

# Children Receiving Preschool Special Education Services

## DEFINITION

*Children receiving preschool special education services* is the percentage of children ages three to five who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and are receiving special education services in Rhode Island.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Preschool special education is an important component of the early care and education system, providing specially-designed instruction so each child can meet learning standards. The federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* specifies that children ages three to five with developmental delays and disabilities have the same right to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment as school-age children with disabilities.<sup>1</sup>

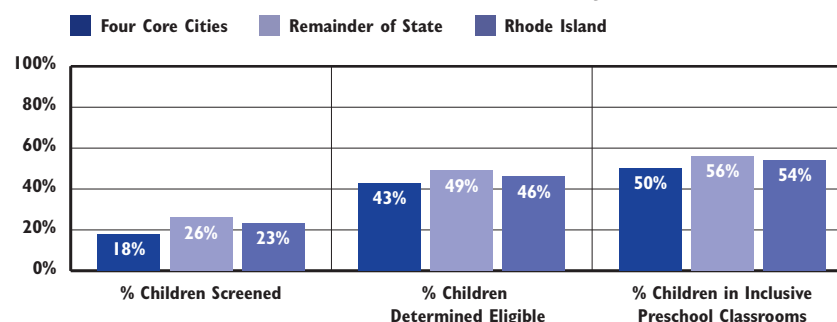
Developmental delays are identified when a child does not reach developmental milestones at the same time as other children their age. Some young children with developmental delays are eventually diagnosed with a disability while others catch up to their peers when provided with high-quality educational opportunities, therapies, or interventions.<sup>2,3</sup> Routine developmental screening during the early stages of life, followed by evaluation and diagnostic assessment, helps children gain access to needed services to prevent more severe

problems.<sup>4</sup>

In Rhode Island, school districts work to screen every child ages three through five every year through the Child Outreach screening program.<sup>5</sup> During the 2020-2021 school year in Rhode Island, districts completed developmental screenings for only 23% of children ages three to five, down from 28% the previous year and from 39% pre-pandemic. Preschool-age children in the core cities were less likely to receive a developmental screening (18%) than children in the remainder of the state (26%). Of the children who were referred for evaluation based on positive screens in 2020-2021, 46% were determined eligible for special education. Children in the core cities were less likely to be determined eligible after referral (43%) than children in the remainder of the state (49%).<sup>6,7</sup>

Approximately 17% of U.S. children ages three to 17 have a developmental disability, with higher prevalence among low-income children, children with low birthweight, and boys.<sup>8</sup> Under *IDEA*, each state sets its own criteria to determine the magnitude of a delay needed to qualify for special education services.<sup>9</sup> In 2019, Rhode Island ranked in the top 10 states for providing preschool special education services by serving 9.8% of children ages three to five compared with a U.S. average of 6.7%.<sup>10</sup>

Preschool Special Education Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion Rates, Rhode Island, June 2021



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2020-2021 Child Outreach Screening and Referral Rates and June 2021 Special Education Census. Percent children determined eligible is of those children referred for evaluation from Child Outreach screening.

- ◆ In June 2021, there were 2,597 children ages three to five receiving preschool special education services (7% of all preschool children), down from 2,904 in 2020 and 3,156 in 2019 (pre-pandemic). Children in the four core cities are less likely to receive preschool special education services (6%) than children in the remainder of the state (8%).<sup>11,12</sup>
- ◆ Preschool children with disabilities who attend high-quality preschool with typically developing children and receive special education services in inclusive settings have improved outcomes.<sup>13</sup> In June 2021 in Rhode Island, 54% of preschool-age children received special education services within an inclusive early childhood classroom. Children in the four core cities were less likely to receive preschool special education services in an inclusive early childhood setting (50%) than children in the remainder of the state (56%).<sup>14</sup>
- ◆ More than four in 10 children receiving preschool special education services in Rhode Island receive services outside of inclusive preschool programs, with 13% enrolled in a separate special education preschool class or school, 22% receiving services through “walk-in” visits to a service provider, 11% enrolled in a preschool setting but receiving special education services in another location, and 1% in a home or hospital.<sup>15</sup>
- ◆ In June 2021, 47% (1,212) of the 2,597 children receiving preschool special education services in Rhode Island qualified under the developmental delay category, 42% (1,102) had an identified speech/language disability, 6% (168) were diagnosed with autism, and 4% (115) had another diagnosed disability.<sup>16</sup>

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Table 41.

