

Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K

DEFINITION

Children enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K is the percentage of low-income children and all children ages three and four enrolled in a Rhode Island Head Start or RI Pre-K preschool program. Head Start is managed by the federal government and RI Pre-K is managed by the Rhode Island Department of Education.

SIGNIFICANCE

Learning disparities appear early and grow over time without access to enriching early learning experiences. Participation in high-quality early learning programs from birth through kindergarten entry, including high-quality preschool, helps to ensure children enter school with the skills needed to succeed. Without government funding, children from low-income families, and Black and Latino children would have less access to high-quality preschool compared to higher-income and white families.^{1,2}

Decades of research have shown that high-quality preschool programs help children gain academic and social-emotional skills prior to school entry and can produce positive outcomes that last well into the school years, including reduced need for special education services and improved high school graduation rates. Sustaining these positive outcomes requires additional investments and high-quality learning in

the early grades and beyond.^{3,4}

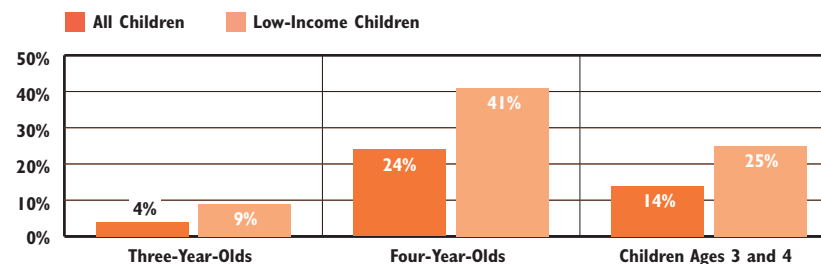
Head Start is a federally-funded comprehensive early childhood program for preschool children ages three through five who are low-income and/or have high needs. Head Start programs deliver early education; dental, medical, and mental health support; nutrition services, and developmental screenings. Families receive wraparound support and have opportunities to be involved with decision making, participate in classes, and volunteer in the program.^{5,6}

State-funded Pre-K programs are growing across the U.S. As of 2021, 44 states and Washington, DC operated state Pre-K programs, serving 29% of four-year-olds and 5% of three-year-olds across the U.S.⁷ The RI Pre-K program was launched in 2009 and serves children who are selected through a state-managed lottery. RI Pre-K is delivered by public schools, Head Start agencies, and child care programs that meet the same quality standards. *The Rhode Island Prekindergarten Education Act* establishes a state goal to provide access to publicly-funded, high-quality Pre-K for all three- and four-year-olds by building on existing early childhood education infrastructure in communities.^{8,9}

Head Start and RI Pre-K are an important part of a strong statewide early learning system that starts at birth and continues through third grade, including high-quality child care and nurturing early elementary classrooms.¹⁰



Percentage of Children Ages 3 and 4 Enrolled in Head Start and/or RI Pre-K, Rhode Island, 2022-2023



Source: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT calculations using October 2022 enrollment in Head Start and RI Pre-K as numerator and Census 2010 population of children ages 3 and 4 as denominator with low-income population estimated using the % of children receiving free or reduced-price lunch.

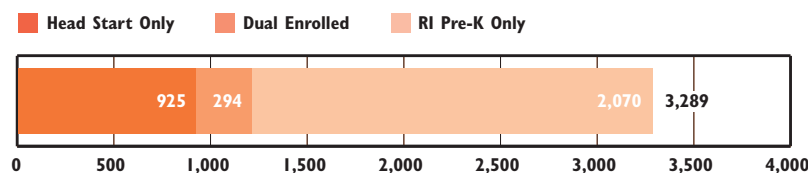
◆ As of October 2022, there were 3,289 children ages three and four enrolled in Head Start, RI Pre-K, or both during the two years before kindergarten, reaching approximately 14% of all children and 25% of low-income children.¹¹

◆ Of the total, 925 children were enrolled in Head Start only, 2,070 children were enrolled in RI Pre-K only, and 294 were dually enrolled in both Head Start and RI Pre-K with braided funding.¹²

◆ In the four core cities, approximately 26% of low-income children and 22% of all children ages three and four, were enrolled in either Head Start, RI Pre-K, or both, while in the remainder of the state, enrollment for low-income children and all children was approximately 22% and 9%, respectively.¹³



Number of Children Ages 3 and 4 Enrolled in Head Start, RI Pre-K, or Both, Rhode Island, 2022

