

Children Receiving Preschool Special Education Services

DEFINITION

Children receiving preschool special education services is the percentage of children ages three to five who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and are receiving special education services in Rhode Island.

SIGNIFICANCE

Preschool special education is an important component of the early care and education system, providing specially designed instruction so each child can meet learning standards. The federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* specifies that children ages three to five with disabilities, including developmental delays, have the same right to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment as school-age children with disabilities.¹

Developmental delays are identified when a child does not reach milestones at the same time as other children their age. Some young children with developmental delays are eventually diagnosed with a disability while others catch up to their peers when provided with high-quality educational opportunities, therapies, or interventions.¹² Routine developmental screening during the early stages of life, followed by evaluation and diagnostic assessment, helps children gain access to

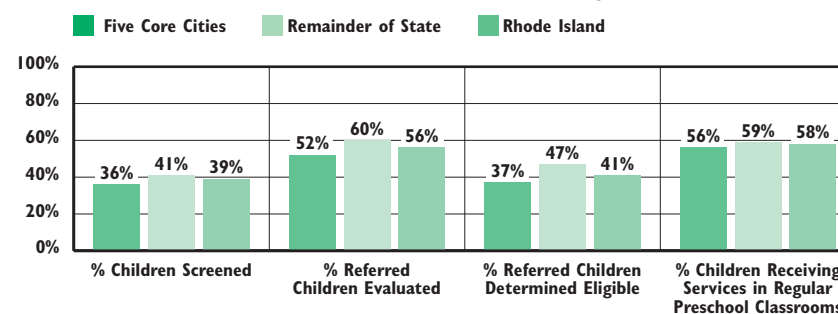
needed services to promote positive outcomes and prevent ongoing educational challenges.³

In Rhode Island, school districts work to screen every child ages three through five every year through the Child Outreach screening program.³ During the 2024-2025 school year in Rhode Island, districts completed developmental screenings for 39% of children ages three to five, up from 37% the previous year and on par with pre-pandemic rates.⁴ Preschool-age children in the five core cities were less likely to receive a developmental screening (36%) than children in the remainder of the state (41%). Of the children who were referred for evaluation based on positive screens, 56% were evaluated and 41% were determined eligible for special education. Children in the five core cities were less likely to be referred for evaluation and to be determined eligible for special education services than children in the remainder of the state.^{4,5}

Approximately 17% of U.S. children ages three to 17 have a developmental disability, with higher prevalence among low-income children, children with low birthweight, and boys.⁶ Under *IDEA*, each state sets its own criteria to determine the magnitude of a delay needed to qualify for special education services.¹



Preschool Special Education Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion Rates, Rhode Island, June 2025



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2024-2025 Child Outreach data and June 2025 Special Education Census. The percentage determined eligible is of those children referred for evaluation from Child Outreach screening.

- ◆ In June 2025, there were 3,624 children ages three to five receiving preschool special education services (11% of all preschool-age children), up from 3,518 (10%) the previous year. Children in the five core cities were more likely to receive preschool special education services (12%) than children in the remainder of the state (10%).^{7,8}
- ◆ Preschool children have improved outcomes when participating in high-quality inclusive early childhood programs. However, young children with disabilities face significant barriers in accessing high-quality, inclusive early care and education.¹⁹
- ◆ In June 2025, 58% of preschool-age children who received special education services received those services within an inclusive early childhood classroom. Children in the five core cities were less likely to receive preschool special education services in an inclusive early childhood setting (56%) than children in the remainder of the state (59%).⁷
- ◆ Many young children in Rhode Island receive *IDEA* services outside of inclusive preschool programs, with 15% receiving services through “walk-in” visits to a service provider, 18% enrolled in a separate special education class or school, and 19% enrolled in a preschool setting but receiving special education services in another location.⁷
- ◆ In June 2025, 48% of children receiving preschool special education services qualified under the developmental delay category, 36% had an identified speech/language disability, 13% were diagnosed with autism, and 4% had another diagnosed disability.⁷

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Table 37.

