

High-Quality Early Learning Programs

DEFINITION

High-quality early learning programs is the percentage of licensed early learning centers, family child care homes, and public schools with preschool classrooms that have a high-quality rating from BrightStars, Rhode Island's Quality Rating and Improvement System for child care and early learning programs.

SIGNIFICANCE

Decades of research show that high-quality early care and education programs can improve children's cognitive and social-emotional development, enabling them to perform better in school. Programs across the U.S. and in Rhode Island vary markedly in quality and can range from rich learning experiences that promote children's development to lower quality settings that can lead to developmental and behavioral setbacks.^{1,2}

Parents strongly prefer high-quality programs and value teachers' educational achievement, however many families cannot afford the cost of higher quality programs and/or don't have enough information about which programs meet recommended quality standards.³

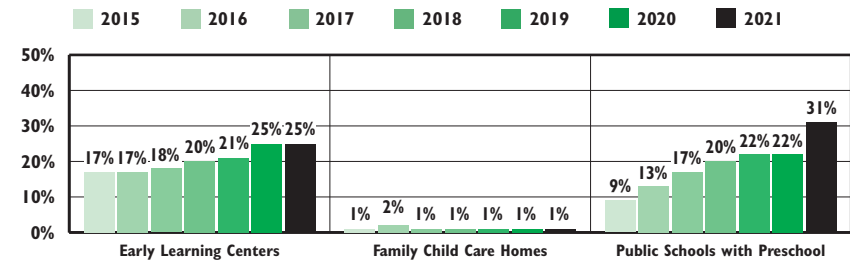
High-quality early care and education programs have qualified educators and low staff turnover, strong staff-child ratios, small class/group sizes, and research-based health, safety, nutrition,

and curriculum practices. Consistent caring, supportive, and educational interactions between early childhood educators and children support children's learning and development. The development and retention of a highly qualified and appropriately compensated workforce for early childhood programs is critical to improve program quality.^{4,5,6,7}

Almost all states use Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) to document and improve the quality of early learning and child care programs. QRIS measure program quality indicators (e.g., staff qualifications, learning environment, and staff-child interactions) and create an index rating. QRIS ratings are shared with parents and are often connected to financial incentives and supports (e.g., enhanced reimbursement rates or quality bonuses for higher quality programs).^{8,9}

BrightStars is Rhode Island's QRIS and conducts program quality assessments for early care and education centers, family child care homes, and public schools. Programs participating in BrightStars receive a star rating and support to set and achieve quality improvement goals. All programs serving children participating in the Child Care Assistance Program and in the State Pre-K program are required to have a BrightStars rating. Star ratings are posted on a public website to inform family decision making when selecting a program.^{10,11}


Percentage of Early Learning Centers, Family Child Care Programs, and Public Schools with a High-Quality BrightStars Rating (4 or 5 Stars), Rhode Island, 2015-2021



Source: RI Association for the Education of Young Children and RI Early Care and Education Data System (ECEDS), January 2015 – January 2021.

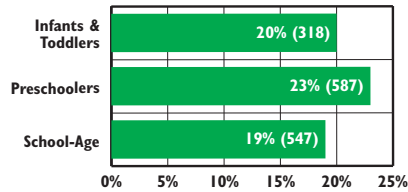
- ◆ As of January 2021, 243 (77%) licensed child care centers, 340 (84%) licensed family child care homes, and 28 (52%) public schools with preschool classrooms had a BrightStars rating. Eighty (25%) licensed early learning centers, four (1%) licensed family child care homes, and 17 (31%) public schools had met the benchmarks for a high-quality rating of four or five stars.¹²
- ◆ Since 2015, the percentage of early learning centers with a high-quality rating has grown from 17% to 25% and the percentage of public schools serving preschoolers that have a high-quality rating has increased from 9% to 31%.¹³
- ◆ Early learning centers in the core cities are more likely to have a high-quality BrightStars rating than those in the remainder of the state (33% vs. 23%). In contrast, public schools in the remainder of the state are more likely to have a high-quality rating than those in the core cities (33% vs. 25%).¹⁴
- ◆ A 2016 evaluation of BrightStars found that the star levels effectively differentiate quality, and five of the ten standards are linked to improved child outcomes, specifically improved social competence and math skills. The study also found that 70% of child care center and preschool directors had a positive or extremely positive impression of BrightStars.¹⁵

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Table 37.

Licensed Child Care Centers and Preschools Participating in the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System, Rhode Island, January 2021

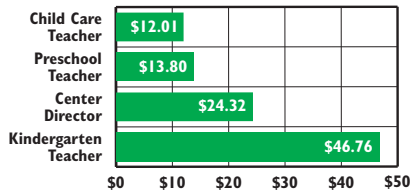
CCAP Children Enrolled in High-Quality Programs (4 or 5 Stars) by Age, December 2020



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, December 2020.

