

# Report and Recommendations on RI Pre-K Expansion

*December 30, 2022*

RI Department of Education

RI Department of Human Services

RI Children's Cabinet

# Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Executive Summary  | 3  |
| Acknowledgements   | 11 |
| Why Invest in High-Quality Pre-K   | 12 |
| Definition and Principles of RI Pre-K  | 12 |
| Current State of RI Pre-K  | 13 |
| Key Focus 1: Equitable Access to RI Pre-K  | 15 |
| Key Focus 2: Expanding RI Pre-K to Three-Year Olds   | 20 |
| Key Focus 3: Ensuring Equitable Access to RI Pre-K for Children with Disabilities                                    | 24 |
| Key Focus 4: Expanding RI Pre-K in the Mixed-Delivery System   | 29 |
| Key Focus 5: Supporting Early Childhood Educators: Preparing, Recruiting, and Retaining a Highly Qualified Workforce | 38 |
| Key Focus 6: Supporting Strong Transitions to Kindergarten   | 47 |
| Key Focus 7: Sustaining and Growing the Infant/Toddler Sector  | 50 |
| Cost of Delivering High-Quality RI Pre-K   | 54 |
| Annual Growth Plan and Budget Projections  | 58 |
| Endnotes   | 65 |

# Executive Summary

As part of the Enacted FY 2023 State Budget Article 10, Section 4, the Department of Education (RIDE), in collaboration with the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Children’s Cabinet, were charged with developing a planning report related to the expansion of RI’s state prekindergarten program, known as RI Pre-K. The statute called for a growth plan with annual targets and projected funding needs to achieve the expansion of RI Pre-K to 5,000 seats, including children ages three and four, with recommendations regarding: equitable investment in the mixed-delivery system, preparing, recruiting, and retaining a highly-qualified workforce, building capacity among new and existing providers, considerations related to facilities, and ensuring that access to infant and toddler care is not at risk during the expansion. This report outlines considerations and investments in infrastructure, educators, and operations to respond to each of these areas. In addition, this report discusses the broader birth to age five system as it relates to RI Pre-K and highlights areas where additional and dedicated strategic planning is needed to protect against unintended consequences and support the broader early childhood system.

**High-quality early learning programs lead to improved academic achievement and increased economic benefits for families.** During the first five years of a child’s life their brains are developing rapidly, making more than a million neural connections every minute. This time of tremendous brain development creates a unique opportunity to positively impact the brain architecture which supports children’s development and long-term academic success. Research consistently shows that early experiences matter, and that high-quality early learning helps all children have a strong start, putting them on a path to future success both in school and life. Research also shows that investing in early childhood has positive long-term economic benefits for society – for every dollar of investment in high-quality early childhood programs, society sees a return on investment up to 13%.<sup>1</sup> Children who attend high-quality early learning programs are more likely to graduate from high school, while also being less likely to live in poverty as adults.

**RI’s state prekindergarten program, RI Pre-K, is a high-quality early learning program delivered through the mixed-delivery system of community-based child care centers, Head Start agencies, and schools.** The RI Pre-K program – one of only six state prekindergarten programs in the country to meet all 10 high-quality criteria from the National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER) – currently serves 2,364 four-year-olds across 18 communities in the state. RI Pre-K increases tuition-free access to high-quality pre-kindergarten by investing in existing preschool settings across the mixed-delivery system and coordinating enrollments. In line with national best practices, each classroom is taught by a teacher with a bachelor’s degree and meets specific standards, including implementing RIDE-endorsed high-quality curriculum.

RI Pre-K layers various funding sources including general revenue, federal Head Start and Child Care Development Block Grant funds, and federal grants in order to maximize family choice, engage more providers in RI Pre-K delivery, and optimize all fund sources. The overall cost of RI Pre-K reflects the labor-intensive nature of early education, which is rooted in supportive adult/child interactions, along with professional development, technical assistance, and adequate materials and facilities that foster children’s development. To maintain this level of quality during expansion, RI Pre-K – as well as the enabling early childhood systems – will need operational support and sufficient funding.

**To be successful, RI Pre-K expansion must be considered in the context of the broader birth to age five early education sector and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.** RI has expanded to the current 2,300 seats over eleven years and has built a strong foundation and model that is poised for expansion. Reaching the next 2,700 seats will face different challenges which are important to highlight in order to contextualize the recommendations within the report:

- **Pandemic Recovery:** The COVID-19 pandemic has had an immense impact on the social-emotional growth and developmental experiences of young children. The students who will be attending RI Pre-K in the coming years experienced unprecedented childhoods and RI’s early learning classrooms must be prepared to support increased developmental needs.
- **Early Childhood Workforce:** The pandemic also significantly exacerbated existing workforce challenges within the early learning sector. As of the writing of this report, many classrooms across RI’s early learning sector that were open prior to the pandemic are not operating due to a lack of educators, many of whom have left the field for higher-paying positions. Attracting and retaining highly-qualified educators for RI Pre-K comes in the context of a

field that continues to face challenges in finding, training, and retaining educators due to the persistently low wages.

- **System Capacity & Pipeline Development:** Many of the programs that were early adopters of RI Pre-K have already maximized their capacity to deliver RI Pre-K classes. To reach 5,000 seats, additional support and resources will be needed to develop a pipeline of ready providers.

**Expanding RI Pre-K to 5,000 seats by 2028 will require careful planning and implementation to ensure equitable access for students, equitable investments across the mixed-delivery system, and ongoing sustainability of the program.** Following a robust planning and stakeholder engagement process, this report is organized into seven “Key Focus” sections that describe policy and implementation recommendations. Together these seven focus areas provide the foundation for the policy and implementation requirements for the initial growth plan to 5,000 seats and offer a roadmap for achieving universal prekindergarten in the future. Each Key Focus area includes a goal statement, a list of considerations for achieving the goal statement, a summary of progress made to date, and a series of recommendations for expansion. Following the Key Focus sections, the report outlines the costs associated with operating RI Pre-K and a growth model with annual targets and projected budget ranges for reaching 5,000 seats by 2028.

The proposed plan for RI Pre-K expansion is built on the following strategies, summarized below:

- **Expand RI Pre-K through the existing program framework, which is nationally recognized for quality, maximizes family choice, and optimizes public investments across early learning.** RI Pre-K is a point of pride for RI as one of only six state prekindergarten programs in the country that meet all NIEER standards. The current RI Pre-K service delivery models ensure that a broad range of existing early learning providers across the mixed-delivery system can become part of RI Pre-K and help to maximize use of all funding streams in early education (*see Cost of Delivering High-Quality RI Pre-K*). By continuing to invest in this framework, RI will ensure choice for families, provide continuity of care for children, engage more providers in RI Pre-K, and continue to maximize existing funding streams in early education. For example, one of the RI Pre-K service delivery models supports Head Start programs that already operate nationally recognized, high-quality pre-kindergarten programming to utilize RI Pre-K funds to extend the number of hours in a school day or increase the number of school days in a year to meet RI Pre-K standards.
- **Make targeted investments across the mixed-delivery system to build a pipeline of programs ready to become RI Pre-K providers so the state can open 35-40 new classrooms a year from 2025-2028.** Across the mixed-delivery system, there are enough existing providers and early learning capacity to reach 5,000 RI Pre-K seats using the current RI Pre-K service delivery models (*see Key Focus 4*). However, not all providers are in a position to open an RI Pre-K program in the near-term. Targeted investments will be needed to support child care centers, Head Start agencies, and Local Education Agencies to increase quality, address facilities barriers, and effectively operate an RI Pre-K program. Additional investments in educator pipeline will be needed to support programs in being able to find and retain qualified educators for RI Pre-K (*see Key Focus 5*). By making investments in the provider pipeline across the mixed-delivery system, RI can ensure that as funding is available for expansion all providers have an equitable opportunity to participate.
- **Develop, pilot, and implement additional program models to meet expansion goals for increased equity, access, and inclusion of 3-year olds that meet all quality standards:**
  - **RI Pre-K for 3-year olds:** Before expanding RI Pre-K to 3-year olds, invest in developing and piloting programming to incorporate 3-year olds within the program in a manner that is developmentally appropriate, meets all NIEER standards for 3-year olds, and builds on existing practices in the mixed-delivery system. In addition, address operational and policy considerations for including 3-year olds. (*See Key Focus 2*).
  - **Delivery of Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) Services:** As more children enter RI Pre-K – including 3-year olds – and an increased number of children will require ECSE services, continue to expand embedded Early Childhood Special Education supports and explore opportunities for students with disabilities to receive services outside of their school districts (*see Key Focus 3*). The growth model

includes funding specifically allocated to ECSE to support the development and implementation of embedded ECSE service delivery.

- **RI Pre-K in Family Child Care:** Currently, there is no RI Pre-K service delivery model for Family Child Care (FCC). This report proposes working with FCCs in RI and learning from best practices nationally to develop and pilot a new RI Pre-K service delivery model for FCC that meets all NIEER criteria (see *Key Focus 4*).
- **Supports for multilingual learners in RI Pre-K:** While many existing RI Pre-K providers implement multilingual accessible classrooms in RI Pre-K, this report recommends investing in identifying and scaling best practices for supporting MLLs during early childhood across all RI Pre-K settings, as 18% of current RI Pre-K students are identified as MLLs (see *Key Focus 1*).
- **Invest in ongoing program sustainability and operations to maintain nation-leading quality.** The RI Pre-K program requires a high level of administrative and operational leadership from RIDE and DHS. Investments in state agency capacity that scale with the expansion of the program, as well as enhanced multilingual family engagement supports, will ensure that the high-quality of RI Pre-K is sustained (see *Cost of Delivering High-Quality RI Pre-K*). In addition, the grant award amounts for RI Pre-K classrooms should be adjusted annually similar to the school funding formula to ensure programs can continue to attract and retain highly-qualified educators and maintain compensation parity across mixed-delivery settings (see *Key Focus 5*). The growth model incorporates these ongoing sustainability costs and adjustments over time into the projection.
- **Make aligned investments and pursue additional strategic planning to support the sustainability, quality, and growth of the birth to five sector as a whole.** RI has the benefit of learning from other states that have expanded their state prekindergarten programs about how best to ensure that the growth of prekindergarten programming does not create the unintended consequence of disinvesting in infant/toddler care or creating educator shortages in other areas of the system. As RI Pre-K expands, this report recommends aligned investments in other parts of the birth to five system – particularly in infant/toddler care – to ensure that infant/toddler care capacity expands and increases in quality in parallel with RI Pre-K expansion (see *Key Focus 5 and Key Focus 7*). The growth model incorporates a proposed infant/toddler set aside to support infant/toddler care as RI Pre-K expands.

