

# 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 enrolled in a Rhode Island Head Start or RI Pre-K preschool program the year before kindergarten. Head Start is managed by the federal government and RI Pre-K is managed by the Rhode Island Department of Education. Both can be operated by community-based agencies or by public schools.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Learning disparities appear early and grow over time without access to enriching early learning experiences. Participation in high-quality early learning programs, 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 than higher-income and white families.<sup>1,2</sup>

Decades of research have shown that high-quality preschool programs help children gain academic and social-emotional skills and knowledge 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.<sup>3,4</sup>

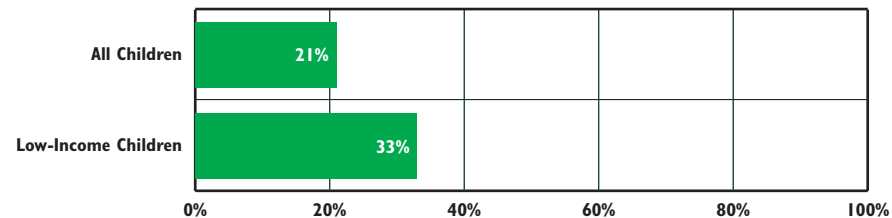
Head Start is a federally-funded comprehensive early childhood program for the lowest income preschool children and is available to children during the two years before kindergarten. It is designed to address a wide variety of needs so that low-income children can begin school on a more equal footing with their economically advantaged peers. Head Start provides early education, medical and dental screenings and referrals, nutrition services, mental health services, family engagement activities, and social service referrals for the whole family.<sup>5,6</sup>

As of 2020, 44 states and the District of Columbia operated state Pre-K programs, serving 34% of four-year-olds and 6% of three-year olds across the U.S. The RI Pre-K program was launched in 2009 and serves four-year-olds in public schools, Head Start agencies, and child care programs that meet the same quality standards.<sup>7</sup> *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.<sup>8</sup>

Head Start and RI Pre-K are an important part of a strong state early learning system that starts at birth and continues through third grade, including high-quality child care and nurturing and language-rich early elementary classrooms.<sup>9</sup>



Percentage of Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K the Year Before Kindergarten, Rhode Island, 2020-2021

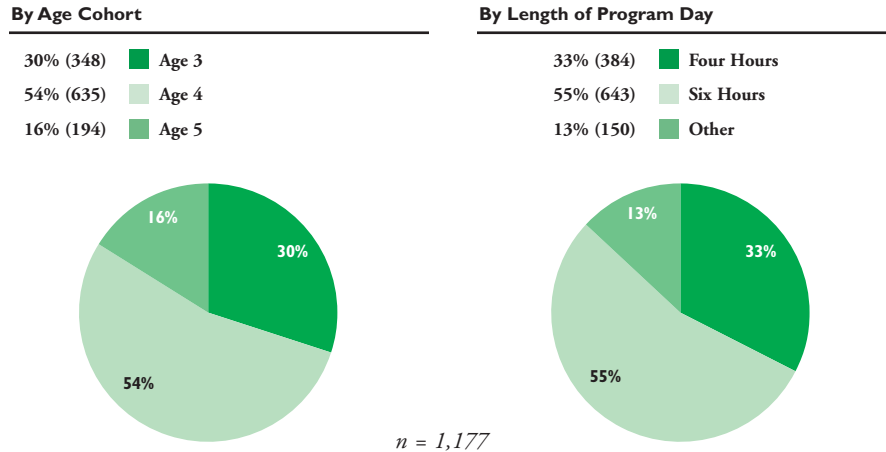


Source: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT calculations using October 2020 enrollment in Head Start and RI Pre-K as numerator and Census 2010 four-year-old population as denominator with low-income population estimated using the % of children receiving free or reduced-price lunch.

