



RIDE Rhode Island
Department
of Education

INVESTING EARLY IN SCHOOL SUCCESS

PROVIDING HIGH QUALITY PRE-KINDERGARTEN FOR RHODE ISLAND'S 4 YEAR OLDS

Executive Summary December 2014

In 2009, Rhode Island established a state-funded pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) program. The pilot program initially included 126 four-year-old children and their families. Simultaneous to the pilot launch, Rhode Island began working with the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), a nationally respected early childhood education research organization, to conduct a landmark randomized control research study to evaluate the effects of Rhode Island's Pre-K pilot program on participating children's early learning outcomes.

At the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year, Rhode Island, in partnership with NIEER, began studying impacts of the Rhode Island Pre-K Demonstration Project on children from all income levels. Children enrolled in the Pre-K pro-

gram formed the *experimental, or Pre-K*, group in the study and the control group of children came from the waiting list. The *control group* children applied to the Demonstration Project, but were not selected by a random lottery held by RIDE in September 2009. In 2009 - 2010, 339 children participated in the study, with 126 children in the state pre-K classrooms. In 2010 - 2011, a second wave of 128 children enrolled in the state pre-K classrooms. The study took place in seven classrooms across the state. Three classrooms were located in Providence, one in Central Falls, two in Warwick, and one in Woonsocket.

The study used direct assessments to determine the impacts of the Demonstration Project on children's language, literacy, math, and social skills. Several aspects of Pre-K classroom quality were also studied through structured observations of classrooms, which were conducted in the fall of 2010 and spring 2011.



regarding Rhode Island's commitment to ongoing quality improvement within the state-funded Pre-K program.

Rhode Island's state pre-K program is currently expanding and will include 1,062 children across the state by 2022. The program is designed to meet high-quality standards, build on the existing early childhood education infrastructure in the state (including child care, Head Start and public schools), and serve children 4 years of age who reside in communities with concentrations of low performing schools.

NIEER researchers describe the results of the RI Pre-K Demonstration Project study as promising.

- **Positive effects** related to state Pre-K participation were found for children from families both below and above 185% of poverty. The two year study of Rhode Island's Pre-K Demonstration Project shows that children who participated in the state pre-K program made significant gains in print knowledge and early math skills compared to the children in the control group.
- **Participation** in the state Pre-K program had greater positive effects on children depending on their income levels.
- **The average classroom quality** of the demonstration classrooms increased over the course of the Demonstration Project due to the training and technical assistance, focused on classroom quality and improving instruction in math, science, and language supports, provided to the programs throughout the school year.

NIEER contends that long-term, increased achievement for children from low- and middle-income families will reduce educational inequality and social problems. Providing statewide, full-day kindergarten programs would likely further increase achievement and consolidate the gains from state-funded Pre-K. The researchers emphasized that the intensity and quality of the state pre-Kindergarten program were the keys to high returns, along with implementing policies to support a continuous improvement cycle that contributes to maintaining and strengthening the current state-funded Pre-K program results.

Overall, initial data showed positive effects of state Pre-K attendance for all children. These results indicate that the Rhode Island state-funded Pre-K program is a good public investment. Children who attend the state-funded Pre-K have better outcomes than children who experience the status quo (i.e. a variety of typical child care settings).

This initial report shares the findings from the NIEER study and evaluation report of the 2009 - 2011 RI Pre-K Demonstration Project, describes the growth of the state pre-K program, and provides details