**The growth model for RI Pre-K projects a range of investment amounts, based on a variety of investment inputs and assumptions.** The growth model for RI Pre-K incorporates the elements described above, including investments to: fund the expansion and sustainability of RI Pre-K seats, including ECSE service delivery; grow the pipeline for new programs to be ready to deliver RI Pre-K and the development of new models; and sustain and grow the infant/toddler early education sector. The growth model incorporates several assumptions into the calculations and includes high and low estimates for the full cost of growing the program.

| Summary of Growth Model Investment Drivers |                            |                           |                            |  |                            |                            |                            |                           |                            |                            |                            |
|--|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Expanding and Sustaining RI Pre-K Seats    |                            |                           |                            |  |                            | Classroom Pipeline         |                            |                           |                            | Infant/Toddler             |                            |
| % Classrooms Leveraging Other Funding      |                            | % Inflation Adjustment    |                            | % of Students in Early Childhood Special Education |                            | Classroom/program pipeline |                            | Educator Pipeline         |                            | % Infant/Toddler Set Aside |                            |
| Lower Investment Estimate                  | Higher Investment Estimate | Lower Investment Estimate | Higher Investment Estimate | Lower Investment Estimate                          | Higher Investment Estimate | Lower Investment Estimate  | Higher Investment Estimate | Lower Investment Estimate | Higher Investment Estimate | Lower Investment Estimate  | Higher Investment Estimate |
| 40%  | 5%                         | 1%                        | 4%                         | 11%  | 20%                        | \$15,000                   | \$70,000                   | \$10,000                  | \$50,000                   | 10%                        | 30%                        |

**Of note, given that approximately \$7M in time-limited federal funding ends after FY23, the funding proposed for FY24 focuses on backfilling this funding to sustain the approximately 800 existing RI Pre-K seats that are at risk for closure.** In FY25-FY28, the growth model assumes that RI Pre-K grows by 35-40 classrooms a year to reach 5,032 seats by FY28.

| Fiscal Year | New Classrooms | Total Seats | Expansion + Retention of Seats |              | Pipeline     |              | Infant/Toddler |             | Total New Funding |              | Total Amount  |               |
|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
|             |                |             | Low                            | High         | Low          | High         | Low            | High        | Low               | High         | Low           | High          |
| FY24        | 0              | 2,364       | \$7,000,000                    | \$7,000,000  | -            | -            | -              | -           | \$7,000,000       | \$7,000,000  | \$ 21,850,000 | \$ 21,850,000 |
| FY25        | 35             | 2,997       | \$9,089,282                    | \$11,982,055 | \$ 875,000   | \$ 4,200,000 | \$908,928      | \$3,594,616 | \$10,873,210      | \$19,776,671 | \$ 32,723,210 | \$ 41,626,671 |
| FY26        | 35             | 3,645       | \$9,441,307                    | \$12,950,225 | \$ 875,000   | \$ 4,200,000 | \$944,131      | \$3,885,068 | \$11,260,437      | \$21,035,293 | \$ 43,108,647 | \$ 58,461,964 |
| FY27        | 35             | 4,292       | \$9,796,852                    | \$13,957,123 | \$ 1,000,000 | \$ 4,800,000 | \$979,685      | \$4,187,137 | \$11,776,537      | \$22,944,260 | \$ 54,010,184 | \$ 77,206,224 |
| FY28        | 40             | 5,032       | \$11,287,845                   | \$16,337,737 | -            | -            | \$1,128,784    | \$4,901,321 | \$12,416,629      | \$21,239,059 | \$ 65,426,813 | \$ 93,645,283 |

While this report focuses on RI Pre-K and addresses challenges through the lens of RI Pre-K expansion, additional recommendations highlight opportunities for further strategic planning for the early childhood sector as a whole. In line with the legislative charge, this report is focused specifically on the expansion of the state’s prekindergarten program, RI Pre-K. Of note, throughout the stakeholder feedback discussions and the process of writing this report, there was significant input about the broader needs of the early childhood education sector. While RI Pre-K is an important component of early learning and supports the mixed-delivery system, it cannot alone solve the broader systemic challenges across the early childhood sector. Throughout this report, broader system topics such as educator compensation and the mixed-delivery system are discussed from the perspective of RI Pre-K expansion. However, these areas, as well as others, would benefit from dedicated strategic planning efforts to strengthen the system holistically. The entirety of the early childhood sector is essential to ensuring that Rhode Island’s youngest learners are on a path to success.

### Summary of Key Focus Areas and Alignment to the Legislative Charge

#### Key Focus 1: Equitable Access to RI Pre-K

*Responsive to achieving universal pre-k in the state and developing an annual growth plan to expand the state prekindergarten program to five thousand seats for three- and four-year-old children, over five years, beginning in FY 2024*

Since its inception, RI Pre-K has focused on advancing equity in educational opportunity. To date, this has included expanding first in communities with higher rates of poverty, using a lottery system to ensure that classrooms’ socioeconomic makeups reflect the community they are in, and providing robust supports and technical assistance for social emotional development, mental health, and family engagement. As a pillar of RI Pre-K, equity must be addressed in each and every consideration for program expansion, but also deserves specific discussion and focus.

This section examines opportunities for current structures and operations of RI Pre-K to increase equitable access, with a focus on children from communities and backgrounds that have been historically excluded from opportunity. Specifically, this section reviews key areas for consideration during expansion planning, including:

- Before care, after-care, and summer learning options for students
- The application and lottery process
- Transportation for students
- Language access for families and children
- Educator diversity
- Approach to equitable expansion of seats

## Key Focus 2: Expanding RI Pre-K to Three-Year Olds

*Responsive to achieving universal pre-k in the state and developing an annual growth plan to expand the state prekindergarten program to five thousand seats for three- and four-year-old children, over five years, beginning in FY 2024*

RI Pre-K has primarily served children who are age four by September 1 (e.g. one year before they are age-eligible to enroll in kindergarten). To expand RI Pre-K to children who are age three, there are many important instructional, programmatic, and operational considerations that must be addressed to ensure the program is developmentally appropriate, centers equity, minimizes transitions, and continues to prioritize family choice.

This section reviews key areas for consideration during expansion planning related to the inclusion of three-year-olds:

- Pedagogy and instruction for three-year-olds
- Policies and protocols, including for admission and transitions across years
- Technical assistance and professional development for programs
- Operational improvements and preparation, such as the lottery data system
- Impact on RI Pre-K classrooms for four-year-olds and infant/toddler care

## Key Focus 3: Ensuring Equitable Access to RI Pre-K for Children with Disabilities

*Responsive to achieving universal pre-k in the state and developing an annual growth plan to expand the state prekindergarten program to five thousand seats for three- and four-year-old children, over five years, beginning in FY 2024*

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) -- supported under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B, Section 619 -- serves children with special education needs ages three through five. Aligned with national best practice, RI Pre-K works to embed ECSE services into a child's everyday classroom activities and routines. Currently, there is no specific funding for the provision of ECSE services within community-based RI Pre-K. Regardless of setting, however, Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are responsible for providing children with disabilities with the services they need as outlined in their Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs). In many instances, and in compliance with regulation, LEAs are providing special education services to children in the community without additional funding.

This section explores key considerations to ensure that children receiving special education services can equitably access RI Pre-K programming. Specific considerations in this section include:

- Family empowerment and choice related to ECSE services
- Embedded ECSE services models
- Professional development and training for the workforce
- Cross-district enrollment
- Funding for programming and services
- Transitions between Early Intervention and ECSE services

## Key Focus 4: Expanding RI Pre-K in the Mixed-Delivery System

*Responsive to ensuring equitable distribution of prekindergarten funding to eligible providers, building capacity among new and existing providers to ensure quality standards are met in all settings, ensuring providers in the mixed-delivery system have sufficient facilities to expand access to high-quality prekindergarten services, and ensuring that access to infant and toddler care is not at risk as RI Pre-K is expanded*

High-quality early learning happens in all settings: child care centers, Head Start, school districts, and home-based care. From the outset, RI Pre-K has been delivered through a mixed-delivery system. A mixed-delivery system refers to programming for children offered in a diverse group of settings that meet common health, safety, and quality standards. The goal of the mixed-delivery system aims to capitalize on the existing investments and infrastructure in the early care and education sector. Mixed-delivery models administer funds across licensed child care, Head Start, and public schools to ensure access to high-quality, affordable child care options for children and families. National experts recognize utilizing a

mixed-delivery system as critical to maximizing family choice and supporting early learning system sustainability when implementing universal pre-k.

Strengthening RI's mixed-delivery system has benefits across the entire birth-to-five sector: ensuring children have continuity of care, families have choice, and providers have sustainable business models. RI Pre-K offers multiple settings a consistent funding stream, which supports a provider's overall stability and quality. These benefits contribute to important system-level benefits too, including increased wages for preschool teachers, improved overall program quality, and the ability to preserve capacity in infant and toddler care. Without preschool aged children (three- and four-year-olds) enrolled, many community-based providers would be financially strained and potentially forced to close because offering slots for solely infants and toddlers (I/T) is not financially sustainable.

This section outlines key considerations to expand RI Pre-K's capacity across the mixed-delivery system, while considering how to equitably distribute funding, build capacity among new and existing providers, and preserve I/T capacity:

- By provider type, current capacity and operational readiness within the system
- By provider type, what supports are needed to expand capacity within the system related to:
  - Facilities
  - Program quality
  - Educators
  - Infrastructure, such as data systems
- Family Child Care opportunities to be involved in RI Pre-K
- Shared licensing and oversight across state agencies

#### **Key Focus 5: Supporting Early Childhood Educators: Preparing, Recruiting, and Retaining a Highly-Qualified Workforce**

*Responsive to preparing, recruiting and retaining a high-qualified early childhood workforce, including adequate wages for early childhood educators, regardless of setting*

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) workforce is a key driver of Rhode Island's economy. Without a workforce of early educators, private and public early childhood care and education settings would not be able to operate, parents would have greater difficulty sustaining employment, and our economy would suffer. Despite the ECCE workforce's importance to economic stability in the state, these educators face a pay penalty for working with children between birth and five years. Approximately 25% of early educators in the state live in poverty, compared to approximately 4% in the K-8 teacher workforce.

This section outlines key considerations for ensuring educators are prepared to lead RI Pre-K classrooms and programs, and are compensated and supported to remain in the field. These topics include:

- Certification requirements and pathways
- RI Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) coursework
- Educator attraction and retention across the mixed-delivery system
- Compensation
- Social Emotional Learning Capacity

#### **Key Focus 6: Supporting Strong Transitions to Kindergarten**

*Responsive to achieving universal pre-k in the state and developing an annual growth plan to expand the state prekindergarten program to five thousand seats for three- and four-year-old children, over five years, beginning in FY 2024*

A planned and positive transition between years and settings has lasting benefits children, families, and educators. Children feel supported when beginning in a new classroom or entering school for kindergarten, families feel welcomed and empowered with the knowledge necessary to help their child have a successful year, and teachers are ready to create and foster an engaging learning environment that best meets each child's needs. Research also highlights the importance of transitions for educational success. A focus on the transition experience can also help ensure that all children receive

the supports they need to be successful, including Early Intervention, language supports, wraparound services and other resources. RI Pre-K providers are already required to complete several annual deliverables related to supporting children and families through the kindergarten transition process.

This section of the report includes key considerations for transitions for students in RI Pre-K, including:

- State-wide resources for families and providers
- Operational support for kindergarten outreach and registration
- Summer learning opportunities
- Professional development across the early learning / early elementary field
- Data sharing
- Specific supports for children including those with disabilities and multilingual learners

### **Key Focus 7: Sustaining and Growing the Infant/Toddler Sector**

*Responsive to ensuring that access to infant and toddler care is not at risk as the state prekindergarten program is expanded*

Infant and toddler care is an essential part of the birth-to-five system. It is crucial to ensure working parents have access to care for their infants as young as six weeks, as parents likely need access to full-day, school-year care for their children well before the age of three. Experts recommend states make investments in high-quality infant/toddler child care, as research shows that investing in infants and toddlers has the greatest impact on children’s development and return on investment over time, given the number of neural connections made in the first three years of life. In RI, finding and affording infant and toddler care is out of reach for most families. Despite the higher cost of I/T care, there are fewer options for public funding assistance for families, as RI Pre-K and Head Start are available only for preschool age children.

The considerations and recommendations for expansion in this section represent an initial set of ideas for opportunities to support the infant/toddler sector within the context of RI Pre-K expansion. However, a more dedicated and comprehensive strategic planning effort that is focused specifically on how to increase capacity, sustainability, and quality in the I/T sector is recommended in order to develop a more specific action plan. As a vital part of the system in and of itself for the development of young children and to support working families, a corollary strategic plan would support future planning and investments. Some of the key areas explored in the key focus area include:

- Preserving and expanding supply of infant/toddler care
- Retention and compensation of infant/toddler educators
- Improving quality of infant/toddler care

### **Cost of Delivering High-Quality RI Pre-K**

*Responsive to providing a growth plan to expand the state prekindergarten program to five thousand seats for three- and four-year-old children, over five years, beginning in FY 2024 and building capacity among new and existing providers to ensure quality standards are met in all settings*

This section details the budget associated with both the direct costs at the classroom and program level as well as state-level costs necessary to maintain RI Pre-K’s nationally recognized quality. Rhode Island has a strong system committed to continuous quality improvement that combines third party observations, professional development, and technical assistance to provide comprehensive high-quality supports to classrooms that receive RI Pre-K funds.

