

High-Quality Early Learning Programs

DEFINITION

High-quality early learning programs is the percentage of licensed early learning centers, family child care homes, and public schools with preschool classrooms that have a high-quality rating from BrightStars, Rhode Island's Quality Rating and Improvement System for child care and early learning programs.

SIGNIFICANCE

Decades of research show that high-quality early care and education programs can improve children's cognitive and social-emotional development, enabling them to perform better in school. Programs across the U.S. and in Rhode Island vary markedly in quality and can range from rich learning experiences to mediocre, custodial care.^{1,2,3,4}

High-quality early care and education is characterized by smaller numbers of children in a classroom or group, fewer children per adult, skilled staff, a language-rich environment with stimulating curricula, warm, nurturing and dependable relationships between staff and children, and a safe environment.⁵ The development and retention of a highly qualified and appropriately compensated workforce for early childhood programs is critical to improve program quality.⁶

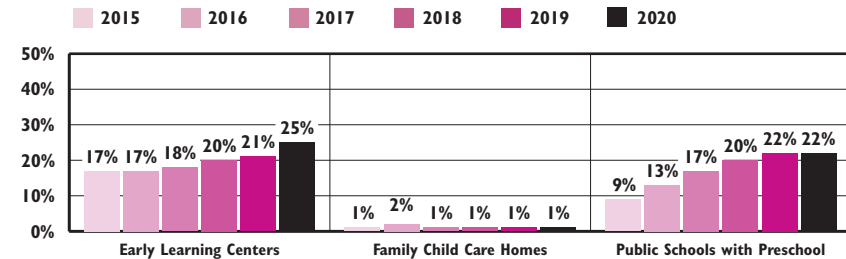
Almost all states use Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) to

document and improve the quality of early learning and child care programs. QRIS measure a variety of program quality indicators (such as staff qualifications, learning environment, and staff-child interactions) and then create a composite index rating. QRIS ratings are shared with parents and they are often connected to financial incentives and supports, such as enhanced reimbursement rates or quality bonuses for higher quality child care programs.^{7,8,9,10} Studies have shown that, over time, state QRIS can improve the quality of care available.¹¹

BrightStars is Rhode Island's QRIS and conducts program quality assessments for early care and education centers, family child care homes, and public schools. Programs participating in BrightStars receive a star rating and support to set and achieve quality improvement goals. All programs serving children participating in the Child Care Assistance Program and in the State Pre-K program are required to have a BrightStars rating. Star ratings are posted on a public website to inform family decision making when selecting a program.^{12,13} Research suggests that parents have a strong preference for quality, particularly teachers' educational achievement. However, they are extremely sensitive to the cost of tuition, and may enroll their children in lower quality programs because they cannot afford the cost of higher quality programs.¹⁴



Percentage of Early Learning Centers, Family Child Care Programs, and Public Schools with a High-Quality BrightStars Rating (4 or 5 Stars), Rhode Island, 2015-2020



Source: RI Association for the Education of Young Children and RI Early Care and Education Data System (ECEDS), January 2015 – January 2020.

◆ As of January 2020, 236 (72%) licensed child care centers, 361 (78%) licensed family child care homes, and 33 (53%) public schools with preschool classrooms had a BrightStars rating. Eighty-three (25%) licensed early learning centers, four (1%) licensed family child care homes, and 13 (22%) public schools had met the benchmarks for a high-quality rating of four or five stars.¹⁵

◆ Since 2015, the percentage of early learning centers with a high-quality rating has grown from 17% to 25% and the percentage of public schools serving preschoolers that have a high-quality rating has increased from 9% to 22%.¹⁶

◆ Early learning centers and public schools in the core cities are more likely to have a high-quality BrightStars rating than those in the remainder of the state (35% vs. 22% for early learning centers and 23% vs. 20% for public schools).¹⁷

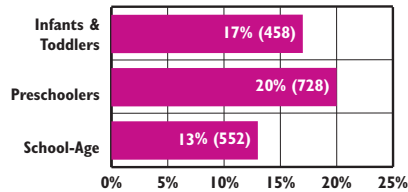
◆ A 2016 evaluation of BrightStars found that the star levels effectively differentiate quality and five of the ten standards are linked to improved child outcomes, specifically improved social competence and math skills. The study also found that 70% of child center and preschool directors had a positive or extremely positive impression of BrightStars.¹⁸

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Table 37.

