

2022 -- S 2235

LC004086

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2022

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR INVESTMENT  
ACT

Introduced By: Senators Cano, DiMario, Quezada, Euer, Murray, Lawson, Kallman,  
Anderson, Seveney, and Pearson

Date Introduced: February 08, 2022

Referred To: Senate Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Legislative findings and purpose.

2 (1) Young children's healthy brain development and learning depends on consistent,  
3 nurturing care and enriching learning opportunities at home and in early care and education settings.  
4 Starting at birth, day-to-day interactions with family members and early educators shape children's  
5 brain architecture upon which all future learning and development is built.

6 (2) Many of the early educators and early childhood professionals in Rhode Island earn  
7 very low wages even when they achieve credentials equivalent to kindergarten through grade  
8 twelve (K-12) teachers and demonstrate effective practices. Childcare, family home visiting, early  
9 head start, head start, Rhode Island pre-K, and early intervention (Part C of the Individuals with  
10 Disabilities Education Act) programs across the state report difficulty attracting, developing, and  
11 retaining effective early childhood professionals.

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

15 (4) The 2019 statewide survey also found that almost one-third (1/3) of early educators had  
16 a second job to help make ends meet and almost two-thirds (2/3) reported that they plan to leave  
17 their early education job if the compensation does not improve. And yet, most report that they enjoy  
18 working with children and families and many have earned college credits and degrees in child

1 development and early education.

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

7 (6) According to 2020 data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median wage for  
8 a childcare teacher in Rhode Island was twelve dollars and eleven cents (\$12.11) per hour and the  
9 median wage for a preschool teacher in Rhode Island was fourteen dollars and thirty-two cents  
10 (\$14.32) per hour, well below the state median wage of twenty-two dollars and seventy-seven cents  
11 (\$22.77) per hour and significantly below the level of kindergarten teachers who had an average  
12 annual salary of seventy-nine thousand one hundred fifty dollars (\$79,150). Rhode Island state  
13 agency data show that median wages for Early Intervention (Part C of the Individuals with  
14 Disabilities Education Act) specialists and Family Home Visitors are significantly below Rhode  
15 Island median wages for similarly qualified individuals.

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

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

22 CHAPTER 112

23 RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR INVESTMENT ACT

24 **16-112-1. Short title.**

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

27 **16-112-2. Establishment of a target wage scale.**

28 (a) The children's cabinet created in § 42-72.5-1 shall work to establish goals to improve  
29 compensation, including a cross-departmental target wage scale, for early educators linked to  
30 education levels above high school and demonstrated competence working with children and  
31 families.

32 (b) The target wage scale shall be developed to apply to educators working in childcare  
33 centers, family childcare homes, Rhode Island Pre-K classrooms, family home visiting programs,  
34 and Early Intervention programs pursuant to part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education

1 Act (20 USC §1431). The cross-departmental target wage scale shall promote parity with  
2 kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) public school teachers for individuals with similar  
3 credentials.

4 (c) In developing this cross-departmental target wage scale, the children's cabinet may  
5 consider findings and recommendations including those provided in the 2019 moving the needle  
6 on compensation task force's report "improving the compensation and retention of effective  
7 infant/toddler educators in Rhode Island."

8 **16-112-3. Developing strategies to increase compensation of early educators.**

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

13 (1) Continuation and expansion of the existing statewide, comprehensive, research-based  
14 early childhood workforce development scholarship program established under § 16-87-4 to  
15 include stronger and ongoing support for compensation, such as implementation of wage  
16 supplements or regular stipends for early educators to lift annual income to meet or exceed the  
17 levels in the target wage scale. Consideration shall be given to the infant/toddler educator education  
18 and retention awards demonstration program recommended by the moving the needle on  
19 compensation's task force.

20 (2) Proposals to increase rates paid to early childhood programs that are adequate to enable  
21 programs to pay early educators wages that meet or exceed the levels in the cross-departmental  
22 target wage scale.

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

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

31 **16-112-4. Reporting.**

32 The children's cabinet shall report back to the governor and general assembly on or before  
33 December 1, 2022 with a cross-departmental target wage scale and initial cost estimates for public  
34 funding to close the wage gaps for early educators.

1 SECTION 3. Title 40 of the General Laws entitled "HUMAN SERVICES" is hereby  
2 amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 6.7

4 CHILDCARE AND EARLY EDUCATOR REGISTRY

5 **40-6.7-Section. Childcare and early educator registry.**

6 (a) On or before December 1, 2022, the department of human services shall implement a  
7 childcare and early educator registry that meets the recommended guidelines of the National  
8 Workforce Registry Alliance, and includes information about staff who work directly with children  
9 in all licensed childcare centers and family childcare homes in the state. The registry shall be  
10 designed to support communication of important information and opportunities, including training  
11 opportunities and opportunities to receive a wage supplement, directly to front-line childcare and  
12 early educators. The registry shall also be designed to help the state gather and maintain information  
13 about the demographics and annual turnover of childcare educators by key factors including  
14 educational qualifications and age category of children they teach.

15 (b) Annually, on or before March 31, 2023, the department of human services shall produce  
16 an annual report on the status of the childcare educator registry and the characteristics of the  
17 childcare workforce, including demographic information, qualifications, and turnover data. The  
18 report shall be shared with the general assembly, the children's cabinet, all licensed childcare  
19 centers and family childcare homes, individuals participating in the registry, and posted on the  
20 department's website for the general public.

21 (c) On or before December 1, 2022, the department of human services shall design and  
22 begin implementation of a five million dollars (\$5,000,000.00) pilot program to provide monthly  
23 wage supplements for childcare educators. The program shall be designed to close the gap between  
24 the actual wages of the childcare educators and the target wages according to the cross-  
25 departmental target wage scale for early educators developed by the children's cabinet. The  
26 department shall consider the design of the infant/toddler educator education and retention awards  
27 demonstration program recommended in 2019 by the moving the needle on compensation's task  
28 force. The pilot shall include childcare educators who work in both licensed childcare centers and  
29 family childcare homes and shall be available statewide, with priority given to childcare educators  
30 who work with infants and toddlers and children enrolled in the childcare assistance program.

31 SECTION 4. 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.

20 (7) Establish and maintain an updated target wage scale for early educators working in  
21 childcare, RI Pre-K, family home visiting, and Early Intervention pursuant to part C of the  
22 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 USC §1431) programs that aligns with  
23 compensation of similarly qualified kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) educators. This shall  
24 include the design of and oversight of the implementation of a strategic plan to close the gap  
25 between current wages and the target wage scale, including parity with similarly qualified public  
26 school teaching staff pursuant to the provisions of chapter 112 of title 16.

27 SECTION 5. 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

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1           This act would require the children’s cabinet, to develop and implement a strategic plan to  
2 retain early childhood educators by creating a cross-departmental target wage scale of early  
3 educators and that of a similarly qualified public school teaching staff or individuals with similar  
4 credentials. The children’s cabinet to would be required to consider matters such as scholarships in  
5 early childhood education, wage supplements or stipends, apprenticeships. The children’s cabinet  
6 would report findings to the governor and the general assembly by December 1, 2022. It would  
7 also require the department of human services to create and maintain a childcare and early educator  
8 registry.

9           This act would take effect upon passage.

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