school-connected play & learn groups. The team organized at least seven city-wide Basics efforts as

<sup>4</sup> East Providence is the first community in the entire First 10 network to establish a family navigator role, which began in November 2022. The family navigator connects families served by the school to other services, such as WIC and SNAP. See the box on East Providence’s successes for more about this role.

### What are The Basics?

Designed by Harvard Educator Ron Ferguson, [The Basics](#) is an evidence-based parenting campaign based on five simple, fun principles:

1

Maximize Love,  
Manage Stress

2

Talk, Sing,  
and Point

3

Count,  
Group, and  
Compare

4

Explore through  
Movement  
and Play

5

Read and  
Discuss  
Stories

part of their Basics campaign over the last two years and received funding from the Rhode Island Foundation for these efforts. In addition, they fostered strong partnerships to share The Basics information including with the city's home visiting programs and with Thundermist, a major healthcare organization and the primary pediatrician in the city. Woonsocket is the first community in the entire First 10 network to partner with a pediatrician's practice. In spring of 2023 East Providence and Johnston shifted their attention toward comprehensively implementing The Basics with dedicated workgroups. Over the past two years they have incorporated information from The Basics into their school-connected play and learn groups, while Johnston also shared information about The Basics regularly with prekindergarten teachers.

## Findings: Team Collaboration and Relationships

**Each community established strong cross-agency partnerships, both internally within their teams and externally with agencies in their communities who are helping promote the First 10 initiative.**

Each community has a First 10 team that oversees its practices and activities, though the structure from community to community looks slightly different. Typically, there are separate workgroups for each First 10 practice area (e.g., The Basics). In Johnston there is a cross-agency leadership group that oversees the overall initiative and there are workgroups for The Basics and Transition to K. The Johnston team feels as though they have all the right roles represented on their team to move the work forward, and they have the support of district and school leadership. Their Basics workgroup has benefitted from having a representative from Tri-County Community Action Agency, who leads the HEZ, because they can easily share information in the places that they support, including WIC offices, HeadStart and the HEZ. This support led to a training of three community health workers and a family event in November 2023 focused on The Basics.

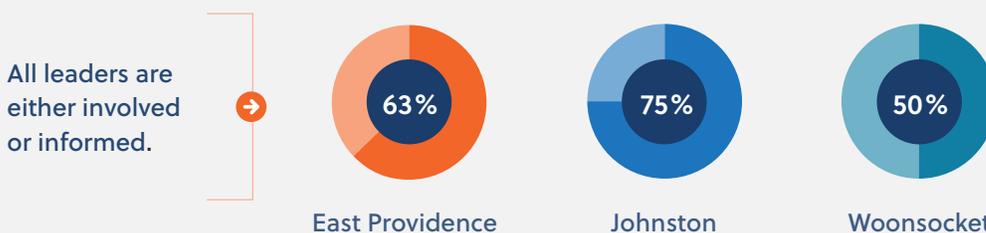
In East Providence the initial family support workgroup shifted to focus on the play and learns, but that workgroup ended toward the latter part of 2023 as the play and learns became

well-established and there was no longer a need for EDC to convene that work group. East Providence also has a Transition to Kindergarten and a Basics workgroup. Representation from agencies has changed over time as has the level of involvement of those who were initially involved. Currently the team has representation from the school district, a prekindergarten principal, teachers, the HEZ, East Bay Community Action Program, and the community librarian. The team feels as though it was helpful to have people at different levels on the team, even if they leave the team for new roles in the community because they can take their knowledge and spread it through their new role.

The East Providence team’s relationship with the library is particularly noteworthy because it reflects a deep commitment to First 10 on behalf of the librarian and staff. This year the library staff received training on the Growing Great Kids model, which is a curriculum for home visiting programs. One team member spoke about how beneficial the relationship with the library is: “Our library is also super, super family-engaged and active. They are always looking to support the schools...They do a lot with our K registration. They have their own little nook when it’s K registration time that they support.”

### Leader Involvement

**At least half of team members agreed that all appropriate leaders are either involved or informed about their First 10 efforts.** A survey conducted in Spring 2022 asked teams if the appropriate community leaders were involved, or at least aware, of their First 10 activities. Responses varied by community, from 50% to 75% agreeing that all leaders are either involved or at least informed.



