

Licensed Capacity of Early Learning Programs

DEFINITION

Licensed capacity of early learning programs is the number of child care and early learning programs and slots licensed by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services for children under age six. Licensed centers include child care programs, preschools, nursery schools, and center-based Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

SIGNIFICANCE

Nationally, more than half of children under age five regularly attend a child care or early learning program. Research shows that when children attend child care and early learning programs that are high-quality, there are lasting benefits including improved math, language, and social skills.¹

However, for many families, high-quality child care is not affordable or available. Nationally, 83% of parents report that finding quality, affordable child care in their area is a serious problem, and nearly three in four parents report that child care issues negatively impacted their career. Families that have infants and toddlers, parents of children with disabilities, immigrant families, and parents working nonstandard hours face limited options for licensed child care.²

Access to stable, affordable, quality child care is a basic need for many working families and is critical for

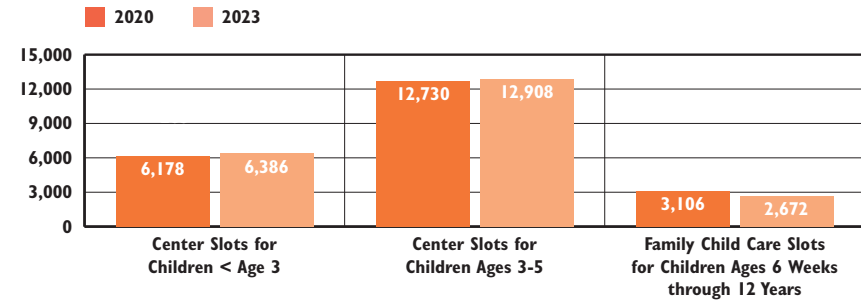
Rhode Island's economy. When parents have difficulty finding and keeping child care, they are more likely to be absent from work and to leave their jobs.³ Between 2017 and 2021, 74% of Rhode Island children under age six had all parents in the workforce, higher than the U.S. rate of 67%.⁴

Revenue from family fees and available public subsidies for child care are not adequate for most child care and early learning programs to pay competitive wages that are needed to attract and retain qualified and effective educators.⁵ In 2021 in Rhode Island, the median wage was \$13.26/hour for a child care educator and \$14.08 for a preschool teacher.⁶

The federal *Child Care and Development Block Grant Act* requires states to establish and enforce clear health and safety standards for child care programs. States must conduct at least one unannounced inspection of all licensed providers each year and must maintain a public website with a searchable list of child care providers with information on the quality of each child care program and the findings from at least three years of licensing inspections. States must also publicly report data on serious injuries, substantiated child maltreatment, and deaths in child care programs.⁷ In 2021, there were four children seriously injured, 12 children who were maltreated, and zero children who died in a licensed child care program in Rhode Island.⁸



Licensed Early Learning Program Capacity, Rhode Island, 2020 and 2023



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, 2020 and 2023.

- ◆ In January 2023, there were 6,386 slots for infants and toddlers (37% for infants less than 18 months and 63% for toddlers ages 18 months through 2 years) and 12,908 slots for preschoolers (ages 3 through 5) in licensed centers. The number of infant/toddler slots is up 3% and the number of preschool slots is up 1% since January 2020 (pre-pandemic).⁹
- ◆ In January 2023, there were 2,672 slots for children ages 6 weeks to 12 years in licensed family child care homes, down 14% since January 2020 (pre-pandemic).¹⁰
- ◆ The number of available spaces for children cannot be determined from licensed capacity data. Staffing shortages caused by low compensation in the child care and early learning field are common nationally, causing classroom closures and reduced operating capacity.¹¹
- ◆ Nationally in October 2022, 67% of child care programs reported they were experiencing a staffing shortage. Among those, 45% reported they are serving fewer children and 37% reported a longer waiting list.¹²
- ◆ As of January 2023, 75% of licensed family child care providers and 69% of licensed early learning centers in Rhode Island accept children participating in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), which covers all or part of the cost of child care for eligible low-income families.¹³
- ◆ In addition to licensed programs operated by community-based agencies and family child care providers, there are 55 traditional public schools, one public charter school, and one state-operated school in Rhode Island that have preschool classrooms.¹⁴

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Table 34.

