

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 that promote children’s development to lower quality settings that can lead to developmental setbacks and contribute to children’s behavior problems.^{1,2}

Research has shown that parents strongly prefer high-quality programs and particularly value teachers’ educational achievement, however many families cannot afford the cost of higher quality programs and/or don’t have enough information about which programs meet recommended quality standards.³

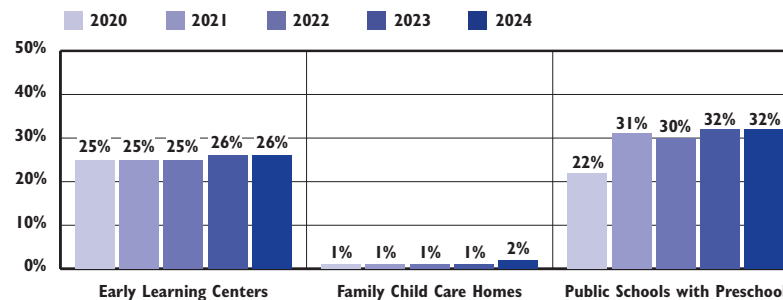
High-quality early care and education programs have qualified educators and low staff turnover, strong staff-child ratios, small class/group sizes,

and research-based health, safety, nutrition, and curriculum practices. Consistent caring, supportive, and educational interactions between early childhood educators and children are the critical ingredient to support children’s learning and development. The development and retention of a highly qualified and appropriately compensated workforce for early childhood programs is critical to improve program quality.^{4,5,6,7}

Most states use Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) to measure and improve the quality of early learning programs. QRIS measure program quality indicators (e.g., staff qualifications, learning environment, and staff-child interactions) and create an index rating. QRIS ratings are shared with parents and often connected to financial incentives and supports.^{8,9}

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 achieve quality improvement goals. All programs serving children participating in the Child Care Assistance Program and in RI Pre-K are required to have a BrightStars rating. All public and non-public schools that serve children ages three through five must have a BrightStars rating by June 2025.^{10,11,12}


Percentage of Licensed Early Learning Centers, Family Child Care Programs, and Public Schools with a High-Quality BrightStars Rating (4 or 5 Stars), Rhode Island, 2020-2024



Source: RI Association for the Education of Young Children, Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Rhode Island Department of Education, January 2020 – January 2024.

★ As of January 2024, 269 (83%) licensed child care centers, 357 (89%) licensed family child care homes, and 32 (49%) public schools with preschool classrooms had a BrightStars rating. Eighty-six (26%) licensed early learning centers, six (2%) licensed family child care homes, and 21 (32%) public schools had met the benchmarks for a high-quality rating of four or five stars.¹³

★ Since 2020, the percentage of programs with a high-quality rating has increased for early learning centers (from 25% to 26%), family child care homes (from 1% to 2%), and public schools serving preschoolers (from 22% to 32%).¹⁴

★ 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 (37% vs. 23% for licensed centers and 40% vs. 29% for public schools) while family child care homes in the core cities are less likely to have a high-quality rating than those in the remainder of the state (2% vs. 1%).¹⁵

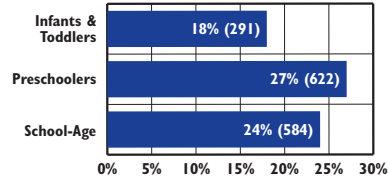
★ A 2016 evaluation of BrightStars found that the star levels effectively differentiate quality, and five of the 10 standards are linked to improved child outcomes (specifically improved social competence and math skills). The study also found that 70% of child care center and preschool directors had a positive or extremely positive impression of BrightStars.¹⁶

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Table 35.

Licensed Child Care Centers and Preschools Participating in the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System, Rhode Island, January 2024

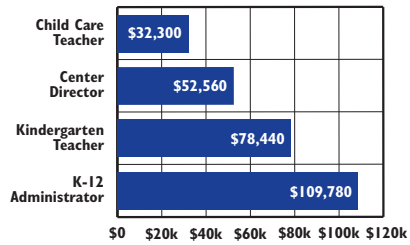
CCAP Children Enrolled in High-Quality Programs (4 or 5 Stars) by Age, December 2023



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, December 2023.