The team structure in Woonsocket is slightly different than the other communities—EDC supports two leads who represent the district and HeadStart. In turn, these leads meet with and support workgroups to implement the practices and activities. This structure was per the request of the Woonsocket team. Initially, a district leader and a HeadStart leader met regularly with EDC and led the First 10 team, but they chose to take a step back because of their schedules. They acknowledge this move was helpful because they were becoming barriers to making progress given their capacity constraints. When they turned the First 10 leadership over to their teammates, they witnessed substantial progress. They attribute this to laying the groundwork and creating more efficiencies this year.



**It’s amazing to all be doing the same work.**

– East Providence First 10 Team Leader

# Findings: Sustainability

## **Institutionalizing First 10 practices will facilitate First 10 sustainability beyond EDC's direct support.**

As EDC prepared to wind down its support for First 10 in December 2023, each community began planning for sustaining their efforts without EDC's regular coordination and without guaranteed state funding. Throughout 2023 the EDC facilitators focused conversations on sustainability efforts, including discussing alternative funding options. Woonsocket successfully secured funding to continue its First 10 programming through an existing grant—a comprehensive literacy grant, which was amended to include First 10. The grant will sustain the district leader for First 10, cover the cost of materials, as well as cover the hourly rate for teachers leading the play and learn sessions. In addition to securing funding, Woonsocket has also put a new model in place for the First 10 activities: the current First 10 leads are training a committee at each school who will implement the activities going forward. The First 10 leads will provide each committee with scripts for the play and learn sessions to ensure uniformity, though some personalization for each school is expected and encouraged. They are also providing a format for the Passport to K event, which they expect each school will tailor to their neighborhood and students' needs. The two First 10 leads plan to convene the school teams on a regular basis to share progress and ideas with one another.

In East Providence the team is confident about the initiative's sustainability because they have institutionalized their events and built systems that are sustainable. For example, the connections the team established with other agencies and departments within the district, and between the district and EBCAP are strong as is buy-in. There is an expectation amongst all parties that they will continue to work together to support families. Moreover, they acknowledge that through EDC's support over the years, many of the First 10 practices have become institutionalized: "So there's all of these little pieces that are happening each year now because of the things that we do. I think that is a huge success, that there's annual things that now we take for granted that weren't there three years ago. It's constant developments that now become annual, and you forget that these things weren't happening before." Some of the First 10 efforts have also spread to other grades and schools beyond early childhood, including placing a family navigator in the middle school. As one of the East Providence leaders said, "We're starting to see all those jump-off components that you look for when you are thinking about sustainability." The team plans to continue to meet as a leadership team and as separate workgroups, but they acknowledge that they will have to designate a scheduler to schedule the meetings since that was handled by EDC. The team did not mention future funding sources as an issue.

The Johnston team, on the other hand, is worried about funding for sustaining the play and learn sessions, though they expect the school budget to cover at least the after-school session. The Johnston team plans to continue meeting moving forward. One team member shared thoughts on their hopes about the future: "I think we've created this little team that I would hate to not meet every once in a while, because a couple of the Graniteville teachers [those in the district prekindergarten program] who've been part of this and the conversations between the principals at the two schools, I think that process is valuable and should continue." The team

acknowledges that they still have a lot of details to work out, but they will continue to share information and resources, including The Basics, through child outreach at the very least.



**We're grateful.** Grateful that we had the opportunity to work with David and some of his other colleagues along the way. The time that we've spent together has really been productive and the work that we've done has impacted the district. We had a lot of lessons learned and we'll take them as time goes on, but if there is a way to continue, we'd love to be part of any initiative with First 10.

– Johnston First 10 Team Leader

## Feedback for Improvement

This section describes some of the challenges that the First 10 teams experienced as well as some of the processes that facilitated teams' progress. Understanding the challenges and helpful processes can inform future First 10 implementation efforts and RIDE's future support.

### Challenges

- **ENGAGING COMMUNITY PARTNERS:** In each community engaging community-based prekindergarten providers was a challenge primarily due to scheduling conflicts and staff shortages, which made it difficult for them to participate in professional learning or First 10 meetings and events. In Woonsocket, an additional challenge with community-based providers arose—many were reluctant to participate in the Passport to K series for fear that they would somehow be monitored or evaluated.
- **TIME:** Time to meet and time to conduct the work were common challenges in each community. Several teams mentioned the difficulty in finding time for the team to meet, including with EDC and for professional learning opportunities. In Woonsocket the team mentioned school unions as an additional barrier because they dictate how much time teachers can spend on professional learning and unfortunately the district set the professional learning calendar before the First 10 team was able to provide input. These factors limited the amount of time teachers could engage in professional learning events. Similarly, Johnston had difficulty involving other kindergarten teachers in their multiple professional learning events.
  - Time for leadership to do this work, especially school principals, is also challenging given that there are many needs and a lot on principals' plates, especially due to COVID. Multiple team members acknowledged that the First 10

leadership role could be a full-time position, especially if that person is school-based and trying to establish a true community-school.

