

# Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K

## DEFINITION

*Children enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K* is the percentage of low-income children and all children ages three and four enrolled in a Rhode Island Head Start or RI Pre-K preschool program. Head Start is managed by the federal government and RI Pre-K is managed by the Rhode Island Department of Education.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Learning disparities appear early and grow over time without access to enriching early learning experiences. Participation in high-quality early learning programs from birth through kindergarten entry, including high-quality preschool, helps to ensure children enter school with the skills needed to succeed. Without government funding, children from low-income families, and Black and Latino children would have less access to high-quality preschool compared to higher-income and white families.<sup>1,2</sup>

Decades of research have shown that high-quality preschool programs help children gain academic and social-emotional skills prior to school entry and can produce positive outcomes that last well into the school years, including reduced need for special education services and improved high school graduation rates. Sustaining these positive outcomes requires additional investments and high-quality learning in

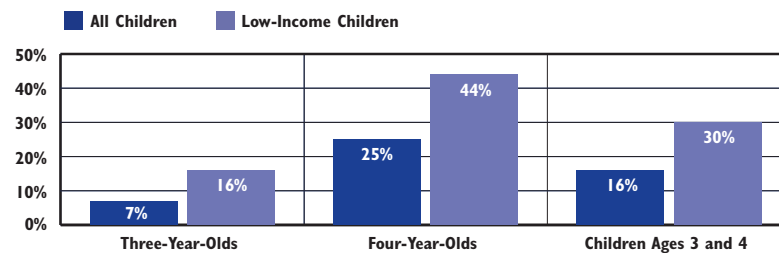
the early grades and beyond.<sup>3,4</sup>

Head Start is a federally-funded comprehensive early childhood program for preschool children ages three through five who are low-income and/or have high needs. Head Start programs deliver early education; dental, medical, and mental health support; nutrition services, and developmental screenings. Families receive wraparound support and have opportunities to be involved with decision making, participate in classes, and volunteer in the program.<sup>5,6</sup>

State-funded Pre-K programs are growing across the U.S. As of 2022, 44 states and Washington, DC operated state Pre-K programs, serving 32% of four-year-olds and 6% of three-year-olds across the U.S.<sup>7</sup> RI Pre-K is delivered by public schools, Head Start agencies, and child care programs that are selected through a competitive grant process and meet the same quality high-quality standards. *The Rhode Island Prekindergarten Education Act* establishes a state goal to provide access to publicly-funded, high-quality Pre-K for all three- and four-year-olds by building on existing early childhood education infrastructure in communities.<sup>8,9</sup>

As of 2022, 14 states and Washington, DC, including Rhode Island, invested state funds in Head Start and/or Early Head Start to serve more children, support more competitive teacher salaries, and to help program meet their federally-required 20% funding match.<sup>10</sup>

**Percentage of Children Ages 3 and 4 Enrolled in Head Start and/or RI Pre-K, Rhode Island, 2023-2024**



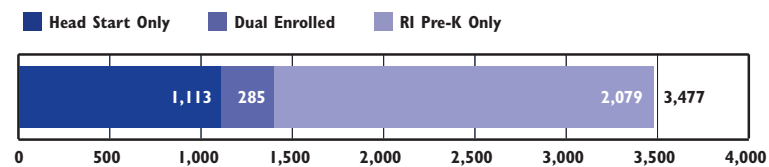
Source: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT calculations using October 2023 enrollment in Head Start and RI Pre-K as numerator and Census 2020 population of children ages 3 and 4 as denominator with low-income population estimated using the % of children receiving free or reduced-price lunch.

★ As of October 2023, there were 3,477 children ages three and four enrolled in Head Start, RI Pre-K, or both during the two years before kindergarten, reaching approximately 16% of all children and 30% of low-income children.<sup>11</sup>

★ Of the total, 1,113 children were enrolled in Head Start only, 2,079 children were enrolled in RI Pre-K only, and 285 were dually enrolled in both Head Start and RI Pre-K with braided funding.<sup>12</sup>

★ In the four core cities, approximately 34% of low-income children and 26% of all children ages three and four, were enrolled in either Head Start, RI Pre-K, or both, while in the remainder of the state, enrollment for low-income children and all children was approximately 26% and 10%, respectively.<sup>13</sup>

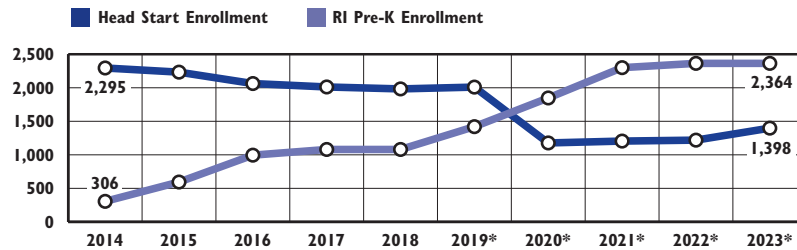
**Number of Children Ages 3 and 4 Enrolled in Head Start, RI Pre-K, or Both, Rhode Island, 2023**



Source: Rhode Island Head Start programs and Rhode Island Department of Education, October 2023 enrollment.

# Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K

## Head Start and RI Pre-K Enrollment, 2014-2023



Sources: Head Start program reports to Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2014 – 2023. RI Pre-K enrollment for 2014 from National Institute for Early Education Research, *The State of Preschool, 2015*. RI Pre-K enrollment for 2015 to 2023 from Rhode Island Department of Education. \*Starting in 2019, some children were dually enrolled in in Head Start and RI Pre-K – 140 in 2019, 176 in 2020, 253 in 2021, 294 in 2022, and 285 in 2023.

★ In October 2023, there were 1,398 children enrolled in Head Start, up 15% from 2022 but down 39% from 2014. Of these, 285 (20%) were dually enrolled in RI Pre-K.<sup>14</sup>

★ Of the 1,398 children enrolled in Head Start, 791 (57%) were age three and 607 (43%) were age four at the start of the school year. Ninety-one percent of children enrolled in Head Start were enrolled in a classroom that operated for at least six hours per day.<sup>15</sup>

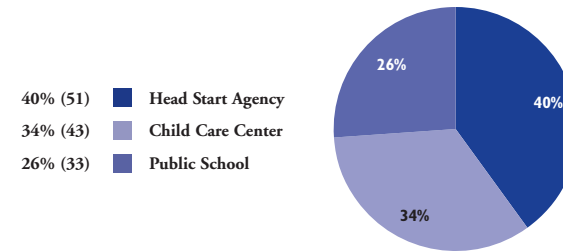
★ In October 2023, there were 261 Head Start seats in Rhode Island that did not have enrolled children because of staff vacancies, 15% of funded capacity. Statewide, there were 336 eligible children on a waiting list for Head Start.<sup>16</sup> Nationally, as of October 2023, 14% of Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms were closed. Inadequate compensation for Head Start teachers was the primary factor for staff vacancies.<sup>17</sup>

★ In October 2023, there were 2,364 children enrolled in RI Pre-K, the same number as in 2022 but up by 673% from 2014 as enrollment in Head Start declined by nearly 40%. Of these, 285 (12%) were dually enrolled in Head Start.<sup>18</sup>

★ Of the 2,364 children enrolled in RI Pre-K, almost all were age four at the start of the school year. Only 19 children (1%) were age 3, all of whom were dually enrolled in Head Start.<sup>19</sup>

★ Of the 2,364 children enrolled in RI Pre-K, 1,807 (76%) were low-income and 557 (24%) were higher-income.<sup>20</sup>

## RI Pre-K Classrooms by Setting, Rhode Island, 2023



*n* = 127

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, October 2023.

★ As of the 2023-2024 school year, there were 127 RI Pre-K classrooms with 51 (40%) operated by Head Start agencies, 43 (34%) operated by child care centers, and 33 (26%) operated by public schools.<sup>21</sup>

## High-Quality Public Preschool Improves Outcomes for Children

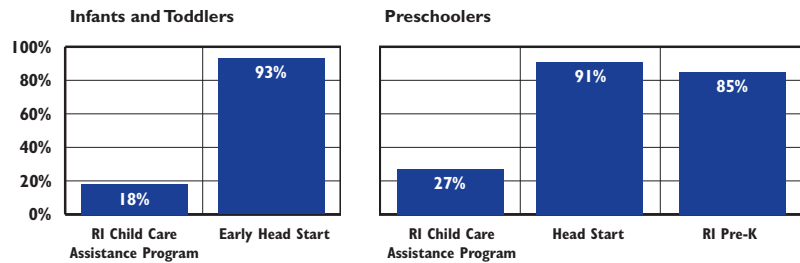
★ Sustained access (two or more years) of high-quality early childhood education improves children’s readiness for school and narrows the achievement gap by half. High-quality early childhood programs are rich with language and conversations and offer many opportunities to play and engage in hands-on exploration.<sup>22</sup>

★ Decades of research has shown that Head Start improves children’s academic, cognitive, language, and social-emotional skills and health including reduced childhood obesity and improved immunization rates. Head Start children are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and receive a postsecondary degree, license or certification.<sup>23,24</sup>

★ A 2012 evaluation of RI Pre-K found that it improves children’s language and math skills and closes the achievement gap between low-income children and higher-income children by three-quarters.<sup>25</sup>

# Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K

## Enrollment in Programs with a High-Quality BrightStars Rating by Funding Source, Rhode Island, 2023



Sources: Rhode Island Head Start Programs, 2023. Rhode Island Department of Education, 2023. Rhode Island Department of Human Services, 2023.

