

2020 -- S 2462

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LC003813
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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2020

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A N A C T

RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- OFFICE OF HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES

Introduced By: Senators Cano, Lawson, Conley, Goodwin, and Gallo

Date Introduced: February 13, 2020

Referred To: Senate Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Legislative findings. The general assembly hereby finds and declares:

2 (1) Young children's healthy brain development and learning depends on consistent,
3 nurturing care and enriching learning opportunities at home and in early care and education
4 settings. Starting at birth, day-to-day interactions with family members and early educators shape
5 children's brain architecture upon which all future learning and development is built.

6 (2) Many of the early educators and early childhood professionals in Rhode Island earn
7 very low wages even when they achieve credentials equivalent to K-12 teachers and demonstrate
8 effective practices. Child care, family home visiting, and early intervention programs across the
9 state report difficulty attracting, developing, and retaining effective early childhood professionals.

10 (3) A 2019 statewide survey of early childhood professionals in Rhode Island found that
11 over 40% of infant/toddler educators worry about having enough food to feed their family and
12 50% worry about having enough money to pay for housing.

13 (4) Almost one-third of early educators have a second job to help make ends meet and
14 almost two thirds report that they plan to leave their early education job if the compensation does
15 not improve. And yet, most report that they enjoy working with children and families and many
16 have earned college credits and degrees in child development and early education.

17 (5) A landmark report issued by the National Academy of Science in 2015 found that
18 educators of young children, including infants and toddlers, need the same high level of

1 knowledge and competencies as teachers of older children and that educational qualifications and
2 compensation of early educators should be equivalent to those of K-12 teachers.

3 (6) According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median wage for a
4 child care teacher in Rhode Island in 2018 was \$12.15/hour, well-below the state median wage of
5 \$20.21/hour and significantly below the level of kindergarten teachers who had an average annual
6 salary of \$65,530. Rhode Island state agency data show that median wages for early intervention
7 providers and family home visitors range from \$13.50/hour to \$20.00/hour.

8 (7) By enacting this law, the general assembly acknowledges the need to develop and
9 implement strategies to improve the compensation of early educators so programs can attract,
10 develop, and retain effective staff to care for and educate young children and provide family-
11 focused services.

12 SECTION 2. Chapter 42-7.2 of the General Laws entitled "Office of Health and Human
13 Services" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

14 **42-7.2-7.1. Establishment of early educators target wage scale.**

15 (a)(1) The secretary in consultation with the department of education shall establish goals
16 to improve compensation, including a common target wage scale for early educators working
17 with children from birth through third grade. The target wage scale shall apply to early educators
18 who have attained an education level above high school and demonstrated competence working
19 with children and families. The target wage scale shall be developed to apply to educators
20 working in child care centers, family child care homes, family home visiting programs, and early
21 intervention programs. The target wage scale shall promote parity with kindergarten through
22 grade twelve (K-12) public school teachers for individuals with similar credentials.

23 (2) In developing this target wage scale, the secretary in consultation with the department
24 of education may consider the findings and recommendations provided in the 2019 Moving the
25 Needle on Compensation Task Force's report "Improving the Compensation and Retention of
26 Effective Infant/Toddler Educators in Rhode Island."

27 (b) Upon establishment of the target wage scale, the secretary in consultation with the
28 department of education shall design strategies and estimate the cost to close the gap between
29 current wages and the target wage scale, including parity with public school teaching staff or
30 individuals with similar credentials. In developing the plan, the following components shall be
31 considered:

32 (1) Continuation and expansion of the existing statewide, comprehensive, research-based
33 early childhood workforce development scholarship program established pursuant to § 16-87-4 to
34 include stronger and ongoing support for compensation, such as implementation of wage

1 supplements or regular stipends for early educators to increase annual income to meet or exceed
2 the levels in the target wage scale. Consideration shall be given to the Infant/Toddler Educator
3 Education and Retention Awards demonstration program recommended by the Moving the
4 Needle on Compensation's Task Force.

5 (2) Proposals to increase rates paid to early childhood programs that are adequate to
6 enable programs to pay early educators wages that meet or exceed the levels in the target wage
7 scale.

8 (3) State contracts with early childhood programs to expand the availability of high-
9 quality services for young children and families with educators in the program paid wages that
10 meet or exceed the levels in the target wage scale.

11 (4) Establishment of registered apprenticeships for early educators that support
12 completion of college coursework and attainment of college credentials while providing
13 opportunities to develop high-quality practices through regular on-the-job coaching by
14 established early educators. Apprenticeships shall be designed and funded to enable successful
15 participants to earn wages that meet or exceed the levels in the target wage scale.

16 (c) Reporting: The secretary shall report back to the governor and general assembly on or
17 before December 1, 2020, with a target wage scale and initial cost estimates for public funding to
18 close the wage gaps for early educators.

19 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

A N A C T

RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- OFFICE OF HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES

- 1 This act would provide that the secretary of health and human services in consultation
- 2 with the department of education establish an early educators' target wage scale.
- 3 This act would take effect upon passage.

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