Children Ages 3 to 5 Receiving Special Education Services, Rhode Island, 2021

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# OF CHILDREN AGES 3-5	DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING RATES				PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION BY SETTING				
		% SCREENED 3 YEARS BEFORE K	% SCREENED 2 YEARS BEFORE K	% SCREENED 1 YEAR BEFORE K	% SCREENED AGES 3 TO 5	INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASS	% IN INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASS	OTHER SETTING	TOTAL # RECEIVING SERVICES	% RECEIVING SERVICES
Barrington	654	11%	33%	69%	41%	22	44%	28	50	8%
Bristol Warren	724	5%	13%	11%	9%	23	53%	20	43	6%
Burrillville	463	5%	35%	58%	32%	20	63%	12	32	7%
Central Falls	1,086	13%	26%	56%	32%	67	51%	65	132	12%
Chariho	645	15%	43%	50%	36%	34	47%	38	72	11%
Coventry	1,029	12%	33%	49%	32%	57	61%	36	93	9%
Cranston	2,622	2%	19%	36%	20%	74	44%	93	167	6%
Cumberland	1,250	6%	21%	42%	24%	69	61%	44	113	9%
East Greenwich	535	7%	16%	30%	18%	28	85%	*	33	6%
East Providence	1,486	5%	18%	40%	21%	91	90%	10	101	7%
Exeter-West Greenwich	351	21%	45%	60%	40%	10	34%	19	29	8%
Foster	100	12%	37%	50%	33%	*	78%	*	*	9%
Glocester	261	12%	37%	50%	33%	*	18%	23	28	11%
Jamestown	124	31%	50%	78%	54%	*	83%	*	*	5%
Johnston	850	10%	21%	44%	25%	45	66%	23	68	8%
Lincoln	758	12%	43%	43%	33%	53	69%	24	77	10%
Little Compton	69	0%	24%	56%	32%	*	80%	*	*	7%
Middletown	707	6%	17%	26%	17%	11	55%	*	20	3%
Narragansett	192	30%	51%	59%	45%	25	86%	*	29	15%
New Shoreham	31	50%	0%	46%	29%	*	33%	*	*	10%
Newport	1,049	6%	12%	11%	10%	18	51%	17	35	3%
North Kingstown	839	32%	51%	74%	53%	41	64%	23	64	8%
North Providence	1,004	8%	20%	29%	19%	32	46%	38	70	7%
North Smithfield	320	15%	47%	68%	44%	13	33%	27	40	13%
Pawtucket	2,955	6%	19%	29%	18%	63	35%	116	179	6%
Portsmouth	563	7%	22%	14%	15%	14	32%	30	44	8%
Providence	7,967	7%	17%	22%	15%	187	47%	207	394	5%
Scituate	282	12%	37%	50%	33%	10	38%	16	26	9%
Smithfield	539	28%	63%	56%	50%	26	60%	17	43	8%
South Kingstown	633	16%	47%	44%	36%	25	68%	12	37	6%
Tiverton	430	4%	11%	59%	25%	10	42%	14	24	6%
Warwick	2,426	6%	19%	29%	18%	79	48%	87	166	7%
West Warwick	1,052	5%	20%	29%	18%	46	39%	71	117	11%
Westerly	596	21%	53%	73%	50%	55	75%	18	73	12%
Woonsocket	1,840	8%	22%	52%	26%	120	74%	42	162	9%
Charter Schools	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	*	100%	0	*	NA
RI School for the Deaf	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0%	11	11	NA
Four Core Cities	13,848	7%	19%	29%	18%	437	50%	430	867	6%
Remainder of State	22,584	9%	27%	40%	26%	953	56%	764	1,717	8%
Rhode Island	36,432	9%	24%	36%	23%	1,392	54%	1,205	2,597	7%

## Sources of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), June 2021 Special Education Census.

2020-2021 Child Outreach screening data is from the RIDE Office of Student, Community, and Academic Supports. Foster, Glocester, and Scituate school districts collaborate to conduct Child Outreach screenings. Separate rates are not available for each of these districts so the same combined rate is used for all three districts.

\*Fewer than 10 students are in this category. Actual numbers are not shown to protect student confidentiality. These students are still counted in district totals and in the four core cities, remainder of the state, and state totals.

The denominator is the number of children ages three to five residing in each district during the 2020-2021 school year from the Rhode Island Department of Health's KIDSNET database shared with RIDE.

Due to changes in the denominator, screening rates and percentage receiving preschool special education services should not be compared with data in Factbooks published before 2016.

Inclusive early childhood class means children receive the majority of their special education services in a general early childhood education class at a public school, a Head Start program, or a community-based child care program or preschool. Data include children who are district-placed and who are parentally-placed.

Charter school is Highlander Charter School.

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

## References

<sup>1,3,9,13</sup> Hebbeler, K. & Spiker, D. (2016). Supporting young children with disabilities. *The Future of Children*, 26(2), 185-205.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). *Facts about developmental disabilities*. Retrieved February 13, 2022, from www.cdc.gov

<sup>45</sup> *Rhode Island's guidelines for implementing Child Outreach screening*. (2018). Providence, RI: Rhode Island Department of Education.

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