



EARLY LEARNING FACT SHEET

Promoting early learning and development Birth to 8

Focus on Program Quality

High-quality child care, preschool, Pre-K, and after-school programs are essential for children’s learning and growth, for parents to work and support their families, and for our state’s economic success. Children who attend high-quality programs are more likely to start school with strong language, cognitive, and social skills.¹

Unfortunately, many families have difficulty finding and enrolling their children in high-quality early care and education programs, because they aren’t available in their communities, don’t have openings for specific ages of children (especially infants), and/or don’t offer the hours parents need. In addition, many families cannot afford the cost of high-quality programs. Neither public nor family payments are adequate to cover the cost of high-quality services, particularly the costs associated with ensuring reasonable compensation to attract, develop, and retain qualified and effective teaching staff.^{2,3}

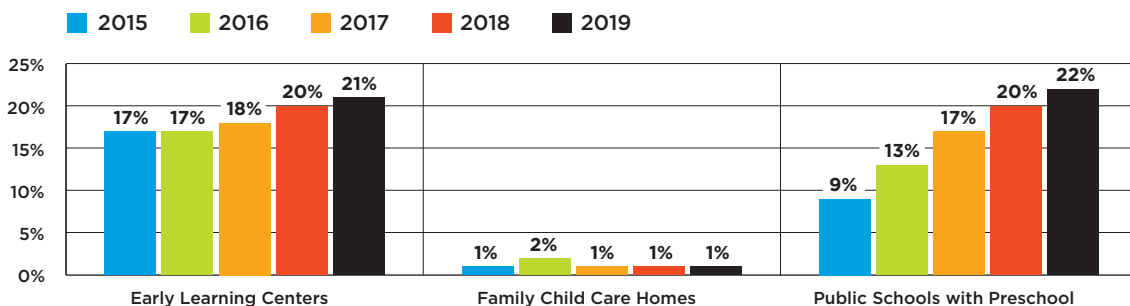
BrightStars: Rhode Island’s Quality Rating and Improvement System

Rhode Island is one of 44 states that uses a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) to measure and improve the quality of early learning and child care programs. QRIS measure a variety of program quality indicators (such as staff qualifications, learning environment, family engagement, and staff-child interactions) and then create an overall quality rating. QRIS ratings are shared with parents, and the ratings are often connected to financial incentives and supports, such as enhanced reimbursement rates or quality bonuses for higher quality child care programs. Studies have shown that state QRIS can improve the quality of care available over time.^{4,5}

BrightStars, Rhode Island’s QRIS, uses research-based standards to measure the quality of child care, preschool, Head Start, and afterschool programs serving children from birth through age 12. All programs serving children participating in the Child Care Assistance Program and all State Pre-K programs are required to have a BrightStars rating. Higher star levels indicate that programs are implementing research-based practices known to promote child development and learning.⁶

An evaluation of BrightStars found that ratings effectively differentiate quality and are linked to improved child outcomes. Researchers also found that 70% of center directors rated BrightStars positively or extremely positively.⁷

PROGRAMS WITH HIGH-QUALITY BRIGHTSTARS RATINGS (4 OR 5 STARS), RHODE ISLAND, 2015-2019



Source: RI Association for the Education of Young Children and RI Early Care and Education Data System (ECEDS), January 2015-January 2019.

KEY INDICATORS OF PROGRAM QUALITY

BRIGHTSTARS MEASURES

<p>Educator Knowledge</p> <p>College coursework and degrees are a key indicator of quality. Educators need specialized knowledge about child development and practice setting up enriching environments and interacting with children to support learning. The National Research Council recommends that all lead educators of children birth through age eight have a bachelor's degree with early childhood specialization.</p>	<p>At 3 Stars and Above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ College transcripts and certificates for lead educators in the program are reviewed to determine percent with CDA credentials, college degrees (AA or BA), and/or college credits in child development and early childhood education.
<p>Educator-Child Ratio and Class/Group Size</p> <p>Smaller class/group sizes and strong staff-child ratios are associated with improved interactions between educators and children.</p>	<p>At 2 Stars and Above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ratio and class/group size are verified at site visits.
<p>Health & Safety</p> <p>Children often spend 10 hours per day in out-of-home care. Strong health and safety practices reduce illness and injury, promote healthy eating habits and active outdoor play, and foster strong mental health.</p>	<p>At 2 Stars and Above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Recent licensing inspection report shows no serious violations. <p>At 3 Stars and Above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Program observations are conducted using a valid and reliable tool.
<p>Curriculum & Child Assessment</p> <p>High-quality programs use curricula and child assessment to support children's development and learning across multiple domains - cognitive, language, social-emotional, and physical.</p>	<p>At 3 Stars and Above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Curriculum is aligned with the RI Early Learning and Development Standards. ■ Evidence that data is gathered about individual children to inform program planning and instruction.
<p>Educator Skills & Interactions With Children</p> <p>Teacher/provider-child interactions are the essential ingredient to improve child outcomes. Children learn best when they have a teacher that promotes a positive emotional climate, offers numerous and varied learning experiences, and provides individualized attention.</p>	<p>At 3 Stars and Above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Program observations are conducted using a valid and reliable tool.
<p>Family Engagement</p> <p>Connections with families help programs understand each individual child and develop partnerships with parents to support growth and learning. Family engagement is also critical to effectively serve children who are English learners and children with developmental delays and disabilities.</p>	<p>At 2 Stars and Above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Evidence of regular family communication, parent-teacher conferences, and family engagement activities.

