

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

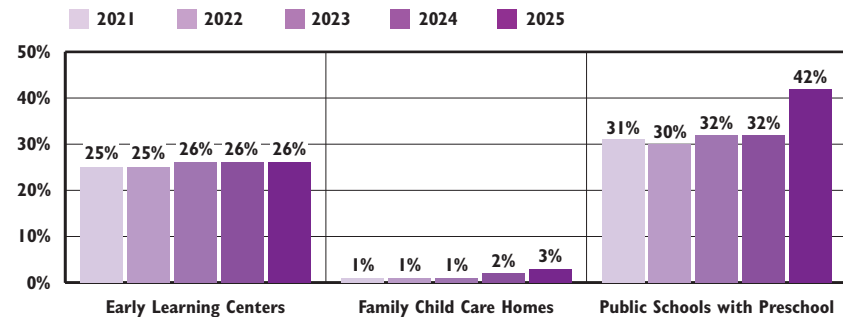
High-quality early care and education programs have qualified educators and low staff turnover, strong staff-child ratios, small class/group sizes,

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 schools that serve children ages three through five must apply for 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, 2021-2025



Source: Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children, Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Rhode Island Department of Education, January 2021 – January 2025.

◆ As of January 2025, 259 (80%) licensed child care centers, 355 (86%) licensed family child care homes, and 44 (66%) public schools with preschool classrooms had a BrightStars rating. Eighty-three (26%) licensed early learning centers, 11 (3%) licensed family child care homes, and 28 (42%) public schools had met the benchmarks for a high-quality rating of four or five stars.¹³

◆ Since 2021, 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 3%), and public schools serving preschoolers (from 31% to 42%).¹⁴

◆ Early learning centers in the core cities are more likely to have a high-quality BrightStars rating than those in the remainder of the state (39% vs. 21%) while public schools and 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 (43% vs. 38% for public schools and 4% vs. 2% for family child care).¹⁵

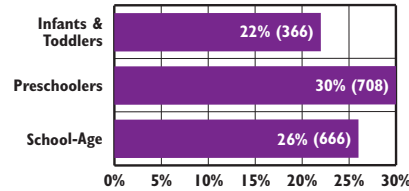
◆ A 2016 evaluation of BrightStars found that the star levels effectively differentiate quality, and five of the 10 standards are linked to improved child outcomes (specifically improved social competence and math skills). The study also found that 70% of child care center and preschool directors had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

High-Quality Early Learning Programs

Table 32.

Licensed Child Care Centers and Preschools Participating in the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System, Rhode Island, January 2025

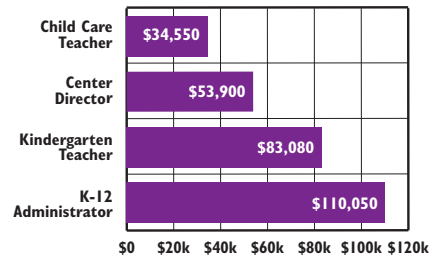
CCAP Children Enrolled in High-Quality Programs (4 or 5 Stars) by Age, December 2024



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, December 2024.

◆ Preschool-age children enrolled in the RI Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) are more likely to be enrolled in a high-quality program (30%) than infants and toddlers (22%) or school-age children (26%).¹⁷

Average Annual Salary, Rhode Island, 2023



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2024). May 2023 State occupational employment and wage estimates, Rhode Island. Retrieved January 22, 2025, from https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_ri.htm