★ Preschool-age children enrolled in the RI Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) are more likely to be enrolled in a high-quality program (27%) than infants and toddlers (18%) or school-age children (24%).¹⁷

Average Annual Salary, Rhode Island, 2022



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023). *May 2022 State occupational employment and wage estimates, Rhode Island*. Retrieved February 19, 2024, from www.bls.gov

★ Early childhood teachers and program directors in Rhode Island earn significantly lower wages than kindergarten teachers and K-12 school administrators.¹⁸

CITY/TOWN	LICENSED PROGRAMS	PROGRAMS THAT ACCEPT CCAP	NO RATING	1 STAR	2 STARS	3 STARS	HIGH-QUALITY		% IN BRIGHTSTARS	% WITH HIGH-QUALITY RATING
							4 STARS	5 STARS		
Barrington	9	5	4	3	1	0	1	0	56%	11%
Bristol	4	3	1	3	0	0	0	0	75%	0%
Burrillville	4	2	1	2	0	0	0	1	75%	25%
Central Falls	3	3	0	0	0	2	1	0	100%	33%
Charlestown	4	4	0	1	0	0	0	3	100%	75%
Coventry	7	7	0	1	2	1	2	1	100%	43%
Cranston	27	23	4	9	6	4	3	1	85%	15%
Cumberland	6	4	2	1	1	0	2	0	67%	33%
East Greenwich	14	7	5	1	2	1	3	2	64%	36%
East Providence	16	13	3	5	4	0	3	1	81%	25%
Exeter	2	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	100%	50%
Foster	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	100%	0%
Glocester	4	4	0	1	2	0	0	1	100%	25%
Hopkinton	3	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	100%	0%
Jamestown	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	100%	0%
Johnston	20	18	2	6	8	2	2	0	90%	10%
Lincoln	6	6	0	2	3	0	0	1	100%	17%
Little Compton	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Middletown	13	9	5	4	1	1	2	0	62%	15%
Narragansett	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	50%	0%
New Shoreham	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Newport	3	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	67%	33%
North Kingstown	8	6	1	2	0	2	3	0	88%	38%
North Providence	9	8	1	3	2	0	1	2	89%	33%
North Smithfield	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	50%	0%
Pawtucket	16	16	1	8	2	1	3	1	94%	25%
Portsmouth	5	1	4	1	0	0	0	0	20%	0%
Providence	52	41	7	11	12	4	7	11	87%	35%
Richmond	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Scituate	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	100%	0%
Smithfield	10	7	1	5	3	1	0	0	90%	0%
South Kingstown	13	9	4	2	1	2	3	1	69%	31%
Tiverton	4	4	1	1	1	0	1	0	75%	25%
Warren	5	3	2	1	0	0	2	0	60%	40%
Warwick	23	22	0	7	5	4	5	2	100%	30%
West Greenwich	3	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	100%	0%
West Warwick	4	4	0	0	1	2	0	1	100%	25%
Westerly	7	5	2	0	2	0	3	0	71%	43%
Woonsocket	12	12	0	2	1	1	4	4	100%	67%
Four Core Cities	83	72	8	21	15	8	15	16	90%	37%
Remainder of State	242	187	48	64	53	22	38	17	80%	23%
Rhode Island	325	259	56	85	68	30	53	33	83%	26%

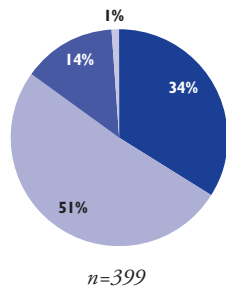
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Table 36.

Licensed Family Child Care Homes Participating in the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System, Rhode Island, January 2024

Licensed Family Child Care Programs by Language Spoken, Rhode Island, 2024

34% (135) ■ English
 51% (204) ■ Spanish
 14% (57) ■ Bilingual English/Spanish
 1% (3) ■ Other



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Licensed family child care providers, 2024.