This section also outlines the various funding models for RI Pre-K that allow programs across the mixed-delivery system to braid and layer RI Pre-K funds with other federal and local fund sources, as well as the funding streams currently used to fund RI Pre-K seats.

## Annual Growth Plan and Budget Projections

*Responsive to providing a growth plan to expand the state prekindergarten program to five thousand seats for three- and four-year-old children, over five years, beginning in FY 2024*

To develop this component of the plan, the state has developed a growth model that includes several assumptions about the investment inputs and drivers. While these assumptions are based on available data and agency expertise, the growth model includes both lower and higher investment estimates to account for the variability possible in these inputs and cost drivers.

Investment inputs and drivers include:

- Expansion and retention of RI Pre-K seats
  - Cost of operating an RI Pre-K classroom, and rate of leveraging other fund streams
  - Early Childhood Special Education costs
  - Average number of students in classrooms
  - Annual inflation adjustment
  - RIDE operational readiness
- Classroom pipeline
  - Classroom/program readiness
  - Educator readiness
- Infant/toddler care investments

## Navigating the Report

In writing this report, the team addressed each component of the legislation across sections. The chart summarizes where in the report each component of the legislation is discussed:

| Legislative Language  | Report Section   |
|---|--|
| Growth plan to expand the state prekindergarten program to five thousand seats for three- and four-year-old children, over five years, beginning in FY 2024 | Annual Growth Plan and Budget Projections  |
| Recommendations for achieving universal prekindergarten in the state  | Discussed throughout, specifically in Key Focus 1, Key Focus 2, Key Focus 3, and Key Focus 6 |
| Equitably distribute prekindergarten funding to eligible providers  | Discussed throughout, specifically in Key Focus 4, Cost of RI Pre-K, and Growth Plan         |
| Ensure that access to infant and toddler care is not at risk as the state prekindergarten program is expanded   | Discussed throughout, specifically in Key Focus 7 and Growth Plan                            |
| Prepare, recruit and retain a high-qualified early childhood workforce, including adequate wages for early childhood educators, regardless of setting       | Discussed throughout, specifically in Key Focus 5, Key Focus 7, and Growth Plan              |
| Build capacity among new and existing providers to ensure quality standards are met in all settings   | Discussed throughout, specifically in Key Focus 4, Key Focus 5, and Growth Plan              |
| Ensure providers in the mixed-delivery system have sufficient facilities to expand access to high-quality prekindergarten services                          | Discussed throughout, specifically in Key Focus 4 and Growth Plan                            |

# Acknowledgements

The RI Pre-K Expansion Report represents a collaboration across state agencies in partnership with families, early education providers, and advocates. The recommendations throughout the report were developed from a series of stakeholder feedback opportunities, including public feedback sessions, an online survey, and meetings with organizations throughout Fall 2022. Without the time, expertise, and input from early learning partners across the community, this report would not have been possible. We are grateful to the following groups and organizations for participating in the development of this report and hosting feedback conversations:

- Members of the Early Learning Council
- Right from the Start Campaign
- Parents Leading for Educational Equity
- RI State Superintendents Association
- RI Head Start Association
- Early Childhood Special Education Coordinators
- Family Child Care Homes of Rhode Island
- Business Owners in Childcare Association
- National Institute for Early Education Research

In addition, we are grateful to the many RI Pre-K leaders and educators who serve young children in RI Pre-K every day.

# Why Invest in High-quality Pre-K

**“Implement universal, high-quality Pre-K for children ages 3 and 4 through a mixed-delivery system.” – RI 2030 Plan: Working Draft and Preliminary Recommendations**

Rhode Island is committed to achieving universal Pre-K to make a difference for children and families today and for generations to come. We want all Rhode Island children to thrive and have opportunities from the earliest years because that’s what makes Rhode Island a great place to grow up and to raise kids.

Investing in our future: High-quality Pre-Kindergarten for all children ages three and four is not only important for today’s children and families but it is also an investment in Rhode Island’s future. Decades of research show that children who attend high-quality early learning are more likely to graduate high school, more likely to attend and graduate from college, and less likely to have behavioral issues in elementary and middle school. Research has shown that a single dollar of investment in high-quality early childhood programs leads to 13% return on investment in reduced costs in future years in areas such as criminal justice.<sup>2</sup> Research is clear that the quality of programs, coupled with strong sustaining environments in elementary school, are key to long-term positive outcomes for children. The current state prekindergarten program -- RI Pre-K -- meets key national quality benchmarks, showing Rhode Island’s commitment to providing programs that will benefit children and our state for years to come. Investments in children’s earliest years are a down payment in the future health and success of tomorrow’s leaders who will become the business owners, entrepreneurs, educators, manufacturers, professionals, artists, and caregivers our state depends on.

A strong start: Young children’s brains are constantly developing as they make more than a million neural connections per minute. This rapid development creates a substantial opportunity to positively impact the brain architecture which will support children’s social, emotional, and academic development. Early experiences matter, and high-quality early learning helps all kids have a strong start, putting them on a path to academic success in later years.

Equity of Opportunity: Currently, high-quality early childhood education is financially out of reach for too many families, particularly low-income families. Across the state, high-quality early childhood education is only affordable for 7% of all families.<sup>3</sup> That not only hurts individual families, but also the state as a whole, as generations of children are not getting the strong start that they deserve while families struggle to afford raising a family. High-quality early education that is truly equitable – accessible, free, culturally competent, and inclusive – will be a game changer for our state.

## Definition and Principles of RI Pre-K

**RI Pre-K is a tuition free, inclusive, high-quality standards-based program, built within the existing early childhood education infrastructure and aims to strengthen the birth through five system as a whole.**

**...tuition free:** The program is free to families, with no tuition or co-pay for families.

**...inclusive:** Families face no structural barriers to participating in RI Pre-K. All families who want an RI Pre-K seat are able to secure one; the children enrolled in RI Pre-K reflect the communities the program is in; and the program is inclusive and welcoming for children of all backgrounds and developmental needs.

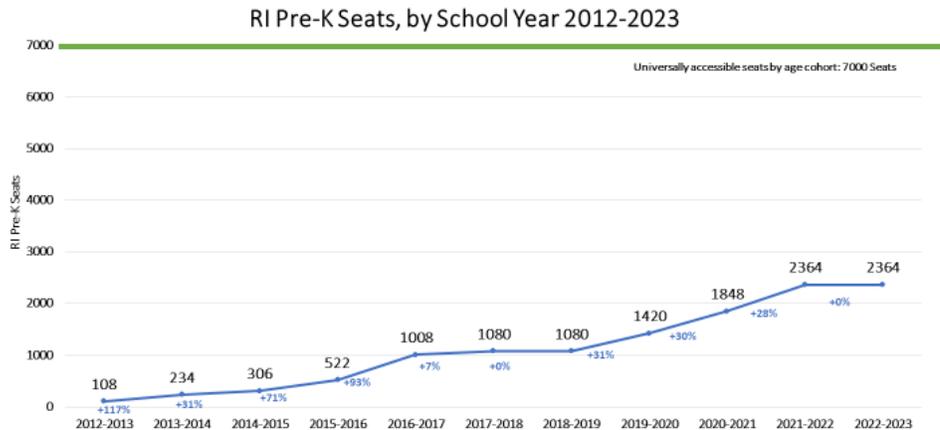
**...high-quality standards-based program:** All classrooms meet the NIEER and RI Pre-K quality standards.

**...built within the existing early childhood education infrastructure:** RI Pre-K is delivered through the mixed-delivery system including Local Education Agencies, Child Care Centers, Head Starts, and Family Child Care.

**...aims to strengthen the birth-to-five system as a whole:** RI Pre-K supports increased quality, access, and stability for the entire birth-to-five early education system, across all ages and components of the mixed-delivery system.

# Current State of RI Pre-K

Rhode Island's [Early Childhood Care and Education \(ECCE\) Strategic Plan](#) is grounded in the vision that all Rhode Island children will enter kindergarten educationally, social-emotionally, and developmentally ready to succeed, putting them on a path to read proficiently by third grade. A key strategy to achieving RI's vision is implementing universally available, high-quality, full-day RI Pre-K for Rhode Island children. Since its inception in 2009, the RI Pre-K program – the state's prekindergarten program as defined in the RI Prekindergarten Education Act -- has offered high-quality early learning opportunities in communities across the state.



Throughout the state, there are many other high-quality early learning and care options that children may attend. However, because they do not receive RI Pre-K funding, participate in the RIDE monitoring and professional development, or share data with RI Pre-K, they are not included in the RI Pre-K numbers.

**RI Pre-K emerged from collaborative efforts across the RI early childhood system.** Following passage of the RI Prekindergarten Education Act (2008), state leaders, advocates, and providers collaborated to design and implement the pilot RI Pre-K program. Rhode Island has leveraged a series of federal grants to expand RI Pre-K, including: the Race to the Top Early Learning Grant (2011), the Preschool Development Expansion Grant (2014), and the Preschool Development Birth through Five Renewal Grant (2020-2023). These grants allowed RI to pilot and then expand RI Pre-K, significantly

increasing enrollment of four-year olds over the last decade. As federal funds have expired or required a match, the State has consistently invested state dollars to sustain and expand RI Pre-K, creating the Early Childhood Categorical Fund at RIDE to fund direct programming and supports. Additionally, the State partners with Federal Head Start Funding Recipients to strategically braid funding to leverage existing resources.

**RI Pre-K increases tuition-free access to high-quality prekindergarten by supporting existing early learning settings across the mixed-delivery system – including child care centers, Head Start agencies, and Local Education Agencies – to increase quality and coordinating enrollments.** As of the 2022-2023 school year, there are 2,364 four-year old children being educated in RI Pre-K funded seats that are delivered through child care centers, Head Start Agencies, and school districts (Local Education Agencies). Importantly, RI Pre-K does not replace existing programming. **Instead, RI Pre-K is designed to provide supplemental funds and supports to enhance quality early learning where it is already happening.** This includes programs such as in Head Start, which RI has invested in for over three decades. Rhode Island stands ready to grow our existing high-quality, nationally recognized RI Pre-K program for all RI children while strengthening the entire birth-through-age-five system.

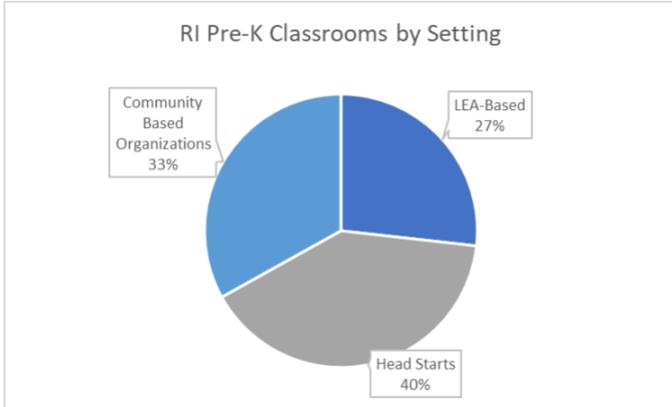
**RI Pre-K is nationally recognized for quality, and we must expand in a way that maintains this quality.** RI Pre-K is a nationally recognized leader in delivering high-quality programming and instruction. The program meets all ten quality criteria of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), one of only 6 states to do so. Despite RI's well-established program quality, not all communities or families have access to the program. In the [2021 NIEER report](#), RI only ranked #31 in the nation for the percent of age-eligible children accessing the program.<sup>4</sup>

Regardless of setting or funding model, all RI Pre-K providers are required to meet the same quality hallmarks of the program through a series of deliverables. These hallmarks – built on the Head Start quality standards and aligned to the NIEER national best practices -- are the reason RI Pre-K is a quality program. This includes:

- Programming is provided for a minimum of **6 hours a day, 180 days a year**
- The programming is **tuition-free** for families
- All classrooms must achieve RIDE's **Comprehensive Early Childhood Education (CECE) certification**

- All classes are taught by a teacher with a [bachelor’s degree](#)
- All classes use a high-quality, [RIDE-endorsed curriculum](#) aligned to the RI Early Learning and Development Standards
- Programs participate in RIDE’s [Continuous Quality Improvement](#) using research-based observation tools and coaching

**To support access and system sustainability, RI Pre-K is provided across the mixed-delivery system in child care centers, Local Education Agencies, and Head Start Agencies.**



RI Pre-K is delivered throughout the state’s existing mixed-delivery system, including child care centers, Head Starts, and school districts (Local Education Agencies). Currently, RIDE funds 127 classrooms, serving 2,364 children, in a nearly even distribution of settings.