◆ 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	10	5	5	2	2	0	1	0	50%	10%
Bristol	3	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Burrillville	4	2	1	2	0	0	0	1	75%	25%
Central Falls	4	4	0	1	0	2	1	0	100%	25%
Charlestown	3	3	0	1	0	0	0	2	100%	67%
Coventry	7	6	0	0	2	2	2	1	100%	43%
Cranston	27	22	7	8	4	5	1	2	74%	11%
Cumberland	7	4	2	2	0	1	2	0	71%	29%
East Greenwich	14	8	5	1	1	2	3	2	64%	36%
East Providence	18	12	4	6	3	1	2	2	78%	22%
Exeter	2	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	100%	50%
Foster	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	100%	0%
Glocester	3	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	100%	0%
Hopkinton	3	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	100%	0%
Jamestown	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	100%	0%
Johnston	19	15	2	4	8	3	1	1	89%	11%
Lincoln	8	6	1	2	2	1	1	1	88%	25%
Little Compton	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Middletown	12	7	5	4	1	1	1	0	58%	8%
Narragansett	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	50%	0%
New Shoreham	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Newport	3	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	67%	33%
North Kingstown	8	6	1	1	0	3	3	0	88%	38%
North Providence	8	7	1	3	2	0	1	1	88%	25%
North Smithfield	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	50%	0%
Pawtucket	17	15	2	5	4	2	3	1	88%	24%
Portsmouth	6	2	4	1	0	0	1	0	33%	17%
Providence	47	36	6	7	12	3	7	12	87%	40%
Richmond	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Scituate	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	100%	0%
Smithfield	10	6	1	5	2	2	0	0	90%	0%
South Kingstown	12	7	4	2	1	2	2	1	67%	25%
Tiverton	4	2	1	1	0	0	2	0	75%	50%
Warren	5	2	2	1	0	0	1	1	60%	40%
Warwick	24	22	0	7	6	4	5	2	100%	29%
West Greenwich	3	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	100%	0%
West Warwick	4	4	1	0	1	1	1	0	75%	25%
Westerly	7	4	2	0	2	0	3	0	71%	43%
Woonsocket	11	10	1	2	1	0	3	4	91%	64%
Four Core Cities	79	65	9	15	17	7	14	17	89%	39%
Remainder of State	243	170	54	60	47	30	35	17	78%	21%
Rhode Island	322	235	63	75	64	37	49	34	80%	26%

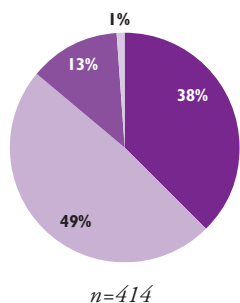
High-Quality Early Learning Programs

Table 33.

Licensed Family Child Care Homes Participating in the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System, Rhode Island, January 2025

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

38% (156) English
49% (201) Spanish
13% (54) Bilingual English/Spanish
1% (3) Other



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

◆ In 2024, of the 414 licensed family child care providers in Rhode Island, 38% spoke English, 49% spoke Spanish, 13% were bilingual in Spanish and English, and 1% spoke another language (Portuguese or Creole).¹⁹

◆ As of December 2024, of the 2,442 children in the CCAP program with reported Hispanic ethnicity, 36% were enrolled in family child care, 63% 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	3	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	33%	0%
Bristol	3	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	67%	0%
Burrillville	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	50%	0%
Central Falls	13	11	0	11	2	0	0	0	100%	0%
Charlestown	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Coventry	3	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	33%	0%
Cranston	44	38	6	20	17	0	1	0	86%	2%
Cumberland	7	2	4	2	0	0	1	0	43%	14%
East Greenwich	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
East Providence	3	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	67%	0%
Exeter	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
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	7	7	0	4	2	0	1	0	100%	14%
Lincoln	6	4	2	2	1	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	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
North Providence	7	7	0	7	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
North Smithfield	4	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	50%	0%
Pawtucket	25	21	2	11	9	1	1	1	92%	8%
Portsmouth	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Providence	251	231	16	120	101	10	2	2	94%	2%
Richmond	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Scituate	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Smithfield	1	1	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	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
Warwick	5	1	3	2	0	0	0	0	40%	0%
West Greenwich	0	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
West Warwick	3	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	67%	0%
Westerly	2	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	100%	0%
Woonsocket	5	4	1	3	1	0	0	0	80%	0%
Four Core Cities	294	267	19	145	113	11	3	3	94%	2%
Remainder of State	120	78	40	52	23	0	5	0	67%	4%
Rhode Island	414	345	59	197	136	11	8	3	86%	3%

High-Quality Early Learning Programs

Table 34.