Children Ages 3 to 5 Receiving Special Education Services, Rhode Island, 2025

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# OF CHILDREN AGES 3-5	DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING EVALUATION, AND ELIGIBILITY, 2024-2025 SCHOOL YEAR				PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION BY SETTING JUNE 2025				
		% POPULATION SCREENED	# REFERRED FOR EVALUATION	% EVALUATED OF REFERRED	% DETERMINED ELIGIBLE OF REFERRED	% IN INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASS	% IN SELF-CONTAINED SETTING	% IN OTHER SETTING	TOTAL # RECEIVING SERVICES	% RECEIVING SERVICES
Barrington	578	43%	19	79%	54%	67%	0%	33%	49	8%
Bristol Warren	701	45%	14	54%	50%	61%	0%	39%	61	9%
Burrillville	444	39%	*	67%	67%	59%	0%	41%	51	11%
Central Falls	880	71%	63	74%	56%	66%	21%	13%	145	16%
Charlho	660	48%	33	79%	50%	64%	0%	36%	88	13%
Coventry	988	42%	19	59%	56%	49%	0%	51%	98	10%
Cranston	2,478	39%	41	39%	28%	64%	10%	26%	218	9%
Cumberland	1,292	34%	20	47%	37%	65%	17%	18%	82	6%
East Greenwich	568	45%	11	61%	50%	93%	0%	7%	45	8%
East Providence	1,423	29%	35	56%	47%	21%	59%	21%	150	11%
Exeter-West Greenwich	361	44%	*	75%	75%	54%	0%	46%	41	11%
Foster	124	NA	NA	NA	NA	36%	9%	55%	11	9%
Glocester	205	NA	NA	NA	NA	38%	10%	52%	21	10%
Jamestown	110	53%	*	100%	67%	70%	0%	30%	*	9%
Johnston	883	52%	40	66%	51%	79%	0%	21%	126	14%
Lincoln	707	46%	28	76%	73%	69%	18%	13%	119	17%
Little Compton	71	42%	*	60%	40%	63%	0%	38%	*	11%
Middletown	533	43%	13	50%	38%	56%	0%	44%	52	10%
Narragansett	178	57%	10	83%	50%	50%	0%	50%	30	17%
New Shoreham	26	65%	*	NA	NA	100%	0%	0%	*	8%
Newport	609	41%	28	74%	46%	60%	15%	25%	48	8%
North Kingstown	849	55%	26	67%	51%	63%	8%	29%	89	10%
North Providence	941	32%	18	56%	41%	57%	18%	25%	88	9%
North Smithfield	356	38%	10	91%	64%	38%	20%	43%	40	11%
Pawtucket	2,633	28%	71	42%	25%	71%	5%	24%	221	8%
Portsmouth	512	42%	12	46%	27%	59%	0%	41%	39	8%
Providence	7,248	34%	342	48%	35%	47%	34%	19%	874	12%
Scituate	278	NA	NA	NA	NA	27%	0%	73%	15	5%
Smithfield	535	57%	15	60%	32%	70%	0%	30%	47	9%
South Kingstown	549	51%	15	89%	67%	51%	0%	49%	47	9%
Tiverton	367	39%	12	48%	32%	68%	3%	29%	38	10%
Warwick	2,130	36%	56	64%	55%	59%	23%	18%	235	11%
West Warwick	850	41%	33	58%	51%	61%	25%	14%	133	16%
Westerly	502	48%	11	58%	37%	89%	0%	11%	53	11%
Woonsocket	1,638	37%	69	73%	59%	68%	8%	24%	241	15%
Charter Schools	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	100%	0%	0%	*	NA
State-Operated Schools	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0%	100%	0%	*	NA
Collaboratives	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Five Core Cities	13,008	36%	573	52%	37%	56%	24%	20%	1,529	12%
Remainder of State	20,199	41%	519	60%	47%	59%	13%	28%	2,095	10%
Rhode Island	33,207	39%	1,092	56%	41%	58%	18%	24%	3,624	11%

Sources of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), June 2025 Special Education Census. Beginning in 2020, the early childhood special education census data was adjusted to exclude children age five on June 30 who were enrolled in kindergarten, and they were included in the K-12 special education census.

2024-2025 Developmental screening, referral, evaluation, and eligibility data is from the RIDE Office of Student, Community, and Academic Supports. Foster, Glocester, and Scituate school districts collaborate as the Northwest Region to conduct screenings, evaluations, and eligibility determinations and data are not available separately for these districts. The Northwest Region screened 39% of their age 3 to 5 population and referred 14 for evaluation. Of those referred for evaluation, 100% had an evaluation completed and 79% were determined eligible for preschool special education services in 2024-2025.

*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.

The denominator is the number of children ages three to five residing in each district during the 2024-2025 school year from the Rhode Island Department of Health's KIDSNET database shared with RIDE.

Due to changes in the denominator, screening rates and percentage receiving preschool special education services should not be compared with data in Factbooks published before 2016.

Inclusive early childhood class means children receive the majority of their special education services in a regular early childhood education class at a public school, a Head Start program, or a community-based child care program or preschool. Data include children who are district-placed and who are parentally placed.

The Charter school is Highlander Charter School.

The State-Operated schools is the Rhode Island School for the Deaf.

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

(References are on page 186)

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Source of Data for Table/Methodology for Children Participating in School Meals

Collaboratives include Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program, West Bay Collaborative and YouthBuild Preparatory Academy.

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

The October 2025 enrollment is for the full month of October and is not comparable with the October 1, 2025 enrollment numbers reported elsewhere in the 2026 *Factbook*.

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