

# Children Enrolled in Kindergarten

## DEFINITION

*Children enrolled in kindergarten* compiles selected data about children enrolled in public kindergarten in Rhode Island.

## SIGNIFICANCE

As of 2016-2017, every public school district in Rhode Island is required to offer full-day kindergarten.<sup>1</sup> Children benefit academically from participating in full-day kindergarten.<sup>2</sup>

The transition to kindergarten is an important point in a child's educational experience, marking either the start of their formal education or the transition between preschool, which is not universally available or guaranteed as part of most states' public education systems, to the early elementary grades. During kindergarten and the early elementary grades, families establish patterns of engagement with their child's school and children learn important social-emotional, literacy, and math skills that establish a foundation for future learning.<sup>3,4</sup>

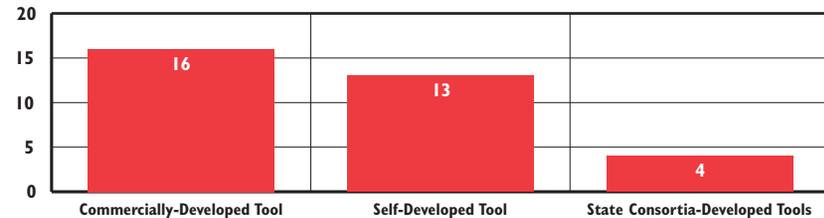
As of October 2017, approximately 68% of four-year-olds and 40% of three-year-olds in the U.S. participated in private or public preschool before kindergarten.<sup>5</sup> Children from higher-income families are more likely to be enrolled in preschool than children from lower-income families. There is

strong evidence that high-quality preschool immediately improves children's language, literacy, and math skills. Preschool participation is also associated with longer-term positive outcomes such as reduced grade retention and need for special education, improved high school graduation rates, and reduced criminal activity.<sup>6</sup>

High-quality and developmentally-appropriate instruction in kindergarten and the early elementary grades helps sustain the positive impacts of preschool and addresses knowledge and skill deficits among children who have not had high-quality early learning opportunities.<sup>7</sup>

Kindergarten and early elementary grade teachers need specialized training in child development, reading instruction, the foundations of math, social-emotional skill building, how to incorporate play and hands-on learning into classroom instruction, and working with diverse groups of children and families. Strategies that support high-quality early grade instruction include requiring pre-K-Grade 3 teaching certificates, incorporating early childhood education training into elementary principal certification, and aligning quality improvement efforts from early childhood through third grade.<sup>8</sup>

## States Using Kindergarten Entry Assessments by Type of Tool, January 2017



Source: Weisenfeld, G. G. (2017). *Assessment tools used in Kindergarten Entry Assessments (KEAs): State scan*. New Brunswick, NJ: Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes.

- ◆ **Kindergarten entry assessments are an organized way to learn what children know and are able to do across all domains of development when they enter kindergarten. The information is used to improve the transition to kindergarten, guide instruction for individual children, and inform policymakers about early learning needs. These assessments should not be used for high-stakes decisions, such as delaying children's entry into kindergarten.**<sup>9,10</sup>
- ◆ **As of January 2017, 33 states were using an assessment tool to track skills and knowledge at kindergarten entry. Rhode Island has not yet implemented a statewide tool.**<sup>11</sup>
- ◆ **Kindergarten teachers can share information about children's strengths and challenges gathered through kindergarten entry assessments to engage parents as partners in the education process.**<sup>12</sup>