- ◆ As of the 2020-2021 school year, there were 2,477 children enrolled in either Head Start or RI Pre-K during the year before kindergarten, down from 2,584 the previous year. This is approximately 21% of all children and 33% of low-income children. Of those enrolled, 629 (25%) were enrolled in Head Start, 176 (7%) were enrolled in both Head Start and RI Pre-K through braided funding, and 1,672 (68%) were enrolled in RI Pre-K.<sup>10,11,12</sup>
- ◆ Children in the four core cities were more likely to be enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K (33%) than children in the remainder of the state (13%).<sup>13,14</sup>
- ◆ Also, in 2020, there were 935 three-year-olds and 879 four-year-olds enrolled in a child care program with a subsidy through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) managed by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services. Children in RI Pre-K or Head Start may also participate in CCAP because Head Start and RI Pre-K do not cover the entire work day or work year for many families. In 2020, 9% of Head Start children were also enrolled in CCAP to cover hours and days when the Head Start program is not open but parents are at work.<sup>15,16</sup>
- ◆ In 2020, there were 2,904 three- and four-year-olds with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) receiving early childhood special education services through a local school district. These services are delivered in Head Start, RI Pre-K, child care, or district operated special education classrooms, or through walk-in appointments.<sup>17</sup>
- ◆ As of 2020, Rhode Island ranked 1st in the U.S. and DC (tied with five other states) for meeting research-based Pre-K quality benchmarks, but 32nd in the U.S. for enrollment of four-year-olds.<sup>18</sup>

# Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K

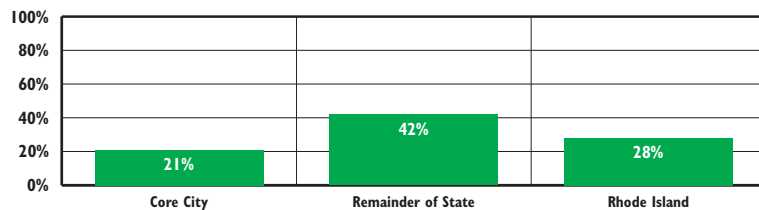
## Children Enrolled in Head Start, Rhode Island, 2020



Source: Rhode Island Head Start program data compiled by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, October 2020.

◆ In October 2020 in Rhode Island, there were 1,177 children ages 3-5 enrolled in Head Start, down 41% from the 2,010 children enrolled the previous year, prior to the pandemic.<sup>19,20</sup>

## Estimated Percentage of Eligible Children Enrolled in Head Start by Child's Residence, Rhode Island, 2020



Source: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT calculations. The numerator is Rhode Island Head Start program enrollment data, October 2020. The denominator is the estimated number of children ages three and four from Census 2010 multiplied by the % of children under age six living in families with incomes below the federal poverty line (FPL) from the 2015-2019 American Community Surveys.

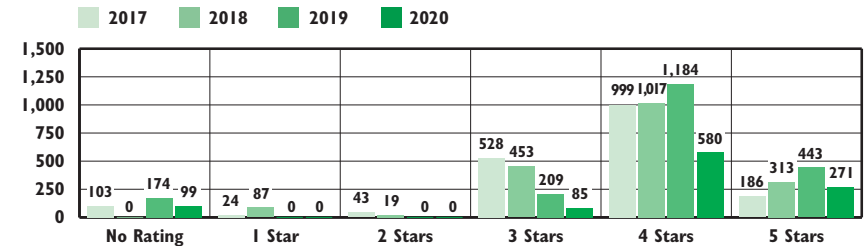
◆ As of 2020, approximately 28% of Rhode Island preschool-age children living in poverty were enrolled in Head Start, down from 43% the previous year, prior to the pandemic.<sup>21,22</sup>

## Head Start Quality and Effectiveness

◆ Across the U.S., Head Start centers are typically higher quality than many other early care and education programs available. Rhode Island Head Start programs score above the national benchmark and are among the highest quality Head Start programs in the U.S. based on classroom observations of teacher-child interactions.<sup>23</sup>

◆ Head Start improves children's academic, cognitive, language, and social-emotional skills. Children who attend Head Start also show improved health outcomes including reduced childhood obesity and improved immunization rates. Head Start children are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and receive a post-secondary degree, license or certification.<sup>24,25</sup>

## Children Enrolled in Head Start by BrightStars Rating of Site, Rhode Island, 2017-2020



Source: Rhode Island Head Start data compiled by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, October 2017-2020.

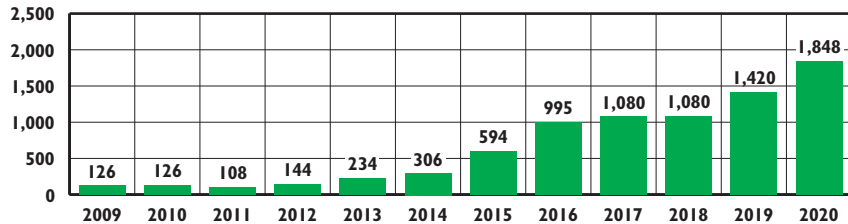
◆ As of October 2020, 82% of children enrolled in Head Start were in a program that had achieved a high-quality BrightStars rating of four or five stars. In comparison, only 23% of preschoolers in the CCAP were enrolled in a program that had achieved a high-quality BrightStars rating.<sup>26,27</sup>