During each expansion, programs have become RI Pre-K providers by applying through RIDE’s competitive grant application and selection process. Applicants must meet certain foundational requirements to be considered – such as a proven ability to provide quality instruction – and agree to fulfill the RI Pre-K deliverables outlined above. RIDE and DHS

have also worked to provide technical assistance and professional development to programs that are interested in becoming RI Pre-K providers, but that may currently not be ready to achieve all of the RI Pre-K deliverables. (For more on the Mixed-Delivery system, see *Key Focus 4*).

**RI Pre-K leverages several funding streams to operate.** RI Pre-K is currently funded through a mix of general revenue, federal funding such as Head Start and Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) funding, and time-limited federal grant funding. When the time-limited federal grant funding expires at the end of FY23, additional investments will be needed to maintain current capacity. More information about the cost of operating the RI Pre-K program, the current funding streams, and the new funding models enabling braiding and blending of funding is available in *Cost of RI Pre-K* section.

**Student enrollment in RI Pre-K is done through a lottery system and is based on district of residence.** RI Pre-K is tuition-free for any family with a 4-year old that lives in one of the 18 communities with RI Pre-K classrooms. Currently, more families are interested than there are available seats; to ensure fair access, families apply for a seat in RI Pre-K via a lottery. When communities have multiple RI Pre-K providers, families can rank which RI Pre-K provider they prefer – if selected, RIDE will seek to place families into their top-choice program. After RIDE runs the lottery to fill classrooms, children who are not initially selected through the lottery are placed on a waitlist. While RI Pre-K is open and tuition-free to all children regardless of income, the lottery process ensures that RI Pre-K classrooms reflect the socioeconomic makeup of the community. As is true for enrollment in elementary school, currently, children must reside in the district where they attend RI Pre-K. This ensures equity of access to additional services, including Early Childhood Special Education – however, it may also create some barriers in access for families in terms of transportation (for more information on equitable access to RI Pre-K, see *Key Focus 1*; for more information early childhood special education (ECSE), see *Key Focus 3*).

# Key Focus 1: Equitable Access to RI Pre-K

**GOAL STATEMENT:** Every age-eligible child has equitable access to RI Pre-K. Our goal is to remove any structural or other barriers that would exclude a family from RI Pre-K.

## Introduction

Advancing equity is a core principle and outcome for RI Pre-K. High-quality early childhood education is a proven approach to addressing opportunity gaps for children living in poverty and can lead to positive intergenerational outcomes for families. Research shows that children who attend high-quality early childhood education are more likely to be ready for kindergarten, graduate high school, and seek higher education.<sup>5</sup>

RI Pre-K seeks to close opportunity gaps for young children so all Rhode Island students enter kindergarten ready to succeed. Since its inception, RI Pre-K has focused on equity. To date, this has included expanding first in communities with higher rates of poverty, using a lottery system to ensure that classrooms' socioeconomic makeup reflects the community they are in, and providing robust supports and technical assistance for social emotional development, mental health, and family engagement. As a pillar of RI Pre-K, equity must be addressed in each and every consideration for program expansion, but also deserves specific discussion and focus.

Enrollment data from the 2021-2022 school year demonstrates that RI Pre-K students largely reflect the overall racial and ethnic diversity of all Rhode Island children.

| Race/Ethnicity         | RI Pre-K Students (2021-2022)<br>(As reported by programs, N = 2520) | All RI Children, 2020 Census Data<br>(RI KIDS COUNT Factbook, 2022) <sup>6</sup> |
|------------------------|--|--|
| American Indian        | 1%   | < 1%   |
| Asian                  | 4%   | 3%   |
| Black/African American | 12%  | 6%   |
| Hispanic               | 29%  | 27%  |
| Native Hawaiian        | 1%   | 1%   |
| White                  | 35%  | 53%  |
| Two or More Races      | 12%  | 8%   |
| Not Reported           | 7%   | N/A  |

In considering RI Pre-K expansion with an equity lens, we are focused on children from communities and backgrounds that have been historically and systematically excluded from opportunity. Specifically, RI Pre-K must ensure that there is equitable access for children who are multilingual learners, children living in poverty, children of color, children with disabilities, and children involved in the child welfare system. In the 2021-2022 school year, the RI Pre-K statewide student body included:

| Priority Population  | RI Pre-K Students (2021-2022)<br>(As reported by programs) |
|--|--|
| Children who are Multilingual Learners (MLL)                 | 18%  |
| Children who are in the child welfare system                 | 9%   |
| Children who are homeless                                    | 1%   |
| Children with an identified disability / special needs (IEP) | 11%  |

**Consideration 1:** How could the structure – e.g. times, locations, application, lottery, etc. -- of the program increase equitable access?

## Overview and Current Context

The structure of the RI Pre-K program may cause barriers to access for families. Structural elements of the program include the number of hours per day, the duration of the program over the course of the year, the process of applying for

and accepting a seat in the program, and transportation. As RI considers expanding the program further and moving towards a truly universal program and system, it is vital that these structural barriers are addressed.

**Duration:** The RI Pre-K program is delivered for 6 hours a day and 180 days a year, following a school-year calendar. However, many families need extended hours of care to cover the full working day and full-year child care. In a statewide family survey, the number one change that families wished to see in their providers was different hours of care, with 25% of parents reporting this as a need.<sup>7</sup> While this finding was not specific to RI Pre-K, it demonstrates that families with young children in RI are struggling to find sufficient child care coverage for the times they need.

**Application Process:** Participation in RI Pre-K is primarily determined through a lottery system. Each year, children who are age eligible and reside in a community with an RI Pre-K can apply online or through a paper form to be entered into the RI Pre-K lottery. Both forms are quick to complete – approximately five to ten minutes – and offered in English and in Spanish. In the application, families select their RI Pre-K program preferences and provide basic information about their child. Families can select and rank their RI PreK Program preferences via their application. RIDE weights the lottery to develop classrooms that reflect the socioeconomic make-up of the community they the classroom is located. The annual application timeline includes:

- **January-April:** If funding is available for expansion, RIDE runs a new grant application opportunity for new RI Pre-K awards which are open to current and new providers. RIDE finalizes grant agreements with new and ongoing RI Pre-K programs for the upcoming school year. Through this process, RIDE identifies the number of available seats in each program inputs this information into the lottery
- **April-July:** The application window for families to apply for the lottery
- **Early July:** RIDE runs the lottery and informs families and programs about who received a seat and who is on the waitlist
- **July-August:** RI Pre-K programs work with families to confirm whether they will be accepting the seat or if they should offer the seat to the next child on the waitlist. RIDE provides on-going supports to providers and families in the enrollment process
- **September:** RI Pre-K classes begin

From community feedback, it is clear that several aspects of the current application and lottery system could be improved. For example, the current system relies on families being aware of the RI Pre-K opportunity, eligibility, and application process. In New York City, for the expansion of their universal prekindergarten program, the city invested in a significant recruitment operation, including hiring over 50 community-embedded organizers, running several phone banks, and pursuing marketing in public transportation, grocery stores, and social media.<sup>8</sup> In addition, for RI's lottery, families need to have an email address to be able to receive confirmation about whether their child received a seat in the lottery, which not all families have or know how to access (of 171 families who declined an offered seat in 2022, 12% of those declines were due to inability to contact families). The timeline of the lottery may also cause barriers, as families may need to make commitments to other early learning programs ahead of hearing back about the outcome of the RI Pre-K lottery, their circumstances will have changed since they submitted their application, or their program selections are no longer aligned to their needs. These barriers may lead families to not apply or not accept a seat in RI Pre-K, even though they may want a seat for their child. With the implementation of the [2021 pilot service delivery models](#), for the first time, some children were enrolled in RI Pre-K classrooms outside of the lottery process, addressing some of the potential barriers discussed above.

**Transportation:** As determined in the 2009 RI Pre-K Design Team recommendations, RI Pre-K currently does not require that programs provide transportation to and from RI Pre-K.<sup>9</sup> Of note, transportation for young children can be cost prohibitive, as the vehicle size, type, and staffing are a much higher cost than K-12 school buses. This lack of transportation can be a barrier for families participating in RI Pre-K. According to RIDE's survey of families who were offered an RI Pre-K seat in the 2022-2023 lottery but declined the seat, 5% noted that transportation was the reason.

## Steps Taken to Date

### *Duration:*

- RI Pre-K requires providers applying from across the mixed-delivery system to support families in accessing before and after care options. This is one of several criteria in the scoring of the RI Pre-K grant application. Among the 2021-2022 cohort of students, 22% of students utilized before care, after care, or both. Of those who reported where they received before/after care, 93% reported receiving services at the same site as the RI Pre-K and 7% attended before/after care at a Family Child Care. However, whether the before and after care options are sufficient across RI Pre-K providers is variable and not necessarily clear to families as they select options within the lottery
- RI Pre-K programs are charged with supporting families with transitions to kindergarten, which may include identifying summer programming options

### *Application Process*

- Direct Recruitment by RI Pre-K programs: RI Pre-K providers are charged with supporting family awareness and knowledge of the RI Pre-K lottery. Providers speak with families already in their programs, attend community events, and work across the community they serve to recruit families and support them in applying for the lottery. The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted many of these recruitment activities, as these were primarily in person
- Social Media Campaigns: RI has leveraged the Preschool Development Birth through Age Five Renewal Grant to run a highly successful social media campaigns advertising the opportunity for the RI Pre-K lottery. These campaigns in both English and Spanish have garnered thousands of views and clicks to the RI Pre-K lottery application site. To date, these campaigns have been funded with time-limited federal grant funds and are not replicable without future funding
- Community Outreach: In 2022, the state partnered with Parents Leading for Education Equity to do office hours for families applying to the RI Pre-K lottery. PLEE hosted several office hours and were available to families to support them in applying for the program

### *Transportation*

- When transportation has presented a barrier for a family enrolled in in RI Pre-K, the RIDE team and the Pre-K provider have collaborated to identify ad hoc solutions. For example, providers will facilitate carpooling if possible or sponsor RIPTA vouchers

## Recommendations for Expansion

### *Duration:*

- Emphasize the availability of before and aftercare in promoting RI Pre-K
- Note type of before/aftercare available at the RI Pre-K provider within the lottery information so families can make informed lottery selection choices
- Support RI Pre-K providers in expanding before- and after-care options, including expanded partnerships with Family Child Care and ensuring options are affordable and high-quality
- Support providers in developing summer options for RI Pre-K students
- Collate summer options for RI Pre-K enrolled families and require providers to help families plan for summer

### *Application Process:*

- Provide grants for grassroots organizations to support families in signing up for the lottery
- Invest in bilingual family engagement and navigation staff capacity at RIDE to coordinate all family engagement and be a point of contact for all families in the program

### *Transportation*

- Conduct a family survey to understand where families would want RI Pre-K options located geographically across the state to address transportation or other geographic barriers
- Consider opportunities for regional approach to RI Pre-K that would allow families to participate in RI Pre-Ks outside their district to allow families to choose programs closer to work or other convenient locations, have all children in a family attend a single program, or other needs

**Consideration 2: How could the delivery – teaching, instruction, curriculum, wraparound supports, etc. -- of the program increase equitable access?**

**Overview and Current Context:**

Currently, RI Pre-K does not have specific curriculum or instructional approach for multilingual learners (MLLs), language immersion classrooms, or fully non-English classrooms. As an increasing number of children in Rhode Island are multilingual learners, this is a significant gap to consider. However, students are not officially assessed for MLL status until they enter the K-12 school system. As a result, RI Pre-K does not have a formal mechanism to determine which students are multilingual learners at ages 3 or 4. According to a survey of current RI Pre-K programs, educators estimate that 18% of current RI Pre-K students are MLLs. Supporting RI’s youngest MLLs through research-based and culturally competent methods is an important consideration.