Public Schools with Preschool Classrooms Participating in the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System, Rhode Island, January 2025

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	1	0	0	0	0	1	50%	50%
Bristol Warren	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	100%	100%
Burrillville	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Central Falls	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	50%	50%
Chariho	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	50%	0%
Coventry	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	50%	50%
Cranston	5	0	1	0	0	2	2	100%	80%
Cumberland	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	100%	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	0	1	100%	100%
Foster	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Glocester	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	100%	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	NA	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	6	1	0	0	0	4	1	83%	83%
Portsmouth	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
Providence	11	3	0	4	2	0	2	73%	18%
Scituate	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Smithfield	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	100%	100%
South Kingstown	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	100%	100%
Tiverton	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Warwick	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
West Warwick	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	50%	50%
Westerly	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
Woonsocket	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Charter Schools	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Collaboratives	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
State-Operated Schools	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	100%	100%
Four Core Cities	21	7	0	4	2	5	3	67%	38%
Remainder of State	46	16	5	3	2	9	11	65%	43%
Rhode Island	67	23	5	7	4	14	14	66%	42%

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 2025. Data on public schools are from the Rhode Island Department of Education, January 2025. Data on BrightStars quality ratings are from the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children, January 2025.

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

- ^{1,4} Donoghue, E. A. & AAP Council on Early Childhood. (2017). Quality early education and child care from birth to kindergarten. *Pediatrics*, 140(2): e20171488.
- ^{2,3} Gordon, J., Herbst, C. M., & Tekin, E. (2018). *Who's minding the kids?: Experimental evidence on the demand for child care quality*. National Bureau of Economic Research.
- ^{5,9} Pianta, R., Downer, J., & Hamre, B. (2016). Quality in early education classrooms: Definitions, gaps, and systems. *The Future of Children*, 26(2), 119-137.
- ⁶ Phillips, D., Austin, L. J. E., & Whitebook, M. (2016). The early care and education workforce. *The Future of Children*, 26(2), 139-158.
- ^{7,8} Workman, S. & Ullrich, R. (2017). *Quality 101: Identifying the core components of a high-quality early childhood program*. 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 Rhode Island Department of Education. *Early Childhood Education: BrightStars and Public Preschools*. Retrieved February 19, 2025, from www.ride.ri.gov/instruction-assessment/early-childhood-education

(continued on page 186)

References

(continued from page 113)

References for Children Enrolled in Early Intervention

⁸ Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Medicaid Core Set Measure, Developmental Screenings Children Under Age 3, Calendar Year 2023, Federal Fiscal Year 2024.

^{9,10,11,12} Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services, 2019 - 2024.

¹³ Anderson, P. (2021, November 26). Rhode Island Early Intervention program for infants and toddlers in 'crisis.' *The Providence Journal*. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from <https://www.providencejournal.com/story/news/politics/2021/11/26/rhode-island-early-intervention-program-shortage-therapists-clinicians/8748277002/>

¹⁴ Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Early Intervention Data Dashboard, Retrieved January 20, 2025, from www.eohhs.ri.gov/consumer/families-children/early-intervention-program/early-intervention-data-dashboard

(continued from page 115)

References for Children Enrolled in Early Head Start

¹¹ Rhode Island KIDS COUNT calculations using enrollment data from Early Head Start programs for the numerator and estimating the number of low-income children under age three using number of children under age 3 according to Census 2020, Table PCT12 multiplied by the percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (at or below 185% of the federal poverty level) in each city or town's school district for the denominator.

¹⁵ Sandstrom, H., Kuhns, C., & Drukker, D. (2024). *Staff shortages in Early Head Start programs*. Urban Institute.

¹⁶ National Head Start Association. (2023, October). *An update on Head Start's ongoing workforce crisis*.

(continued from page 119)

References for Children Receiving Child Care Subsidies

⁷ U.S. Department of the Treasury. (2021). *The economics of child care supply in the United States*. Retrieved April 2, 2022, from www.treasury.gov

⁸ McLean, C., Austin, L. J. E., Whitebook, M., & Olson, K. L. (2021). *Early childhood workforce index 2020*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

⁹ National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2018). *Transforming the financing of early care and education*. The National Academies Press.

¹⁰ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2024). *May 2023 State occupational employment and wage estimates, Rhode Island*. Retrieved February 24, 2025, from https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_ri.htm

^{11,12,13} Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Child Care Assistance Program enrollment, 2003-2024.

(continued from page 123)

References for High-Quality Early Learning Programs

^{13,14,15,19} Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Rhode Island Department of Education, Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children, licensed child care programs and public schools with BrightStars ratings, January 2021 – January 2025.

¹⁶ Maxwell, K. L., Blasberg, A., Early, D. M., Li, W., & Orfali, N. (2016). *Executive summary: Evaluation of Rhode Island's BrightStars Child Care Center and Preschool Quality Framework*. Child Trends.

