

K-12 Students Receiving Special Education Services

DEFINITION

K-12 students receiving special education services is the percentage of students in grades K-12 who received special education services in Rhode Island public schools or who were placed in private special education programs by their district of residence.

SIGNIFICANCE

Approximately 17% of U.S. children ages three to 17 have a developmental delay or disability. Developmental disabilities are more common in boys and among children in low-income and less educated families. Young children living in poverty often have adverse early experiences and multiple risk factors that can negatively impact brain development and lead to increased prevalence of developmental disabilities.¹

The federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* guarantees a free appropriate public education to every child with a disability. Prior to passage of the original 1975 federal law, many children with disabilities were excluded from public school. Since its passage, outcomes for children with disabilities have steadily improved. More students with disabilities are being educated in neighborhood schools, included in general education classrooms, reaching proficiency standards, graduating from high school, enrolling in postsecondary

education programs, and becoming employed as adults.² Concerns remain that not all children who could benefit from services are identified, that Children of Color are less likely to receive special education services than their white peers, and that special education funding is not adequate.³

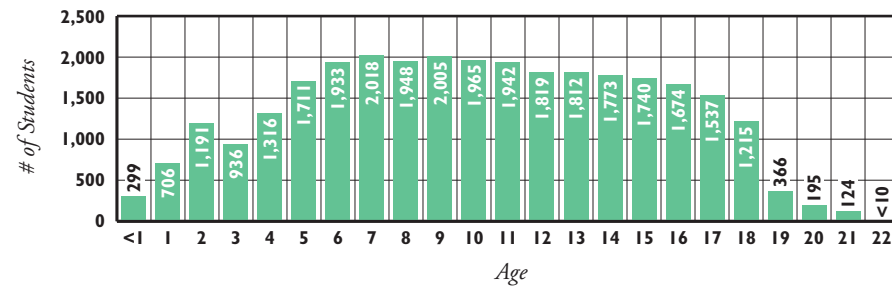
Despite improvements in high school graduation rates and postsecondary school enrollment, students with disabilities are still less likely to graduate from high school and more likely to be suspended than students without disabilities.^{4,5} Nationally, 65% to 75% of youth under age 18 who are involved in the justice system have mental, emotional, behavioral, and/or physical health problems and 33% qualify for special education.⁶

Students with disabilities are much less likely to meet or exceed expectations on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*. In 2024-2025, only 11% of third graders with a disability met or exceeded expectations in ELA and 15% in math, compared with 43% in ELA and 44% in math for students without special education needs.⁷

In Rhode Island, the four-year graduation rate for students receiving special education services in the Class of 2025 was 68% compared to 89% for students not receiving these services.⁸ Some students enrolled in special education may take additional time to graduate.



Students Ages Birth to 22 Receiving Early Intervention and Special Education Services, Rhode Island, June 2025



Source: Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Center for Child and Family Health, Early Intervention enrollment, June 30, 2025. Rhode Island Department of Education, Office of Diverse Learners, Special Education Census, June 30, 2025. Includes parentally placed students.

- ◆ As of June 2025, there were 23,740 students in grades K-12 (18% of all kindergarten through grade 12 students) receiving special education services through Rhode Island public schools. Thirty-four percent of these students had a learning disability, 20% had a health impairment, 14% had a speech/language impairment, 13% had an autism spectrum disorder, 8% had a developmental delay, 5% had an emotional disturbance, 4% had an intellectual disability, and 2% had other disabilities.⁹
- ◆ Students in grades K-12 enrolled in a traditional public school district in one of the five core cities were more likely to be receiving special education services (21%) than those enrolled in traditional public school districts in the remainder of the state (17%), in public charter schools (15%) or in state-operated public schools (11%).⁹
- ◆ As of June 2025, 76% of students ages six to 22 receiving special education services in Rhode Island were in their regular classroom for 80% of the day or more, 19% were in a regular classroom but for less than 80% of the day, 6% were in a separate school, 1% were in a residential facility, homebound, hospitalized, or in a correctional facility.⁹
- ◆ Among students ages six to 22 receiving special education services in June 2025, 64% were male, 36% were female, and <1% identified as another gender. By identified race/ethnicity, 48% were white 32% were Hispanic, 10% were Black, 6% were Multiracial, 2% were Asian, 1% were American Indian or Alaska Native, and <1% were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. The majority were low-income (68% eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch) and 17% were Multilingual Learners.⁹

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Table 42.