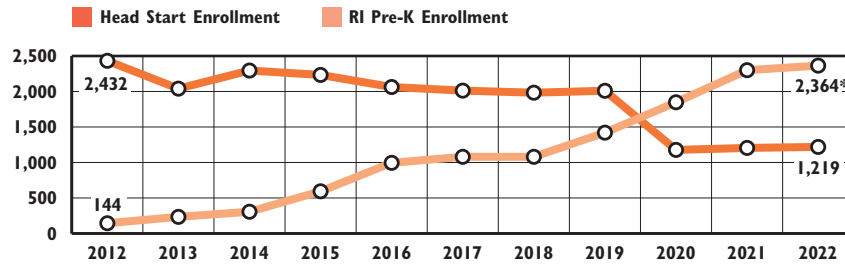


Source: Rhode Island Head Start programs and Rhode Island Department of Education, October 2022 enrollment.

Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K



Head Start and RI Pre-K Enrollment, 2012-2022

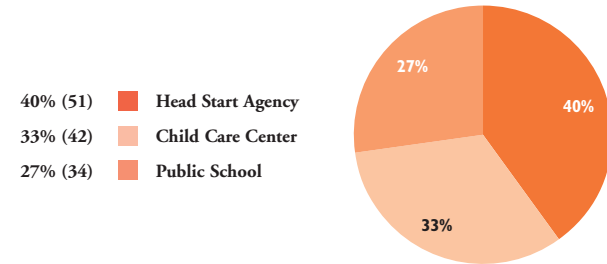


Sources: Head Start program reports to Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2012-2022. RI Pre-K enrollment for 2012 to 2021 from National Institute for Early Education Research, *The State of Preschool 2013, 2014, 2015*. RI Pre-K enrollment for 2015 to 2022 from Rhode Island Department of Education. *Some children are dually enrolled in Head Start and RI Pre-K -- 140 in 2019, 176 in 2020, 253 in 2021, and 294 in 2022.

- ◆ In October 2022, there were 1,219 children enrolled in Head Start, down 39% from 2019 and down 50% from 2012. Of these, 294 (24%) were dually enrolled in RI Pre-K.¹⁴
- ◆ Of the 1,219 children enrolled in Head Start, 497 (41%) were age three and 722 (59%) were age four at the start of the school year. Eighty-two percent of children enrolled in Head Start were enrolled in a classroom that operated for at least six hours per day.¹⁵
- ◆ Inability to hire and retain qualified Head Start teachers due to noncompetitive wages caused the closure of 30 Head Start classrooms as well as reduced enrollment in 14 Head Start classrooms in the 2022-2023 school year, despite a waiting list of 237 eligible children.¹⁶
- ◆ Nationally, 20% of Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms are closed and there is an estimated waiting list of over 100,000 children. Inadequate compensation for Head Start teachers is the primary reason for the closures and wait lists.¹⁷
- ◆ In October 2022, there were 2,364 children enrolled in RI Pre-K, up 66% from 2019. Of these, 294 (12%) were dually enrolled in Head Start.¹⁸ Of the 2,364 children enrolled in RI Pre-K, almost all were age four at the start of the school year. Less than 1% were age 3, all of whom were dually enrolled in Head Start.¹⁹
- ◆ Of the 2,364 children enrolled in RI Pre-K, 1,781 (75%) were low-income and 583 (25%) were higher-income.²⁰



RI Pre-K Classrooms by Setting, Rhode Island, 2022



n = 127

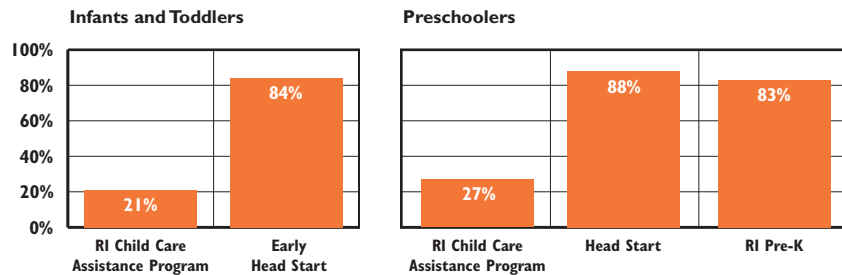
Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, October 2022.

