

Children Receiving Preschool Special Education Services

DEFINITION

Children receiving preschool special education services is the percentage of children ages three to five who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and are receiving special education services in Rhode Island.

SIGNIFICANCE

Preschool special education is an important component of the early care and education system, providing specially-designed instruction so each child can meet learning standards. The federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* specifies that children ages three to five with disabilities, including developmental delays, have the same right to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment as school-age children with disabilities.¹

Developmental delays are identified when a child does not reach milestones at the same time as other children their age. Some young children with developmental delays are eventually diagnosed with a disability while others catch up to their peers when provided with high-quality educational opportunities, therapies, or interventions.^{2,3} Routine developmental screening during the early stages of life, followed by evaluation and diagnostic assessment, helps children gain access to needed services to promote positive

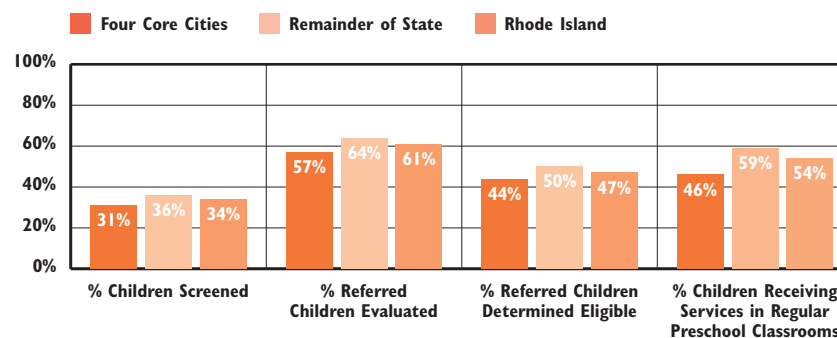
outcomes and prevent ongoing educational challenges.⁴

In Rhode Island, school districts work to screen every child ages three through five every year through the Child Outreach screening program.⁵ During the 2021-2022 school year in Rhode Island, districts completed developmental screenings for only 34% of children ages three to five, up from 23% the previous year but down from 39% pre-pandemic. Preschool-age children in the four core cities were less likely to receive a developmental screening (31%) than children in the remainder of the state (36%). Of the children who were referred for evaluation based on positive screens in 2021-2022, 61% were evaluated and 47% were determined eligible for special education. Children in the four core cities were less likely to be evaluated (57%) or determined eligible (44%) than children in the remainder of the state (64% and 50% respectively).^{6,7}

Approximately 17% of U.S. children ages three to 17 have a developmental disability, with higher prevalence among low-income children, children with low birthweight, and boys.⁸ Under *IDEA*, each state sets its own criteria to determine the magnitude of a delay needed to qualify for special education services.⁹



Preschool Special Education Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion Rates, Rhode Island, June 2022



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2021-2022 Child Outreach data and June 2022 Special Education Census. Percent children determined eligible is of those children referred for evaluation from Child Outreach screening.

- ◆ In June 2022, there were 2,920 children ages three to five receiving preschool special education services (8% of all preschool children), up from 2,597 in 2021 but down from 3,156 in 2019 (pre-pandemic). Children in the four core cities were just as likely to receive preschool special education services (8%) as children in the remainder of the state (8%).^{10,11}
- ◆ Preschool children with disabilities who attend high-quality preschool with typically developing children and receive special education services in inclusive settings have improved outcomes.¹² In June 2022 in Rhode Island, 54% of preschool-age children received special education services within an inclusive early childhood classroom. Children in the four core cities were less likely to receive preschool special education services in an inclusive early childhood setting (46%) than children in the remainder of the state (59%).¹³
- ◆ More than four in 10 children receiving preschool special education services in Rhode Island receive services outside of inclusive preschool programs, with 13% enrolled in a separate special education preschool class or school, 22% receiving services through “walk-in” visits to a service provider, 10% enrolled in a preschool setting but receiving special education services in another location, and <1% in a home or hospital.¹⁴
- ◆ In June 2022, 47% (1,375) of the 2,920 children receiving preschool special education services in Rhode Island qualified under the developmental delay category, 43% (1,258) had an identified speech/language disability, 6% (176) were diagnosed with autism, and 4% (111) had another diagnosed disability.¹⁵

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Table 40.

