

2024 -- H 7497

LC004490

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2024

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- RHODE ISLAND PREKINDERGARTEN EDUCATION ACT

Introduced By: Representatives McNamara, Donovan, Cruz, Alzate, Solomon, Casey, Bennett, and Ackerman

Date Introduced: February 02, 2024

Referred To: House Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 16-87 of the General Laws entitled "Rhode Island Prekindergarten
2 Education Act" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following sections:

3 **16-87-8. High quality, universal prekindergarten.**

4 (a) The general assembly acknowledges the need to adequately prepare all children to
5 succeed in school by providing access to publicly funded, high quality prekindergarten education
6 programs for all children ages three (3) and four (4) and to sustain and expand access to high-
7 quality early care and education programs for infants and toddlers under age three (3).

8 (b) Access to free, inclusive and high-quality prekindergarten classrooms in a mixed-
9 delivery system that includes state investments to be layered on top of federal investments to sustain
10 and expand the federally managed Head Start program model for children ages three (3) and four
11 (4) and the federally managed Early Head Start program model for infants and toddlers under age
12 three (3).

13 The state managed prekindergarten program model shall be sustained and expanded in a
14 mixed delivery-system that includes Head Start agencies, local education agencies, licensed center-
15 based child care providers, and licensed family child care providers, or family child care networks,
16 shall be expanded annually across all communities in Rhode Island until every family who wants
17 a high-quality prekindergarten seat for their children ages three (3) or four (4), has one.

18 (c) Universal access will be considered achieved when no less than seventy percent (70%)

1 of all children ages three (3) and four (4) are enrolled in high-quality prekindergarten programs.

2 (d)(1) The Rhode Island prekindergarten program administered by the department of
3 elementary and secondary education shall make funds available that are needed to sustain all
4 existing RI Pre-K classrooms through a mixed-delivery model to ensure the median wages for all
5 to RI Pre-K teachers and teaching assistants are at least equal to the median wages of public
6 kindergarten teaching staff with comparable qualifications and experience.

7 (2) The department of human services shall make funds available through state contracts
8 with Head Start agencies to support programs in offering competitive wages to Head Start and
9 Early Head Start classroom teachers and teaching assistants with the goal of ensuring the median
10 wages for all Head Start teachers and teaching assistants are at least equal to the median wages of
11 public kindergarten teaching staff with comparable qualifications and experience.

12 (3) Any new funding allocated for expansion of the Rhode Island prekindergarten program
13 shall include a thirty percent (30%) set aside of funding to be administered by the department of
14 human services to sustain and expand access to high-quality child care and early learning programs
15 for infants and toddlers.

16 (e) On or before October 1, 2024, and annually on or before October 1 thereafter, the
17 department of elementary and secondary education, in collaboration with the department of human
18 services, the Head Start Collaboration Office, and the RI early learning council, shall submit to the
19 governor, speaker of the house, senate president, and chairs of house and senate finance committees
20 and education committees a status report and updated year-by-year growth plan to achieve
21 universal access to high-quality prekindergarten for all children ages three (3) and four (4)
22 including investments in both the federally managed Head Start model and the state managed
23 prekindergarten model; the growth plan shall detail annual growth targets and projected funding
24 needs, as well as how the state will:

25 (1) Equitably distribute prekindergarten funding to eligible providers, to sustain and
26 expand access to both the federally managed Head Start model and the state managed
27 prekindergarten model, as described in §16-87-9(a);

28 (2) Ensure that Early Head Start classrooms serving infants and toddlers under age three
29 (3) are adequately funded and can be sustained and expanded with a combination of federal and
30 state resources to deliver high-quality early care and education staffed with competitively-
31 compensated educators who meet or exceed the qualifications outlined in the federal Head Start
32 Performance Standards;

33 (3) Set year-by-year investment targets for each year of the pre-K growth plan to sustain
34 and improve access to high-quality infant-toddler early care and education in both child care centers

1 and family child care homes staffed with qualified and skilled educators;

2 (4) Identify resources needed to prepare, recruit and retain a highly-qualified early
3 childhood educator workforce statewide to staff existing programs that provide support for healthy
4 child development and early learning opportunities for children from infancy through age five (5).
5 This shall include resources needed to ensure competitive compensation to attract and retain
6 qualified and skilled early childhood educators, regardless of setting, that provide a living wage
7 and are equivalent to wages to public kindergarten teaching staff with similar credentials and
8 experience in the state;

9 (5) Build capacity among new and existing early care and education providers to ensure
10 quality standards are met in all settings; and

11 (6) Ensure providers in the mixed-delivery system have sufficient facilities to expand
12 access to high-quality prekindergarten and infant/toddler early care and education services.