- ◆ As of the 2022-2023 school year, there were 127 RI Pre-K classrooms with 51 (40%) operated by Head Start agencies, 42 (33%) operated by child care centers, and 34 (27%) operated by public schools.²¹
- ◆ Children are selected to participate in RI Pre-K through a lottery, with outreach to recruit children from low-income and moderate-income families, children who are differently abled, children who are Multilingual Learners, children who are involved with the child welfare system, and children who are experiencing homelessness.²²
- ◆ Decades of research has shown that Head Start improves children's academic, cognitive, language, and social-emotional skills and health including reduced childhood obesity and improved immunization rates. Head Start children are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and receive a postsecondary degree, license or certification.^{23,24}
- ◆ A 2012 evaluation of RI Pre-K found that it improves children's language and math skills and closes the achievement gap between low-income children and higher-income children by three-quarters.²⁵

Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K



Enrollment in Programs with a High-Quality BrightStars Rating by Funding Source, Rhode Island, 2022



Sources: Rhode Island Head Start Programs, 2022. Rhode Island Department of Education, 2022. Rhode Island Department of Human Services, 2022.

- ◆ Across the U.S., Head Start centers are typically higher quality than many other early care and education programs.²⁶
- ◆ Rhode Island Head Start programs score above the national average and significantly above research-based thresholds for emotional support and classroom organization and meet the research-based threshold for instructional support based on classroom observations of teacher-child interactions.²⁷
- ◆ In 2021, Rhode Island was one of only five states with a Pre-K program that met all 10 recommended quality benchmarks, including teachers who have a bachelor's degree with specialized training in early childhood education and program monitoring that includes annual classroom observations.²⁸
- ◆ As of 2022, 88% of children enrolled in Head Start and 83% of children enrolled in RI Pre-K were in a program that had achieved a high-quality BrightStars rating of four or five stars. In comparison, only 27% of preschool-age children in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) were enrolled in a program that had achieved a high-quality BrightStars rating.^{29,30,31}
- ◆ As of 2022, 84% of infants and toddlers enrolled in Early Head Start were in a program that had achieved a high-quality BrightStars rating of four or five stars. In comparison, only 21% of infants and toddlers in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) were enrolled in a program that had achieved a high-quality BrightStars rating.^{32,33}



Children with High Needs

- ◆ Of the 1,219 children enrolled in Head Start as of October 2022, 115 (9%) children enrolled in Head Start had developmental delays or disabilities and received special education services through their local school districts. Also, in October 2022, 27 (2%) were in foster care and 24 (2%) were homeless.³⁴
- ◆ In 2020-2021, Head Start programs in Rhode Island were serving 37% of Black children, 44% of Hispanic children, and 40% of white children who lived in poverty.³⁵
- ◆ In 2020-2021, 31% of children enrolled in Head Start programs in Rhode Island spoke a language other than English at home, with 24% speaking Spanish.³⁶
- ◆ Of the 2,364 children enrolled in RI Pre-K in October 2022, 283 (12%) children in RI Pre-K had a developmental delay or disability and received special education services through their local school districts. Also, in October 2022, 43 (2%) were in foster care and 21 (1%) were homeless.³⁷
- ◆ Of the 2,364 children enrolled in RI Pre-K in October 2022, 82 (3%) were Asian/Pacific Islander, 384 (16%) were Black, 792 (34%) were Hispanic/Latino, 382 (16%) were Multiracial, 9 (less than 1%) were Native American, and 715 (30%) were white.³⁸



Public Preschool Contributes to a Strong, Equitable Birth to Five System

- ◆ Including Head Start, child care centers, and family child care homes in public preschool expansion and leveraging the national Head Start model and expanding Head Start and Early Head Start programs to serve more families would help build an equitable birth to five system.
- ◆ Increasing investments to sustain, expand, and improve programs for infants and toddlers as preschool expands is vital to a strong birth to five system.
- ◆ States should provide equitable and competitive compensation to early childhood educators serving children from birth through age five, regardless of setting.³⁹

Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K

Table 39.

