EARLY LEARNING FACT SHEET

Promoting early learning and development Birth to 8

Focus on BrightStars

High-quality child care, preschool, and after-school programs are essential for our children's learning and growth, for parents to work and support their families, and for our state's economic success. Children who attend high-quality programs gain language and cognitive skills and demonstrate stronger social and emotional development than children who attend low-quality programs.[1]
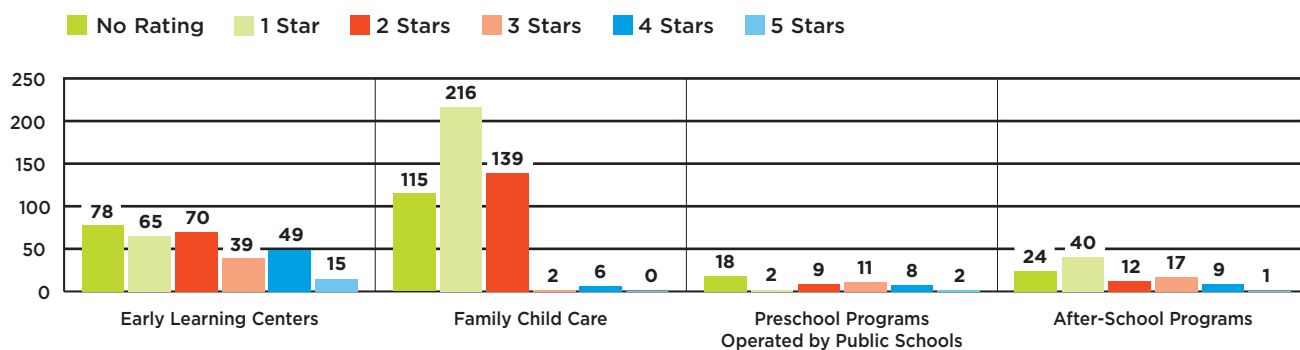
As of 2017, 41 states and the District of Columbia use a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) to measure and improve the quality of early learning and child care programs. The systems measure a variety of program quality indicators (such as staff qualifications, learning environment, family engagement, 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. Studies have shown that state QRIS can improve the quality of care available over time.[2,3]

BrightStars: Rhode Island's Quality Rating and Improvement System

Launched in 2009 after a design and pilot phase supported by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, the United Way of Rhode Island, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, and the Rhode Island Foundation, BrightStars uses research based standards to measure the quality of licensed child care and early learning programs serving children from birth through age 12. In addition, preschool programs operated by public schools can participate in BrightStars. All programs serving children participating in the Child Care Assistance Program and all State Pre-K programs are required to have a BrightStars rating.

Programs participating in BrightStars receive a star rating from one to five stars. Higher star levels indicate that programs are implementing research-based practices known to promote child development and learning. Each incremental step in the BrightStars rating demonstrates an important step toward best practice. BrightStars helps programs develop a quality improvement plan and identify resources to make improvements.[4]

BRIGHTSTARS RATINGS, RHODE ISLAND, JANUARY 2018

Legend: No Rating | 1 Star | 2 Stars | 3 Stars | 4 Stars | 5 Stars

	No Rating	1 Star	2 Stars	3 Stars	4 Stars	5 Stars
Early Learning Centers	78	65	70	39	49	15
Family Child Care	115	216	139	2	6	0
Preschool Programs Operated by Public Schools	18	2	9	11	8	2
After-School Programs	24	40	12	17	9	1

Source: Rhode Island Early Care and Education Data System (ECEDS), 2018. Note: Only programs that serve children in the Child Care Assistance Program (infants through school-age) and children in State Pre-K are required to have a BrightStars rating.