13 **16-87-9. High quality elements.**

14 (a) To expand access to high-quality prekindergarten education programs, the state shall
15 implement and provide sufficient funding to support a mixed-delivery system including state
16 investments to sustain all state prekindergarten, Head Start, and Early Head Start classrooms
17 statewide and to expand these models through contracting with eligible providers including local
18 education agencies, Head Start agencies, licensed center-based child care providers, licensed family
19 child care providers or licensed family child-care provider networks, or a consortium of these
20 entities.

21 (b) To build and maintain an adequate system of providers, the state shall support a
22 continuous quality improvement system for providers of prekindergarten services participating in,
23 or seeking to participate in, the state prekindergarten program and shall work with the federal Office
24 of Head Start to ensure all Head Start and Early Head Start programs receive continuous quality
25 improvement support

26 (c) The Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary education (the
27 "department") is hereby authorized to promulgate and adopt rules and regulations for the
28 implementation of high quality, universal prekindergarten. Research-based quality standards shall
29 be defined in regulation by the department, and shall meet or exceed the recommended quality
30 standards for state preschool programs outlined by the National Institute for Early Education
31 Research and/or the federal Head Start Performance Standards. Quality standards shall include, but
32 not be limited to:

33 (1) Teacher education and certification;

34 (2) Class size and staff ratios;

- 1 (3) Learning time;
2 (4) Developmentally appropriate, evidence-based learning standards;
3 (5) Curriculum prioritizing developmentally appropriate, play-based learning;
4 (6) Access, inclusion and support for students with special needs, including a system to
5 ensure delivery of high-quality, inclusive early education services required by the Individuals with
6 Disabilities Education Act to children with developmental delays and disabilities who are enrolled
7 in community-based programs which may or may not be located in the same municipality where
8 the child lives;
9 (7) Support for English language learners;
10 (8) Professional development;
11 (9) Child assessments; and
12 (10) Observations and coaching to improve practice.

13 (d) To whatever extent deemed necessary by the department, quality standards may be
14 differentiated by prekindergarten education setting and include federal support and oversight for
15 the Head Start and Early Head Start Performance Standards, such that every provider-type in a
16 mixed-delivery model is able and expected to meet the highest research-based quality standards as
17 defined by the department.

18 **16-87-10. Successful transition.**

19 (a) Successful coordination between Rhode Island's high-quality prekindergarten and
20 kindergarten programs is essential for setting a solid foundation for all students. In order to have a
21 seamless pathway from prekindergarten to third grade, standards, curriculum, instruction and
22 assessments shall be aligned.

23 (b) Effective transition programs and practices to help students and families move
24 successfully from one setting to another shall be established.

25 (c) All local education agencies (LEAs) in Rhode Island shall develop a kindergarten
26 transition strategy to support incoming students and families. The transition strategy must include:

- 27 (1) Student and family communication and engagement plans; and
28 (2) Program-level transition plans including student visits to their future kindergarten
29 classroom.

30 **16-87-11. Prekindergarten facilities.**

31 (a) No later than December 31, 2024, the department of human services shall provide the
32 senate president and the speaker of the house with a report on the status of disbursement and impact
33 of capital funds made available by the early learning facilities general obligation bond approved
34 March 2, 2021.

1 (b) The department of elementary and secondary education and the department of human
2 services shall establish programs and initiatives to ensure providers renovate, acquire, develop,
3 and/or expand facilities that meet licensing and facilities standards, in order to sustain and increase
4 access to high-quality prekindergarten and early learning environments. Programs and initiatives
5 may include, but shall not be limited to:

6 (1) Grant programs to be used for facility planning, predevelopment activities, and/or
7 urgent facility maintenance required for the health, safety and quality of existing programs;

8 (2) Supporting the establishment of strategic partnerships between local education agencies
9 and community-based early learning providers to make use of available space in existing facilities;
10 and/or

11 (3) Technical assistance for providers to access capital, navigate licensing standards for
12 facilities, and/or begin the facility improvement and development processes.

