

# Children Receiving Preschool Special Education Services

## DEFINITION

Children receiving preschool special education services is the percentage of children ages three to five who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and are receiving special education services in Rhode Island.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Preschool special education is an important component of the early care and education system, providing specially-designed instruction so each child can meet learning standards. The federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* specifies that children ages three to five with disabilities, including developmental delays, have the same right to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment as school-age children with disabilities.<sup>1</sup>

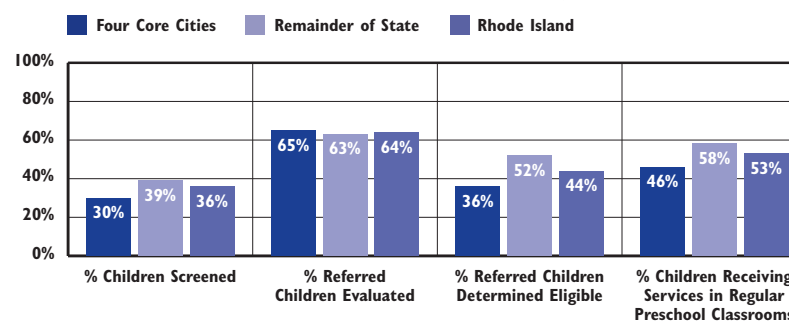
Developmental delays are identified when a child does not reach milestones at the same time as other children their age. Some young children with developmental delays are eventually diagnosed with a disability while others catch up to their peers when provided with high-quality educational opportunities, therapies, or interventions.<sup>2,3</sup> Routine developmental screening during the early stages of life, followed by evaluation and diagnostic assessment, helps children gain access to needed services to promote positive

outcomes and prevent ongoing educational challenges.<sup>4</sup>

In Rhode Island, school districts work to screen every child ages three through five every year through the Child Outreach screening program.<sup>5</sup> During the 2022-2023 school year in Rhode Island, districts completed developmental screenings for 36% of children ages three to five, up from 34% the previous year but down from 39% pre-pandemic. Preschool-age children in the four core cities were less likely to receive a developmental screening (30%) than children in the remainder of the state (39%). Of the children who were referred for evaluation based on positive screens, 64% were evaluated and 44% were determined eligible for special education. Children in the four core cities were less likely to be determined eligible (36%) than children in the remainder of the state (52%).<sup>6,7</sup>

Approximately 17% of U.S. children ages three to 17 have a developmental disability, with higher prevalence among low-income children, children with low birthweight, and boys.<sup>8</sup> Under *IDEA*, each state sets its own criteria to determine the magnitude of a delay needed to qualify for special education services.<sup>9</sup>

Preschool Special Education Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion Rates, Rhode Island, June 2023



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2022-2023 Child Outreach data and June 2023 Special Education Census. The percentage determined eligible is of those children referred for evaluation from Child Outreach screening.

★ In June 2023, there were 3,368 children ages three to five receiving preschool special education services (9% of all preschool children), up from 3,156 in 2019 (pre-pandemic). Children in the four core cities were just as likely to receive preschool special education services as children in the remainder of the state.<sup>10,11</sup>

★ Preschool children have improved outcomes when participating in high-quality inclusive early childhood programs. However, young children with disabilities face significant barriers in accessing high-quality, inclusive early care and education.<sup>12,13</sup>

★ In June 2023, 53% of preschool-age children who received special education services received those services within an inclusive early childhood classroom. Children in the four core cities were less likely to receive preschool special education services in an inclusive early childhood setting (46%) than children in the remainder of the state (58%).<sup>14</sup>

★ Many young children in Rhode Island receive *IDEA* services outside of inclusive preschool programs, with 21% receiving services through “walk-in” visits to a service provider, 15% enrolled in a separate special education class or school, and 10% enrolled in a preschool setting but receiving special education services in another location.<sup>15</sup>

★ In June 2023, 47% (1,596) of the 3,368 children receiving preschool special education services in Rhode Island qualified under the developmental delay category, 42% (1,420) had an identified speech/language disability, 7% (248) were diagnosed with autism, and 3% (104) had another diagnosed disability.<sup>16</sup>

# Children Receiving Preschool Special Education Services

Table 39.