- **STAFFING:** Staff availability was a challenge in East Providence, specifically the availability of staff to run the play and learn sessions. Staff from the East Bay Community Action Program staffed the play and learns and when they had turnover, they were not able to fill the positions immediately. Fortunately, the librarian and others stepped in to assist. The East Providence team also acknowledged that their family navigators are highly demanding but are entry-level positions: they require working nights and weekends to meet with families but are paid near minimum wage. One First 10 leader shared her concern with this system: “We’re saying this work is worth doing, and it’s worth doing well. But we’re not saying it’s worth funding. It’s a systemic issue.”
- **CREATING COMMUNITY SCHOOLS:** The East Providence team experienced a unique challenge in their efforts to move toward establishing a community school. They shared that moving toward this model in an elementary school is challenging because the schools already cannot handle what they have. Additionally, they shared that early childhood needs are different than elementary needs, but schools treat grades K-8 the same, with a focus on testing and preparing young students for testing in later grades. A team member expressed that it would be ideal to focus on the needs of K-2 students separately from the rest of the school and have less emphasis on future testing in grade 3.



## Facilitating Processes

- **ADMINISTRATOR BUY-IN:** The First 10 initiatives in Woonsocket and East Providence built upon the Transition to Kindergarten efforts that began in 2019. Garnering district administrator support was initially challenging during that initiative, but because of those efforts, the communities now have complete buy-in from superintendents, principals, and other agency leaders. Their support facilitates the success of First 10. For example, a Woonsocket team member shared the following:

“[The Superintendent] is very involved, very engaged, and so incredibly proud of these ladies. He pushes out a community newsletter once a week and we had asked if he would support the Passport to K. It’s been in his weekly communication. He is so incredibly proud of these efforts. He also helped to connect me with somebody from the Woonsocket newspaper so that we could get a little press about the events. And one call from [the superintendent] and there we had it: we had a reporter there and she stayed almost the whole time. It was really adorable. She was like, ‘This is so fun.’”



- **INSTITUTIONALIZING EVENTS:** Time is needed to establish annual routines and expectations among families and early childhood educators. Setting appropriate expectations around implementation uptake and institutionalization of processes will be beneficial for new First 10 communities. For East Providence, Johnston, and Woonsocket implementation of First 10 practices occurred gradually over several years to where now the practices are institutionalized, albeit to varying degrees across communities. In addition to time, a key to institutionalizing practices is to hold them consistently, whether they are bi-monthly play and learn sessions or annual Welcome to K events. Consistency establishes expectations for all involved and fosters sustainability.
- **CROSS-AGENCY COLLABORATION** is a key feature of the First 10 model, which in turn bolsters the impact of the First 10 initiatives. Each First 10 team represented multiple agencies—some of which had not previously worked together in support of early childhood—and they connected with other agencies, such as libraries, health care organizations, and clubs to share information and/or coordinate services for children and families. Through these cross-agency partnerships new opportunities arose. For example, in East Providence, EDC connected the team with the local Boys and Girls club. Together they created a summer camp program for rising kindergarteners who had not attended prekindergarten. In Woonsocket the team connected with the Autism Project, which is now funding their Basics Insights program. First 10 teams also collaborated with other agencies on local and federal grant opportunities, with the support of EDC. Overall, cross-agency representation and participation by partners at different levels within an organization contribute to successful First 10 implementation.
- **NEW INNOVATIONS:** The teams shared that one of the biggest benefits from EDC's support was the innovative ideas that the EDC facilitators brought to the First 10 teams regarding strategies and practices to implement. Each team acknowledged that they would not have known about or thought of many of the activities that they

implemented without EDC bringing those ideas to their team or hearing about them at the First 10 Network meetings. EDC's support around clarifying the ideas and implementing them was also viewed as extremely beneficial.

- **ORGANIZATION:** EDC helped organize the teams in terms of articulating plans, facilitating regular meetings, and taking notes, which was beneficial to moving the work forward as well as for holding the teams accountable. Without EDC filling this role in the future the teams will have to take ownership of these tasks, which some mentioned they know will be difficult—particularly scheduling meetings. Multiple team members acknowledged they feel as though EDC has empowered them to lead the work, so the added responsibility of organization should be a reasonable adjustment.
- **COMMUNICATION:** EDC's First 10 Director played a key role in communicating about the First 10 initiative overall and specific practices to internal and external audiences in each community. For example, in Woonsocket he met with the Thundermist director and provided information and the research base for The Basics. In East Providence he presented about First 10 to the Boys and Girls club. In Johnston, he helped facilitate joint-professional learning. The teams noted how helpful this process has been and will need to take ownership of this role moving forward, perhaps with the use of marketing materials and talking points from EDC.