Licensed Child Care Centers and Preschools Participating in the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System, Rhode Island, January 2020

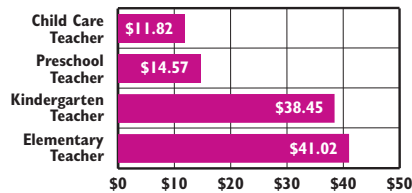
CCAP Children Enrolled in High-Quality Programs (4 or 5 Stars) by Age, December 2019



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, December 2019.

◆ Preschool-age children enrolled in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) are more likely to be enrolled in a high-quality program (20%) than infants and toddlers (17%) or school-age children (13%).¹⁹

Teacher Median Hourly Wages, Rhode Island, 2017



Source: Whitebook, M., McLean, C., Austin, L. J. E., & Edwards, B. (2018). *Early childhood workforce index 2018*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment.

◆ Early childhood teachers in Rhode Island earn less than the overall state median wage (\$19.45) and have significantly lower wages than kindergarten and elementary school teachers.²⁰

CITY/TOWN	LICENSED PROGRAMS	DCYF PROBATION	NO RATING	1 STAR	2 STARS	3 STARS	HIGH-QUALITY		% IN BRIGHTSTARS	% WITH HIGH-QUALITY RATING
							4 STARS	5 STARS		
Barrington	8	1	5	1	1	0	1	0	38%	13%
Bristol	4	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	50%	25%
Burrillville	3	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	100%	33%
Central Falls	3	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	100%	33%
Charlestown	4	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	100%	75%
Coventry	7	0	0	3	1	1	2	0	100%	29%
Cranston	31	0	12	7	7	2	2	1	61%	10%
Cumberland	6	0	1	1	2	0	2	0	83%	33%
East Greenwich	15	0	8	2	2	1	2	0	47%	13%
East Providence	20	0	7	6	4	0	3	0	65%	15%
Exeter	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	100%	50%
Foster	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	100%	0%
Glocester	3	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	67%	33%
Hopkinton	3	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	67%	0%
Jamestown	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	100%	0%
Johnston	19	1	6	3	8	0	2	0	68%	11%
Lincoln	6	0	1	1	2	0	1	1	83%	33%
Little Compton	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Middletown	11	0	6	1	0	1	3	0	45%	27%
Narragansett	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	100%	0%
New Shoreham	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Newport	4	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	100%	50%
North Kingstown	7	0	3	0	1	0	3	0	57%	43%
North Providence	9	0	1	3	2	0	3	0	89%	33%
North Smithfield	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	50%	0%
Pawtucket	16	0	0	5	5	1	3	2	100%	31%
Portsmouth	4	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	25%	0%
Providence	51	2	14	5	13	4	9	6	73%	29%
Richmond	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Scituate	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	100%	0%
Smithfield	9	0	3	2	2	0	2	0	67%	22%
South Kingstown	13	0	4	2	2	2	2	1	69%	23%
Tiverton	3	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	100%	33%
Warren	5	0	2	1	0	0	2	0	60%	40%
Warwick	26	1	4	4	7	4	6	1	85%	27%
West Greenwich	3	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	100%	0%
West Warwick	6	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	83%	33%
Westerly	9	0	4	0	2	0	2	1	56%	33%
Woonsocket	11	0	2	2	0	0	5	2	82%	64%
Four Core Cities	81	2	16	12	19	6	18	10	80%	35%
Remainder of State	248	3	78	47	54	14	45	10	69%	22%
Rhode Island	329	5	94	59	73	20	63	20	71%	25%

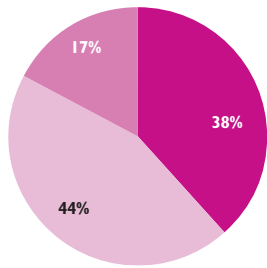
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Table 38.

Licensed Family Child Care Homes Participating in the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System, Rhode Island, January 2020

Licensed Family Child Care Programs by Language Spoken, Rhode Island 2014

38% English Only
 44% Spanish Only
 17% Bilingual in English and Spanish



n=188

Source: Oldham, E. & Hawes, S. (2014). *Rhode Island early learning workforce study: Licensed centers and family child care homes*. Retrieved March 6, 2019, from <http://exceed.ri.gov>

◆ In 2014, 44% of family child care providers in Rhode Island reported speaking Spanish only, 38% English only, and 17% were bilingual in English and Spanish. More than two-thirds worked more than 40 hours per week and 84% reported earning less than \$40,000 annually.²¹

◆ In Rhode Island, Hispanic children in the CCAP program are more likely to be enrolled in family child care (38%) than non-Hispanic children (8%).²²