In addition, similar to the K-12 education system, the educators working in RI Pre-K often do not reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the students in their classrooms. Research is clear that representation is an important factor to supporting student learning outcomes and engagement.

**Steps Taken to Date**

*Language Access*

- RI Pre-K providers are independently incorporating best practices on language access into their programs. In 2021-2022, 53% of students were in classrooms that self-reported providing multilingual supports, primarily in Spanish and in Portuguese
- Using PDG B-5 Renewal Funding, RIDE has engaged with WIDA Early Years to make professional development modules regarding best practices for supporting MLLs available for free to all RI Pre-K, LEA-based, and DHS-licensed early childhood programs

*Educator Diversity*

- Several educator career advancement and higher education access programs have focused on supporting incumbent early educators in gaining additional credentials. See *Key Focus 5* for more information on workforce initiatives

**Recommendations for Expansion**

*Language Access*

- Build on efforts to provide specialized PDLTA to support programs in implementing a multilingual classroom and invest in the development of multilingual classrooms
- Support recruitment and retention of multilingual early educators
- Make implementation of a multilingual classroom a bonus criterion for future RI Pre-K awards within the grant agreement
- Support Family Child Care in becoming part of the RI Pre-K delivery system, as many FCCs are Spanish speaking
- Explore opportunities to partner with school districts to provide MLL assessment prior to Kindergarten to support transition to K-12 MLL supports (RI has applied for funding from the federal Administration of Children and Families to conduct a broad needs assessment of MLL supports in early education settings)

*Educator Diversity*

- Partner with organizations that are focusing on K-12 educator diversity and pipeline to find opportunities to support the ECCE workforce as well
- Address educator compensation to ensure pay parity with kindergarten teachers to attract educators to the early childhood field
- See *Key Focus 5* for additional recommendations about the workforce

**Consideration 3: How can we equitably expand RI Pre-K across Rhode Island communities?**

**Overview and Current Context:**

The 2009 RI Pre-K Design Team recommended focusing first on the 15 communities that had ‘state intervention status’ due to lower academic outcomes.<sup>10</sup> Since then, RI Pre-K has expanded with a focus on prioritizing communities with higher rates of poverty and with demonstrated need for additional high-quality preschool capacity. During each expansion opportunity, RI Pre-K has added at least one new community to RI Pre-K. Currently, RI Pre-K is in 18 communities.

As we consider opening the next 2,700 seats reach the 2028 goal and beyond, it is important that there is a transparent approach to how the program expands with equity. While further exploration of options for changing how students access Early Childhood Special Education is undertaken (see Key Focus 3), RI Pre-K enrollment will continue to be primarily based on district residency. As a result, as RIDE works to expand the program, there will be trade-offs to consider between expanding to new communities versus achieving depth in communities that already have RI Pre-K and face higher rates of poverty. In addition, to reach 5,000 seats by 2028, RI will need to prioritize investing in programs that are ready to deliver the program, which may not be equitably geographically distributed across the state. As noted in the [2019 Facilities Needs Assessment](#), RI has the physical infrastructure for universal Pre-K, but it is not distributed across the state proportional to school district population.<sup>11</sup>

### Steps Taken to Date

- To focus on reaching communities that have been historically excluded from economic opportunity, the RI Pre-K grant application scoring criteria include components related to community need and applicants' history of supporting children living in poverty. In addition, the review team considers the saturation of high-quality RI Pre-K and Head Start seats within the community to prioritize communities with lower access to high-quality preschool
- In each RI Pre-K expansion, the program has expanded to at least one new community to ensure that more communities are part of program

### Recommendations for Expansion

- RIDE will continue to have discretion in grant awards to balance expansion across Rhode Island with the urgency to reach 5,000 seats, prioritizing areas that are ready for expansion with existing facilities and infrastructure
- Continue to expand with a balanced approach that ensures that (1) communities with higher rates of poverty continue to be prioritized when considering grants for new programs and that (2) at least two new communities are brought into RI Pre-K in each expansion
- Identify priority access benchmarks and track progress to ensure children and families with fewer resources and greater access challenges are equitably enrolling in existing seats and expansion seats
- Conduct an overall impact assessment of removing district-residency requirements for RI Pre-K in the long-term to maximize family choice and access
  - Conduct a family survey to understand where families would want RI Pre-K options across the state -- i.e. near their residence, near their workplace, or other geographic considerations – to guide RI Pre-K grant decisions going forward to align with family demand
  - Building on the 2019 Facilities Needs Assessment, inventory existing high-quality, licensed facilities with preschool age classrooms and research the utilization of these classrooms based on residency to understand current trends in cross-municipality enrollment
  - See Key Focus 3 for discussion of impact and needs for children with special needs to access Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)

### Long-term Considerations:

As RI Pre-K expands beyond 5,000 seats and moves towards being truly universal, additional policy recommendations to advance equity:

- **Allow cross-district RI Pre-K enrollment:** Consider allowing families to enroll in RI Pre-K programs outside their school district. This would help families address potential transportation barriers, as they could select a program that is closer to a workplace rather than their residence. This would have significant implications for ECSE, which are further addressed in *Key Focus 3*.

# Key Focus 2: Expanding RI Pre-K to 3-Year-Olds

**GOAL STATEMENT:** RI Pre-K will be prepared to serve children who are age 3 by September 1 of the year they are applying for RI Pre-K (e.g. are 2 years away from entering Kindergarten, or “K-2”).

## Introduction

Except for a few existing mixed-age classrooms in Head Start RI Pre-Ks, RI Pre-K to date has primarily served children who are age 4 by September 1 (e.g., one year before they are age-eligible to enroll in kindergarten, also known as “K-1”). To expand RI Pre-K to children who are age 3, there are many important instructional, programmatic, and logistical considerations that must be addressed. From an instructional approach perspective, there are varying philosophies across programs and models about having mixed age 3- and 4-year-old classrooms versus having separate classes by age. In addition, there are logistical considerations, such as that any classroom with children who are age three can only have a maximum of 18 children due to licensing requirements. In comparison, a classroom with children all age four can have a maximum of 20 children based on ratios and classroom square footage.

It will be important to establish clear policies about new eligibility for RI Pre-K. For example, enrollment policies will be needed such as whether a child who is enrolled in RI Pre-K at age three is guaranteed a seat at age four (the recommended practice). These policies will have significant impact on the way RI Pre-K expands over the coming years to 3-year-olds and the number of providers who will be able to offer RI Pre-K for 3-year-old children. To formally incorporate 3-year-olds into RI Pre-K, we must address substantive and operational questions to ensure equity, minimize transitions, and prioritize family choice.

*Note: There are further considerations for 3-year-olds related to Early Childhood Special Education that are discussed in depth in Key Focus 3.*

## **Consideration 1: Are changes to the RI Pre-K instructional approach needed to support 3-year-olds in RI Pre-K classrooms?**

### Overview and Current Context

While children reach developmental milestones at different times, children who are 3-years-old are typically at a different developmental stage than children that are 4-years-old. [Rhode Island’s Early Learning and Development Standards \(RIELDS\)](#) describes the different expectations across these ages. As a result, classroom instruction, behavior expectations, and practice must be developmentally appropriate for 3-year-olds.

#### **Steps Taken to Date**

- RIDE is in the process of completing a revision of the RIELDS which will be the foundation for RI Pre-K classrooms to understand developmental expectations for all ages
- RIDE recently completed a review of curriculum to establish an updated endorsed curriculum list for RI Pre-K. In this review, the team ensured that all selected curriculums had a 3-year-old component as well as a 4-year-old component aligned to RIELDS

#### **Recommendations for Expansion**

- Within the RI Pre-K grant application, include new requirements for programs applying to open RI Pre-K seats for 3-year-olds. Recommended requirements include:
  - All RI Pre-K programs proposing to serve 3-year-olds must also have 4-year-old RI Pre-K seats for children to matriculate into, ensuring that children have two years of RI Pre-K within the same program
  - For any RI Pre-K provider applying to serve 3-year-olds, the application should include new requirements that demonstrate previous experience and readiness for serving 3-year-olds. In addition, programs must commit that children will not be required to be toilet trained to attend the program

- Adopt a policy that RI Pre-K classrooms can serve all 3-year-olds, all 4-year-olds, or mixed ages 3- and 4- year olds. Applicants applying for mixed age classrooms must demonstrate prior experience and a clear model for successfully delivering a high-quality mixed age room For example, the Head Start model includes mixed age classrooms and has proven highly effective for supporting child outcomes.
- As a condition of the award, the RIDE grant application for RI Pre-K will continue to require that all new classrooms of RI Pre-K not displace or replace any infant/toddler (I/T) rooms to support the continued capacity of I/T care in RI (see further discussion of I/T care in *Key Focus 7*). RIDE will work with DHS to support the expansion of RI Pre-K within the current early learning landscape to minimize program disruptions
- Ensure that class sizes will be based on licensing standards and NIEER standards, with any class having 3-year-olds having a maximum of 18 children and only a classroom of all 4-year-olds being eligible for 20 children
- RI Pre-K grant award amounts should cover the cost of the room regardless of the number of children, functionally creating a higher per pupil rate for 3-year-olds than 4-year-olds
- Increase capacity for technical assistance (TA) and invest in additional professional development (PD) experiences for programs that are opening RI Pre-K rooms with 3-year-olds to ensure the successful delivery of high-quality programming and support continuous quality improvement
- Pilot expanding RI Pre-K to 3-year-olds with a small set of programs to refine policies and implementation approach before expanding more broadly. Collaborate with families to evaluate the pilot and refine the approach.

### **Consideration 2: How will transitions between age 3 and age 4 work for children enrolled in RI Pre-K at age 3?**

#### **Overview and Current Context**

Currently, except for a small number of children aged 3-years-old enrolled in Head Start RI Pre-K classrooms, all children in RI Pre-K are age four and transition to Kindergarten after leaving RI Pre-K. Incorporating 3-year-olds into the program raises new and important transition questions including:

- Are children who receive an RI Pre-K seat at age 3 guaranteed a seat at age 4?
- If there is a guarantee for a seat at age 4, is it guaranteed at the same program or anywhere within RI Pre-K?
- If a child moves between school districts between age 3 and age 4, what happens to their RI Pre-K enrollment?
- How will siblings who are age eligible for RI Pre-K but different ages be handled in the lottery?