◆ Preschool-age children enrolled in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) are more likely to be enrolled in a high-quality program (23%) than infants and toddlers (20%) or school-age children (19%).¹⁶

Teacher Median Hourly Wages, Rhode Island, 2019



Source: *Early childhood workforce index 2020: Rhode Island*. (2021). Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of the Child Care Workforce.

◆ Early childhood teachers and program directors in Rhode Island earn significantly lower wages than kindergarten teachers.¹⁷

CITY/TOWN	LICENSED PROGRAMS	PROGRAMS THAT ACCEPT CCAP	NO RATING	1 STAR	2 STARS	3 STARS	HIGH-QUALITY		% IN BRIGHTSTARS	% WITH HIGH-QUALITY RATING
							4 STARS	5 STARS		
Barrington	8	3	5	1	1	0	1	0	38%	13%
Bristol	4	3	1	3	0	0	0	0	75%	0%
Burrillville	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	100%	50%
Central Falls	3	3	0	0	1	1	1	0	100%	33%
Charlestown	3	2	0	0	0	0	1	2	100%	100%
Coventry	7	7	0	3	1	0	3	0	100%	43%
Cranston	30	21	8	8	8	2	3	1	73%	13%
Cumberland	7	5	2	1	2	0	2	0	71%	29%
East Greenwich	16	10	6	3	3	1	3	0	63%	19%
East Providence	14	9	2	5	4	0	2	1	86%	21%
Exeter	2	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	50%	50%
Foster	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	100%	0%
Glocester	3	3	0	1	1	0	0	1	100%	33%
Hopkinton	3	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	100%	0%
Jamestown	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	100%	0%
Johnston	20	18	5	4	8	1	2	0	75%	10%
Lincoln	5	5	0	2	1	0	1	1	100%	40%
Little Compton	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Middletown	11	6	6	1	0	1	3	0	45%	27%
Narragansett	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	50%	0%
New Shoreham	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Newport	4	3	1	0	2	0	1	0	75%	25%
North Kingstown	7	4	1	0	2	1	3	0	86%	43%
North Providence	10	7	2	3	2	0	3	0	80%	30%
North Smithfield	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	50%	0%
Pawtucket	13	12	0	4	4	0	4	1	100%	38%
Portsmouth	4	2	3	1	0	0	0	0	25%	0%
Providence	53	40	13	9	12	5	9	5	75%	26%
Richmond	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Scituate	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	100%	0%
Smithfield	8	6	2	1	3	1	1	0	75%	13%
South Kingstown	13	8	4	2	2	2	2	1	69%	23%
Tiverton	3	2	0	1	1	0	1	0	100%	33%
Warren	5	2	2	1	0	0	2	0	60%	40%
Warwick	23	21	2	5	5	5	6	0	91%	26%
West Greenwich	3	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	100%	0%
West Warwick	6	5	1	0	2	1	1	1	83%	33%
Westerly	7	4	2	0	2	0	3	0	71%	43%
Woonsocket	11	11	1	1	2	1	4	2	91%	55%
Four Core Cities	80	66	14	14	19	7	18	8	83%	33%
Remainder of State	237	169	60	51	55	17	45	9	75%	23%
Rhode Island	317	235	74	65	74	24	63	17	77%	25%

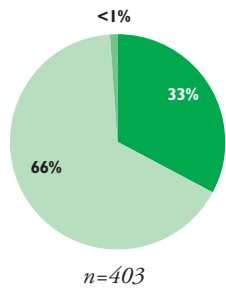
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Table 38.

Licensed Family Child Care Homes Participating in the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System, Rhode Island, January 2021

Licensed Family Child Care Programs by Preferred Language, Rhode Island, 2021

33% (135) ■ English Only
 66% (267) ■ Spanish Only
 <1% (1) ■ Bilingual in English and Spanish



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Licensed family child care providers, 2021.

◆ In 2021, Of the 403 licensed family child care providers in Rhode Island, 33% preferred English communication, 66% preferred Spanish communication, and <1% preferred another language for communication. Information about providers who spoke more than one language was not available.¹⁸

◆ As of December 2020, of the children in the CCAP program with reported Hispanic ethnicity, 59% were enrolled in a center, 40% were enrolled in family child care, and 1% were enrolled in license-exempt care. In comparison, of all children in the CCAP program, 77% were enrolled in a center, 22% were enrolled in family child care, and 1% were enrolled in license-exempt care.¹⁹