SUMMARY OF BRIGHTSTARS REQUIREMENTS

QUALITY LEVEL	BRIGHTSTARS REQUIREMENTS
1 star	• DCYF license to operate a child care program or public school • Quality improvement plan*
2 stars	• Compliance with critical health and safety standards in licensing • Complete training on learning environment • Compliance with ratio and group size during site visit • Professional development plan for all teachers (or the family child care provider) • Program shares information with parents about developmental screening resources • Two family communication activities*
3 stars	• Learning Environment score of 3.0 or greater measured through site visit (basic quality) • 75% of teachers (family child care provider) have 12 college credits in ECE • Center director has Associate's degree or higher • Education Coordinator trained in the RI Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) • Written curriculum** • Program includes children with developmental delays and disabilities** • Family-teacher conference offered 2x per year*
4 stars	• Learning Environment score of 4.0 or higher measured through site visit (good quality) • 25% of teachers have an Associate's degree and 50% of preschool teachers trained in the RIELDS • Center director has a Bachelor's degree or higher and 6 college credits in ECE • Program uses child assessment strategies (2 or more methods) to inform instruction** • Annual family survey*
5 Stars	• Learning Environment score of 5.0 or higher measured through site visit (excellent quality) • 75% of teachers (family child care provider) have an Associate's degree or higher and 24 college credits in ECE • 50% of preschool teachers have a Bachelor's degree or higher and 24 college credits in ECE • 75% of preschool teachers (family child care provider) have training in the RIELDS • Center director has a Bachelor's degree or higher and 12 college credits in ECE • Written curriculum framework aligned with RIELDS** • CLASS observation conducted in preschool classrooms to inform practice • Program collaborates with Child Outreach developmental screening for children ages 3 to 5 • Program uses child assessment strategies (3 or more) to inform instruction** • Staff collaborate with IEP/IFSP teams to serve children with developmental delays • Three family communication activities • Program has family advisory board (not required for family child care)*

* Plus all requirements in lower star levels. ** Standard can be met through NAEYC accreditation or compliance with Head Start performance standards.

Source: Adapted and simplified from *BrightStars Child Care Center and Preschool Quality Framework* (2013), *BrightStars Family Child Care Quality Framework* (2013), and *BrightStars School-Age Child Care (K-5) Quality Framework* (2011). Note: School-age child care standards differ in some areas (e.g., curriculum required at level 4, staff may have college credits in any field).

BrightStars Think Tank

In 2017, Rhode Island was invited to participate in a national Think Tank to review research about effective QRIS strategies and identify opportunities to improve the state's QRIS. Building on the work completed in the national meetings, the state convened a BrightStars Think Tank in 2018 to develop recommendations to strengthen Rhode Island's cross-sector QRIS so that it is more effective at supporting the continuous quality improvement of child care and early learning programs across the state. Recommendations for improvements will be considered by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services and the Rhode Island Children's Cabinet.[5]

Staff Qualifications

Programs that achieve BrightStars ratings of three through five stars have staff that meet qualifications above basic licensing standards. Evidence suggests that more qualified staff provide higher-quality learning opportunities. Researchers recommend that all lead teachers in early care and education programs for children birth through age eight have a Bachelor's degree with specialized training in child development and early education.[6] Some of the more challenging standards to meet in BrightStars are the staff qualifications. Due to lack of funding, many child care and early learning programs are not able to offer wages and benefits that are sufficient to attract and retain qualified and effective early childhood educators and after school enrichment staff.[7] It is also difficult for staff who are not fluent English speakers, readers, and writers to earn college credits and degrees in Rhode Island.

RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR AVERAGE WAGE ESTIMATES, 2016
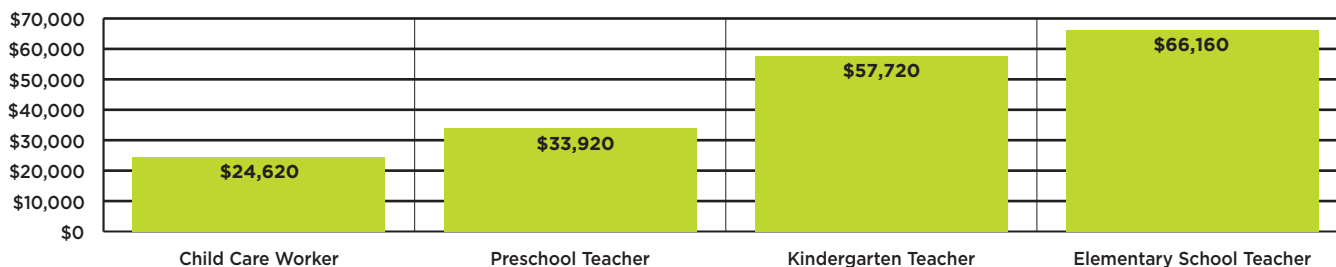
Source: U.S. Department of Labor. *May 2016 State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates: Rhode Island.* Retrieved April 12, 2017, from www.bls.gov

