

Children Enrolled in State Pre-K

DEFINITION

Children enrolled in State Pre-K is the number and percentage of children enrolled in the State Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) program managed by the Rhode Island Department of Education. The State Pre-K program is operated by child care programs, Head Start programs, and public schools.

SIGNIFICANCE

State-funded Pre-K programs for children ages three and four are available in 42 states, with 29% of four-year-olds and 5% of three-year-olds enrolled nationwide. Seven states and the District of Columbia have more than half of their four-year-olds enrolled in State Pre-K.¹ States have increased investments in Pre-K, recognizing that children who attend high-quality preschool make substantive developmental, academic, language, and social gains that can persist well into later school years, and are less likely to be retained a grade or enrolled in special education.^{2,3,4} In states without large public Pre-K programs, children of high-income and highly educated families are much more likely to be enrolled in preschool than children from low- and moderate-income families.⁵

High-quality preschool programs show strong economic returns, with benefits to children and the public far exceeding the original investment. Small

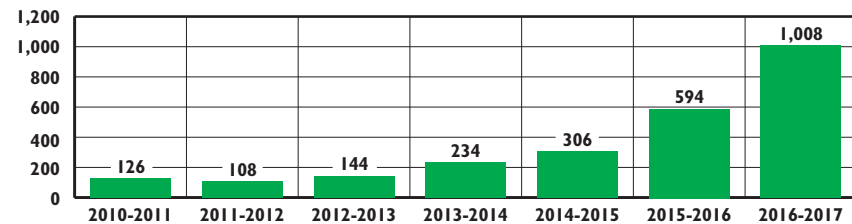
class sizes, low child-teacher ratios, and teachers who are well-educated, well-paid, emotionally supportive, and use curricula effectively produce the biggest gains for children.^{6,7,8}

In 2008, the General Assembly passed *The Rhode Island Prekindergarten Education Act*, acknowledging the need to adequately prepare all children to succeed in school by providing access to publicly-funded, high quality Pre-K and requiring the Rhode Island Department of Education to plan for the development of a State Pre-K program that meets high-quality standards, builds on the existing early childhood education infrastructure, and serves children ages three and four.⁹

Rhode Island began offering the State Pre-K program for four-year-olds in the 2009-2010 school year. The state's program is one of only seven in the U.S. to meet all recommended quality benchmarks.¹⁰ Rhode Island's State Pre-K program has been found to improve children's language and math skills and close the achievement gap between low-income children and their more affluent peers by three-quarters.¹¹

State Pre-K is an important part of a strong state early learning system that starts at birth and continues through third grade, including nurturing, language-rich environments in child care, Head Start, full-day kindergarten, and the early elementary grades.¹²

Rhode Island State Pre-K Funded Slots, 2010-2011 through 2016-2017



Sources: National Institute for Early Education Research, *The State of Preschool 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015*. Rhode Island Department of Education, State Pre-K programs 2015-2016 through 2016-2017.

- ◆ As of the 2016-2017 school year, there were 56 State Pre-K classrooms in Rhode Island with a total of 995 children enrolled. Of the children in State Pre-K with a reported home language, 29% spoke a language other than English at home.¹³
- ◆ Of the 56 State Pre-K classrooms, 38% (21) were operated by a Head Start agency, 36% (20) were operated by a child care center/preschool, and 27% (15) were operated by a public school district.¹⁴
- ◆ State Pre-K funds are targeted to communities with a high proportion of low-income families, using the percentage of children participating in the local school district's free and reduced-price lunch program as a guideline. Children are selected to participate in State Pre-K through a lottery, with children from low-income families prioritized for enrollment based on the proportion of low-income children in the local school district.¹⁵
- ◆ In the 2016-2017 school year, 676 (68%) of the children enrolled in State Pre-K were low-income.¹⁶ This is approximately 13% of the population of low-income four-year olds under 200% FPL statewide.¹⁷ Including the 1,305 low-income four-year-olds enrolled in Head Start in Rhode Island, approximately 38% of the state's low-income four-year-olds were enrolled in a public preschool program (State Pre-K or Head Start).¹⁸

State Pre-K Expansion

- ◆ With 8% of all four-year-olds enrolled, Rhode Island ranks near the bottom of the 40 states for access to State Pre-K.^{19,20} Expansion of the State Pre-K program is included in Rhode Island's education funding formula.²¹ In 2014, Rhode Island was awarded a federal Preschool Development Grant that has accelerated expansion.²²

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Table 40.