#### **Steps Taken to Date**

- The 2021 pilot service delivery models provided initial insight for incorporating 3-year-olds into RI Pre-K. From this information, the RI Pre-K team saw that many families chose to enroll in the RI Pre-K lottery for 4-year-olds and select new RI Pre-K providers even when they were offered a guaranteed RI Pre-K seat to matriculate into at their existing program. This emphasized the need to provide family choice at each age

#### **Recommendations for Expansion**

- As noted above, pilot expansion of RI Pre-K to 3-year-olds with a small subset of programs to refine approach and collaborate closely with families to develop the policies, practices, and communications about RI Pre-K for 3-year-olds
- Adopt and communicate clear policies about how children can enroll in RI Pre-K at age 3. *Recommended policy:* Children who are age 3 by September 1 can enter RI Pre-K either through applying for the RI Pre-K lottery, directly via enrollment in a Head Start RI Pre-K room, or through CCAP matriculation

- Adopt and communicate clear policies about matriculation between age 3 and age 4 for RI Pre-K that reduces the number of transitions required for families but also maintains family choice and flexibility. *Recommended policy:* Students who receive a seat through the lottery at age three would be guaranteed a seat at age four at the same RI Pre-K program. As a result, all providers offering RI Pre-K for 3-year-olds would also need to be an RI Pre-K provider for 4-year-olds so that there is an opportunity for matriculation within the same program. If a child needs to leave their provider for age 4 – due to a change in school district residence or other eligible reason – there would be a process to place students into another provider for age 4 before the general lottery is run
- Adopt and communicate clear policies regarding siblings. *Recommended policy:* If siblings are both entered in the RI Pre-K lottery – either in different ages or the same age – if one is selected randomly through the lottery, then the other(s) should be enrolled in as well in the same RI Pre-K program. This is current practice within the lottery for multiples
- Provide technical assistance to providers to support reviewing and updating current practices to incorporate RI Pre-K for 3-year-olds into their operations. This might include reviewing current classroom placement practices and age policies

### **Consideration 3: What changes to the lottery are needed to support incorporating 3-year-olds into RI Pre-K?**

#### **Overview and Current Context**

Currently, there is one RI Pre-K lottery that is open for applications in late Spring through early July (see *Key Focus 1* for full lottery timeline and overview). Families apply online or through paper forms and attest to the eligibility of their child’s age and district of residence for enrollment. When families apply, they rank the program options within their district of residence and can choose up to three programs to rank. The lottery then is run in early July and places children into programs based on how families ranked their choices and is weighted to ensure that classrooms reflect the socioeconomic makeup of the community they are in to ensure equity.

The current lottery system is run internally at RIDE on a platform built in-house. It has capability to take in applications, run the lottery, and send lists of selected and waitlisted students to the RI Pre-K programs. However, the current system requires significant staff time and monitoring, as it does not have the ability to disallow duplicate entries for the same child and cannot provide direct access for programs to review their lists or provide updates about family enrollment. Staff spend significant time removing duplicates, checking the accuracy of information, downloading spreadsheet lists, emailing lists to programs, and more. Currently, the lottery could be duplicated for 3-year-olds but would not have the capability to support more complex criteria such as ensuring all siblings in a family are selected together.

#### **Steps Taken to Date**

- RI is proposing funding for a discovery phase analysis of the current lottery and potential lottery upgrades within a grant application to the federal government (the Preschool Development Grant – Planning 2022)

#### **Recommendations for Expansion**

- Invest in an updated lottery system that can support the complex operations of conducting both an age three and age four lottery, with the capability of managing functions such as identifying siblings. In addition, this system should have the capability of being configurable to include new criteria as needed as the program expands, such as managing students that move districts between school years
- Consider documenting the lottery procedure and reviewing it on a regular basis for equity and access

## Long-term considerations

Currently, across the early childhood system, children are primarily cohorted by their birth date rather than their school entry date eligibility. The further back the school entry date - i.e., a child's age on September 1 – becomes the functional date of social promotion throughout the system, the more profound the impact will be throughout the early learning sector. For example, currently a child turning three might move into a 3-year-old classroom at any time during the year on their birthdate, but with a specific school entry date for RI Pre-K, they would wait until September to begin their 3-year-old room. This would have significant impacts on the facilities, staffing, and enrollment practices for programs. As RI Pre-K considers expansion to 3-year-olds, it is important to consider developmental needs of children as well as the system impacts of beginning to cohort children by school entry date rather than birthdate.

# Key Focus 3: Ensuring Equitable Access to RI Pre-K for Children with Disabilities

**GOAL STATEMENT:** Children found eligible for ECSE services will have equitable access to RI Pre-K classrooms and will receive embedded services within the general education setting.

## Introduction

Many students ages three and four who are eligible to participate in RI Pre-K are eligible for special education services through Early Childhood Special Education (supported under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B, Section 619, ECSE), which is special education for children ages three to five. In Rhode Island, as of June 2021, approximately 7% of children ages three to five statewide were receiving special education services. However, as 16% of RI's K-12 students receive special education, it is likely that there are thousands of young children who need special education services but are not receiving them during a critical time of early brain development.

Local Education Agencies (LEA) are responsible for providing ECSE services. Most children receive ECSE services in LEA-based special education classes which typically operate for only a half day and may offer a partial week of programming. Over the last several years with RIDE's support, aligned to evidence-based best practice, 24 LEAs have started to embed ECSE services within general education settings across the mixed-delivery system within the boundaries of their district (i.e. districts will provide ECSE services within a community-based child care provider or Head Start, so long as the provider is within the boundaries of the district and the student receiving services is a resident of the district). In this way, families with children who have disabilities are able to choose educational settings and access the same high-quality full school year and full school day programming as their peers, while receiving the vital ECSE services to which they are entitled. RIDE has a goal of all children ages three to five with IEPs receiving ECSE services embedded within a general education setting and access to RI Pre-K is an essential component of that goal.

As access to RI Pre-K programming expands, there are numerous considerations to ensure that children with disabilities have equitable access to the program. In 2021, almost 11% of RI Pre-K students were identified as receiving special education services, indicating that RI Pre-K is currently reflective of the population of students with disabilities. RI Pre-K providers report an additional 17% of children enrolled in RI Pre-K as being below widely held expectations, even if the child does not have an IEP. Of the students in RI Pre-K that receive special education services, providers reported that 75% of children receive services embedded in their everyday classroom activities and routines. Yet, nearly 19% of children receiving special education services in RI Pre-K still have to travel to their school district to receive services, which means that many children are experiencing disruptive transitions throughout their days. This suggests that RI still needs to make progress to ensure that all RI Pre-K students are given the opportunity to receive embedded ECSE services in their general education classroom.

Currently, however, there is no specific funding for the provision of ECSE services within community-based RI Pre-K. Regardless of setting, however, LEAs are responsible for providing children with disabilities with the services they need as outlined in their Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs). In many instances, and in compliance with regulation, LEAs are providing special education services to children in the community without additional funding. As RI Pre-K expands, this is unsustainable for LEAs and may lead to children with disabilities being unable to access RI Pre-K. RI Pre-K expansion must include a focus on ensuring that children with disabilities are not excluded from RI Pre-K classrooms because their services are offered only in another setting.

Additionally, the expansion of RI Pre-K to children age three represents new logistical considerations. When children transition from Early Intervention (IDEA Part C), the transition occurs at the child's third birthday. However, access to RI Pre-K would not begin until September 1, regardless of birthdate. This potential gap in timing between the transition from EI into ECSE and entry into RI Pre-K with embedded ECSE services creates a potential barrier to accessing RI Pre-K for children with disabilities. In addition, as more and more children enter RI Pre-K, it is likely that more children will be identified as needing ECSE services and RI Pre-K must be prepared to support all children equitably.

In order to identify and support children with disabilities, one of Rhode Island’s goals is to screen all three-, four- and five-year-old children each year before they enter kindergarten. Child Outreach Screening is the first step in identifying young children who require further evaluation to determine the need for special education service. The pandemic has likely increased the number of students needing special education services, yet only 34% of all age-eligible children have been screened. As the rate of children screened increases, RI must be prepared to deliver an increase in special education services and to provide all children high-quality special education services embedded into general education settings including RI Pre-K.

**Consideration 1: How can RI Pre-K ensure that children receiving special education services and their families are aware of and know how to access the program?**

**Overview and Current Context**

RI has made meaningful efforts to deliver ECSE services embedded within general education settings through the Rhode Island Itinerant Early Childhood Special Education Service-Delivery Model (RI-IECSE). This model, currently in 24 LEAs, moves ECSE services from being delivered in a special education classroom to being a set of services that are embedded wherever the child is enrolled for early education. The RI-IECSE model is aligned to best practice as research shows that children with disabilities have better outcomes when educated alongside their peers in general education environments and while receiving their special education services across their existing daily routine. This provides children with opportunities for authentic practice of skills, as well as increased motivation, success, and transferability of skills. Additionally, when instruction is embedded into a child’s typical day, their general education teachers have the opportunity to collaborate with the special education teachers and therapists to better support the child in the general education setting. In Rhode Island, 54% of children ages three to five receive a majority of their services in regular early childhood programs, which is above the national average of 40% -- and in RI Pre-K, 75% of children receive services embedded in their everyday classroom activities and routines.

Despite the expansion of the RI-IECSE services, many families are unaware that special education services can be delivered successfully within high-quality general early childhood programs and or that this would be an option for their child. In addition, many LEAs have not begun implementing the RI-IECSE model or other embedded services models, meaning that families may believe they have limited options for how to receive special education services. Many LEAs operate special education integrated preschool classrooms which may only offer classes part-day, or part-week, frequently include more than the recommended ratios of children with and without disabilities, and do not necessarily meet all the high-quality deliverables that RI Pre-K programs are required to meet. As a result, once children are enrolled in special education preschool classrooms, their families may not be aware or be advised that they can apply for the RI Pre-K lottery for their child, while maintaining special education services.

**Steps Taken to Date**

- As noted above, Rhode Island has been a leader in the creation of the RI Itinerant Early Childhood Special Education Service-Delivery Model (RI-IECSE) which provides services to all children regardless of disability in the environments they would typically attend if not for their disability.<sup>12</sup> Since 2016, RIDE has offered targeted professional development and technical assistance to school districts and community-based staff to support the RI-IECSE service delivery model. To date, RI has supported implementation of the RI-IECSE model in 24 LEAs.
- RI Pre-K enrollment and eligibility requirements for students has included a school district residency requirement. In this way, RI has ensured that any child who participated in RI Pre-K would

**Recommendations for Expansion**

*Family Empowerment & Choice*

- Ensure all families are aware of the research around inclusive education & their rights to have their children participate in the RI Pre-Ks and to receive their special education services within these classes
- Create a multilingual RI Pre-K Family Liaison position which would include support for families entering the RI Pre-K program and those navigating the special education system

*LEAs*

- Support all LEAs in providing the RI-IECSE model or other embedded services models through targeted professional development, technical assistance, and strategic planning grants
- Explore opportunities for regionalization of ECSE services to allow for RI Pre-K students to potentially attend RI Pre-K programs outside the geography of their LEA, thereby

be located within the geographic catchment of the LEA responsible for providing ECSE services.

- RI Pre-K providers receive a 6-hour Intro to the RI-IECSE service delivery model professional development. The training provides information on the IECSE's role within the classroom, as well as the general early childhood teacher's role supporting children with disabilities. It introduces the research behind the model, the rationale for adoption, the key features, and the alignment with RI's vision for supporting all young children within high-quality general early learning programs. RI Pre-Ks receive support in collaborating with LEAs and ongoing technical assistance from RIDE.
- Increased Medicaid rates for the KidsConnect program at EOHHS provides funding to support additional KidsConnect staff to be in community-based early education classrooms

expanding family choice and potentially decreasing the number of transitions for children

- Conduct a need and impact study for cross-district enrollment.
- Explore Colorado's model of ECSE delivery where all children three to five who have an IEP have access to a general education preschool program through the school district in which the child resides. Districts have access to a portion of dedicated general funding for children receiving ECSE and may provide the preschool programming themselves, embedding the special education and related services, or contract with other providers in the community, but the district remains responsible for oversight and payment agreements. Colorado's approach to ECSE has propelled them to become a national leader, with 92% of children with IEPs receiving services in general education early childhood programming.

## Consideration 2: How can we support providers to meaningfully include and support children receiving ECSE?

### Overview and Current Context

There are two key barriers to supporting children with special education needs in RI Pre-K classrooms: workforce readiness and pipeline & equitable funding to deliver needed services.

*Workforce Readiness and Pipeline:* As more children enter RI Pre-K programs where Child Outreach Screening is required, there is a likely increase in number children receiving Child Outreach referrals to special education and identified as needing services. This will necessitate additional resources for special educators and therapists. In addition, general education classroom teachers must be ready to differentiate instruction and embed special education practices into their instruction.