CITY/TOWN	LICENSED PROGRAMS	PROGRAMS THAT ACCEPT CCAP	NO RATING	1 STAR	2 STARS	3 STARS	HIGH-QUALITY		% IN BRIGHTSTARS	% WITH HIGH-QUALITY RATING
							4 STARS	5 STARS		
Barrington	4	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	50%	0%
Bristol	5	1	3	2	0	0	0	0	40%	0%
Burrillville	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Central Falls	15	15	0	12	3	0	0	0	100%	0%
Charlestown	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Coventry	3	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	33%	0%
Cranston	37	35	5	18	14	0	0	0	86%	0%
Cumberland	7	2	6	1	0	0	0	0	14%	0%
East Greenwich	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
East Providence	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	50%	0%
Exeter	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Foster	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Glocester	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Hopkinton	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Jamestown	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Johnston	9	8	0	6	3	0	0	0	100%	0%
Lincoln	5	1	4	1	0	0	0	0	20%	0%
Little Compton	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Middletown	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Narragansett	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
New Shoreham	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Newport	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
North Kingstown	3	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	33%	0%
North Providence	7	6	1	6	0	0	0	0	86%	0%
North Smithfield	3	2	0	2	0	0	1	0	100%	33%
Pawtucket	30	27	5	14	10	1	0	0	83%	0%
Portsmouth	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Providence	241	235	16	129	91	2	3	0	93%	1%
Richmond	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Scituate	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Smithfield	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
South Kingstown	3	3	1	1	1	0	0	0	67%	0%
Tiverton	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Warren	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Warwick	7	3	5	2	0	0	0	0	29%	0%
West Greenwich	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
West Warwick	3	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	33%	0%
Westerly	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	50%	0%
Woonsocket	6	6	0	5	1	0	0	0	100%	0%
Four Core Cities	292	283	21	160	105	3	3	0	93%	1%
Remainder of State	111	72	42	50	18	0	1	0	62%	1%
Rhode Island	403	355	63	210	123	3	4	0	84%	1%

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Table 39.

Public Schools with Preschool Classrooms Participating in the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System, Rhode Island, January 2021

DISTRICT	SCHOOLS WITH PRESCHOOL CLASSROOMS	NO RATING	1 STAR	2 STARS	3 STARS	HIGH-QUALITY		% IN BRIGHTSTARS	% WITH HIGH-QUALITY RATING
						4 STARS	5 STARS		
Barrington	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Bristol Warren	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Burrillville	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Central Falls	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Chariho	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Coventry	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	100%	100%
Cranston	6	0	0	0	3	2	1	100%	50%
Cumberland	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
East Greenwich	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	100%	0%
East Providence	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	50%	50%
Exeter-West Greenwich	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
Foster	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Glocester	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Jamestown	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
Johnston	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
Lincoln	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	100%	0%
Little Compton	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	N/A	N/A
Middletown	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Narragansett	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
New Shoreham	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Newport	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	0%
North Kingstown	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
North Providence	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	100%	0%
North Smithfield	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Pawtucket	3	0	1	0	0	1	1	100%	67%
Portsmouth	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
Providence	5	1	0	0	3	1	0	80%	20%
Scituate	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Smithfield	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
South Kingstown	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Tiverton	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Warwick	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
West Warwick	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Westerly	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
Woonsocket	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Charter Schools	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
RI School for the Deaf	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
Four Core Cities	12	5	1	0	3	2	1	58%	25%
Remainder of State	42	21	0	3	4	5	3	54%	20%
Rhode Island	54	26	1	3	7	13	4	52%	31%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Data on the number of licensed early learning programs and family child care homes are from the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, January 2021. Data on public schools are from the Rhode Island Department of Education, January 2021. Data on BrightStars quality ratings are from the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children, January 2021.

High-quality rating means a BrightStars rating of four or five stars.

NA=Not applicable.

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

References

- ¹⁴ Donoghue, E. A. & AAP Council on Early Childhood. (2017). Quality early education and child care from birth to kindergarten. *Pediatrics*, 140(2): e20171488.
- ²³ Gordon, J., Herbst, C. M., & Tekin, E. (2018). *Who's minding the kids?: Experimental evidence on the demand for child care quality*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- ⁵⁹ Pianta, R., Downer, J., & Hamre, B. (2016). Quality in early education classrooms: Definitions, gaps, and systems. *The Future of Children*, 26(2), 119-137.
- ⁶ Phillips, D., Austin, L. J. E., & Whitebook, M. (2016). The early care and education workforce. *The Future of Children*, 26(2), 139-158.
- ⁷⁸ Workman, S. & Ullrich, R. (2017). *Quality 101: Identifying the core components of a high-quality early childhood program*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.
- ¹⁰ Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children. (n.d.). *Frequently asked questions about BrightStars Quality Rating & Improvement System*. Retrieved March 20, 2021, from www.brightstars.org
- ¹¹ *Request for proposals: Rhode Island Pre-K Programs 2020-2021*. Retrieved March 1, 2020, from www.ride.ri.gov

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