

# 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 from birth through kindergarten entry, including high-quality preschool, helps to ensure children enter school with the skills needed to succeed. Without government funding, children from low-income families, Black and Latino children would have less access to high-quality preschool compared to higher-income and white families.<sup>1,2</sup>

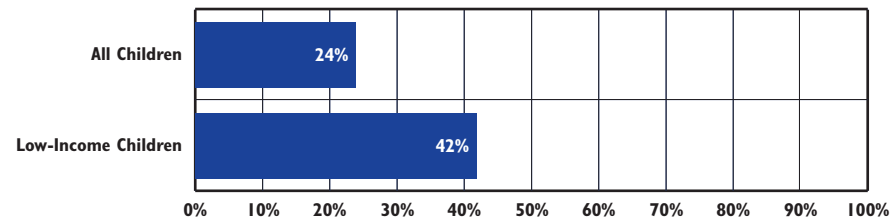
Decades of research have shown that high-quality preschool programs help children gain academic and social-emotional skills prior to school entry and can produce positive outcomes that last well into the school years, including reduced need for special education services and improved high school graduation rates.<sup>3,4</sup>

Head Start is a federally-funded comprehensive early childhood program for preschool children ages three through five who are low-income and/or have high needs. Head Start programs deliver early education; dental, medical, and mental health support; nutrition services, and developmental screenings. Families receive wraparound support and have opportunities to be involved with decision making, participate in classes, and volunteer in the program.<sup>5,6</sup>

State-funded Pre-K programs are growing across the U.S. As of 2021, 44 states and Washington, DC operated state Pre-K programs, serving 29% of four-year-olds and 5% of three-year-olds across the U.S.<sup>7</sup> The RI Pre-K program was launched in 2009 and serves four-year-olds who are selected through a state-managed lottery. RI Pre-K is delivered by public schools, Head Start agencies, and child care programs that meet the same quality standards. 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 in communities.<sup>8</sup>

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

Percentage of Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K the Year Before Kindergarten, Rhode Island, 2021-2022



Source: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT calculations using October 2021 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.

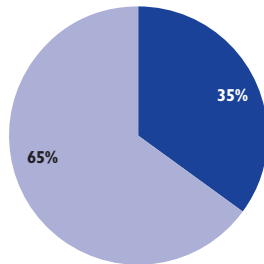
- ◆ As of October 2021, there were 2,832 children ages four through five enrolled in either Head Start or RI Pre-K during the year before kindergarten, approximately 24% of all children and 42% of low-income children. Of the total, 785 children were enrolled in Head Start and 2,300 children in RI Pre-K (with 253 children dually enrolled in both Head Start and RI Pre-K with braided funding).<sup>10,11</sup>
- ◆ Of those enrolled the year before kindergarten, 532 (19%) were enrolled in Head Start only, 253 (9%) were dually enrolled in both Head Start and RI Pre-K through braided funding, and 2,047 (72%) were enrolled in RI Pre-K only.<sup>12,13</sup>
- ◆ Children in the four core cities were more likely to be enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K (38%) than children in the remainder of the state (15%).<sup>14,15</sup>
- ◆ As of the 2020-2021 school year, Rhode Island ranked 1st in the U.S. (tied with four other states) for meeting research-based Pre-K quality benchmarks, and 31st in the U.S. for enrollment of four-year-olds.<sup>16</sup>

# Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K

## Children Enrolled in Head Start, Rhode Island, 2021

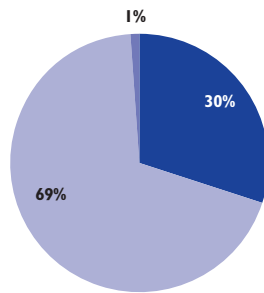
By Number of Years Before Kindergarten

35% (420) ■ Two Years (Age 3 turning 4)  
65% (785) ■ One Year (Age 4 turning 5)



By Length of Program Day

30% (367) ■ Four Hours  
69% (831) ■ Six Hours  
1% (7) ■ Other



*n* = 1,205

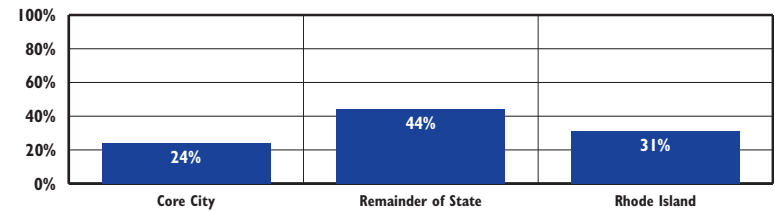
Source: Rhode Island Head Start program reports to Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, October 2021.