Children Ages 3 to 5 Receiving Special Education Services, Rhode Island, 2022

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# OF CHILDREN AGES 3-5	DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING EVALUATION, AND ELIGIBILITY, 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR				PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION BY SETTING JUNE 2022				
		% POPULATION SCREENED	# REFERRED FOR EVALUATION	# EVALUATED	# DETERMINED ELIGIBLE	% IN INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASS	% IN SELF-CONTAINED SETTING	% IN OTHER SETTING	TOTAL # RECEIVING SERVICES	% RECEIVING SERVICES
Barrington ⁺	630	46%	10	7	7	62%	0%	38%	45	7%
Bristol Warren ⁺	714	23%	48	26	17	64%	4%	32%	50	7%
Burrillville	452	37%	18	17	16	60%	2%	37%	43	10%
Central Falls ⁺	1,045	38%	82	67	47	64%	17%	19%	139	13%
Charlino	666	51%	33	31	25	37%	1%	62%	90	14%
Coventry ⁺	1,058	38%	27	19	18	49%	1%	50%	98	9%
Cranston ⁺	2,635	31%	77	33	20	49%	8%	43%	186	7%
Cumberland	1,312	31%	40	24	16	64%	13%	23%	109	8%
East Greenwich ⁺	604	40%	11	10	8	100%	0%	0%	38	6%
East Providence ⁺	1,460	29%	51	19	16	81%	9%	10%	105	7%
Exeter-West Greenwich	386	42%	8	7	6	46%	0%	54%	28	7%
Foster	102	NA	NA	NA	NA	73%	0%	27%	11	11%
Glocester	238	NA	NA	NA	NA	29%	0%	71%	28	12%
Jamestown	126	62%	7	6	4	60%	0%	40%	*	4%
Johnston ⁺	894	35%	26	21	20	74%	0%	26%	89	10%
Lincoln	720	48%	64	45	40	80%	3%	18%	80	11%
Little Compton	66	35%	8	7	6	50%	0%	50%	*	3%
Middletown	813	23%	38	18	16	46%	8%	46%	37	5%
Narragansett	192	48%	3	2	2	88%	0%	12%	26	14%
New Shoreham	26	44%	0	0	0	NA	NA	NA	0	0%
Newport ⁺	1,029	33%	36	21	14	53%	11%	36%	47	5%
North Kingstown	863	56%	33	27	21	65%	0%	35%	68	8%
North Providence ⁺	1,003	35%	42	25	18	48%	14%	38%	73	7%
North Smithfield	345	43%	8	7	5	43%	0%	57%	28	8%
Pawtucket ⁺	2,997	30%	179	97	64	28%	50%	22%	215	7%
Portsmouth	591	34%	24	15	9	53%	0%	48%	40	7%
Providence ⁺	7,746	30%	587	297	240	44%	15%	41%	529	7%
Scituate	270	NA	NA	NA	NA	40%	0%	60%	25	9%
Smithfield	546	57%	27	15	7	71%	0%	29%	45	8%
South Kingstown ⁺	620	56%	20	17	15	62%	0%	38%	42	7%
Tiverton	420	30%	34	14	10	58%	15%	27%	26	6%
Warwick	2,264	24%	53	31	27	43%	39%	17%	180	8%
West Warwick ⁺	1,034	34%	56	39	34	53%	28%	19%	120	12%
Westerly ⁺	589	50%	39	32	21	82%	0%	18%	68	12%
Woonsocket ⁺	1,914	32%	122	96	76	60%	3%	37%	196	10%
Charter Schools ⁺	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	100%	0%	0%	*	NA
RI School for the Deaf	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0%	100%	0%	*	NA
Four Core Cities	13,702	31%	970	557	427	46%	20%	34%	1,079	8%
Remainder of State	22,668	36%	861	553	431	59%	9%	32%	1,832	8%
Rhode Island	36,370	34%	1,831	1,110	858	54%	13%	33%	2,920	8%

Sources of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), June 2022 Special Education Census. Beginning in 2020, the early childhood special education census data was adjusted to exclude children age five on June 30 who were enrolled in kindergarten and they were included in the K-12 special education census.

2021-2022 Developmental screening, referral, evaluation, and eligibility data is from the RIDE Office of Student, Community, and Academic Supports. Foster, Glocester, and Scituate school districts collaborate as the Northwest Region to conduct screenings, evaluations, and eligibility determinations and data is not available separately for these districts. The Northwest Region screened 35% of their population, referred 20 children for evaluations, completed evaluations for 18 children, and determined 13 children eligible for preschool special education services in 2021-2022.

⁺ Districts implementing Itinerant Early Childhood Special Education, delivering services in community-based early childhood classrooms.

*Fewer than 10 students are in this category. Actual numbers are not shown to protect student confidentiality. These students are still counted in district totals and in the four core cities, remainder of the state, and state totals.

The denominator is the number of children ages three to five residing in each district during the 2021-2022 school year from the Rhode Island Department of Health's KIDSNET database shared with RIDE.

Due to changes in the denominator, screening rates and percentage receiving preschool special education services should not be compared with data in Factbooks published before 2016.

Inclusive early childhood class means children receive the majority of their special education services in a regular early childhood education class at a public school, a Head Start program, or a community-based child care program or preschool. Data include children who are district-placed and who are parentally-placed.

Charter school is Highlander Charter School.

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

References

^{1,3,9,12} Hebbeler, K. & Spiker, D. (2016). Supporting young children with disabilities. *The Future of Children*, 26(2), 185-205.

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