^{17,20} Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Child Care Assistance Program enrollment, December 2024.

¹⁸ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2024). *May 2023 State occupational employment and wage estimates, Rhode Island*. Retrieved January 22, 2025, from https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_ri.htm

(continued from page 127)

References for Children Enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K

¹⁰ National Head Start Association. (2022). *Fact sheet: State investments in Head Start and Early Head Start to support at-risk children and families*. Retrieved March 10, 2024, from <https://nhsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2022-EHS-State-Investments.pdf>

^{11,12,13} Rhode Island KIDS COUNT calculations using Rhode Island Head Start and RI Pre-K program enrollment data as the numerator and the estimated number of children ages three and four from Census 2020 as the denominator for all children and multiplied by the percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (at or below 185% of the federal poverty level) to estimate the number of low-income children.

^{14,15,16,19,29,32,34} Rhode Island Head Start and Early Head Start Program reports to Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, October 2015-2024.

¹⁷ National Head Start Association. (2023, October). *An update on Head Start's ongoing workforce crisis*. Retrieved March 23, 2025, from www.nhsa.org

^{18,20,21,30,36,37} Rhode Island Department of Education, RI Pre-K, October 2015-2024.

²² Bustamante, A. S., Dearing, E., Zachrisson, H. D., Vandell, D. L., Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2021). *High-quality early child care and education: The gift that lasts a lifetime*. Retrieved February 19, 2024, from www.brookings.edu

^{23,26} Barnett, W. S. & Friedman-Krauss, A. H. (2016). *State(s) of Head Start*. National Institute for Early Education Research.

²⁴ Schanzenbach, D. W. & Bauer, L. (2016). *The long-term impact of the Head Start program*. Retrieved March 25, 2021, from www.brookings.edu

²⁵ Barnett, W. S. (2012). *Rhode Island State Pre-K Demonstration Program evaluation*. Presentation to the Rhode Island General Assembly.

^{31,35} Rhode Island Department of Human Services, children participating in the Child Care Assistance Program, December 2024.

³⁵ Office of Head Start, Program Information Report (PIR) Summary Report, 2024, State Level – Rhode Island. Retrieved March 23, 2025, from the Head Start Enterprise System at <https://hses.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/pir/reports>

(continued from page 129)

References for Children Receiving Preschool Special Education Services

^{1,3,9,12} Hebbeler, K. & Spiker, D. (2016). Supporting young children with disabilities. *The Future of Children*, 26(2), 185-205.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). *Facts about developmental disabilities*. Retrieved February 13, 2022, from www.cdc.gov

^{4,5} Rhode Island Department of Education. (2018). *Rhode Island's guidelines for implementing Child Outreach screening*.

⁶ Rhode Island Department of Education, 2023-2024 Child Outreach Screening, Referral, Evaluation and Eligibility Data.

⁷ Rhode Island Department of Education, 2018-2019 and 2021-2022 Child Outreach Screening Rates.

⁸ Zablotsky, B., et al. (2019). Prevalence and trends of developmental disabilities among children in the United States, 2009-2017. *Pediatrics*, 144(4), 1-11.

^{10,14,15,16} Rhode Island Department of Education, June 2024 Special Education Census.

¹¹ Rhode Island Department of Education, June 2019 Special Education Census.

¹³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education. (2023). *Policy statement on inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood programs*. Retrieved January 26, 2024, from <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/>

(continued from page 131)

Source of Data for Table/Methodology for Public School Enrollment and Demographics

Students enrolled in state-operated schools, charter schools, and collaboratives are not counted in totals for the four core cities or for the remainder of the state, but they are included in the Rhode Island state totals.

References for Public School Enrollment and Demographics

¹ Barton, P. E. & Coley, R. J. (2009). *Parsing the achievement gap II*. Educational Testing Service.

^{2,3,5,7,10} Rhode Island Department of Education [RIDE]. (2024). *Public schools enrollment dashboard*. Retrieved December 4, 2024, from <https://datacenter.ride.ri.gov/Home/FileDetail?fileid=994>

⁴ RIDE. (2024). *Private/parochial school data, 2023-2024 school year*.

⁶ RIDE. (2024). *RI Pre-K enrollment October 1, 2024*.

⁸ RIDE. (2024). *Office for Diverse Learners, Special Education Census, 2023-2024 school year*.