- ◆ In October 2021 in Rhode Island, there were 1,205 children ages three through five enrolled in Head Start, down 40% from the 2,010 children enrolled in 2019 (pre-pandemic). Of these, 253 were dually enrolled in RI Pre-K.<sup>17,18</sup>
- ◆ In October 2021 in Rhode Island, there were 494 vacancies in the Head Start program (29% of the 1,699 funded slots) and there were 228 children on the waiting list. Vacancies and waiting lists were caused by lack of adequate funding to hire and retain qualified teachers.<sup>19</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>20</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.<sup>21,22</sup>

## Estimated Percentage of Eligible Children Enrolled in Head Start by Child's Residence, Rhode Island, 2021

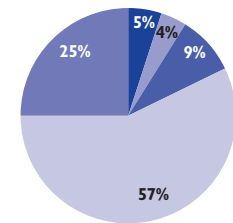


Source: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT calculations. The numerator is Rhode Island Head Start program enrollment data, October 2021. The denominator is the estimated number of children ages three and four from Census 2010 multiplied by the % of children under age six living in families with incomes below the federal poverty line (FPL) from the 2016-2020 American Community Surveys.

- ◆ As of 2021, approximately 31% of Rhode Island preschool-age children living in poverty were enrolled in Head Start, down from 43% in 2019 (pre-pandemic).<sup>23,24</sup>

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

5% (66) ■ No Rating  
4% (46) ■ 1 Star  
0% (0) ■ 2 Stars  
9% (111) ■ 3 Stars  
57% (683) ■ 4 Stars  
25% (299) ■ 5 Stars



Source: Rhode Island Head Start program reports to Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, October 2021.

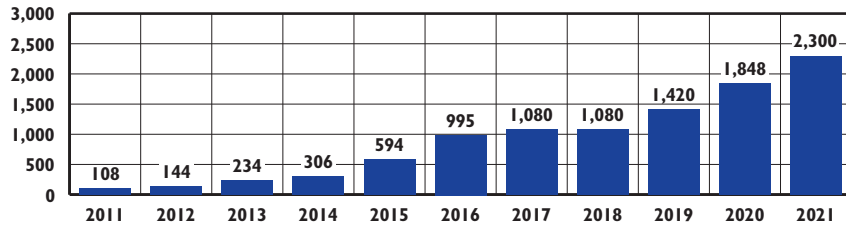
- ◆ As of October 2021, 81% of children enrolled in Head Start were in a program that had achieved a high-quality BrightStars rating of four or five stars compared to 28% of preschoolers in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP).<sup>25,26</sup>

## Head Start and Children with High Needs

- ◆ Rhode Island Head Start programs serve significant numbers of children with high needs. As of October 2021, 113 (9%) children enrolled in Head Start had developmental delays or disabilities and received special education services through their local school districts, 16 (1%) were in foster care, and 29 (2%) were homeless.<sup>27</sup>

# Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K

RI Pre-K Enrollment, 2011 through 2021



Sources: National Institute for Early Education Research, *The State of Preschool 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015*. Rhode Island Department of Education, RI Pre-K program enrollment, October 2015 through 2021.

◆ Rhode Island began offering RI Pre-K for four-year-olds in the 2009-2010 school year.<sup>28</sup> In October 2021 in Rhode Island, there were 2,300 children ages four through five enrolled in RI Pre-K, up 62% from the 1,420 children enrolled in 2019 (pre-pandemic). Of these, 253 were dually enrolled in Head Start.<sup>29,30,31</sup>

◆ In October 2021 in Rhode Island, there were 64 vacancies in the RI Pre-K program (3% of the 2,364 funded slots) and zero children on the waiting list.<sup>32</sup>

◆ Children are selected to participate in RI Pre-K through a lottery, with outreach to recruit children from low-income and moderate-income families, children who are differently abled, children who are multilingual learners, children who are involved with the child welfare system, and children who are experiencing homelessness.<sup>33</sup>

◆ In October 2021, 1,519 (66%) children enrolled in RI Pre-K were low-income and 781 (34%) were higher income.<sup>34</sup>

RI Pre-K and Children with High Needs

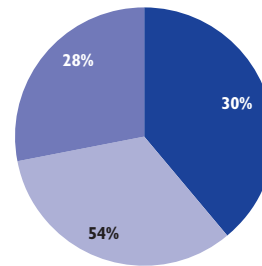
◆ RI Pre-K classrooms serve significant numbers of children with high needs. As of October 2021, 271 (12%) children in RI Pre-K had a developmental delay or disability, 24 (1%) were in foster care, and 21 (1%) were homeless.<sup>40</sup>

◆ Of the 2,300 children enrolled in RI Pre-K in October 2021, 5% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 13% were Black, 34% were Hispanic/Latino, 8% were Multiracial, 1% were Native American, and 39% were white.<sup>41</sup>

RI Pre-K Funded Slots, Rhode Island, 2021

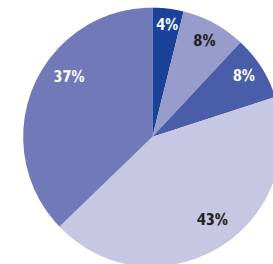
By Setting

- 30% (918) Head Start Agency
- 54% (782) Child Care Program
- 28% (664) Public School



By BrightStars Rating of Site

- 4% (96) No Rating
- 0% (0) 1 Star
- 8% (188) 2 Stars
- 8% (186) 3 Stars
- 43% (1,024) 4 Stars
- 37% (870) 5 Stars



n=2,364

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, October 2021.