Capacity of Licensed Early Learning Programs, Rhode Island, January 2023

CITY/TOWN	# OF LICENSED CENTERS	# OF CENTER SLOTS FOR INFANTS < AGE 18 MONTHS	# OF CENTER SLOTS FOR TODDLERS AGES 18 MONTHS THROUGH < AGE 3	# OF CENTER SLOTS FOR CHILDREN AGES 3-5	# OF LICENSED FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES	# OF LICENSED FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME SLOTS*	TOTAL LICENSED EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM SLOTS
Barrington	10	58	95	391	5	32	576
Bristol	4	29	32	68	4	24	153
Burrillville	4	21	26	86	1	6	139
Central Falls	3	31	47	209	13	87	374
Charlestown	4	8	6	92	0	0	106
Coventry	7	52	87	233	3	20	392
Cranston	27	245	288	1,139	45	303	1,975
Cumberland	6	24	55	306	9	76	461
East Greenwich	14	170	297	599	0	0	1,066
East Providence	16	39	118	548	1	6	711
Exeter	2	12	12	52	0	0	76
Foster	1	8	11	18	0	0	37
Glocester	4	32	43	100	0	0	175
Hopkinton	3	0	0	63	1	8	71
Jamestown	1	8	22	34	1	8	72
Johnston	20	201	257	545	9	65	1,068
Lincoln	5	48	87	206	6	36	377
Little Compton	1	0	0	20	0	0	20
Middletown	11	91	137	407	1	6	641
Narragansett	2	0	12	60	1	6	78
New Shoreham	1	0	10	12	0	0	22
Newport	3	14	41	145	1	8	208
North Kingstown	7	41	66	326	3	16	449
North Providence	9	38	71	265	7	46	420
North Smithfield	1	0	8	30	4	40	78
Pawtucket	15	125	292	743	24	160	1,320
Portsmouth	5	32	55	151	1	12	250
Providence	52	250	530	2,289	228	1,531	4,600
Richmond	0	0	0	0	1	12	12
Scituate	2	24	59	127	0	0	210
Smithfield	9	125	218	503	1	8	854
South Kingstown	13	101	172	390	4	30	693
Tiverton	4	24	36	142	1	8	210
Warren	5	32	48	201	1	6	287
Warwick	22	330	517	1,171	5	34	2,052
West Greenwich	3	16	30	89	0	0	135
West Warwick	5	50	97	269	4	26	442
Westerly	7	42	61	282	1	6	391
Woonsocket	12	24	98	597	6	46	765
Four Core Cities	82	430	967	3,838	271	1,824	7,059
Remainder of State	238	1,915	3,074	9,070	121	848	14,907
Rhode Island	320	2,345	4,041	12,908	392	2,672	21,966

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Human Services, number of licensed child care center slots and programs for children under age six and number of licensed family child care homes and slots, January 2023.

Licensed centers include child care programs, preschools, nursery schools, and center-based Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

*Licensed family child care slots are for children ages six weeks to 12 years old.

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

References

¹⁵ Donoghue, E. A. & AAP Council on Early Childhood. (2017). Quality early education and child care from birth to kindergarten. *Pediatrics*, 140(2): e20171488.

² Malik, R., et al. (2018). *America's child care deserts in 2018*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

³ Schochet, L. (2019). *The child care crisis is keeping women out of the workforce*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. Retrieved March 25, 2021, from www.americanprogress.org

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017-2021. Table DP03.

⁶ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022). *May 2021 State occupational employment and wage estimates, Rhode Island*. Retrieved April 2, 2022, from www.bls.gov

⁷ Matthews, H., Schulman, K., Vogtman, J., Johnson-Staub, C., & Blank, H. (2017). *Implementing the Child Care and Development Block Grant Reauthorization: A Guide for States*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy & National Women's Law Center.

⁸ Rhode Island Department of Human Services. (2022). *Office of child care: Aggregated data report (2021)*. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from www.dhs.ri.gov

^{9,10,13} Rhode Island Department of Human Services, child care licensing data, January 2020 and January 2023.

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