

Licensed Capacity of Early Learning Programs

DEFINITION

Licensed capacity of early learning programs is the number of child care and early learning programs and slots licensed by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services for children under age six. It does not reflect the actual staffed capacity since programs can have closed classrooms or reduced enrollment due to lack of staff.

SIGNIFICANCE

Nationally, more than half of children under age five regularly attend a child care or early learning program. Research shows that when children attend child care and early learning programs that are high-quality, there are lasting benefits including improved math, language, and social skills.¹

However, for many families, high-quality child care is not affordable or available. Nationally, 83% of parents report that finding quality, affordable child care in their area is a serious problem, and nearly three in four parents report that child care issues negatively impacted their career. Families that have infants and toddlers, parents of children with disabilities, immigrant families, and parents working nonstandard hours face limited options for licensed child care.²

Access to stable, affordable, quality child care is a basic need for many working families and is critical for Rhode Island's economy. When parents

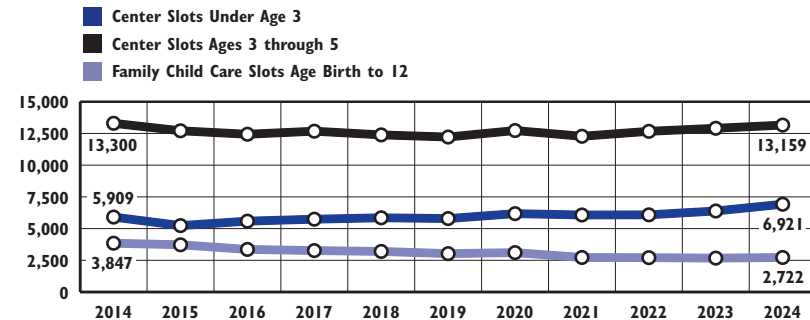
have difficulty finding and keeping child care, they are more likely to be absent from work and to leave their jobs.³ Between 2018 and 2022, 74% of Rhode Island children under age six had all parents in the workforce, higher than the U.S. rate of 67%.⁴

Revenue from family fees and available public subsidies for child care are not adequate for most child care and early learning programs to pay competitive wages that are needed to attract and retain qualified staff.⁵ In 2022 in Rhode Island, the median wage was \$13.97/hour for a child care educator and \$24.56/hour for a child care or preschool director.⁶

The federal *Child Care and Development Block Grant Act* requires states to establish and enforce clear health and safety standards for child care programs. States must conduct at least one unannounced inspection of all licensed providers each year and must maintain a public website with a searchable list of child care providers with information on the quality of each child care program and the findings from at least three years of licensing inspections. States must also publicly report data on serious injuries, substantiated child maltreatment, and deaths in child care programs.⁷ Between 2020 and 2022, there were 11 children seriously injured, 28 children who were maltreated, and zero children who died in a licensed child care program in Rhode Island.⁸



Early Learning Program Capacity, Rhode Island, 2014-2024



Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, 2014-2019 and Rhode Island Department of Human Services, 2020-2024. RI Early Care and Education Data System (ECEDS), 2016-2020.

★ In January 2024, there were 6,921 slots for infants and toddlers and 13,159 slots for preschoolers (ages three through five) in 325 licensed centers. The number of infant/toddler slots is up 12% and the number of preschool slots is up 3%, but the number of licensed early learning centers is down 1% from 329 centers in January 2020 (pre-pandemic).⁹

★ In January 2024, there were 2,722 slots children ages six weeks to 12 years in 399 licensed family child care homes. The number of family child care slots is down 12% and the number of licensed family child care homes is down 13% from 460 homes in January 2020 (pre-pandemic).¹⁰

★ As of January 2024, 85% of licensed family child care providers and 80% of licensed early learning centers in Rhode Island accept children participating in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), which covers all or part of the cost of child care for eligible low-income families.¹¹



Impact of Federal Child Care Stabilization Funds Ending

★ An October 2023 national survey of child care programs found that among those that had run out of federal stabilization funding, 35% had raised tuition for families, 28% had cut staff wages or ended salary increases, 13% reduced staff benefits, 34% had lost staff, 24% were serving fewer children, and 23% had growing waitlists.¹²

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Table 33.