K-12 Students Receiving Special Education Services by Primary Disability, Rhode Island, 2025

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL # OF STUDENTS	AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER	DEVELOPMENTAL DELAY	EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE	HEALTH IMPAIRMENT	INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY	LEARNING DISABILITY	SPEECH/LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT	OTHER	TOTAL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES	% STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION
Barrington	3,227	62	12	40	96	13	98	58	12	391	12%
Bristol Warren	2,625	65	15	22	79	18	172	91	*	469	18%
Burrillville	1,942	39	29	21	59	16	162	42	*	374	19%
Central Falls	2,400	63	74	19	60	18	168	37	14	453	19%
Chariho	2,837	66	33	16	74	*	170	46	18	431	15%
Coventry	3,910	94	49	47	141	25	261	113	*	736	19%
Cranston	9,830	236	88	86	346	64	505	137	24	1,486	15%
Cumberland	4,754	142	50	32	100	20	265	87	54	750	16%
East Greenwich	2,443	49	40	11	58	14	92	25	*	296	12%
East Providence	4,977	154	75	35	205	34	322	125	11	961	19%
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,459	31	16	*	41	*	40	21	*	169	12%
Foster	225	*	*	*	*	0	*	*	*	39	17%
Foster-Glocester	1,268	15	0	*	38	*	44	*	*	119	9%
Glocester	557	*	*	*	*	0	20	37	0	79	14%
Jamestown	383	10	0	*	19	*	20	17	*	73	19%
Johnston	3,025	93	67	22	123	25	223	113	21	687	23%
Lincoln	3,159	100	33	34	122	14	186	57	*	555	18%
Little Compton	206	*	*	*	11	*	19	*	0	45	22%
Middletown	1,807	44	25	29	101	*	106	59	*	379	21%
Narragansett	900	13	*	*	24	*	48	22	*	120	13%
New Shoreham	120	0	*	*	*	*	*	*	0	19	16%
Newport	1,746	57	35	34	53	27	161	47	*	420	24%
North Kingstown	3,685	81	29	32	108	*	170	96	22	543	15%
North Providence	3,414	88	53	30	111	24	216	75	11	608	18%
North Smithfield	1,591	23	20	14	37	12	108	48	*	265	17%
Pawtucket	7,468	231	169	70	217	49	597	184	24	1,541	21%
Portsmouth	2,115	43	24	24	83	*	89	53	*	331	16%
Providence	19,841	404	424	207	640	199	1,236	618	79	3,807	19%
Scituate	1,178	21	*	*	35	*	57	52	*	194	16%
Smithfield	2,295	57	28	14	82	*	125	40	*	364	16%
South Kingstown	2,192	53	27	15	96	*	89	52	10	349	16%
Tiverton	1,492	49	17	21	79	11	103	25	*	312	21%
Warwick	7,636	219	177	103	338	46	532	146	27	1,588	21%
West Warwick	3,354	105	58	51	156	31	232	81	17	731	22%
Westerly	2,053	53	27	22	115	11	86	59	11	384	19%
Woonsocket	5,448	203	123	106	339	72	406	197	22	1,468	27%
Charter Schools	12,605	141	147	64	414	44	707	405	12	1,934	15%
Collaboratives	418	*	0	*	12	0	40	*	0	56	13%
State Operated Schools	1,778	16	0	16	43	*	97	*	17	198	11%
Department of Corrections	NA	0	0	12	*	0	*	0	0	16	NA
Five Core Cities	36,903	958	825	436	1,309	365	2,568	1,083	145	7,689	21%
Remainder of State	80,659	2,017	1,016	758	2,902	451	4,573	1,800	330	13,847	17%
Rhode Island	132,363	3,133	1,988	1,288	4,683	861	7,986	3,297	504	23,740	18%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), Office for Diverse Learners, Special Education Census June 30, 2025. Data do not include parentally placed students. The denominator (number of students) is the "resident average daily membership" (RADM) for grades K-12 in the 2024-2025 school year provided by RIDE. Special education services under the IDEA must be provided until an individual's 22nd birthday.

As of 2023-2024, students in DCYF care and those receiving instruction through DCYF operated schools (the Training School) remain enrolled with their home district/the district they were in at the time of entering DCYF care so IEP data on these youth are included in their home district's data. Data about youth with IEPs receiving educational services at the Training School are included in the Youth in the Justice System indicator.

Due to changes in methodology, K-12 Students Receiving Special Education Services in this Factbook cannot be compared with Factbooks prior to 2015. Data about preschool students receiving special education services can be found in the Children Receiving Preschool Special Education Services indicator.

* 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 five core cities, remainder of the state, and state totals.

Totals of students and percentages of students receiving special education may not sum due to rounding.

The category "other" includes students who are visually impaired, hearing impaired, deaf/blind, multi-handicapped, orthopedically impaired, and/or have traumatic brain injury.

Five core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

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