★ In 2024, of the 399 licensed family child care providers in Rhode Island, 34% spoke English, 51% spoke Spanish, 14% were bilingual in Spanish and English, and 1% spoke another language (Portuguese or Creole).¹⁹

★ As of December 2023, of the 2,107 children in the CCAP program with reported Hispanic ethnicity, 35% were enrolled in family child care, 65% were enrolled in a center, and less than 1% were enrolled in license-exempt care.²⁰

CITY/TOWN	LICENSED PROGRAMS	PROGRAMS THAT ACCEPT CCAP	NO RATING	1 STAR	2 STARS	3 STARS	HIGH-QUALITY		% IN BRIGHTSTARS	% WITH HIGH-QUALITY RATING
							4 STARS	5 STARS		
Barrington	5	1	2	2	0	1	0	0	60%	0%
Bristol	3	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	67%	0%
Burrillville	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Central Falls	12	12	0	10	2	0	0	0	100%	0%
Charlestown	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Coventry	4	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	25%	0%
Cranston	43	37	1	24	18	0	0	0	98%	0%
Cumberland	7	2	4	3	0	0	0	0	43%	0%
East Greenwich	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
East Providence	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	50%	0%
Exeter	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Foster	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Glocester	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Hopkinton	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Jamestown	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Johnston	8	7	0	4	4	0	0	0	100%	0%
Lincoln	6	3	2	3	0	0	1	0	67%	17%
Little Compton	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Middletown	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Narragansett	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
New Shoreham	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Newport	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
North Kingstown	4	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	25%	0%
North Providence	6	6	1	5	0	0	0	0	83%	0%
North Smithfield	3	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	67%	33%
Pawtucket	27	23	2	12	11	1	0	1	93%	4%
Portsmouth	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Providence	237	224	10	125	92	7	2	1	96%	1%
Richmond	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Scituate	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Smithfield	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
South Kingstown	3	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	67%	0%
Tiverton	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Warren	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Warwick	5	2	3	2	0	0	0	0	40%	0%
West Greenwich	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
West Warwick	5	4	0	5	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Westerly	2	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Woonsocket	6	6	0	5	1	0	0	0	100%	0%
Four Core Cities	282	265	12	152	106	8	2	2	96%	1%
Remainder of State	117	74	30	61	23	1	2	0	74%	2%
Rhode Island	399	339	42	213	129	9	4	2	89%	2%

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Table 37.

Public Schools with Preschool Classrooms Participating in the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System, Rhode Island, January 2024

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	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Bristol Warren	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Burrillville	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Central Falls	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	50%	50%
Chariho	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	100%	100%
Coventry	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	100%	100%
Cranston	8	3	0	0	2	2	1	63%	38%
Cumberland	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
East Greenwich	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	100%	0%
East Providence	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	100%	100%
Exeter-West Greenwich	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
Foster	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Glocester	2	2	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	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	50%	0%
Little Compton	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Middletown	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Narragansett	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	100%	100%
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	4	1	1	0	0	0	2	75%	50%
Portsmouth	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
Providence	7	1	0	2	1	1	2	86%	43%
Scituate	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Smithfield	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
South Kingstown	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Tiverton	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Warwick	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
West Warwick	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Westerly	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	100%	100%
Woonsocket	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Charter Schools	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
RI School for the Deaf	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
Four Core Cities	15	5	1	2	1	2	4	67%	40%
Remainder of State	48	27	0	3	4	7	7	44%	29%
Rhode Island	65	33	1	5	5	10	11	49%	32%

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 2024. Data on public schools are from the Rhode Island Department of Education, January 2024. Data on BrightStars quality ratings are from the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children, January 2024.

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

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- ⁷⁸ Workman, S. & Ullrich, R. (2017). *Quality 101: Identifying the core components of a high-quality early childhood program*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.
- ¹⁰ Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children. (n.d.). *BrightStars RI: Connecting quality child care FAQ's*. Retrieved February 29, 2024, from www.brightstars.org
- ¹¹ Rhode Island Department of Education, personal communication, [March 1], 2024.
- ¹² State of Rhode Island Department of Education. *Non-public schools*. Retrieved February 29, 2024, from www.ride.ri.gov

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