Children Ages 3 to 5 Receiving Special Education Services, Rhode Island, 2023

| SCHOOL DISTRICT        | # OF CHILDREN AGES 3-5 | DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING EVALUATION, AND ELIGIBILITY, 2022-2023 SCHOOL YEAR |                           |                         |                                   | PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION BY SETTING JUNE 2023 |                             |                    |                            |                      |
|------------------------|------------------------|--|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
|                        |                        | % POPULATION SCREENED  | # REFERRED FOR EVALUATION | % EVALUATED OF REFERRED | % DETERMINED ELIGIBLE OF REFERRED | % IN INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASS             | % IN SELF-CONTAINED SETTING | % IN OTHER SETTING | TOTAL # RECEIVING SERVICES | % RECEIVING SERVICES |
| Barrington             | 641                    | 48%  | 16                        | 88%                     | 81%                               | 73%  | 0%                          | 27%                | 52                         | 8%                   |
| Bristol Warren         | 702                    | 38%  | 38                        | 66%                     | 63%                               | 50%  | 3%                          | 47%                | 62                         | 9%                   |
| Burrillville           | 452                    | 34%  | 15                        | 80%                     | 80%                               | 62%  | 2%                          | 37%                | 52                         | 12%                  |
| Central Falls          | 1,091                  | 51%  | 90                        | 83%                     | 42%                               | 61%  | 15%                         | 23%                | 166                        | 15%                  |
| Chariho                | 589                    | 48%  | 34                        | 62%                     | 59%                               | 48%  | 0%                          | 52%                | 93                         | 16%                  |
| Coventry               | 1,044                  | 36%  | 36                        | 69%                     | 61%                               | 50%  | 1%                          | 49%                | 103                        | 10%                  |
| Cranston               | 2,581                  | 33%  | 95                        | 53%                     | 43%                               | 54%  | 8%                          | 38%                | 204                        | 8%                   |
| Cumberland             | 1,304                  | 33%  | 55                        | 40%                     | 29%                               | 68%  | 12%                         | 20%                | 114                        | 9%                   |
| East Greenwich         | 609                    | 43%  | 11                        | 91%                     | 91%                               | 95%  | 0%                          | 5%                 | 42                         | 7%                   |
| East Providence        | 1,443                  | 34%  | 54                        | 56%                     | 54%                               | 57%  | 28%                         | 14%                | 127                        | 9%                   |
| Exeter-West Greenwich  | 381                    | 43%  | 11                        | 73%                     | 55%                               | 39%  | 0%                          | 61%                | 31                         | 8%                   |
| Foster                 | 119                    | NA   | NA                        | NA                      | NA                                | 91%  | 0%                          | 9%                 | 11                         | 9%                   |
| Glocester              | 225                    | NA   | NA                        | NA                      | NA                                | 39%  | 0%                          | 61%                | 28                         | 12%                  |
| Jamestown              | 112                    | 61%  | *                         | 60%                     | 40%                               | 100%   | 0%                          | 0%                 | *                          | 7%                   |
| Johnston               | 931                    | 60%  | 62                        | 53%                     | 48%                               | 76%  | 0%                          | 24%                | 100                        | 11%                  |
| Lincoln                | 685                    | 42%  | 33                        | 82%                     | 70%                               | 74%  | 5%                          | 21%                | 97                         | 14%                  |
| Little Compton         | 66                     | 27%  | *                         | 71%                     | 43%                               | 75%  | 0%                          | 25%                | *                          | 12%                  |
| Middletown             | 782                    | 19%  | 26                        | 12%                     | 12%                               | 50%  | 5%                          | 45%                | 44                         | 6%                   |
| Narragansett           | 181                    | 41%  | *                         | 100%                    | 100%                              | 79%  | 3%                          | 17%                | 29                         | 16%                  |
| New Shoreham           | 16                     | 47%  | *                         | 100%                    | 50%                               | NA   | NA                          | NA                 | 0                          | 0%                   |
| Newport                | 745                    | 41%  | 46                        | 37%                     | 30%                               | 61%  | 12%                         | 27%                | 51                         | 7%                   |
| North Kingstown        | 884                    | 57%  | 30                        | 70%                     | 50%                               | 65%  | 0%                          | 35%                | 77                         | 9%                   |
| North Providence       | 1,006                  | 35%  | 45                        | 78%                     | 67%                               | 50%  | 8%                          | 42%                | 86                         | 9%                   |
| North Smithfield       | 347                    | 40%  | *                         | 80%                     | 40%                               | 39%  | 9%                          | 52%                | 33                         | 10%                  |
| Pawtucket              | 2,922                  | 22%  | 132                       | 65%                     | 32%                               | 44%  | 34%                         | 22%                | 255                        | 9%                   |
| Portsmouth             | 624                    | 34%  | 17                        | 76%                     | 59%                               | 50%  | 0%                          | 50%                | 48                         | 8%                   |
| Providence             | 7,727                  | 30%  | 605                       | 58%                     | 30%                               | 38%  | 20%                         | 42%                | 617                        | 8%                   |
| Scituate               | 262                    | NA   | NA                        | NA                      | NA                                | 33%  | 0%                          | 67%                | 21                         | 8%                   |
| Smithfield             | 524                    | 58%  | 37                        | 59%                     | 51%                               | 57%  | 0%                          | 43%                | 60                         | 11%                  |
| South Kingstown        | 648                    | 52%  | 16                        | 94%                     | 81%                               | 68%  | 0%                          | 32%                | 56                         | 9%                   |
| Tiverton               | 401                    | 16%  | 22                        | 73%                     | 18%                               | 63%  | 9%                          | 28%                | 32                         | 8%                   |
| Warwick                | 2,122                  | 34%  | 53                        | 72%                     | 62%                               | 40%  | 42%                         | 17%                | 220                        | 10%                  |
| West Warwick           | 982                    | 36%  | 54                        | 78%                     | 61%                               | 47%  | 31%                         | 22%                | 128                        | 13%                  |
| Westerly               | 542                    | 45%  | 28                        | 50%                     | 39%                               | 92%  | 0%                          | 8%                 | 65                         | 12%                  |
| Woonsocket             | 1,867                  | 33%  | 108                       | 86%                     | 74%                               | 60%  | 8%                          | 32%                | 233                        | 12%                  |
| Charter Schools        | NA                     | NA   | NA                        | NA                      | NA                                | 100%   | 0%                          | 0%                 | *                          | NA                   |
| RI School for the Deaf | NA                     | NA   | NA                        | NA                      | NA                                | 0%   | 100%                        | 0%                 | 10                         | NA                   |
| Four Core Cities       | 13,607                 | 30%  | 935                       | 65%                     | 36%                               | 46%  | 20%                         | 34%                | 1,271                      | 9%                   |
| Remainder of State     | 21,950                 | 39%  | 880                       | 63%                     | 52%                               | 58%  | 11%                         | 31%                | 2,082                      | 9%                   |
| Rhode Island           | 35,557                 | 36%  | 1,815                     | 64%                     | 44%                               | 53%  | 15%                         | 32%                | 3,368                      | 9%                   |