CITY/TOWN	LICENSED PROGRAMS	DCYF PROBATION	NO RATING	1 STAR	2 STARS	3 STARS	HIGH-QUALITY		% IN BRIGHTSTARS	% WITH HIGH-QUALITY RATING
							4 STARS	5 STARS		
Barrington	4	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	50%	0%
Bristol	5	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	20%	0%
Burrillville	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Central Falls	18	0	2	13	3	0	0	0	89%	0%
Charlestown	3	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	33%	0%
Coventry	5	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	20%	0%
Cranston	46	0	11	19	16	0	0	0	76%	0%
Cumberland	7	0	6	1	0	0	0	0	14%	0%
East Greenwich	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
East Providence	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	50%	0%
Exeter	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	100%	0%
Foster	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Glocester	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Hopkinton	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Jamestown	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Johnston	10	0	1	6	3	0	0	0	90%	0%
Lincoln	5	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	20%	0%
Little Compton	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Middletown	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Narragansett	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
New Shoreham	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Newport	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
North Kingstown	4	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	50%	0%
North Providence	7	0	1	6	0	0	0	0	86%	0%
North Smithfield	4	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	50%	25%
Pawtucket	29	0	2	15	11	1	0	0	93%	0%
Portsmouth	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Providence	276	0	36	150	86	1	3	0	87%	1%
Richmond	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Scituate	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Smithfield	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
South Kingstown	5	0	3	1	1	0	0	0	40%	0%
Tiverton	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Warren	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Warwick	7	0	6	1	0	0	0	0	14%	0%
West Greenwich	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
West Warwick	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	50%	0%
Westerly	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Woonsocket	6	0	0	5	1	0	0	0	100%	0%
Four Core Cities	329	0	40	183	101	2	3	0	88%	1%
Remainder of State	131	0	59	50	20	1	1	0	55%	1%
Rhode Island	460	0	99	233	121	3	4	0	78%	1%

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Table 39.

Public Schools with Preschool Classrooms Participating in the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System, Rhode Island, January 2020

DISTRICT	SCHOOLS WITH PRESCHOOL CLASSROOMS	NO RATING	1 STAR	2 STARS	3 STARS	HIGH-QUALITY		% IN BRIGHTSTARS	% WITH HIGH-QUALITY RATING
						4 STARS	5 STARS		
Barrington	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Bristol Warren	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Burrillville	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Central Falls	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	100%	100%
Chariho	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	100%	100%
Coventry	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	100%	100%
Cranston	7	1	0	0	6	0	0	86%	0%
Cumberland	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
East Greenwich	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	100%	0%
East Providence	4	2	0	1	0	0	1	50%	25%
Exeter-West Greenwich	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
Foster	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Glocester	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Jamestown	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
Johnston	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
Lincoln	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	100%	0%
Little Compton	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	NA	NA
Middletown	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Narragansett	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
New Shoreham	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Newport	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	100%	0%
North Kingstown	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
North Providence	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	100%	0%
North Smithfield	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Pawtucket	3	0	1	0	0	1	0	67%	33%
Portsmouth	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Providence	7	3	1	0	3	0	0	57%	0%
Scituate	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Smithfield	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
South Kingstown	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Tiverton	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Warwick	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	50%	0%
West Warwick	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Westerly	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
Woonsocket	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
<i>Charter Schools</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>0%</i>
<i>RI School for the Deaf</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>62%</i>	<i>23%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>54%</i>	<i>20%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>53%</i>	<i>22%</i>

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Data on the number of licensed early learning programs and family child care homes are from the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, January 2020. Data on public schools are from the Rhode Island Department of Education, January 2020. Data on BrightStars quality ratings are from the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children, January 2020. Data matched through the RI Early Care and Education Data System (ECEDS).

High-quality rating means a BrightStars rating of four or five stars.

NA=Not applicable.

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

References

- ¹ Burchinal, M., Kainz, K., & Cai, Y. (2011). How well do our measures of quality predict child outcomes? In Zaslow, M., Martinez-Beck, L., Tout, K., & Halle, T. (Eds.), *Quality measurement in early childhood settings*. (pp. 11-31). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
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- ^{3,4} Gordon, J., Herbst, C. M., & Tekin, E. (2018). *Who's minding the kids?: Experimental evidence on the demand for child care quality*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- ^{4,5} Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2007). *A science-based framework for early childhood policy: Using evidence to improve outcomes in learning, behavior, and health for vulnerable children*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.
- ⁶ Phillips, D., Austin, L. J. E., & Whitebook, M. (2016). The early care and education workforce. *The Future of Children*, 26(2), 139-158.

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