★ Across the U.S., Head Start centers are typically higher quality than many other early care and education programs.<sup>26</sup> Rhode Island Head Start programs score above the national average and significantly above research-based thresholds for emotional support and classroom organization and meet the research-based threshold for instructional support based on classroom observations of teacher-child interactions observations of teacher-child interactions.<sup>27</sup>

★ In 2022, Rhode Island was one of only five states with a Pre-K program that met all 10 recommended quality benchmarks, including teachers who have a bachelor's degree with specialized training in early childhood education and program monitoring that includes annual classroom observations.<sup>28</sup>

★ As of 2023, 91% of children enrolled in Head Start and 85% of children enrolled in RI Pre-K were in a program that had achieved a high-quality BrightStars rating of four or five stars. In comparison, only 27% of preschool-age children in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) were enrolled in a program that had achieved a high-quality BrightStars rating.<sup>29,30,31</sup>

★ As of 2023, 93% of infants and toddlers enrolled in center-based Early Head Start were in a program that had achieved a high-quality BrightStars rating of four or five stars. In comparison, only 18% infants and toddlers in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) were enrolled in a program that had achieved a high-quality BrightStars rating.<sup>32,33</sup>

## Children Enrolled In RI Pre-K and Head Start

★ Of the 1,398 children enrolled in Head Start as of October 2023, 136 (10%) had a developmental delay or disability and received special education services through their local school districts. Also, in October 2023, 31 (2%) were in foster care and 36 (3%) were homeless.<sup>34</sup>

★ In the 2022-2023 program year, Rhode Island Early Head Start and Head Start programs reported 3% of enrolled children were Asian/Pacific Islander, 17% were Black, 12% were Multiracial, 26% were Some other race, and 41% were white. More than half of children enrolled (52%) were Hispanic (of any race). Almost one-third (32%) spoke a language other than English at home.<sup>35</sup>

★ Of the 2,364 children enrolled in RI Pre-K in October 2023, 228 (10%) had a developmental delay or disability and received special education services through their local school districts. Also, in October 2023, 14 (1%) were in foster care and 23 (1%) were homeless.<sup>36</sup>

★ Of the 2,181 children enrolled in RI Pre-K in October 2023 with information about race and ethnicity, 103 (5%) were Asian/Pacific Islander, 258 (12%) were Black, 774 (35%) were Hispanic/Latino, 322 (15%) were Multiracial, 6 (<1%) were Native American, and 718 (33%) were white. Almost one-third (32%) spoke a language other than English at home.<sup>37</sup>

## Public Preschool Implementation Guidelines for a Strong, Equitable Birth to Five System

★ Include Head Start, child care centers, and family child care homes in public preschool expansion. Leverage the national Head Start model by expanding Head Start and Early Head Start programs to serve more families.

★ Increase investments to sustain, expand, and improve programs for infants and toddlers as preschool expands.

★ Provide equitable and competitive compensation to early childhood educators serving children from birth through age five, regardless of setting.<sup>38</sup>

# Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K

Table 38.