*Equitable Funding:* Providing adequate funding for ECSE rests primarily at the local level. A small portion of funding comes from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B, Section 619, which is the specific section for ECSE. Additionally, RI's funding formula provides per-pupil funding, but only for children with IEPs who are enrolled in LEA-based early childhood programs, not when children are placed in the community in other programs across the mixed-delivery system. For more information about potential changes to support organizational readiness see *Key Focus 4*.

Currently, children with disabilities who receive services in RI Pre-K classrooms operated by child care centers or Head Start Agencies are counted as "service only" in the funding formula, meaning that no additional funding is provided to the LEA, despite their legal obligation to provide special education services. This means that LEAs have to cover increasing special education costs when a child remains in a community-based RI Pre-K program. Given RI Pre-K's commitment to investing in the mixed-delivery system, the current structure creates funding gaps for LEAs.

#### Steps Taken to Date

- RI Pre-K programs currently support children with disabilities and welcome embedded special education services and collaboration with LEAs

#### Recommendations for Expansion

##### *Workforce Pipeline and Readiness:*

- Support Institutions of Higher Education in offering coursework that is aligned with national best practices on embedded instruction within general early childhood settings

- RIDE offers an Introduction to the IECSE service delivery model to RI Pre-K teachers, teaching assistants, and education coordinators
- RIDE has worked with LEAs to transition to more general early childhood programming with embedded special education services. This has been difficult without dedicated funding to support these efforts.
- RIDE has collaborated with Early Intervention around the RI-IECSE model to best support parents in accessing high-quality programs with embedded special education services
- With PDG B-5 Renewal funding, RI has provided funding to two Intuitions of Higher Education (IHE) for aligning IECSE practices with current coursework
- Increase capacity to provide additional dedicated professional development and technical assistance to providers and programs to promote inclusive education and embedded instruction
- Explore options to attract prospective educators, especially educators of color and those that are multilingual, to enter the ECSE profession
- Provide funding to programs to plan for and support necessary staffing and facilities changes (see *Key Focus 4*)

#### *Equitable Funding*

- Explore changes to RI’s state funding formula to ensure that LEAs serving children in ECSE in RI Pre-K classrooms receive funding formula support regardless of setting. This might include updating the funding formula to provide LEAs with a scaled per-pupil expenditure for children designated as “service only” and enrolled in RI Pre-K and other community-based high-quality programs like Head Start, regardless of setting.
- Offer transition supports to LEA-based programs that serve children with disabilities as they transition to RI Pre-K (see *Key Focus 4* for further discussion)

### **Consideration 3: How can we support children as they transition between early childhood programs?**

#### **Overview and Current Context**

Transitioning between programs and settings can be challenging for young children, as well as for families and providers. For young children with disabilities, intentional and strong transitions are especially important.

One transition that is determined by federal policy is the transition from Early intervention (IDEA Part C) to Early Childhood Special Education (IDEA Part B Section 619) which takes place at a child’s third birthday. LEAs have a mandatory 6-month transition period prior to the child’s third birthday to partner with EI to evaluate each child, determine if the child is eligible for ECSE and if so, to create and Individualized Education Program (IEP). All services are required to be implemented on or before the child’s third birthday and LEAs are responsible for delivering the services as defined in the IEP. How Rhode Island leverages EI and ECSE to support children and families is a critical long-term consideration for the expansion of RI Pre-K.

In an effort to reduce transitions for children, RI piloted a Pre-K service delivery model that allowed for children utilizing the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) from DHS to matriculate from their age three preschool rooms into RI Pre-K, if it was at the same early learning program (see *Cost of RI Pre-K*, discussion of Service Delivery Model 4). Even as we consider ways to support family choice and reduce transitions, until RI is prepared to offer embedded ECSE supports across district boundaries at scale, RI will continue the current policy that children attend RI Pre-K in their district of residence so children with disabilities can equitably access the necessary ECSE services to be successful in their RI Pre-K classrooms.

## Steps Taken to Date

- The Early Intervention Interagency Coordination Council (ICC), an advisory council to assist EOHHS in the implementation of Early Intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities, provides a forum for collaboration between state and community-based programs. As a body of representatives from a variety of early childhood organizations and parents of children who are currently or formerly enrolled in Early Intervention, the ICC has served as a sounding board for families and providers to discuss challenges and successes in their Early Intervention experiences, such as those related to EI transition to early childhood special education.
- RI Pre-K requires Child Outreach screens for all children within 45 days of the beginning of school

## Recommendations for Expansion

- Leverage the transition from EI to ECSE to orient families to the option for enrolling in RI Pre-K and their options for embedded services in general education settings
- In the near-term, while potential options are explored for changes to the provision of ECSE across district boundaries, ensure that children matriculating from a child care program into an RI Pre-K classroom are in their district of residence
- As RI Pre-K pilots the matriculation of students outside of their district of residence, ensure that there is clear guidance and procedures for the delivery of special education services
- Conduct focused strategic planning around the provision of developmental supports for young children -- with a focus on EI, ECSE, and Kids Connect -- to improve alignment, transitions, and access for families and children ages 0-5. (*RI has applied for funding from the federal Administration for Children and Families to support this planning effort*)

## Long-term Considerations

As RI considers expansion beyond 5,000 seats to reach universal access, there are additional considerations that the State will need to address to ensure that children with disabilities will have access to RI Pre-K.

- **Access:** Consider ensuring that all children found eligible for ECSE services who meet the RI Pre-K age requirements are offered a seat in a RI Pre-K classroom.
- **Maintaining a natural proportion:** Ensure that each community provides sufficient RI Pre-K and Head Start classes and seats to allow all children receiving ECSE services to participate, while maintaining natural proportions of children with and without disabilities in each classroom. This aligns to best practices and ensures that children with disabilities are equitably served.
- **Transitions:** Explore options employed in other states that could allow family choice for a child to remain in EI beyond their third birthday and until a child would be eligible to enter RI Pre-K. A similar practice is already implemented in some places, including Washington, DC.
- **Social Emotional Development & Learning:** RI should continue to meaningfully support social-emotional development and learning. RI Pre-K has dedicated resources for targeted intervention when a child presents with specific needs, and has partnered with ECSE to provide individualized supports to children with disabilities, but continued broad-based training and supports are crucial for children. RI is in the process of developing additional implementation plans to support social-emotional learning and new resources to support implementation should be prioritized during further expansion.
- **Family choice:** Once RI reaches universal access for RI Pre-K, RI will need to ensure that families who do not wish to participate in RI Pre-K programming still have equitable access to high-quality early childhood special education services.
- **Cross-district enrollment:** In other sections of this report, we have discussed long-term options that would allow for cross district enrollment in RI Pre-K. If this were to happen, there would be significant implications for children with disabilities, as the responsibility for and funding of services is currently covered by a child's district of residence. Further planning is needed for how this would be accomplished to ensure that children with disabilities were being equitably served and districts have the requisite supports to enable delivery of services.

# Key Focus 4: Expanding RI Pre-K in the Mixed-Delivery System

**GOAL STATEMENT:** RI Pre-K will continue to provide access to high-quality early childhood education to children and families through a mixed-delivery model. Continuing this strategy will ensure that RI is well positioned to continue to braid and layer funding sources to enhance the sustainability of the ECCE system while supporting family choice and equity.

## Introduction

High-quality early learning happens in all settings: child care centers, Head Start, school districts, and home-based care. From the outset, RI Pre-K has been delivered through a mixed-delivery system. A mixed-delivery system refers to programming for children offered in a diverse group of settings that meet common health, safety, and quality standards. The mixed-delivery system aims to capitalize on the existing infrastructure in the early care and education sector. Mixed-delivery models administer funds across licensed child care, Head Start, and public schools to ensure access to high-quality, affordable child care options for children and families. National experts recognize utilizing a mixed-delivery system as critical to maximize family choice and supporting early learning system sustainability when striving for universal pre-K.<sup>13</sup>

Recognized as a best practice, strengthening RI's mixed-delivery system has benefits across the entire birth-to-five sector: ensuring children have continuity of care, families have choice, and providers have sustainable business models. Specifically, RI Pre-K offers multiple settings a consistent funding stream, which supports a provider's overall stability and quality. These benefits contribute to important system-level benefits as well, including increased wages for teachers, improved overall program quality, and the ability to preserve capacity in infant and toddler care. Preschool enrollment is critical to sustaining small business operations, because three- to five- year-old slots generate more revenue than younger age groups due to the higher child to staff ratios permitted by state licensing. Without preschool aged children enrolled, many community-based providers would be financially strained and potentially forced to close because offering slots for solely infants and toddlers (I/T) is not financially sustainable. By expanding RI Pre-K through the mixed-delivery system, funding in turn helps to support the sustainability of I/T care capacity across the state. Additionally, working families may need care for longer than the typical six-hour school day, may prefer for their child to remain at the same program before entering elementary school, and may prefer to have one early learning provider for multiple siblings of different ages. These reasons highlight the importance of continuing to expand RI Pre-K by investing in the mixed-delivery system where different types of settings can offer different options that meet families' individual needs.

Expanding RI Pre-K through the mixed-delivery system also offers opportunities to leverage existing investments in the early childhood education system to achieve the goals of RI Pre-K expansion. In 2021, in collaboration with stakeholders, RI piloted new [service delivery models](#) that created opportunities for providers to apply for existing classrooms to become RI Pre-K classrooms by braiding and layering fund streams from RIDE, DHS, and the federal government (see *Cost of RI Pre-K* discussion of service delivery models). These pilot models supported existing classrooms to become part of RI Pre-K by raising the quality, extending the days/hours of classrooms, or expanding enrollment in classrooms already serving four-year olds. The new models have proven initially successful. In 2021-2022 the state had access to \$3M in funding for expansion. The original, full classroom grants for RI Pre-K would have yielded 15 new classrooms (300 seats). Using the pilot models, 27 classrooms were opened or brought into RI Pre-K, representing new 516 seats in the RI Pre-K program.

To achieve 5,000 RI Pre-K seats and more, it is important to understand and address the current challenges and needs of each segment of the mixed-delivery system. For the purposes of this report, we will categorize the mixed-delivery system into the following types: (1) Child Care Centers (2) Head Start Agencies (2) Local Education Agencies (LEA) and (4) Family Child Care Homes (FCC). The supports for each provider type will focus on existing infrastructure and be categorized by capacity in relation to facilities and program quality. In order to equitably, strategically and sustainably expand RI Pre-K through a mixed-delivery system, resources such as funding dedicated to compensation, quality, facilities, and data systems infrastructure are essential.

For each provider type in the mixed-delivery system – Child Care Centers (CCs), Head Start Agencies (HS), and Local Education Agencies (LEA) -- it is vital to understand the current capacity and specific needs for expansion readiness:

- With current capacity, how many RI Pre-K seats could exist in the current system?
- What supports are needed to expand capacity within the system?

## Child Care Centers

Child care centers (CCs) are private entities, including both profit and not for profit, that offer center-based child care. Rhode Island General Law requires all child care centers to be licensed by the Department of Human Services (DHS). They often provide full day, full year care for children of working families as well as part-day, part-time options to meet different families' needs. Child care centers may provide care to children of any age from infancy to school age. To be eligible applicants to provide RI Pre-K, child care centers are required to have their DHS license in good standing, accept the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) subsidy, and be rated 3 stars or higher on [BrightStars](#), the Quality Rating and Improvement Scale (QRIS).