Learning Environment

BrightStars uses valid and reliable tools to conduct program observations that measure the overall quality of the learning environment. The tools employed by BrightStars are widely used across the U.S. and the world for research and for program quality improvement: *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale - Revised (ITERS-R), Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale - Revised (ECERS-R), Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale - Revised (FCCERS-R), and School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS).* The scales are designed to measure program practices that meet three basic needs of children: protection of health and safety, building positive relationships, and providing opportunities for stimulation and learning. Observations in a classroom or group of children last three and one-half to four hours and gather data on 38-49 items scored from one (inadequate) to seven (excellent). The item scores are combined into an overall score, ranging from one to seven.[8]
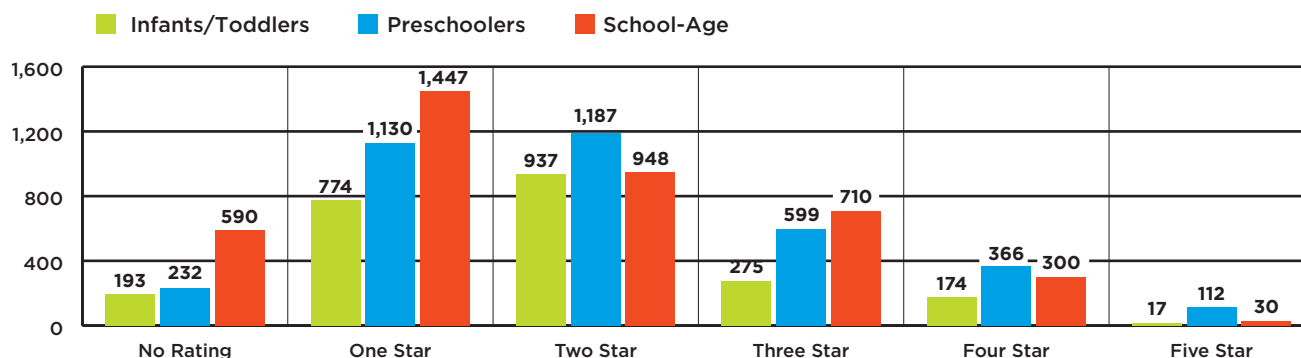
SELECTED EXAMPLES FROM THE EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE - REVISED

CATEGORY	EXAMPLE OF PRACTICES SCORING 5 OR "GOOD" ON ECERS-R
Space and Furnishings	At least three interest centers defined and equipped for learning experiences (e.g., block area, reading area, dramatic play area).
Personal Care Routines	Each child is greeted individually by name. Adequate handwashing and care given to children's cleanliness and comfort.
Language & Reasoning	A wide selection of appropriate books is accessible for most of the day. There are many staff-child conversations.
Activities	There are enough blocks and accessories (e.g., toy people, animals, vehicles, etc.) for three or more children to build/play at the same time.
Interactions	Most staff-child interactions are pleasant and helpful. Staff give children help and encouragement when needed.
Program Structure	The schedule provides a balance of structure and flexibility (teacher-directed and child-directed, indoor and outdoor play periods). No long periods of waiting between daily events.

