

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2022

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A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- RHODE ISLAND PRE-KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION
ACT

Introduced By: Senators Gallo, Cano, Pearson, Lawson, DiMario, Murray, Goodwin, and
McCaffrey

Date Introduced: March 15, 2022

Referred To: Senate Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 16-87 of the General Laws entitled "Rhode Island Pre-Kindergarten
2 Education Act" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following sections:

3 **16-87-6. High-quality, universal pre-Kindergarten.**

4 (a) The general assembly acknowledges the need to adequately prepare all children to
5 succeed in school by providing access to publicly funded, high quality pre-Kindergarten education
6 programs for all children ages three (3) and four (4).

7 (b) Access to free, inclusive and high-quality pre-Kindergarten classrooms in a mixed-
8 delivery system that includes Head Start centers, public school districts, child care centers and
9 family child care providers, shall be expanded across all communities in Rhode Island, so that no
10 later than June 30, 2028, every family who wants a high-quality pre-Kindergarten seat for their
11 children ages three (3) or four (4), shall have one.

12 (c) Universal access will be considered achieved when no less than seventy percent (70%)
13 of all children ages three (3) and four (4) are enrolled in high-quality pre-Kindergarten programs.

14 (d) For the school year 2023-2024, the Rhode Island Pre-Kindergarten program
15 administered by the department of education shall make funds available to offer no less than four
16 thousand (4,000) high-quality pre-Kindergarten seats through a mixed-delivery model, of which no
17 less than twenty-five percent (25%) shall be made available for all children age three (3).

18 (e) No later than December 31, 2022, the department of education, in collaboration with

1 the department of human services, the Head Start Collaboration Office, and the RI early learning
2 council shall submit to the governor, speaker of the house, senate president, and chairs of house
3 and senate finance committees and education committees a year-by-year growth plan to achieve
4 universal access to high-quality pre-kindergarten for all children ages three (3) and four (4) by June
5 30, 2028; the growth plan shall detail annual growth targets and projected funding needs, as well
6 as how the state will:

7 (1) Equitably distribute pre-Kindergarten funding to Head Start centers, center-based
8 providers, family child care providers and school districts;

9 (2) Ensure the expanding pre-Kindergarten program does not disrupt the stability of infant
10 and toddler care throughout the state;

11 (3) Prepare, recruit and retain a highly-qualified early childhood workforce;

12 (4) Build capacity among new and existing providers to ensure quality standards are met
13 in all settings; and

14 (5) Ensure providers in the mixed-delivery system have sufficient facilities to expand
15 access to high-quality pre-Kindergarten services.

16 **16-87-7. High quality elements.**

17 (a) To expand access to high-quality pre-Kindergarten education programs, it is essential
18 to invest in expanding high-quality early learning in order to meaningfully increase children's
19 school readiness.

20 (b) The Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary education (the
21 "department") is hereby authorized to promulgate and adopt rules and regulations for the
22 implementation of high quality, universal pre-Kindergarten. The following quality standards shall
23 be established in regulation by the department:

24 (1) Teacher education and certification;

25 (2) Class size and staff ratios;

26 (3) Learning time;

27 (4) Learning standards;

28 (5) Curriculum;

29 (6) Support for students with special needs;

30 (7) Support for dual English language learners;

31 (8) Professional development;

32 (9) Child assessments; and

33 (10) Observations to improve practice.

34 (c) To whatever extent deemed necessary by the department, quality standards may be

1 differentiated by pre-Kindergarten education setting, such that every provider-type in a mixed-
2 delivery model is able and expected to meet the highest quality standards as defined by the
3 department.

4 **16-87-8. Successful transitions.**

5 (a) Successful coordination between Rhode Island's high-quality pre-Kindergarten and
6 kindergarten programs is essential for setting a solid foundation for all students. In order to have a
7 seamless pathway from pre-Kindergarten to third grade, standards, curriculum, instruction and
8 assessments shall be aligned.

9 (b) Effective transition programs and practices to help students and families move
10 successfully from one setting to another shall be established.

11 (c) All local education agencies (LEAs) in Rhode Island shall develop a kindergarten
12 transition strategy to support incoming students and families. The transition strategy must include
13 two (2) parts:

14 (1) Student and family communication and engagement plans; and

15 (2) Program-level transition plans.

16 These strategies may include:

17 (1) For student and family transition, the following strategies shall be considered:

18 (i) Student visits to their future kindergarten classroom;

19 (ii) Kindergarten teacher visits to the pre-Kindergarten classrooms;

20 (iii) Workshops for families of incoming kindergarten children; and

21 (iv) Kindergarten orientation sessions the summer before school starts.

22 (2) For program-level transition planning the following strategies shall be considered:

23 (i) Creation of transition teams and liaisons between pre-Kindergarten programs and
24 district schools;

25 (ii) Joint professional development and data sharing for pre-Kindergarten to third grade
26 teachers; and

27 (iii) Teacher-to-teacher conferences.