13 SECTION 2. Section 16-87-4 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-87 entitled "Rhode Island
14 Prekindergarten Education Act" is hereby amended to read as follows:

15 **16-87-4. Early childhood workforce development.**

16 (a) The Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary education shall work with
17 ~~other state departments and private philanthropy to establish~~ the department of human services to
18 sustain and expand the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood program, a statewide, comprehensive,
19 research-based early childhood workforce development scholarship program to expand the number
20 of early childhood educators who have an associate's or bachelor's degree in early childhood
21 education and who work with children from birth to age five (5).

22 (b)(1) In furtherance of the goals set forth in this chapter, no later than January 1, 2023, the
23 governor's workforce board shall convene a working group comprised of representatives from the
24 department of elementary and secondary education, department of human services, office of the
25 postsecondary commissioner, the RI early learning council, organized labor, and early childhood
26 education industry employers, whose purpose shall be to identify barriers to entry into the early
27 childhood education workforce, and to design accessible and accelerated pathways into the
28 workforce, including, but not limited to, registered apprenticeships and postsecondary credit for
29 prior work experience.

30 (2) No later than April 1, 2023, the working group shall provide the general assembly with
31 recommendations for addressing the barriers to workforce entry and implementing the solutions
32 identified by the working group; the recommendations shall outline any administrative and
33 legislative action that would be required by participating agencies to implement the
34 recommendations.

1 (3) If and when appropriate, and in accordance with program administration guidelines, the
2 industry employers may seek to create a sector partnership via the real jobs Rhode Island program
3 to implement workforce solutions.

4 SECTION 3. Sections 16-87-3 and 16-87-5 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-87 entitled
5 "Rhode Island Prekindergarten Education Act" are hereby repealed.

6 ~~**16-87-3. Planning phase for a prekindergarten program.**~~

7 ~~(a) The Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary education shall begin~~
8 ~~planning an initial, pilot prekindergarten program that meets high quality standards, builds on the~~
9 ~~existing early childhood education infrastructure in the state (including child care, Head Start and~~
10 ~~public schools) and serves children ages three (3) and four (4) who reside in communities with~~
11 ~~concentrations of low performing schools. This planning phase will develop specific goals to~~
12 ~~expand the pilot prekindergarten program over time and will also identify opportunities to~~
13 ~~strengthen care and learning programs for infants and toddlers.~~

14 ~~(b) During this planning phase, the Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary~~
15 ~~education will quantify the resources needed to achieve and maintain high quality standards in~~
16 ~~prekindergarten programs and identify incentives and supports to develop a qualified early~~
17 ~~education workforce, including opportunities for experienced early childhood educators and~~
18 ~~paraprofessionals to acquire college degrees and earn early childhood teacher certification.~~

19 ~~(c) The Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary education will begin to~~
20 ~~develop plans to collect and analyze data regarding the impact of the pilot prekindergarten program~~
21 ~~on participating children's school readiness and school achievement.~~

22 ~~**16-87-5. Reporting.**~~

23 ~~The Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary education shall report back to~~
24 ~~the general assembly and the governor on the progress of the pilot planning phase no later than~~
25 ~~October 31, 2008.~~

26 SECTION 4. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO EDUCATION -- RHODE ISLAND PREKINDERGARTEN EDUCATION
ACT

1 This act would establish guidelines for the continued implementation and expansion of
2 public, high quality prekindergarten education programs with the goal of reaching all children ages
3 three (3) and four (4) throughout Rhode Island to increase children's school readiness. This act
4 would require continued investments in the RI Pre-K, Head Start, and Early Head Start models;
5 require adequate funding to provide compensation parity with comparably qualified public
6 kindergarten teaching staff; and require a 30% funding set-aside of prekindergarten expansion
7 funds to sustain and expand access to high-quality child care and early learning programs for infants
8 and toddlers. This act would also repeal the statutory laws pertaining to the initial pilot
9 prekindergarten program.

10 This act would take effect upon passage.

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