## Head Start and Children with High Needs

◆ Rhode Island Head Start programs serve significant numbers of children with high needs. As of 2020, 121 (10%) children enrolled in Head Start had developmental delays or disabilities and received special education services through their local school districts. Also, in 2020, 30 (3%) of Head Start children were in foster care, and 12 (1%) were homeless.<sup>28</sup>

# Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K

**RI Pre-K Enrollment, 2009 through 2020**



Sources: National Institute for Early Education Research, *The State of Preschool 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015*. Rhode Island Department of Education, RI Pre-K program enrollment, October 2015 through 2020.

◆ Rhode Island began offering RI Pre-K for four-year-olds in the 2009-2010 school year and it is offered through public schools, Head Start agencies, and child care programs.<sup>29</sup>

◆ As of the 2020-2021 school year, there were 101 RI Pre-K classrooms in Rhode Island with a total of 1,848 children enrolled, which is approximately 15% of all four-year-olds. As of the 2020-2021 school year, 39% of the classrooms were operated by Head Start agencies, 36% were operated by child care programs, and 26% were operated by public schools.<sup>30</sup>

◆ In 2020-2021, 135 very low-income children were enrolled in both Head Start and RI Pre-K with braided funding. These classrooms are economically integrated and meet both the Head Start and the RI Pre-K standards.<sup>31,32</sup>

**RI Pre-K Enrollment and Family Income**

◆ Children are selected to participate in RI Pre-K through a lottery, with children from low-income families prioritized for enrollment based on the proportion of low-income children in the local school district.<sup>33</sup>

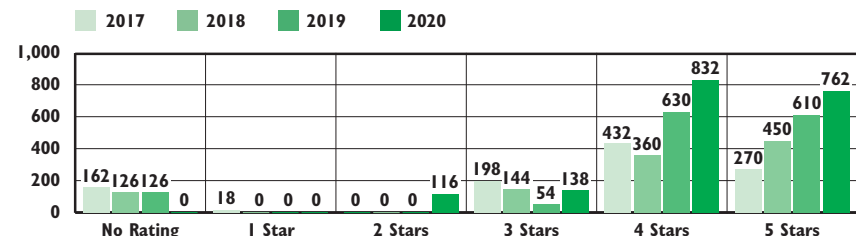
◆ In 2020-2021, 1,194 (65%) children enrolled in RI Pre-K were low-income and 654 (35%) were higher income.<sup>34</sup>

**RI Pre-K Quality and Effectiveness**

◆ In 2020, RI Pre-K was one of only six State Pre-K programs in the U.S. to meet all 10 recommended quality benchmarks, including requiring teachers to have a bachelor's degree with specialized training in early childhood education and conducting annual classroom observations.<sup>35</sup>

◆ An 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 their more affluent peers by three-quarters.<sup>36</sup>

**Children Enrolled in RI Pre-K by BrightStars Rating of Site, Rhode Island, 2017-2020**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2017-2020.

◆ As of 2020, 86% of children enrolled in RI Pre-K were in program sites with high-quality BrightStars ratings (four or five stars). In comparison, only 23% of preschoolers in CCAP were enrolled in programs with high-quality BrightStars ratings.<sup>37,38</sup>

**RI Pre-K and Children with High Needs**

◆ RI Pre-K classrooms serve significant numbers of children with high needs. As of October 2020, 210 (11%) children in RI Pre-K had a developmental delay or disability, 89 (5%) were in foster care, and 5 (< 1%) were homeless.<sup>39</sup>

◆ Race and ethnicity data was available for 1,820 children enrolled in RI Pre-K. Of these children, 2% were American Indian, 5% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 23% were Black, 29% were Hispanic/Latino, 12% were Two or More Races, 29% were white.<sup>40</sup>

# Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K

Table 40.

Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K, Rhode Island, 2020

SCHOOL DISTRICT	CHILDREN AGE 3 ENROLLED IN HEAD START (ALL LOW-INCOME)		% LOW-INCOME CHILDREN	ESTIMATED # LOW-INCOME CHILDREN AGE 4	AGE 4					
	# CHILDREN AGE 4				ENROLLED IN HEAD START ONLY (ALL LOW-INCOME)	DUAL ENROLLED RI PRE-K/ HEAD START (ALL LOW-INCOME)	ENROLLED IN RI PRE-K ONLY LOW-INCOME	ENROLLED IN RI PRE-K ONLY HIGHER INCOME	ESTIMATED % OF LOW-INCOME CHILDREN AGE 4 IN HEAD START OR RI PRE-K	ESTIMATED % OF ALL CHILDREN AGE 4 IN HEAD START OR RI PRE-K
Barrington	2	199	4%	8	1	0	0	0	13%	1%
Bristol	4	206	28%	58	14	0	0	0	24%	7%
Burrillville	6	173	35%	61	7	0	0	0	12%	4%
Central Falls	5	345	87%	300	9	0	101	9	37%	34%
Charlestown	2	81	19%	15	3	0	0	0	19%	4%
Coventry	12	366	29%	106	2	17	4	55	22%	21%
Cranston	50	862	42%	362	36	40	26	96	28%	23%
Cumberland	2	426	20%	85	3	0	0	0	4%	1%
East Greenwich	1	158	5%	8	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
East Providence	13	469	51%	239	30	0	96	102	53%	49%
Exeter	1	55	11%	6	2	0	0	0	33%	4%
Foster	0	53	25%	13	1	0	0	0	8%	2%
Glocester	0	106	11%	12	1	0	0	0	9%	1%
Hopkinton	0	87	19%	17	4	0	0	0	24%	5%
Jamestown	0	50	5%	3	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Johnston	9	278	42%	117	8	0	17	21	21%	17%
Lincoln	1	211	27%	57	3	0	0	0	5%	1%
Little Compton	0	28	14%	4	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Middletown	9	226	27%	61	6	5	7	24	29%	19%
Narragansett	0	117	16%	19	2	0	0	0	11%	2%
New Shoreham	0	7	17%	1	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Newport	23	232	70%	162	13	0	25	11	23%	21%
North Kingstown	6	318	20%	64	6	0	4	14	16%	8%
North Providence	22	282	45%	127	22	0	18	18	32%	21%
North Smithfield	0	108	18%	19	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Pawtucket	19	1,006	71%	714	54	0	106	42	22%	20%
Portsmouth	2	196	14%	27	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Providence	38	2,382	84%	2,001	317	0	466	92	39%	37%
Richmond	0	102	19%	19	3	0	0	0	15%	3%
Scituate	1	94	11%	10	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Smithfield	2	169	9%	15	2	0	0	0	13%	1%
South Kingstown	0	273	19%	52	1	0	0	0	2%	0%
Tiverton	6	143	24%	34	9	0	0	0	26%	6%
Warren	5	127	28%	36	8	0	7	11	42%	20%
Warwick	34	850	31%	264	14	45	0	63	22%	14%
West Greenwich	1	53	11%	6	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
West Warwick	23	354	52%	184	7	19	19	34	24%	22%
Westerly	5	244	34%	83	7	0	6	12	16%	10%
Woonsocket	68	584	76%	444	34	50	116	50	45%	43%
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>4,317</i>	<i>80%</i>	<i>3,454</i>	<i>414</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>789</i>	<i>193</i>	<i>36%</i>	<i>33%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>242</i>	<i>7,703</i>	<i>29%</i>	<i>2,234</i>	<i>215</i>	<i>126</i>	<i>229</i>	<i>461</i>	<i>26%</i>	<i>13%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>372</i>	<i>12,020</i>	<i>46%</i>	<i>5,529</i>	<i>629</i>	<i>176</i>	<i>1,018</i>	<i>654</i>	<i>33%</i>	<i>21%</i>

**Source of Data for Table/Methodology**

Rhode Island Head Start Programs, children enrolled as of October 2020. Children enrolled are listed by residence of child, not location of the Head Start program. Rhode Island Department of Education, children enrolled in RI Pre-K as of October 2020.

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 2021. Percentages should not be compared with prior Factbooks.

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

**References**

<sup>1,3</sup> *A matter of equity: Preschool education in America.* (2015). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

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

<sup>5,23,24</sup> Barnett, W. S. & Friedman-Krauss, A. H. (2016). *State(s) of Head Start.* New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

<sup>6</sup> Cosse, R. (2017). *Head Start preschool participants, programs, families and staff in 2016.* Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy.

<sup>7,18,29,35</sup> Friedman-Kraus, A. H., et al. (2021). *The state of preschool 2020: State preschool yearbook.* New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

<sup>8</sup> Rhode Island Prekindergarten Education Act, Rhode Island General Laws, 16-87.

<sup>9</sup> Guernsey, L., Bornfreund, L., McCann, C., & Williams, C. (2014). *Subprime learning: Early education in America since the Great Recession.* Washington, DC: New America.

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