RI Pre-K Structure, Quality, and Effectiveness

◆ As of the 2021-2022 school year, there were 127 RI Pre-K classrooms and 2,364 funded RI Pre-K slots; 40% of the RI Pre-K slots were contracted to Head Start agencies, 33% were contracted to child care programs, and 27% were contracted to public schools.<sup>35</sup>

◆ In 2021, Rhode Island was one of only five states with a Pre-K program that met 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>36</sup>

◆ As of 2021, 80% of RI Pre-K slots were in program sites with high-quality BrightStars ratings (four or five stars), compared to 28% of preschoolers in CCAP.<sup>37,38</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>39</sup>

# Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K

Table 40.

Children Enrolled in Head Start and/or RI Pre-K, Rhode Island, 2021

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	3	199	4%	8	0	3	0	0	38%	2%
Bristol	3	206	22%	45	1	3	18	5	49%	13%
Burrillville	5	173	27%	47	4	0	0	0	9%	2%
Central Falls	11	345	82%	283	16	0	121	9	48%	42%
Charlestown	1	81	17%	14	5	0	0	0	36%	6%
Coventry	10	366	16%	59	4	15	5	56	41%	22%
Cranston	36	862	33%	284	34	40	60	118	47%	29%
Cumberland	2	426	13%	55	5	0	0	0	9%	1%
East Greenwich	0	158	5%	8	1	1	0	0	25%	1%
East Providence	22	469	28%	131	16	1	95	102	85%	46%
Exeter	0	55	12%	7	1	1	0	0	30%	4%
Foster	0	53	26%	14	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Glocester	2	106	9%	10	2	0	0	0	21%	2%
Hopkinton	3	87	17%	15	1	1	0	0	14%	2%
Jamestown	0	50	4%	2	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Johnston	4	278	39%	108	11	0	16	22	25%	18%
Lincoln	0	211	24%	51	1	1	4	13	12%	9%
Little Compton	0	28	10%	3	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Middletown	16	226	26%	59	10	7	5	24	37%	20%
Narragansett	1	117	11%	13	0	1	0	0	8%	1%
New Shoreham	0	7	4%	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Newport	29	232	64%	148	13	8	17	11	26%	21%
North Kingstown	7	318	15%	48	7	1	3	14	23%	8%
North Providence	3	282	38%	107	18	9	17	28	41%	26%
North Smithfield	1	108	11%	12	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Pawtucket	22	1,006	70%	704	80	9	127	66	31%	28%
Portsmouth	1	196	9%	18	1	0	0	0	6%	1%
Providence	102	2,382	82%	1,953	216	18	531	115	39%	37%
Richmond	2	102	17%	17	2	0	0	0	12%	2%
Scituate	0	94	10%	9	1	0	0	0	11%	1%
Smithfield	2	169	7%	12	4	1	0	0	42%	3%
South Kingstown	5	273	13%	35	1	8	10	0	54%	7%
Tiverton	1	143	17%	24	8	0	0	0	33%	6%
Warren	13	127	22%	28	4	5	15	10	86%	27%
Warwick	23	850	27%	230	13	33	8	85	24%	16%
West Greenwich	2	53	12%	6	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
West Warwick	24	354	46%	163	5	22	17	33	27%	22%
Westerly	9	244	30%	73	6	9	27	0	57%	17%
Woonsocket	55	584	73%	426	41	56	170	70	63%	58%
Four Core Cities	190	4,317	78%	3,367	353	83	949	260	41%	38%
Remainder of State	230	7,703	23%	1,772	179	170	317	521	38%	15%
Rhode Island	420	12,020	41%	4,928	532	253	1,266	781	42%	24%

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Head Start Programs, children enrolled as of October 2021, by child residence. Rhode Island Department of Education, children enrolled in RI Pre-K as of October 2021, by child residence.

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>5,20,21</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> National Head Start Association. (2022). *Rhode Island 2022 Head Start and Early Head Start profile.* Retrieved April 30, 2022, from www.nhsa.org

<sup>7,16,28,36</sup> Friedman-Kraus, A. H., et al. (2022). *The state of preschool 2021: 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.

<sup>10,12,14,17,19,25,27,31</sup> Rhode Island Head Start Program reports to Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, October 2021.

(continued on page 188)