## Summary

This report summarized findings related to each communities' progress toward their goals, team collaboration and relationships, sustainability, challenges, and facilitating processes. In summary, each team has made considerable progress toward their goals through implementing innovative practices. The communities vary in the degree of their implementation but are addressing each of the main three strategies in the First 10 model. The teams have established strong cross-agency partnerships, both internally within their teams and externally with agencies in their communities who are helping promote the First 10 initiative. The teams vary in the extent to which they have established sustainability plans and resolved the need for funding future efforts. The teams are exploring local and federal grants as possibilities, while Woonsocket has already revised an existing grant to cover some of the initiative's costs. The biggest challenges experienced by the teams include engaging community partners and time to undertake the work including conducting professional learning. Several processes facilitated teams' success including securing administrator buy-in, institutionalizing events, and collaborating across agencies. In addition, EDC's support in bringing new innovations to the teams, organizing the teams, and communicating with external agencies was beneficial.

# Appendix: First 10 Successes in Each Community

## First 10 Successes: East Providence



EDC supported the East Providence community in its transition to kindergarten efforts from 2019-2020 and again through this First 10 initiative. With this intensive support, the East Providence team observed numerous successes and is seen as a national model for its cross-agency collaboration. In fact, one of its biggest successes, according to the team members, is the First 10 team itself. The team represents the district, schools, the Health Equity Zone, and the local library, and regularly engages with other agencies, including the district's school registrar and the local Boys & Girls club. As one team member noted, First 10 brought them together and fostered relevant connections:



I share a building, and the person in the office next to me was working on an initiative. We didn't even know we were working together. We were doing things totally separate until we happened to be in a meeting, and it was like, "What?" So, it's really helped with the communication within my own agency, but also the relationships with ... Over the years, I always heard Karen's name. I always heard the great things that were happening with pre-K, and it's just helped with those relationships and to be able to have staff working in the schools.

– *First 10 Team Leader*

These connections are attributable to First 10's support in brokering relationships. For example, the team attributed the new connection with the Boys & Girls club to the First 10 Facilitator's connection-making as well as his engagement in fostering the relationship through a presentation about First 10. This collaboration led to a new summer camp for rising kindergartens with no prior preschool experience.

Through the First 10 team collaboration, the team has considered multiple grants (local and federal), which they acknowledge is a direct result of the First 10 collaboration: "So looking at how can we not compete for our resources, but recognize we have the same goal? We can get so much further if we collaborate and say, 'Okay, I have a little extra this time. You have a little extra this time. Let's share the wealth.'" EDC has also supported the team with preparing to apply for grant opportunities.

Another notable success for East Providence is that they've presented to and shared their First 10 model with other communities in Rhode Island, including Bristol-Warren, who have now begun to explore implementing certain practices related to kindergarten readiness. This spread was facilitated through the First 10 team members who represent the East Bay Community Action Program (EBCAP), which is the backbone for the HEZ in East Providence and operates in other Rhode Island communities.

East Providence has also made strong progress toward their goal of establishing a community school to create a hub for services for families and children. The Hennessey school is moving toward a community school model and may seek federal funding to further this effort. The school is one of three schools that is served by a family navigator, which is also a new role developed through the First 10 initiative. The family navigator connects families served by the school to other services, such as WIC and SNAP, and they run the play and learn sessions so that families have a familiar face at those events. The district's two family navigators also serve two preschool programs and the team hopes to extend them to all elementary schools in the future.

To read more about East Providence's First 10 journey and successes, see [this case study](#).

## First 10 Successes: Johnston



Through the First 10 initiative the Johnston team realized multiple successes including building relationships between agencies and establishing a strong relationship between the school district and community-based preschools. They also implemented school-connected play and learn sessions, provided joint professional learning sessions for prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers, and utilized the same instructional materials across both settings.

The First 10 team recognized that one of their biggest successes was the integration of community-based preschools into the initiative and the First 10 team. The team consists of several school district staff, the local librarian (schedule permitting), and two staff from a community-based preschool. The team collaborated with community-based providers and the state prekindergarten program to implement a kindergarten transition form, which is being used by all prekindergarten programs in the community. This strong relationship helped set the groundwork for the school-connected play and learn series. The series involved prekindergarten program teachers creating the lesson content, Head Start and prekindergarten teachers facilitating the sessions, and a high school student volunteer.