Capacity of Licensed Early Learning Programs, Rhode Island, January 2024

CITY/TOWN	# OF LICENSED CENTERS	# OF CENTER SLOTS FOR INFANTS/TODDLERS < AGE 3	# OF CENTER SLOTS FOR CHILDREN AGES 3-5	# OF LICENSED FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES	# OF LICENSED FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME SLOTS*	TOTAL LICENSED EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM SLOTS
Barrington	9	136	322	5	34	492
Bristol	4	61	77	3	18	156
Burrillville	4	64	84	1	6	154
Central Falls	3	98	229	12	82	409
Charlestown	4	14	92	0	0	106
Coventry	7	151	224	4	26	401
Cranston	27	600	1,135	43	300	2,035
Cumberland	6	102	323	7	58	483
East Greenwich	14	436	688	0	0	1,124
East Providence	16	238	565	2	12	815
Exeter	2	24	52	0	0	76
Foster	1	19	18	0	0	37
Glocester	4	75	112	0	0	187
Hopkinton	3	14	60	1	8	82
Jamestown	1	30	34	1	8	72
Johnston	20	471	550	8	55	1,076
Lincoln	6	135	237	6	40	412
Little Compton	1	0	20	0	0	20
Middletown	13	243	375	1	6	624
Narragansett	2	12	60	1	6	78
New Shoreham	1	12	26	0	0	38
Newport	3	72	145	1	8	225
North Kingstown	8	156	334	4	26	516
North Providence	9	152	248	6	40	440
North Smithfield	2	86	122	3	32	240
Pawtucket	16	434	752	27	176	1,362
Portsmouth	5	116	152	1	12	280
Providence	52	896	2,286	237	1,581	4,763
Richmond	0	0	0	1	12	12
Scituate	1	11	36	0	0	47
Smithfield	10	312	481	1	8	801
South Kingstown	13	297	349	3	24	670
Tiverton	4	76	147	1	8	231
Warren	5	80	203	1	8	291
Warwick	23	873	1,313	5	36	2,222
West Greenwich	3	47	97	0	0	144
West Warwick	4	131	257	5	32	420
Westerly	7	107	265	2	14	386
Woonsocket	12	140	689	6	46	875
Four Core Cities	83	1,568	3,956	282	1,885	7,409
Remainder of State	242	5,353	9,203	117	837	15,393
Rhode Island	325	6,921	13,159	399	2,722	22,802

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Human Services, number of licensed child care center slots and programs for children under age six and number of licensed family child care homes and slots, January 2024.

Licensed centers include child care programs, preschools, nursery schools, and center-based Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

*Licensed family child care slots are for children ages six weeks to 12 years old.

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

References

¹⁵ Donoghue, E. A. & AAP Council on Early Childhood. (2017). Quality early education and child care from birth to kindergarten. *Pediatrics*, 140(2): e20171488.

² Malik, R., et al. (2018). *America's child care deserts in 2018*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

³ Schochet, L. (2019). *The child care crisis is keeping women out of the workforce*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. Retrieved March 25, 2021, from www.americanprogress.org

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2018-2022. Table DP03.

⁶ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023). *May 2022 State occupational employment and wage estimates, Rhode Island*. Retrieved February 11, 2024, from www.bls.gov

⁷ Matthews, H., Schulman, K., Vogtman, J., Johnson-Staub, C., & Blank, H. (2017). *Implementing the Child Care and Development Block Grant Reauthorization: A Guide for States*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy & National Women's Law Center.

⁸ Rhode Island Department of Human Services. (2023). *Office of child care: Aggregated data report (2022)*. Retrieved February 16, 2024, from www.dhs.ri.gov

^{9,10,11} Rhode Island Department of Human Services, child care licensing data, January 2020, and January 2024.

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