Sources: Wechsler, M., Melnick, H., Maier, A. & Bishop, J. (2016). *The building blocks of high-quality early childhood education programs*. Washington, DC: Learning Policy Institute. *Caring for our children basics: Health and safety foundations in early care and education*. (2015). Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families. *BrightStars Quality Frameworks* retrieved June 4, 2019, from www.brightstars.org

Quality of State Pre-K & Head Start

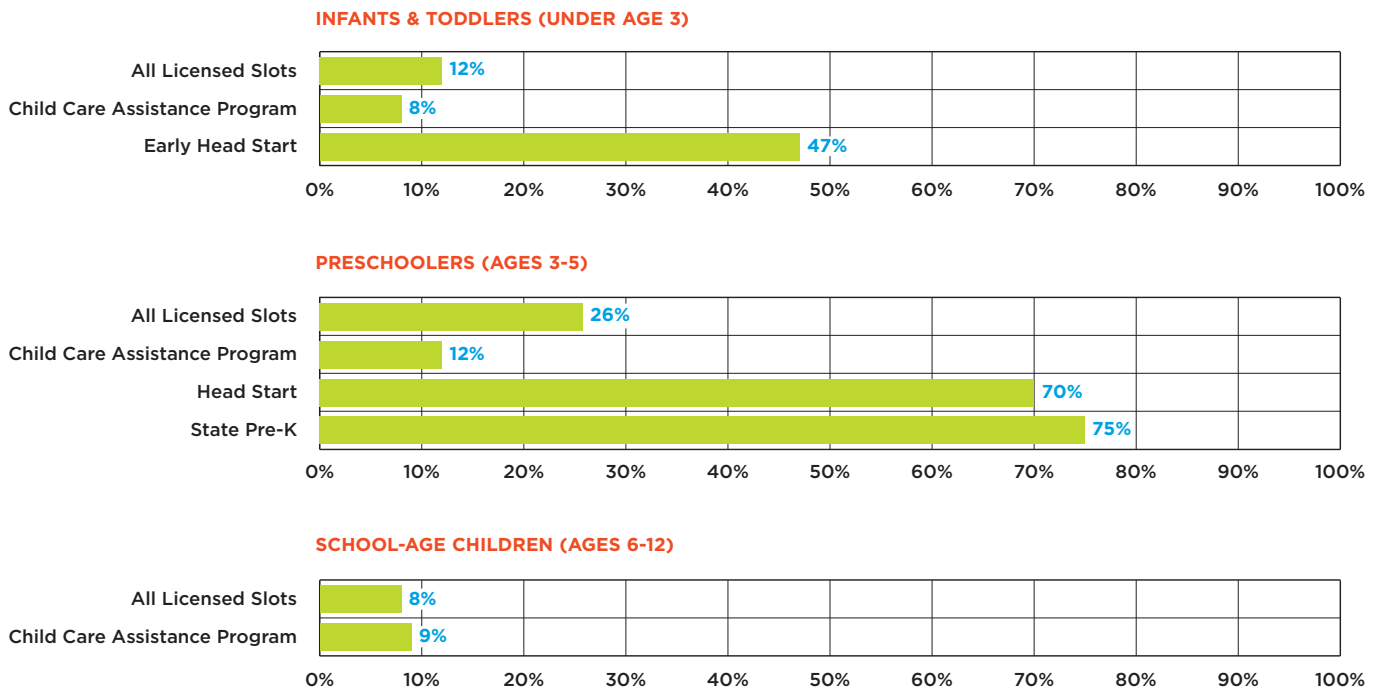
The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has identified ten key preschool program quality benchmarks that are linked to improved child outcomes. These benchmarks include: teacher-child ratio and class size (no higher than 1:10 in a class of 20), teacher and assistant teacher education levels (bachelor's degree for teacher and CDA for assistant teacher), guidance and support for curriculum selection and implementation, and use of valid and reliable observation data to improve classroom and teacher practices. Rhode Island's State Pre-K program is one of three in the U.S. that meets all 10 of these quality benchmarks and is one of only four states with a salary parity policy to ensure State Pre-K teachers are paid salaries comparable to public school K-3 teachers.⁸