Source: Harms, T., Clifford, R. M., & Cryer, D. (1998). *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale: Revised edition.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

BrightStars and the Child Care Assistance Program

Many state child care subsidy programs encourage and support program quality improvement by paying higher rates to higher quality programs (tiered quality rates). Rhode Island is one of only nine states in the U.S. and the only state in New England that does not have a tiered rate structure to support child care quality.[9]

CHILDREN RECEIVING CCAP BY BRIGHTSTARS QUALITY RATING OF PROGRAM, DECEMBER 2017

Legend: Infants/Toddlers · Preschoolers · School-Age

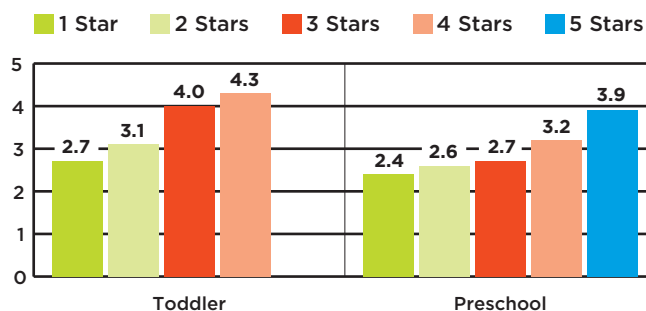| Rating	Infants/Toddlers	Preschoolers	School-Age
No Rating	193	232	590
One Star	774	1,130	1,447
Two Star	937	1,187	948
Three Star	275	599	710
Four Star	174	366	300
Five Star	17	112	30

Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services and Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children, Child Care Assistance Program enrollment by BrightStars program quality rating, December 2017.

BrightStars Evaluation

An evaluation of the BrightStars Child Care Center and Preschool Quality Framework found that BrightStars ratings effectively differentiate quality and are linked to improved child outcomes. The researchers found that that CLASS scores (an independent measure of program quality) increase as BrightStars ratings increase. They also found positive, meaningful relationships between BrightStars standards and preschoolers' social-emotional competence and between the curriculum standard and children's math skills. In addition, the study also found that 70% of program directors rated BrightStars positively or extremely positively.[10]

CLASS INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT SCORES BY BRIGHTSTARS RATING

Legend: 1 Star · 2 Stars · 3 Stars · 4 Stars · 5 Stars

	1 Star	2 Stars	3 Stars	4 Stars	5 Stars
Toddler	2.7	3.1	4.0	4.3	
Preschool	2.4	2.6	2.7	3.2	3.9

Source: Maxwell, K. L., Blasberg, A., Early, D. M., Li, W., & Orfali, N. (2016). *Evaluation of Rhode Island's BrightStars child care center and preschool quality framework.* Chapel Hill, NC: Child Trends. Note: There were no 5-star programs serving toddlers that participated in the evaluation.

References

[1] Burchinal, M., Kainz, K. & Cai, Y. (2011). How well do our measures of quality predict child outcomes? In Zaslow, M., Martinez-Beck, I., Tout, K. & Halle, T. (Eds.), *Quality measurement in early childhood settings,* 11-31. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

[2] The Build Initiative & Child Trends. (2017). *A catalog and comparison of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS)* [Data System]. Retrieved March 27, 2018, from https://qualitycompendium.org

[3] Tout, K. et al. (2010). *Compendium of quality rating systems and evaluations.* Washington, DC: Child Trends and Mathematica Policy Research.

[4] *BrightStars child care center and preschool quality framework.* (2013). Retrieved March 27, 2018, from www.brightstars.org

[5] QRIS National Learning Network. (2017). *2017 QRIS 3.0 Think Tank.* Retrieved April 8, 2018, from www.qrisnetwork.org. Rhode Island Department of Human Services, 2017.

[6] *Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8: A unifying foundation.* (2015). Washington, DC: Institute of Medicine and National Research Council.

[7] Oldham, E. & Hawes, S. (2014). *Rhode Island early learning workforce study: Licensed centers and family child care homes.* Retrieved March 27, 2018, from www.earlylearningri.org

[8] Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. *Environment Rating Scales: Assessment instruments for early childhood and child care program quality.* Retrieved March 27, 2018, from http://ers.fpg.unc.edu

[9] Schulman, K. & Blank, H. (2017). *Persistent gaps: State child care assistance policies 2017.* Washington, DC: National Women's Law Center.

[10] Maxwell, K. L., Blasberg, A., Early, D. M., Li, W., & Orfali, N. (2016). Evaluation of Rhode Island's BrightStars child care center and preschool quality framework. Chapel Hill, NC: Child Trends.

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