28 **16-87-9. Pre-Kindergarten facilities.**

29 (a) No later than December 31, 2022, the department of human services shall provide the
30 senate president and the speaker of the house with a report on the status of disbursement and impact
31 of capital funds made available by the early learning facilities general obligation bond approved
32 March 2, 2021.

33 (b) The department of elementary and secondary education and the department of human
34 services shall establish programs and initiatives to ensure providers renovate, acquire, develop,

1 and/or expand facilities that meet licensing and facilities standards, in order to increase access to
2 high-quality pre-Kindergarten learning environments. Programs and initiatives may include, but
3 shall not be limited to:

4 (1) Grant programs to be used for facility planning, predevelopment activities, and/or
5 urgent facility maintenance required for the health, safety and quality of existing programs;

6 (2) Supporting the establishment of strategic partnerships between local education agencies
7 and community-based early learning providers to make use of available space in existing facilities;
8 and/or

9 (3) Technical assistance for providers to access capital, navigate licensing standards for
10 facilities, and/or begin the facility improvement and development processes.

11 SECTION 2. Section 16-87-4 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-87 entitled "Rhode Island
12 Pre-Kindergarten Education Act" is hereby amended to read as follows:

13 **16-87-4. Early childhood workforce development.**

14 (a) The Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary education shall work with
15 other state departments and private philanthropy to establish a statewide, comprehensive, research-
16 based early childhood workforce development scholarship program to expand the numbers of early
17 childhood educators who have an associate's or bachelor's degree in early childhood education and
18 who work with children from birth to age five (5).

19 (b)(1) In furtherance of the goals set forth in this chapter, no later than January 1, 2023, the
20 governor's workforce board of Rhode Island shall convene a working group comprised of
21 representatives from the department of elementary and secondary education, department of human
22 services, office of the postsecondary commissioner, the RI early learning council, organized labor
23 and early childhood education industry employers, whose purpose shall be to identify barriers to
24 entry into the early childhood education workforce, and to design accessible and accelerated
25 pathways into the workforce, including, but not limited to, registered apprenticeships and
26 postsecondary credit for prior work experience.

27 (2) No later than April 1, 2023, the working group shall provide the general assembly with
28 recommendations for addressing the barriers to workforce entry and implementing the solutions
29 identified by the working group; the recommendations shall outline any administrative action to be
30 taken by the participating agencies to implement the recommendations, as well as any legislative
31 action required to make a solution feasible.

32 (3) If and when appropriate, and in accordance with program administration guidelines, the
33 industry employers may seek to create a sector partnership via the real jobs Rhode Island program
34 to implement workforce solutions.

1 SECTION 3. Sections 16-87-3 and 16-87-5 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-87 entitled
2 "Rhode Island Pre-Kindergarten Education Act" are hereby repealed.

3 **16-87-3. Planning phase for a pre-Kindergarten program.**

4 ~~(a) The Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary education shall begin~~
5 ~~planning an initial, pilot pre-Kindergarten program that meets high quality standards, builds on the~~
6 ~~existing early childhood education infrastructure in the state (including child care, Head Start and~~
7 ~~public schools) and serves children ages three (3) and four (4) who reside in communities with~~
8 ~~concentrations of low performing schools. This planning phase will develop specific goals to~~
9 ~~expand the pilot pre-Kindergarten program over time and will also identify opportunities to~~
10 ~~strengthen care and learning programs for infants and toddlers.~~

11 ~~(b) During this planning phase, the Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary~~
12 ~~education will quantify the resources needed to achieve and maintain high quality standards in pre-~~
13 ~~Kindergarten programs and identify incentives and supports to develop a qualified early education~~
14 ~~workforce, including opportunities for experienced early childhood educators and~~
15 ~~paraprofessionals to acquire college degrees and earn early childhood teacher certification.~~

16 ~~(c) The Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary education will begin to~~
17 ~~develop plans to collect and analyze data regarding the impact of the pilot pre-Kindergarten~~
18 ~~program on participating children's school readiness and school achievement.~~

19 **16-87-5. Reporting.**

20 ~~The Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary education shall report back to~~
21 ~~the general assembly and the governor on the progress of the pilot planning phase no later than~~
22 ~~October 31, 2008.~~

23 SECTION 4. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO EDUCATION -- RHODE ISLAND PRE-KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION
ACT

1 This act would create public, high-quality pre-Kindergarten education programs which are
2 available to all children ages three (3) and four (4) throughout Rhode Island by June 30, 2028, to
3 increase children’s school readiness. This act would require the Rhode Island Pre-Kindergarten
4 Program to make funds available to offer no less than four thousand (4,000) high-quality pre-
5 Kindergarten seats for the school year 2023-2024. This act would repeal the statutory laws
6 pertaining to the initial pilot pre-Kindergarten program.

7 This act would take effect upon passage.

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