Relationship building between the school district and other agencies, beyond early childcare providers, is another success noted by the team and attributed to EDC's support. For example, the relationship with Tri-County Community Action Agency is strong. One team member shared the following:



Before we were just the Johnston School District and we did our own thing. [The facilitator] got us involved with the Head Starts, he got us involved with the play and learns, he got us involved with Tri-County—he got the community involved with us a lot more, [including] the library. I don't think creating those partnerships would have happened if we didn't have this grant and weren't working with [the facilitator].

– *First 10 Team Leader*

This relationship building has facilitated the team's integration of First 10 practices into existing systems, such as sharing First 10 information through the district's child outreach screener staff, who also attend the Saturday play and learn sessions and share information about the screening process. They also conduct screenings at the same time, so they can cross-refer families between the play and learn session and the screening. This reciprocal model benefits both the screening program and the First 10 team, but ultimately, benefits families the most. A team member noted this sentiment: "It's almost even before students are coming to the district, they have this new natural way of communicating with each other." Although the team is pleased with their success related to offering integrated services and connections for families, they acknowledge that they will always have work to do in this area because there will always be new families to reach.

Another success noted by the team is their professional learning activities, which the First 10 facilitator helped organize. The prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade standards cross-walking activity in particular was well-received: One team member/teacher noted, "We did not realize how much academics that they are touching upon in pre-K. So, it was just a great thing to be able to see that they're doing all of these things." The team also noted the successful implementation of the Heggerty Phonemic Awareness curriculum in both the prekindergarten and kindergarten programs, which benefitted children because they're using the same vocabulary in both settings. Additionally, the prekindergarten programs receive and use about 10 of the same books as the kindergarten classes. The prekindergarten teachers emphasize them throughout the year, and in the beginning of kindergarten the kindergarten teachers also use them to create a familiar setting for the children.

## First 10 Successes: Woonsocket



EDC supported the Woonsocket community in its transition to kindergarten efforts from 2019-2020 and again through this First 10 initiative. One of the biggest accomplishments of the earlier efforts was the new collaboration between the school district and the local Head Start. This collaboration continues to thrive as representatives from each agency are the leaders of the First 10 team. Since establishing such a strong relationship between the school district and Head Start, the team has expanded to work with other local agencies including the Health Equity Zone (HEZ), a local healthcare group—Thundermist (who is also connected to the HEZ and is the primary pediatric office in the community), and the Autism Project (a local nonprofit organization). In the opinion of one team member, the HEZ has acted as a true hub to foster connections across agencies, noting that the First 10 team has been able to rely on the HEZ to make and foster formal connections between groups.

The team's collaboration with Thundermist is particularly noteworthy. This began with one of the leaders reaching out to the doctor/owner and being invited to share more about First 10 and specifically, The Basics. The First 10 Director presented to the Thundermist group alongside the First 10 team leaders. One leader noted how helpful it was to have him participate because "he knows the history of the program inside and out and could really speak to things that I didn't know of, and how it has developed, and the research behind it, and how long it's been in action." From this meeting Thundermist agreed to share The Basics information with families, including on its television screens in their waiting rooms.

Involving others in the First 10 work is another success noted by the team leaders: "We have people coming from all different schools, schools that are not schools they work at to be a part of a vision, a vision to support these youngest kiddos in our district and give them exposure. They're super passionate about it. I have everyone from a first grade teacher, to our psychologist, to social workers coming back." One example of the involvement of others in the First 10 initiative is the local librarian, who over the past two years has collaborated on a summer reading program, created a bookmark for a book scavenger hunt, shared information about First 10 events, and hosted a regular play and learn event.

Woonsocket's "Passport to K" series has also been very successful. The event is an opportunity for incoming kindergarten students and their families—with "passports" in hand—to participate in activities at their new school. They receive a stamp on their passport after visiting each station, which may include a fun activity staffed by an educator or other school staff member. New this year, the activities are all aligned to The Basics. Principals and families provided the team with feedback that indicates they've embraced the initiative, and they would like it to continue.

Lastly, in the Spring of 2023 the team applied for and received a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation to fund their Basics campaign. They received \$10,000 which they are using to fund their play and learn sessions, which are structured around The Basics. This is one way in which the Woonsocket team is planning for the sustainability of their First 10 efforts.

