



Embargo requested until 12:01 a.m. on Monday, September 19, 2016

Contact: Katherine Linwood Chu, Communications Manager

401.351.9400, Ext. 22 / kchu@rikidscount.org

Follow the conversation on Twitter: [#EarlyLearningRI](https://twitter.com/EarlyLearningRI)

Investing in the Future: Financing Early Education & Care in Rhode Island

New Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Issue Brief released at Policy Roundtable

Providence, RI (September 16, 2016): Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will release their newest publication, *Investing in the Future: Financing Early Education & Care in Rhode Island* at a policy roundtable on Monday, September 19, 2016, from 9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. at Heritage Park YMCA, 333 Roosevelt Avenue, Pawtucket, RI. Featured speakers will include Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT; Governor Gina Raimondo; Elizabeth Roberts, Secretary of the RI Executive Office of Health and Human Services; Ken Wagner, Commissioner of the RI Department of Education; and Charles Clifford, CEO of the YMCA of Pawtucket. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Senior Policy Analyst Leanne Barrett will share the *Issue Brief* findings.

The Governor and other participants will be given a tour of three early childhood classrooms at Heritage Park YMCA, the largest licensed early learning center in Rhode Island and the center that serves the most children receiving child care subsidies. Classrooms on the tour include a State Pre-K classroom operated in partnership with Ready to Learn Providence, an Early Head Start – Child Care classroom operated in partnership with Children’s Friend and an infant child care classroom. Heritage Park opened a new State Pre-K classroom in September, one of 23 new State Pre-K classrooms in the state providing preschool to an additional 414 four-year-olds statewide.

Why Early Education Matters

The first five years in a child’s life are crucial to their success in school. Children begin learning at birth and brain development proceeds rapidly in early childhood. Disparities in learning based on access to enriched experiences and environments begin to appear in the first years of life and, without intervention, grow over time. Access to high-quality early learning opportunities from birth through kindergarten entry, at home and in the community, helps prepare children for success in school.

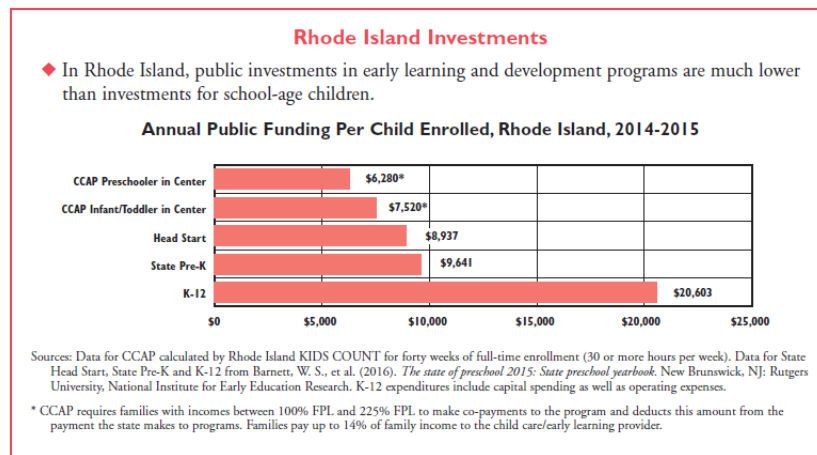
For the specific components of the early care and education system in Rhode Island, please see the ‘Early Education Funding System’ chart on page 2 of the Issue Brief.

Access to high-quality early learning programs is tied to family income. Children in higher-income families are more likely to attend preschool than children from lower-income families. In fact, 83% of four-year-olds in the U.S. who have families with incomes in the top quintile attend preschool.

Many families cannot afford to enroll their children in high-quality early learning programs. Public funding for child care, Head Start, and Pre-K, helps some low-income families enroll in high-quality early learning programs, but many children from low-and moderate-income families are left out due to limited public funding. Even middle-and high-income families struggle to afford the cost of high-quality early care and education programs.

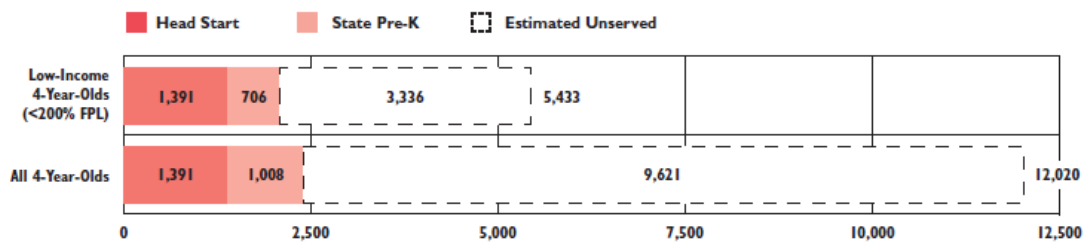
How do Investments in Education Compare?

Studies show that the return on investment is greater for early childhood interventions than later investments. Economically, it makes more sense to invest early.



“When thinking about the economic and education goals for Rhode Island, it’s crucial that we examine our starting place,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “Research shows that the earlier education investments are made, the greater the return. As Rhode Island looks to the future, we need to strategically invest in and expand access to the continuum of programs that we know support the learning and development of our children – from the very beginning.”

Four-Year-Olds, Access to Head Start and State Pre-K, Rhode Island, Projected for 2016-2017



Source: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT calculations assuming Head Start enrollment remains stable and 70% of children enrolled in State Pre-K are low-income (below 200% FPL).

As of the 2016-2017 school year, 39% of low-income four-year-olds (families with incomes up to 200% FPL) and 20% of all four-year-olds in Rhode Island are enrolled in a publicly funded preschool (Head Start or State Pre-K).

Rhode Island's State Pre-K program has been recognized as one of only seven in the U.S. to meet all recommended quality benchmarks, but the state is ranked among the lowest nationally (41st out of 43 states) in terms of access for four-year-olds.

Key findings and recommendations from the *Issue Brief* include:

- **Implement a tiered reimbursement system for the Child Care Assistance Program,** with enhanced rates for child care programs that meet research-based quality standards in BrightStars, the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System. Most states have tiered quality reimbursement rate systems, meaning that the higher quality a program is, the higher the rates paid by the state for low-income children enrolled in programs. Current rates for child care centers serving children in the Child Care Assistance Program are well below recommended levels and do not provide adequate resources or incentives to support quality improvement.
- **Expand Public Preschool Options for 3- and 4-Year Olds** – Especially Low-Income Children.
 - Expand access to Head Start to serve more eligible children living in poverty by taking advantage of opportunities for additional federal funding and increasing state funding for Head Start.
 - Continue to grow the State Pre-K program, focusing on communities with the highest needs first, with a long-term goal of providing all children in Rhode Island with access to high-quality, publicly-funded preschool.
- **Invest in Early Childhood Educators**
 - Help early childhood educators attain college credentials and degrees through the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood workforce development model. Implement targeted wage enhancement strategies to attract and retain more qualified early childhood and effective early childhood educators. Research shows that adequate compensation for early childhood teachers improves staff retention, attracts teachers with better qualifications, and results in higher-quality educational experiences for children.
 - However, annual wages for child care and preschool teachers are among the lowest in the U.S., with child care workers paid wages at the third percentile and preschool teachers paid at the 19th percentile of the average wage range. In Rhode Island, early childhood educators in licensed early learning programs make between \$9.00 and \$15.25 per hour.
- For the full list of recommendations, please see page 11 of the *Issue Brief*.

###

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children.