

2025 -- S 0394

LC000719

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- RHODE ISLAND PREKINDERGARTEN EDUCATION
ACT

Introduced By: Senators Gallo, Lawson, LaMountain, Pearson, Zurier, Valverde,
Kallman, Lauria, Vargas, and Urso

Date Introduced: February 26, 2025

Referred To: Senate Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Sections 16-87-2 and 16-87-4 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-87 entitled
2 "Rhode Island Prekindergarten Education Act" are hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **16-87-2. Findings.**

4 (a) The general assembly hereby finds that attending high quality early childhood education
5 programs helps children develop important social and cognitive skills and knowledge that prepares
6 children to succeed in school. Research has shown long-lasting benefits for children who participate
7 in very high quality, educationally focused early childhood programs. The benefits to children can
8 also generate substantial government cost savings, including reduced need for special education
9 services, reduced need for cash assistance and other public benefits, and reduced rates of
10 incarceration.

11 (b) The general assembly finds that there are substantial numbers of children in Rhode
12 Island entering kindergarten who are not adequately prepared to succeed in school. Early school
13 failure may ultimately contribute to such children dropping out of school at an early age, failing to
14 achieve their full potential, becoming dependent upon public assistance, or becoming involved in
15 criminal activities.

16 (c) Furthermore, the general assembly finds that there is an existing infrastructure of early
17 childhood programs in Rhode Island serving preschool age children in full-day and half-day
18 programs that is supported through state and federal investments in child care, Head Start and

1 special education. It is the goal of the general assembly to support a system of publicly-funded,
2 high quality prekindergarten education programs that are operated through a diverse delivery
3 network, including child care, Head Start and public school districts.

4 (d) By enacting this law, the general assembly acknowledges the need to adequately
5 prepare all children to succeed in school by providing access to publicly-funded high quality
6 prekindergarten education programs [for all children ages three \(3\) and four \(4\) and to sustain and](#)
7 [expand access to high-quality early care and education programs for infants and toddlers under age](#)
8 [three \(3\).](#)

9 **16-87-4. Early childhood workforce development.**

10 (a) The Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary education shall work with
11 ~~other state departments and private philanthropy to establish~~ [the department of human services to](#)
12 [sustain and expand the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood program,](#) a statewide, comprehensive,
13 research-based early childhood workforce development scholarship program to expand the number
14 of early childhood educators who have an associate's or bachelor's degree in early childhood
15 education and who work with children from birth to age five (5).

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

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

29 SECTION 2. Chapter 16-87 of the General Laws entitled "Rhode Island Prekindergarten
30 Education Act" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

31 **16-87-8. Prekindergarten implementation and expansion.**

32 [\(a\) The state-managed prekindergarten program model shall be sustained and, as funds are](#)
33 [available, expanded in a mixed-delivery system that includes Head Start programs, local education](#)
34 [agencies, licensed center-based child care providers, and licensed family child care providers or](#)

1 family child care networks in order that no less than seventy percent (70%) of all children ages
2 three (3) and four (4) are enrolled in high-quality prekindergarten options.

3 (b) The department of elementary and secondary education is hereby authorized to
4 promulgate and adopt rules and regulations for the implementation of high-quality prekindergarten
5 options.

6 (c) Research-based quality standards shall be defined in rules and regulations promulgated
7 by the department and shall meet or exceed the recommended quality standards for state preschool
8 programs outlined by the National Institute for Early Education Research and/or the federal Head
9 Start Performance Standards. Quality standards shall include, but not be limited to:

10 (1) Teacher education and certification;

11 (2) Class size and staff ratios;

12 (3) Learning time;

13 (4) Developmentally appropriate, evidence-based learning standards;

14 (5) Curriculum prioritizing developmentally appropriate, play-based learning;

15 (6) Access, inclusion and support for students with special needs, including a system to
16 ensure delivery of high-quality, inclusive early education services required by the Individuals with
17 Disabilities Education Act to children with developmental delays and disabilities who are enrolled
18 in community-based programs which may or may not be located in the same municipality where
19 the child lives;

20 (7) Support for English language learners;

21 (8) Professional development;

22 (9) Child assessments; and

23 (10) Observations and coaching to improve practice.

24 (d) To whatever extent deemed appropriate and efficient by the department, quality
25 standards may be differentiated by prekindergarten education setting and include federal support
26 and oversight for the Head Start Performance Standards, such that every provider in a mixed-
27 delivery model is able and expected to meet research-based quality standards.

28 (e) Funds to sustain and expand prekindergarten and Head Start shall be allocated to ensure
29 teacher wages and benefits are competitive with similarly qualified kindergarten teacher wages and
30 benefits.

31 (f) Commencing with fiscal year 2026 and every fiscal year thereafter, any increase by the
32 general assembly in funding allocated for expansion of the Rhode Island prekindergarten program
33 shall include a thirty percent (30%) set aside of funding to be administered by the department of
34 human services to sustain and expand access to high-quality child care and early learning programs

1 [for infants and toddlers, including Early Head Start.](#)

2 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 PREKINDERGARTEN EDUCATION
ACT

1 This act would establish guidelines, rules and regulations for the expansion of high-quality
2 public prekindergarten education programs for children ages three (3) and four (4) to increase
3 children's school readiness and to ensure high quality prekindergarten services by the department
4 of elementary and secondary education.

5 This act would take effect upon passage.

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