Children Enrolled in Head Start and/or RI Pre-K, Rhode Island, 2023

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# CHILDREN AGES 3 AND 4	% LOW-INCOME CHILDREN	ESTIMATED # LOW-INCOME CHILDREN AGES 3 AND 4	AGE 3		AGE 4				ESTIMATED % OF LOW-INCOME CHILDREN AGE 3 OR 4 IN HEAD START OR RI PRE-K	ESTIMATED % OF ALL CHILDREN AGE 3 OR 4 IN HEAD START OR RI PRE-K
				ENROLLED IN HEAD START ONLY	DUAL ENROLLED IN RI PRE-K & HEAD START	ENROLLED IN HEAD START ONLY	DUAL ENROLLED IN RI PRE-K & HEAD START	ENROLLED IN RI PRE-K ONLY LOW-INCOME	ENROLLED IN RI PRE-K ONLY HIGHER-INCOME		
Barrington	404	7%	28	1	0	1	0	0	0	7%	0%
Bristol	263	32%	84	7	0	1	8	5	0	25%	8%
Burrillville	321	34%	109	3	0	5	0	0	0	7%	2%
Central Falls	673	94%	633	28	0	2	0	139	9	27%	26%
Charlestown	104	19%	20	4	0	4	0	0	0	40%	8%
Coventry	692	30%	208	1	0	0	14	62	0	37%	11%
Cranston	1,617	44%	711	63	0	24	47	66	112	28%	19%
Cumberland	815	19%	155	4	0	2	0	1	0	5%	1%
East Greenwich	299	6%	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
East Providence	871	49%	427	17	0	20	0	100	98	32%	27%
Exeter	120	12%	14	2	0	3	0	0	0	35%	4%
Foster	53	26%	14	0	0	2	0	0	0	15%	4%
Glocester	188	13%	24	2	0	2	0	0	0	16%	2%
Hopkinton	160	19%	30	1	0	1	1	0	0	10%	2%
Jamestown	62	7%	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Johnston	540	45%	243	8	0	13	2	20	18	18%	11%
Lincoln	469	26%	122	1	0	2	0	9	8	10%	4%
Little Compton	55	13%	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Middletown	365	31%	113	12	0	10	8	16	12	41%	16%
Narragansett	139	14%	19	0	1	0	1	0	0	10%	1%
New Shoreham	22	19%	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Newport	440	68%	299	24	0	26	1	18	17	23%	20%
North Kingstown	534	20%	107	3	0	5	0	9	9	16%	5%
North Providence	602	39%	235	15	1	16	9	15	27	24%	14%
North Smithfield	215	19%	41	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Pawtucket	1,781	55%	980	72	5	13	4	152	49	25%	17%
Portsmouth	347	14%	49	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Providence	4,364	78%	3,404	370	10	99	9	611	79	32%	27%
Richmond	159	19%	30	1	0	3	0	0	0	13%	3%
Scituate	164	16%	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Smithfield	337	11%	37	3	0	2	2	0	0	19%	2%
South Kingstown	412	19%	78	0	1	6	7	7	1	27%	5%
Tiverton	266	27%	72	2	0	11	0	0	0	18%	5%
Warren	174	32%	56	3	0	11	1	37	5	93%	33%
Warwick	1,522	38%	578	24	0	8	45	62	19	24%	10%
West Greenwich	94	12%	11	1	0	1	0	0	0	18%	2%
West Warwick	668	41%	274	22	0	12	41	4	27	29%	16%
Westerly	388	34%	132	10	1	2	13	20	1	35%	12%
Woonsocket	1,122	48%	539	68	0	34	53	169	66	60%	35%
Four Core Cities	7,940	69%	5,479	538	15	148	66	1,071	203	34%	26%
Remainder of State	13,881	30%	4,164	234	4	193	200	451	354	26%	10%
Rhode Island	21,821	44%	9,601	772	19	341	266	1,522	557	30%	16%

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Head Start Programs, children enrolled as of October 2023, by child residence. Rhode Island Department of Education, children enrolled in RI Pre-K as of October 2023, by child residence.

The estimated number of children ages three and four is from Census 2020, Summary File 1. The percentage of low-income four-year-olds is estimated using the percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (at or below 185% of the federal poverty level) in the local public school district with regional school district data used for all communities in the region.

The city/town table was redesigned in 2023 to include children ages three and four. Percentages should not be compared with prior Factbooks.

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

### References

- <sup>1,3</sup> *A matter of equity: Preschool education in America.* (2015). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- <sup>2,4</sup> Meloy, B., Gardner, M., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2019). *Untangling the evidence on preschool effectiveness: Insights for policymakers.* Washington, DC: Learning Policy Institute.
- <sup>5,27</sup> Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., & Duer, J. K. (2022). *The state(s) of Head Start and Early Head Start: Looking at equity.* New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.
- <sup>6</sup> National Head Start Association. (2023). *Rhode Island 2023 Head Start and Early Head Start profile.* Retrieved April 2, 2023, from [www.nhsa.org](http://www.nhsa.org)
- <sup>7,28</sup> Friedman-Kraus, A. H., et al. (2023). *The state of preschool 2022: State preschool yearbook.* New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.
- <sup>8</sup> Rhode Island Department of Education. (2022, April 6). 2022-2023 RI State Pre-K lottery opens.
- <sup>9</sup> *Rhode Island Prekindergarten Education Act,* Rhode Island General Laws, 16-87.

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