## Sources of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), June 2023 Special Education Census. Beginning in 2020, the early childhood special education census data was adjusted to exclude children age five on June 30 who were enrolled in kindergarten and they were included in the K-12 special education census.

2022-2023 Developmental screening, referral, evaluation, and eligibility data is from the RIDE Office of Student, Community, and Academic Supports. Foster, Glocester, and Scituate school districts collaborate as the Northwest Region to conduct screenings, evaluations, and eligibility determinations and data is not available separately for these districts. The Northwest Region screened 40% of their age 3 to 5 population and referred 22 children for evaluation. Of those referred for evaluation, 86% had an evaluation completed and 59% were determined eligible for preschool special education services in 2022-2023.

\*Fewer than 10 students are in this category. Actual numbers are not shown to protect student confidentiality. These students are still counted in district totals and in the four core cities, remainder of the state, and state totals.

The denominator is the number of children ages three to five residing in each district during the 2022-2023 school year from the Rhode Island Department of Health's KIDSNET database shared with RIDE.

Due to changes in the denominator, screening rates and percentage receiving preschool special education services should not be compared with data in Factbooks published before 2016.

Inclusive early childhood class means children receive the majority of their special education services in a regular early childhood education class at a public school, a Head Start program, or a community-based child care program or preschool. Data include children who are district-placed and who are parentally-placed.

The Charter school is Highlander Charter School.

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

## References

<sup>1,3,8,12</sup> Hebbeler, K. & Spiker, D. (2016). Supporting young children with disabilities. *The Future of Children*, 26(2), 185-205.

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