The federal government funds and oversees Early Head Start and Head Start programs. The *2007 Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act* included several provisions to strengthen Head Start quality including requiring higher educational qualifications for Head Start teachers and increased program monitoring. Since then, the percentage of Early Head Start and Head Start teachers with bachelor's degrees has climbed dramatically, and the federal monitoring system now uses a valid and reliable classroom observation tool to improve program quality. As of 2018 in Rhode Island, 88% of Head Start teachers and 19% of Early Head Start teachers had a bachelor's degree or higher. Classroom observation scores for Rhode Island Head Start programs were among the highest in the U.S. in 2015.^{9,10,11}

Access to High-Quality Programs

Researchers agree that only high-quality early care and education programs produce large and lasting improvements in children's learning and development.¹² In Rhode Island, children participating in Early Head Start, Head Start, or State Pre-K are much more likely to be enrolled in high-quality early learning programs (4 or 5 stars) than those participating in the Child Care Assistance Program.¹³

PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN IN HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS (4 OR 5 STARS), RHODE ISLAND, 2018-2019



Sources: Licensed Slots: Early Care and Education Data System, January 2019, CCAP: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, December 2018, Early Head Start and Head Start: Rhode Island Head Start programs, October 2018, and State Pre-K: Rhode Island Department of Education, October 2018. Note: licensed family child care slots were evenly divided across age groups, estimated at 33% infants and toddlers, 33% preschoolers, and 33% school-age children.

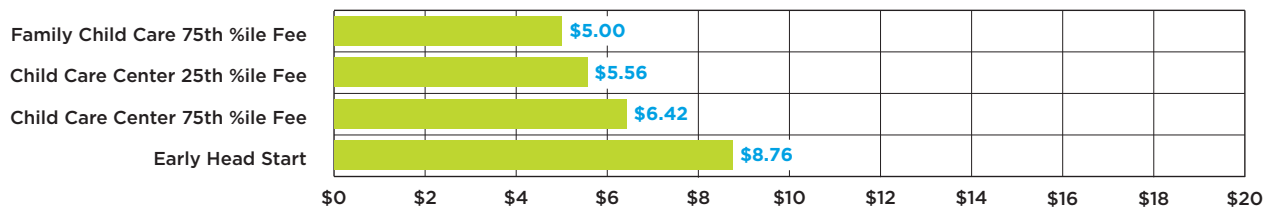
More Funding Needed to Deliver High-Quality Care and Education

Early care and education programs constitute the first or second largest household expense for many families, with monthly spending often more than a mortgage or rent. Most of the cost for early care and education is allocated to staff wages and benefits (60% to 80% of program costs on average) with staffing costs decreasing as children get older and require less one-on-one care and supervision.¹⁴ One study estimated that infant/toddler care costs 61% more to deliver than care for a preschooler, yet payment rates are only 27% higher.¹⁵

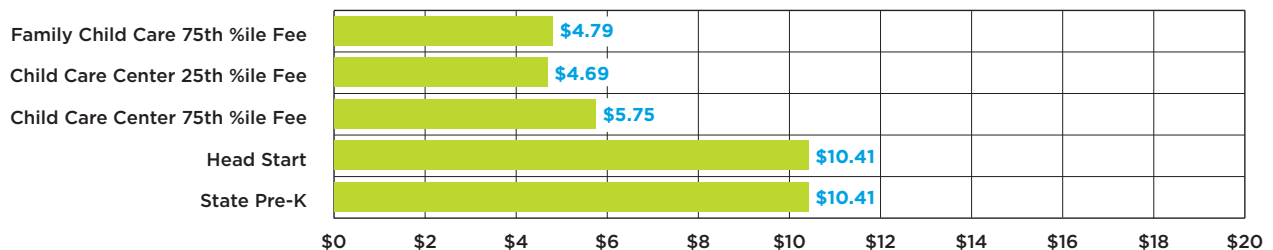
High-quality early care and education standards require even more resources for staffing to attract, develop, and retain more qualified and effective teachers. The National Academy of Sciences found that improving infant teacher qualifications and compensation to meet research-based goals would make full-time care for an infant in a child care center cost \$35,354 per child per year or \$17 per child per hour.¹⁶ Due to low public funding and tuition from families that does not cover the cost of high-quality care, many child care programs cannot afford to provide adequate wage increases for teaching staff who earn college degrees, education credentials, and/or improve their teaching practices.¹⁷ In general across the U.S., child care subsidy rates are determined based on local market prices rather than on the cost of meeting high-quality standards. Every three years, the state conducts a market rate survey to determine the weekly fees charged by child care programs that serve children of different ages. The federal government has established the 75th percentile of the market rate survey as a benchmark for subsidy rates that provide low-income families with access to quality programs equal to the the general public's access.¹⁸ Although current RI Child Care Assistance Program rates for infants and toddlers in 5-star programs meet the federal benchmark for equal access (75th %ile), the chart below shows how much lower hourly funding for child care is compared with Head Start, Pre-K, or K-12 funding.¹⁹