Children Enrolled in Head Start and/or RI Pre-K, Rhode Island, 2022

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# CHILDREN AGES 3 AND 4	% LOW-INCOME CHILDREN	ESTIMATED # LOW-INCOME CHILDREN AGES 3 AND 4	AGE 3		AGE 4				ESTIMATED % OF LOW-INCOME CHILDREN AGE 3 OR 4 IN HEAD START OR RI PRE-K	ESTIMATED % OF ALL CHILDREN AGE 3 OR 4 IN HEAD START OR RI PRE-K
				ENROLLED IN HEAD START ONLY	DUAL ENROLLED IN RI PRE-K & HEAD START	ENROLLED IN HEAD START ONLY	DUAL ENROLLED IN RI PRE-K & HEAD START	ENROLLED IN RI PRE-K ONLY LOW-INCOME	ENROLLED IN RI PRE-K ONLY HIGHER-INCOME		
Barrington	369	6%	23	0	0	0	1	2	0	13%	1%
Bristol	401	29%	115	5	0	0	3	8	3	14%	5%
Burrillville	321	32%	102	4	0	6	0	0	0	10%	3%
Central Falls	699	96%	668	6	0	21	0	136	14	24%	25%
Charlestown	153	17%	27	1	0	0	1	1	0	11%	2%
Coventry	734	28%	208	9	0	1	16	26	32	25%	11%
Cranston	1,684	39%	652	45	0	26	35	90	99	30%	18%
Cumberland	810	18%	148	1	0	5	0	3	0	6%	1%
East Greenwich	277	7%	20	0	0	0	0	2	0	10%	1%
East Providence	982	47%	457	19	0	12	3	112	100	32%	25%
Exeter	105	14%	15	2	1	1	1	0	0	34%	5%
Foster	99	31%	31	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Glocester	191	13%	25	1	0	2	0	0	0	12%	2%
Hopkinton	167	17%	29	3	0	0	1	0	0	14%	2%
Jamestown	102	7%	7	0	0	0	0	1	0	15%	1%
Johnston	528	43%	226	9	0	15	0	15	14	17%	10%
Lincoln	412	25%	103	2	0	2	0	8	5	12%	4%
Little Compton	49	12%	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Middletown	431	34%	146	6	0	4	10	10	6	21%	8%
Narragansett	210	14%	28	0	0	0	0	2	0	7%	1%
New Shoreham	15	12%	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Newport	514	63%	324	23	0	10	9	20	4	19%	13%
North Kingstown	593	22%	128	4	0	7	1	4	9	12%	4%
North Providence	575	40%	227	11	1	9	12	9	3	18%	8%
North Smithfield	218	18%	39	0	0	1	0	2	0	8%	1%
Pawtucket	2,053	61%	1,260	30	0	64	9	106	53	17%	13%
Portsmouth	359	13%	48	1	0	3	0	3	0	14%	2%
Providence	4,743	77%	3,669	155	1	179	20	660	105	28%	24%
Richmond	190	17%	33	1	0	3	0	0	0	12%	2%
Scituate	197	14%	27	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Smithfield	343	14%	49	3	0	5	0	2	0	21%	3%
South Kingstown	504	17%	87	2	5	4	8	0	0	22%	4%
Tiverton	287	22%	62	7	0	4	0	0	0	18%	4%
Warren	240	29%	69	9	0	2	14	10	6	51%	17%
Warwick	1,579	34%	544	16	0	4	45	44	52	20%	10%
West Greenwich	115	14%	16	1	0	0	1	0	0	12%	2%
West Warwick	703	51%	359	24	0	7	40	16	16	24%	15%
Westerly	490	32%	156	11	2	2	8	4	4	17%	6%
Woonsocket	1,218	77%	936	76	0	29	56	181	58	37%	33%
Four Core Cities	8,713	75%	6,546	267	1	293	85	1,083	230	26%	22%
Remainder of State	14,947	29%	4,304	220	9	135	209	394	353	22%	9%
Rhode Island	23,660	45%	10,692	487	10	428	294	1,477	583	25%	14%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Head Start Programs, children enrolled as of October 2022, by child residence. Rhode Island Department of Education, children enrolled in RI Pre-K as of October 2022, by child residence.

The estimated number of children age four is from Census 2010, Summary File 1. The percentage of low-income four-year-olds is estimated using the percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (at or below 185% of the federal poverty level) in the local public school district with regional school district data used for all communities in the region.

The city/town table was redesigned in 2023 to include children ages three and four. Percentages should not be compared with prior Factbooks.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

References

^{1,3} *A matter of equity: Preschool education in America.* (2015). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

^{2,4} Meloy, B., Gardner, M., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2019). *Untangling the evidence on preschool effectiveness: Insights for policymakers.* Washington, DC: Learning Policy Institute.

^{5,27,35,36} Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., & Duer, J. K. (2022). *The state(s) of Head Start and Early Head Start: Looking at equity.* New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

⁶ National Head Start Association. (2023). *Rhode Island 2023 Head Start and Early Head Start profile.* Retrieved April 2, 2023, from www.nhsa.org

^{7,28} Friedman-Kraus, A. H., et al. (2022). *The state of preschool 2021: State preschool yearbook.* New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

⁸ *Rhode Island Prekindergarten Education Act,* Rhode Island General Laws, 16-87.

^{9,22} *Request for proposal (RFP) – Bid# 7535368: Evaluate quality of Rhode Island Pre-Kindergarten Program.* (2013). Providence, RI: State of Rhode Island Department of Administration, Division of Purchases.

(continued on page 187)