

# 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>

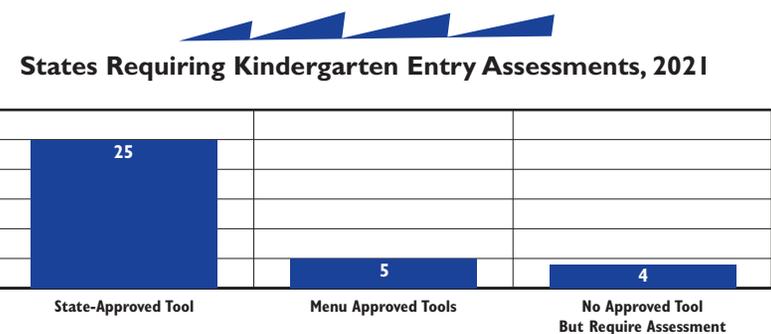
The transition to kindergarten is an important point in a child's educational experience, marking either the start of their formal education or the transition between preschool, which is not universally available or guaranteed as part of most states' public education systems, to the early elementary 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 2020, approximately 50% of four-year-olds and 30% of three-year-olds in the U.S. participate 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>



Source: Yun, C., Melnick, H., & Wechsler, M. (2021). *High-quality early childhood assessment: Learning from states' use of kindergarten entry assessments*. Washington, DC: Learning Policy Institute.

◆ **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 August 2021, 34 states require an assessment 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, 2021, there were 9,692 children enrolled in public kindergarten in Rhode Island, an increase of 8% from the 8,948 children enrolled the previous year. National reports indicate that kindergarten enrollment dropped the previous year due to school disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.**<sup>13,14,15</sup>

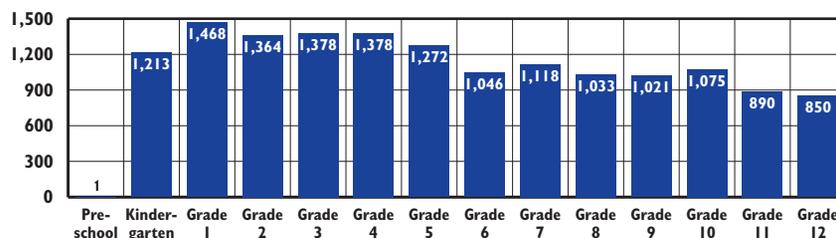
◆ **There were 8,629 kindergarteners in traditional public schools (up 7% from 2020), 1,059 in public charter schools (up 18% from 2020), and four in a state-operated school (Rhode Island School for the Deaf). All were enrolled in full-day classrooms.**<sup>16,17</sup>

# Children Enrolled in Kindergarten

## Young Multilingual Learners/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>18</sup>
- ◆ Being bilingual or multilingual 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 or multilingual also may help delay or prevent the onset of cognitive problems associated with aging.<sup>19</sup>
- ◆ Both bilingual and multilingual education and English immersion programs can effectively promote English language acquisition and proficiency. Bilingual dual education has the added advantage of supporting the development of a child's home language, encouraging fluency in both languages.<sup>20</sup>
- ◆ In Rhode Island, students in kindergarten through fourth grades are more likely to be Multilingual Learners/English Learners (MLL/ELs) than older students. In 2020-2021, 5,423 children in grades K-3 (14% of all children in grades K-3 in Rhode Island) were MLL/ELs. Only one child in a public school preschool classroom in Rhode Island (less than 1% of the 2,834 children receiving preschool services from a public school) was identified as an MLL/EL. Of the 1,213 kindergarteners who were MLL/ELs, 41% were enrolled in the Providence Public Schools, 18% were in one of the other three core city public school districts, and 19% were in a public charter school.<sup>21</sup>

## Multilingual Learners/English Learners by Grade Level, Rhode Island, 2020-2021 School Year



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2020-2021.

## 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 10 times more likely to experience academic failure, have negative attitudes toward school, drop out of high school, and become incarcerated.<sup>22</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>23</sup>
- ◆ In 2020-2021 in Rhode Island, there were 46 kindergartners who were suspended at least one day, 56% of whom had a developmental delay or disability. Kindergartners experienced 46 disciplinary actions, with 41 out-of-school suspensions and five in-school suspensions. These students were suspended for a total of 52 days.<sup>24</sup>
- ◆ Compared to the 2019-2020 school year, the number of kindergartners who were suspended decreased by 30%, the number of suspensions by 58%, and the number of days kindergartners were suspended by 64%. Decreases in suspensions may be attributed to decreased use or underreporting of disciplinary actions during distance learning.<sup>25,26</sup>
- ◆ As of 2018, approximately 16 states limit the use of suspension in the early grades.<sup>27</sup>

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Rhode Island General Law 16-99-3.
- <sup>23</sup> Auck, A., & Atchison, B. (2016). *50-state comparison: K-3 quality*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.
- <sup>24</sup> Atchison, B., Diffey, L., & Workman, E. (2016). *K-3 policymakers' guide to action: Making the early years count*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.
- <sup>25</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, School enrollment supplement, Table 2-1, October 2020.
- <sup>26</sup> Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2016). When does preschool matter? *The Future of Children*, 26(2), 21-35.
- <sup>27</sup> *Case studies of the early implementation of Kindergarten Entry Assessments final report*. (2016). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service.

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