HOURLY SPENDING PER CHILD ENROLLED, RHODE ISLAND

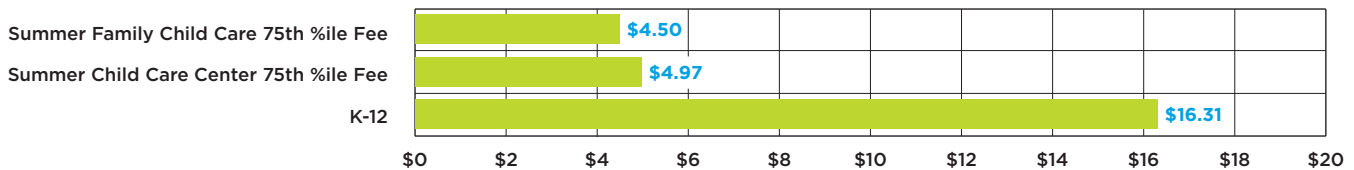
INFANTS & TODDLERS (UNDER AGE 3)



PRESCHOOLERS (AGES 3-5)



SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (AGES 6+)



Sources: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT calculations using 30-hour week for school-day programs (K-12, Early Head Start, Head Start, and State Pre-K) and 40-hour week for child care and summer programs with data on funding levels from Silver, B. E. (2018). *Statewide survey of child care rates in Rhode Island*. Kingston, RI: University of Rhode Island. Friedman-Krauss, A. H., et al. (2019). *The state of preschool 2018: State preschool yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research and Barnett, W. S. & Friedman-Krauss, A. H., et al. (2016). *State(s) of Head Start*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

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- ² Donoghue, E. A. & AAP Council on Early Childhood. (2017). Quality early education and child care from birth to kindergarten. *Pediatrics*, *140*(2), 1-6.
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- ⁴ *Moving on up?: Program quality ratings under Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge*. (2019). Washington, DC: Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.
- ⁵ *Quality compendium: A catalog and comparison of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS)* [Data System developed by Build Initiative and Child Trends]. Retrieved June 4, 2019, from <https://qualitycompendium.org>
- ⁶ *BrightStars: Frequently asked questions*. Retrieved June 4, 2019, from www.brightstars.org
- ⁷ Maxwell, K. L., Blasberg, A., Early, D. M., Li, W., & Orfali, N. (2016). *Executive Summary: Evaluation of Rhode Island's BrightStars child care center and preschool quality framework*. Chapel Hill, NC: Child Trends.
- ^{8,2} Friedman-Krauss, A. H. et al., (2019). *The state of preschool 2018: State preschool yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.
- ⁹ Barnett, W. S. & Friedman-Krauss, A. H. (2016). *State(s) of Head Start*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.
- ¹⁰ Office of Head Start: Policy and regulations. Retrieved June 12, 2019, from www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/policy
- ¹¹ Office of Head Start Program Information Report (PIR). Staff qualification report - 2018 - State level - Rhode Island. Retrieved June 11, 2019, from Head Start Enterprise System.
- ¹² Rhode Island Early Care and Education Data System (ECEDS), January 2019.
- ^{13,7} Workman, S. (2018). *Where does your child care dollar go?: Understanding the true cost of quality early childhood education*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.
- ¹⁴ Workman, S. & Jessen-Howard, S. (2018). *Understanding the true cost of child care for infants and toddlers*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.
- ¹⁵ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2018). *Transforming the financing of early care and education*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
- ¹⁶ National Center for Child Care Subsidy Innovation and Accountability. (2017). *CCDF payment rates: Understanding the 75th percentile*. Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.



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