Children Enrolled in State Pre-K, Rhode Island, 2016-2017

CITY/TOWN	# OF CHILDREN AGE 4	% CHILDREN <AGE 6 IN LOW-INCOME FAMILIES	ESTIMATED # OF LOW-INCOME CHILDREN AGE 4	# LOW-INCOME CHILDREN ENROLLED IN STATE PRE-K	% LOW-INCOME CHILDREN AGE 4 ENROLLED IN STATE PRE-K	# CHILDREN ENROLLED IN STATE PRE-K	% CHILDREN AGE 4 ENROLLED IN STATE PRE-K
Barrington	199	1.0%*	2	0	0%	0	0%
Bristol	206	30.4%***	63	0	0%	0	0%
Burrillville	173	16.1%*	28	0	0%	0	0%
Central Falls	345	82.2%*	284	64	23%	72	21%
Charlestown	81	53.8%***	44	0	0%	0	0%
Coventry	366	33.4%**	122	0	0%	0	0%
Cranston	862	34.5%*	297	21	7%	54	6%
Cumberland	426	15.5%*	66	0	0%	0	0%
East Greenwich	158	18.0%**	28	0	0%	0	0%
East Providence	469	50.9%**	239	64	27%	133	28%
Exeter	55	13.3%***	7	0	0%	0	0%
Foster	53	25.9%***	14	0	0%	0	0%
Glocester	106	16.1%***	17	0	0%	0	0%
Hopkinton	87	33%***	29	0	0%	0	0%
Jamestown	50	NA	NA	0	NA	0	0%
Johnston	278	41.2%**	115	9	8%	18	6%
Lincoln	211	40.5%**	85	0	0%	0	0%
Little Compton	28	34.9%***	10	0	0%	0	0%
Middletown	226	33.2%*	75	0	0%	0	0%
Narragansett	117	18.9%***	22	0	0%	0	0%
New Shoreham	7	33.3%***	2	0	0%	0	0%
Newport	232	40.2%**	93	36	39%	54	23%
North Kingstown	318	30.9%**	98	0	0%	0	0%
North Providence	282	26.5%**	75	8	11%	18	6%
North Smithfield	108	20.6%***	22	0	0%	0	0%
Pawtucket	1,006	58.1%*	584	70	12%	90	9%
Portsmouth	196	15.5%**	30	0	0%	0	0%
Providence	2,382	65.3%*	1,556	269	17%	322	14%
Richmond	102	15.3%***	16	0	0%	0	0%
Scituate	94	13.4%***	13	0	0%	0	0%
Smithfield	169	7.9%*	13	0	0%	0	0%
South Kingstown	273	28.9%**	79	0	0%	0	0%
Tiverton	143	22.0%**	32	0	0%	0	0%
Warren	127	32.3%***	41	0	0%	0	0%
Warwick	850	21.5%*	183	12	7%	36	4%
West Greenwich	53	8.4%***	4	0	0%	0	0%
West Warwick	354	53.2%**	188	29	15%	72	20%
Westerly	244	33%**	80	0	0%	0	0%
Woonsocket	584	75.8%*	443	94	21%	126	22%
Four Core Cities	4,317	66.6%	2,874	497	17%	610	14%
Remainder of State	7,703	30.1%	2,316	179	8%	385	5%
Rhode Island	12,020	43.6%	5,246	676	13%	995	8%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

The number of children enrolled in State Pre-K is from the Rhode Island Department of Education, October 2016.

The number of children age four in each community is from Census 2010, Summary File 1.

Estimated number of low-income children age four is the number of children age four according to Census 2010 multiplied by the % of children under age six living in families with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line (FPL) according to the Population Reference Bureau's analysis of 2011-2015 American Community Survey data. Estimated eligible children for the four core cities, remainder of state, and Rhode Island are calculated using PRB estimates for those groupings and is not a sum of estimates by community.

The American Community Survey is a sample survey, and therefore the number and percentage of children living in poverty are estimates. The reliability of these estimates varies by community.

*The Margin of Error around the percentage is greater than 5 but less than 10 percentage points.

**The Margin of Error around the percentage is greater than 10 but less than 15 percentage points.

***The Margin of Error around the percentage is greater than or equal to 15 percentage points.

NA: American Community Survey estimate of % of children under six in poverty is not available for this community.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

References

^{1,10,20,22} Barnett, W. S., et al. (2016). *The state of preschool 2015: State preschool yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers Graduate School of Education.

^{2,6} Epstein, D. J. & Barnett, W. S. (2012). Early education in the United States: Programs and access. In R. C. Pianta, W. S. Barnett, L. M. Justice & S. M. Sheridan (Eds.), *Handbook of early childhood education*. (pp. 3-21). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

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