

2023 -- H 5790

LC001545

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2023

A N A C T

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

Introduced By: Representatives Cotter, Baginski, Morales, Speakman, Tanzi, Casimiro,  
Kazarian, Kislak, McNamara, and Batista

Date Introduced: February 22, 2023

Referred To: House Finance

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 **16-87-8. 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 agencies, local education agencies, licensed center-based  
9 child care providers, and licensed family child care providers, or family child care networks, shall  
10 be expanded annually across all communities in Rhode Island until every family who wants a high-  
11 quality pre-kindergarten seat for their children ages three (3) or four (4), has 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 2024-2025, 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, 2023, 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). The  
5 growth plan shall detail annual growth targets and projected funding needs, as well as how the state  
6 will:

7 (1) Equitably distribute pre-kindergarten funding to eligible providers, as described in §  
8 16-87-9(a);

9 (2) Ensure that infant-toddler care is further strengthened through state investments as the  
10 state pre-kindergarten program is expanded to achieve universal access;

11 (3) Prepare, recruit and retain a highly-qualified early childhood workforce, and ensure  
12 adequate wages for early childhood educators, regardless of setting, that provide a living wage and  
13 are equivalent to wages for elementary educators with similar credentials and experience in the  
14 state;

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

17 (5) Ensure providers in the mixed-delivery system have sufficient facilities to expand  
18 access to high-quality pre-kindergarten services.

19 **16-87-9. High quality elements.**

20 (a) To expand access to high-quality pre-kindergarten education programs, the state shall  
21 implement and provide sufficient funding to support a mixed-delivery system comprised of eligible  
22 providers including local education agencies, Head Start agencies, licensed center-based child care  
23 providers, licensed family child care providers or licensed family child-care provider networks, or  
24 a consortium of these entities.

25 (b) To build and maintain an adequate system of providers, the state shall support a  
26 continuous quality improvement system for providers of pre-kindergarten services participating in,  
27 or seeking to participate in, the state pre-kindergarten program.

28 (c) The Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary education (the  
29 "department") is hereby authorized to promulgate and adopt rules and regulations for the  
30 implementation of high quality, universal pre-kindergarten. Research-based quality standards shall  
31 be defined in regulation by the department, and shall include, but not be limited to:

32 (1) Teacher education and certification;

33 (2) Class size and staff ratios;

34 (3) Learning time;

- 1 (4) Developmentally appropriate, evidence-based learning standards;
- 2 (5) Curriculum prioritizing developmentally appropriate, play-based learning;
- 3 (6) Access, inclusion and support for students with special needs;
- 4 (7) Support for English language learners;
- 5 (8) Professional development;
- 6 (9) Child assessments; and
- 7 (10) Observations and coaching to improve practice.

8 (d) To whatever extent deemed necessary by the department, quality standards may be  
9 differentiated by pre-kindergarten education setting, such that every provider-type in a mixed-  
10 delivery model is able and expected to meet the highest research-based quality standards as defined  
11 by the department.

12 **16-87-10. Successful transitions.**

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

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

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

- 22 (1) Student and family communication and engagement plans; and
- 23 (2) Program-level transition plans.

24 (d) These strategies may include:

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

- 26 (i) Student visits to their future kindergarten classroom;
- 27 (ii) Kindergarten teacher visits to the pre-kindergarten classrooms;
- 28 (iii) Workshops for families of incoming kindergarten children; and
- 29 (iv) Kindergarten orientation sessions the summer before school starts.

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

31 (i) Creation of transition teams and liaisons between pre-kindergarten programs and district  
32 schools;

33 (ii) Joint professional development and data sharing for pre-kindergarten to third grade  
34 teachers; and

1 (iii) Teacher-to-teacher conferences.

2 **16-87-11. Pre-Kindergarten facilities.**

3 (a) No later than December 31, 2023, the department of human services shall provide the  
4 senate president and the speaker of the house with a report on the status of disbursement and impact  
5 of capital funds made available by the early learning facilities general obligation bond approved on  
6 March 2, 2021.

7 (b) The department of elementary and secondary education and the department of human  
8 services shall establish programs and initiatives to ensure providers renovate, acquire, develop,  
9 and/or expand facilities that meet licensing and facilities standards, in order to increase access to  
10 high-quality pre-kindergarten learning environments. Programs and initiatives may include, but  
11 shall not be limited to:

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

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

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

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

21 **16-87-4. Early childhood workforce development.**

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

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

1 (2) No later than April 1, 2023, the working group shall provide the general assembly with  
2 recommendations for addressing the barriers to workforce entry and implementing the solutions  
3 identified by the working group; the recommendations shall outline any administrative and  
4 legislative action that would be required by participating agencies to implement the  
5 recommendations.

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

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

11 ~~**16-87-3. Planning phase for a pre-Kindergarten program.**~~

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

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

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

27 ~~**16-87-5. Reporting.**~~

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

31 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

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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 to increase children's  
3 school readiness. This act would also require the Rhode Island Pre-Kindergarten Program to make  
4 funds available to offer no less than four thousand (4,000) high-quality pre-kindergarten seats for  
5 the school year 2024-2025. This act would repeal the statutory laws pertaining to the initial pilot  
6 pre-kindergarten program.

7           This act would take effect upon passage.

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