## Public School Kindergarten Enrollment

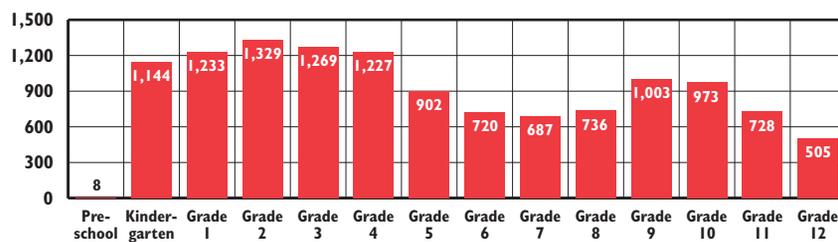
- ◆ **On October 1, 2018, 100% of the 10,004 children enrolled in public kindergarten in Rhode Island were in full-day kindergarten classrooms. There were 9,205 kindergarteners in traditional public schools, 794 in public charter schools, and five in a state-operated school (The Rhode Island School for the Deaf).**<sup>13</sup>

# Children Enrolled in Kindergarten

## Young English Learners

- ◆ Language learning is most effective and efficient during the early childhood years, between birth and age eight. Infants and young children learn new languages faster and with more competence than older children and adults.<sup>14</sup>
- ◆ Being bilingual has several advantages, including expanded economic and social opportunities and higher level executive function skills (cognitive flexibility and inhibitory control) that contribute to academic success. Being bilingual also may help delay or prevent the onset of cognitive problems associated with aging.<sup>15</sup>
- ◆ Both bilingual education and English immersion programs can effectively promote English language acquisition and proficiency. Bilingual education has the added advantage of supporting the development of a child’s native language, encouraging fluency in both languages.<sup>16</sup>
- ◆ In Rhode Island, students in kindergarten through third grades are more likely to be identified as an English Language Learner than older students. In 2017-2018, 12% of all children in grades K-3 in Rhode Island (4,975) were English Learners compared to 9% of students in grades 4-6, 7% in grades 7-9, and 7% in grades 10-12. Less than 1% of the 1,664 children enrolled in public school preschool classrooms were identified as an English Learner. Of the 1,144 kindergarteners who were English Learners, 45% were enrolled in the Providence Public Schools, 17% were in one of the other three core city public school districts, and 15% were in a public charter school.<sup>17</sup>

English Learners by Grade Level, Rhode Island, 2016-2017 School Year



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2017-2018.

### References

<sup>1</sup> Rhode Island General Law 16-99-3. Enacted by the General Assembly as Article 6 of H-5900Aaa in 2015.

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## Kindergartners and School Suspensions

- ◆ Children who are suspended early in their school years are more likely to be suspended again in future years. Students who are suspended are almost ten times more likely to experience academic failure, have negative attitudes toward school, drop out of high school, and become incarcerated.<sup>18</sup>
- ◆ Early suspensions are more likely when teachers believe the resources and supports available to them are inadequate to meet the needs of children with challenging behaviors. Large class sizes, inadequate child-teacher ratios, and lack of school resources to help teachers manage challenging behaviors are associated with increased suspensions. Early childhood mental health consultation is an intervention that works with teachers and families to reduce children’s challenging behaviors, improve child-adult relationships, and prevent early suspensions.<sup>19</sup>

School Suspensions in Kindergarten, Rhode Island, 2017-2018

DISTRICT	NUMBER OF KINDERGARTNERS SUSPENDED	NUMBER OF SUSPENSIONS FOR KINDERGARTNERS	NUMBER OF DAYS KINDERGARTNERS WERE SUSPENDED
Central Falls	0	0	0
Pawtucket	0	0	0
Providence	37	80	125
Woonsocket	22	34	41
<i>Charter Schools</i>	20	49	66
<i>Remainder of State</i>	59	121	139
<i>Rhode Island</i>	138	284	371

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2017-2018

- ◆ In 2017-2018 in Rhode Island, there were 138 kindergartners who were suspended at least one day, 49% of whom had a developmental delay or disability. Kindergartners experienced 284 disciplinary actions, with 249 out-of-school suspensions and 35 in-school suspensions. These students were suspended for a total of 371 days.<sup>20</sup>
- ◆ Compared to the 2016-2017 school year, the number of kindergartners who were suspended increased by 59%, and the number of suspensions increased by 68% in 2017-2018. The number of days kindergartners were suspended increased by 47% in the 2017-2018 school year.<sup>21,22</sup>