

2021 -- H 5158

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2021

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A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR INVESTMENT
ACT

Introduced By: Representatives Casimiro, Noret, Shallcross Smith, Donovan, and
McNamara

Date Introduced: January 25, 2021

Referred To: House Health, Education & Welfare

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by
2 adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 110

4 RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR INVESTMENT ACT

5 **16-110-1. Short title.**

6 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Rhode Island Early Educator
7 Investment Act."

8 **16-110-2. Legislative findings and purpose.**

9 The general assembly hereby finds that:

10 (1) Young children's healthy brain development and learning depends on consistent,
11 nurturing care and enriching learning opportunities at home and in early care and education settings.

12 Starting at birth, day-to-day interactions with family members and early educators shape children's
13 brain architecture upon which all future learning and development is built.

14 (2) Many of the early educators and early childhood professionals in Rhode Island earn
15 very low wages even when they achieve credentials equivalent to kindergarten through grade
16 twelve (K-12) teachers and demonstrate effective practices. Childcare, family home visiting, and
17 early intervention programs across the state report difficulty attracting, developing, and retaining
18 effective early childhood professionals.

1 (3) A 2019 statewide survey of early childhood professionals in Rhode Island found that
2 over forty percent (40%) of infant/toddler educators worry about having enough food to feed their
3 family and fifty percent (50%) worry about having enough money to pay for housing.

4 (4) Almost one-third (1/3) of early educators have a second job to help make ends meet
5 and almost two-thirds (2/3) report that they plan to leave their early education job if the
6 compensation does not improve. And yet, most report that they enjoy working with children and
7 families and many have earned college credits and degrees in child development and early
8 education.

9 (5) A landmark report issued by the National Academy of Science in 2015 found that
10 educators of young children, including infants and toddlers, need the same high level of knowledge
11 and competencies as teachers of older children and that educational qualifications and
12 compensation of early educators should be equivalent to those of kindergarten through grade twelve
13 (K-12) teachers.

14 (6) According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median wage for a
15 childcare teacher in Rhode Island in 2018 was twelve dollars and fifteen cents (\$12.15) per hour,
16 well below the state median wage of twenty dollars and twenty-one cents (\$20.21) per hour and
17 significantly below the level of kindergarten teachers who had an average annual salary of sixty-
18 five thousand five hundred thirty dollars (\$65,530). Rhode Island state agency data show that
19 median wages for early intervention providers and family home visitors range from thirteen dollars
20 and fifty cents (\$13.50) per hour to twenty dollars (\$20.00) per hour.

21 (7) By enacting this chapter, the general assembly acknowledges the need to develop and
22 implement strategies to improve the compensation of early educators so programs can attract,
23 develop, and retain effective staff to care for and educate young children and provide family-
24 focused services.

25 **16-110-3. Establishment of a target wage scale.**

26 (a) The children's cabinet established in §42-72.5-1 shall work in collaboration with the
27 department of human services, the department of health, the executive office of health and human
28 services, and the department of education to establish goals to improve compensation, including a
29 common target wage scale for early educators linked to education levels above high school and
30 demonstrated competence working with children and families.

31 (b) The target wage scale shall be developed to apply to educators working in childcare
32 centers, family childcare homes, Rhode Island Pre-K classrooms, family home visiting programs,
33 and early intervention programs. The target wage scale shall promote parity with kindergarten
34 through grade twelve (K-12) public school teachers for individuals with similar credentials.

1 (c) In developing this target wage scale, the children's cabinet may consider the findings
2 and recommendations provided in the 2019 Moving the Needle on Compensation Task Force's
3 report "Improving the Compensation and Retention of Effective Infant/Toddler Educators in Rhode
4 Island."

5 **16-110-4. Developing strategies to increase compensation of early educators.**

6 (a) Once the target wage scale has been established, the children's cabinet shall design
7 strategies and estimate the cost to close the gap between current wages and the target wage scale,
8 including parity with public school teaching staff or individuals with similar credentials. In
9 developing the plan, the following components shall be considered:

10 (1) Continuation and expansion of the existing statewide, comprehensive, research-based
11 early childhood workforce development scholarship program established under § 16-87-4 to
12 include stronger and ongoing support for compensation, such as implementation of wage
13 supplements or regular stipends for early educators to lift annual income to meet or exceed the
14 levels in the target wage scale. Consideration shall be given to the Infant/Toddler Educator
15 Education and Retention Awards demonstration program recommended by the Moving the Needle
16 on Compensation Task Force.

17 (2) Proposals to increase rates paid to early childhood programs that are adequate to enable
18 programs to pay early educators wages that meet or exceed the levels in the target wage scale.

19 (3) Contracts to early childhood programs to expand the availability of high-quality
20 services for young children and families with educators in the program paid wages that meet or
21 exceed the levels in the target wage scale.

22 (4) Registered apprenticeships for early educators that support completion of college
23 coursework and attainment of college credentials while providing opportunities to develop high-
24 quality practices through regular on-the-job coaching by master early educators. Apprenticeships
25 shall be designed and funded to enable successful participants to earn wages that meet or exceed
26 the levels in the target wage scale.

27 **16-110-5. Reporting.**

28 The children's cabinet shall report back to the governor and general assembly on or before
29 December 1, 2021 with a target wage scale and initial cost estimates for public funding to close the
30 wage gaps for early educators.

31 SECTION 2. Section 42-72.5-2 of the General Laws in Chapter 42-72.5 entitled
32 "Children's Cabinet" is hereby amended to read as follows:

33 **42-72.5-2. Policy and goals.**

34 The children's cabinet shall:

1 (1) Meet at least monthly to address all issues, especially those that cross departmental
2 lines, and relate to children's needs and services;

3 (2) Review, amend, and propose all interagency agreements necessary to provide
4 coordinated services to children;

5 (3) Produce an annual comprehensive children's budget, to be submitted with other budget
6 documents to the general assembly;

7 (4) Produce, by December 1, 2015, a comprehensive, five (5) year statewide plan and
8 proposed budget for an integrated state child service system. This plan shall be submitted to the
9 governor; the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the senate, and updated
10 annually thereafter;

11 (5) [Deleted by P.L. 2015, ch. 141, art. 5, § 21].

12 (6) Develop a strategic plan to coordinate and share data to foster interagency
13 communication, increase efficiency of service delivery, and simultaneously protect children's
14 legitimate expectations of privacy and rights to confidentiality. This shall include data-sharing with
15 research partners, pursuant to data-sharing agreements, that maintains data integrity and protects
16 the security and confidentiality of these records. Any such data-sharing agreements shall comply
17 with all privacy and security requirements of federal and state law and regulation governing the use
18 of such data. Any universal student identifier now in use by the state or developed in the future
19 shall not involve a student's social security number- ; and

20 (7) Establish a target wage scale for early educators working in child care, RI Pre-K, family
21 home visiting, and early intervention programs and design a strategic plan to close the gap between
22 current wages and the target wage scale, including parity with similarly qualified public school
23 teaching staff pursuant to the provisions of chapter 110 of title 16.

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25 SECTION 3. 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 EARLY EDUCATOR INVESTMENT
ACT

- 1 This act would require the children's cabinet, in conjunction with the department of
- 2 education, to develop and implement strategies to improve the compensation of early educators.
- 3 This act would take effect upon passage.

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