**Currently, of the 2,364 RI Pre-K seats, 782 are in 18 child care centers, representing 33% of the total RI Pre-K capacity.**

This includes:

- 36 classrooms using the traditional model, where all students are enrolled via the RI Pre-K lottery
- Six classrooms using Model 4, where age-eligible students who utilize CCAP and were already students at the child care center are given the option of matriculating directly into the RI Pre-K classroom and all remaining seats are enrolled via the RI Pre-K lottery. Providers continue to receive compensation through the CCAP voucher for the matriculating students and are receive the balance of the classroom costs to increase the quality of the classroom from RIDE RI Pre-K funds, creating a braiding of CCAP and RI Pre-K funds and reducing cost to General Revenue funds. (see *Cost of RI Pre-K* discussion of service delivery models)

## With current capacity, how many RI Pre-K seats could exist in current child care centers?

Based on BrightStars ratings and preschool-aged licensed capacity as of September 2022, there are approximately 2,700 child care center-based seats that not currently part of the RI Pre-K program or Head Start. This current capacity represents a prime opportunity for expansion for RI Pre-K, because the child care centers meet the criteria for applying to become RI Pre-K: they are in good standing with DHS licensing, have achieved a BrightStars rating of 3 or higher, and accept CCAP. However, there may be barriers for this potential set of providers, including employing and hiring educators with the required credentials (see *Key Focus 5*) or organizational readiness to take on the requirements of RI Pre-K. RI Pre-K requires providers to develop and submit a competitive application to receive funding, commit to a set of deliverables, and integrate a new funding stream into their budgeting processes which can prove to be challenging for child care centers-- especially those operating for 12 hour days to meet the varying scheduling demands of working families.

### Steps Taken to Date

#### *Educator Workforce:*

- *Qualifications:* As discussed in *Key Focus 5*, many lead teachers in high-quality child care programs may not have the requisite credentials to become a lead teacher for RI Pre-K. To address this barrier and ensure that the incumbent workforce can have career advancement, RI has invested in piloting innovative, accelerated higher education pathways and funding scholarship programs.
- *Compensation:* RI Pre-K provides businesses with funding to more equitably compensate teachers in relation to the public school system, although level RI Pre-K awards have not kept up with inflation or increases in public school pay. Often, RI Pre-K Teachers earn more than the rest of their colleagues

### Recommendations for Expansion

*Education Workforce:* See *Key Focus 5* for recommendations.

#### *Organizational Readiness:*

- Develop targeted technical assistance for providers who meet the criteria to deliver quality RI Pre-K but need business support. Technical assistance through the PDATA Hub could include support in writing and developing the RI Pre-K application and consulting on organizational budgeting approaches and practices. Providers who participate in this TA would become part of a pipeline of ready applicants for future RI Pre-K grant awards.
- Provide support for business forecasting and budgeting so providers can effectively leverage all fund sources to operate, including how best to blend and braid various

in child care centers, but typically still earn less than educators with the same qualifications within public schools.

#### *Organizational Readiness:*

- There are multiple supports offered to child care centers through the PDTA Hub (Center for Early Learning Professionals) and traditional small business supports through CommerceRI and the Small Business Administration

funding streams and use funding to investment in their program as a whole

### **What supports are needed to expand capacity within child care centers?**

According to data from September 2022, there are 6,964 licensed preschool-aged seats in child care centers with BrightStars ratings of 1-2 stars or that are unrated. If these providers could move up the quality continuum, they would represent an additional expansion opportunity for RI Pre-K. If more quality licensed capacity was to be created – such as through an increase in the number of facilities – that would represent an additional opportunity for expansion. Importantly, while there is enough built space for universal Pre-K across Rhode Island, the distribution of current high-quality facilities is not geographically equitable.<sup>14</sup> For RI Pre-K access to continue to be based on school district boundaries, there must be investments in facilities deserts.

#### **Steps Taken to Date**

##### *Quality Improvements:*

- The FY23 Budget includes \$1M in ARPA SFRF funds to support quality enhancements for the early childhood education sector. The goal of this funding is to invest in targeted supports that help providers who have a lower BrightStars rating achieve and maintain a higher BrightStars rating. This will enable more child care centers to become eligible applicants for RI Pre-K.
- Using the PDG B-5 Renewal Grant and CCDBG ARPA funds, DHS has invested in the LearnERS initiative to provide several cohorts of trainings for child care centers and educators on the Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) quality rating tools. This is a training to support programs in understanding and utilizing the evidence-based valid and reliable ERS assessment tool utilized to assess overall program quality in early care and education settings.
- In 2022 the BrightStars Advisory Committee moved to modify the QRIS standards on a pilot basis to offer flexibility around staff qualifications. Before, in order to achieve a high-quality rating, programs must achieve a high-quality score across all indicators. The recent change allows for programs to receive a high-quality rating if they have scored high in all areas other than staff qualifications.

##### *Facilities*

- RI conducted a [comprehensive needs assessment of early childhood education facilities in 2019](#) to evaluate readiness for [meeting CECE requirements](#)
- RI used \$600,000 in PDG Renewal funds to award facilities planning grants to 25 community-based organizations (including HS agencies) to prepare required materials for facilities expansion, such as architectural plans, environmental reviews, and other requisite capital planning

#### **Recommendations for Expansion**

##### *Quality Improvements:*

- Consider opportunities to pair programs interested in becoming RI Pre-K providers with existing RI Pre-K providers as a 'mentorship' relationship to support quality improvement
- Identify programs interested in moving up BrightStars and provide targeted, intensive PDTA to support advancement
- Invest in supporting the RI ECCE workforce (see *Key Focus 5* re: workforce recommendations)

##### *Facilities*

The below recommendations are drawn from the 2019 Facilities Needs Assessment of items that have not been implemented to date:

- Develop, fund and implement a state backed loan guarantee program in order to incentivize greater private investment in the early learning sector
- Contemplate policy change that allows delaying start-up of newly awarded pre-k classrooms to allow time for adequate planning and infrastructure development. Few providers or developers will build new space on speculation and current time frame does not allow for development of new spaces
- Work with legislature and municipalities to: a. Create a blanket property tax exemption or stabilization program for providers meeting key benchmarks (quality, high needs populations, etc.) This will afford greater financial stability to existing providers and better encourage new development. Lessen zoning restrictions so that more buildings and sites can be considered for early learning use
- Launch developer and business incentives for including early learning in mixed use developments.

- In March 2021, based on the findings of the 2019 Needs Assessment, RI voters approved a bond initiative to invest \$15M in early learning facilities. The bond award application was opened in July of 2022 and has received over \$35M requests to open over 1,700 new seats or increase quality of seats
  - RI also created the [new service delivery models](#) which allow providers to apply for existing classrooms to become RI Pre-K classrooms. Previously, to ensure that no students were displaced, all new RI Pre-K classrooms had to be in classrooms that were not being used. The new models make it possible for child care centers to support existing classrooms to become RI Pre-K without displacing children and without needing an entirely new room.
- Conversely, consider implementing developer impact fees
- Offer tax incentive programs that make early learning space a more viable component of a mixed-use real estate project

## Head Start Agencies

The federal Head Start (HS) program is a nationally recognized leader in the field of early childhood education for providing evidence-based services to children and families who will most benefit from early education and comprehensive services. Head Start funding is the first and most stable source of federal funding for early childhood education. A key tenet of the program established that it be culturally responsive to the communities served, and that the communities have an investment in its success. To support local agencies in meeting their state match and to ensure equity in accessing care and education for our state’s most vulnerable children and families, the State of Rhode Island began funding State Head Start slots in 1987 and since 2008, the State has provided \$1.4 million annually to fund 130 Head Start slots.

Since its beginning, Head Start has grown significantly and maintained its mission of advancing equity. HS programs employ a whole family approach to breaking the cycle of poverty through delivering high-quality care and education for young children and comprehensive support services for families. The model is demonstrated to have multigenerational impacts around family wellbeing and economic success. Economists consider investing in Head Start to be the highest ROI for public spending with an average return of 7-13%- the highest being in the earlier years, infant and toddler care.<sup>15</sup>

Local Head Start agencies are federally funded non-profit social service organizations that deliver free, evidence-based high-quality comprehensive care and education programs that promote the school readiness of infants, toddlers and preschool-age children to children and families living at or below the federal poverty level. Families are considered categorically eligible for HS if they meet any of the following criteria:

- At or Below Federal Poverty Level
- Receiving Public Assistance
  - SNAP
  - SSI (child)
  - RI Works
- Experiencing Homelessness
- Foster Care

Head Start programs are designed to prioritize enrollment for those most in need. They screen families for a variety of circumstances and assign points based on pre-determined risk factors specific to their community of residence. A portion of enrollment is specifically reserved for children with disabilities.

In Rhode Island, Head Start programs are licensed by DHS and are consistently ranked as some of the highest quality programs in BrightStars. Additionally, Head Start agencies may have non-Head Start programs in their facilities, such as non-Head Start child care slots and a variety of other social services programs. Therefore, not only do our local Head Start programs offer comprehensive support services as a part of the federal Head Start Model, but they are well poised to support families to access a myriad of programs.

RI Pre-K's quality hallmarks are built upon Head Start's high-quality benchmarks. As a result, Head Start agencies are well-positioned to deliver RI Pre-K because of the inherent alignment on the model and commitment to quality. However, due to the way RI Pre-K funding was distributed prior to 2020, this functionally meant that one classroom at a Head Start agency would be funded by Head Start funds and another classroom would be funded by RI Pre-K funds. In collaboration with the Head Start agencies, in 2020, RI Pre-K developed a new service delivery model that could layer RI Pre-K funding into existing Head Start rooms there were not already operating at duration, to support them to extend their duration to 6 hours day for 180 days of the year (*See Cost of RI Pre-K, Service Delivery Models 2 and 3*). In this way, a portion of existing Head Start classrooms became part of the RI Pre-K program, with new opportunities to share resources across classrooms and leverage the PDATA supports from the State in addition to the supports from the federal government. Importantly, this method of braiding the two fund sources within one classroom created new access for children who do not qualify for Head Start due to income level and created classrooms that are more socio-economically diverse and representative of the community's population (a recognized best practice). The new models and funding also supported Head Start agencies in retaining federal funding for Head Start seats and reaffirmed our commitment to supplement and not supplant any current classrooms. As of the 2022-2023 school year, RI Pre-K funding contributes over \$5M to Head Start to fund seats, duration, and high-quality staffing and materials through the variety of service delivery models. As RI Pre-K continues to expand, the strong partnership with Head Start will remain essential.

**Currently, of the 2,364 RI Pre-K seats, 918 are in all 6 Head Start agencies, representing 39% of the total RI Pre-K capacity.** This includes the new service delivery models that braid Head Start funding:

- 40 classrooms that use the traditional RI Pre-K model, where all students in the classroom are funded by RI Pre-K categorical funds and are placed in the classroom via the lottery. Students do not need to be income-eligible for HS to be in the RI Pre-K classroom
- Six classrooms use Model 2, where all students are directly enrolled in Head Start and are all income-eligible for Head Start. RI Pre-K provides funding to supplement the federal Head Start funds to allow the program to reach duration of either 6 hours a day or 180 days a year to align with RI Pre-K standards.
- Five classrooms use Model 3, where some students are enrolled directly in Head Start and are funded by Head Start and any open seats are enrolled via the RI Pre-K lottery where students are of any income level and are funded by RI Pre-K. All students receive the same wraparound services, regardless of income.

### **With current capacity, how many RI Pre-K seats could exist in current Head Start Agencies?**

As of September 2022, there are approximately 1000 Head Start seats in RI that are not part of the RI Pre-K program. Importantly, these seats are all high-quality preschool seats that adhere to the Head Start Program Performance Standards and provide vital early childhood education to young children in Rhode Island that are funded by the Office of Head Start. To date, they have not been counted as part of the state prekindergarten program because they either do not receive funding from RI Pre-K or they may not meet all the hallmarks of RI Pre-K, such as operating classrooms for a six-hour day and 180-day calendar (Head Start was originally developed as a half-day program and since has been strategically and incrementally expanded by the Federal Government).

Expansion within Head Start could include either new Model 1 rooms – where an entirely new classroom is created and staffed within the Head Start facility – or Model 2 or 3 rooms, where existing Head Start classrooms also become RI Pre-K classrooms. Working collaboratively with Head Start to include all eligible Head Start slots in RI Pre-K would not only be fiscally efficient as the slots are primarily federally funded, but also invest in programs serving the highest need students.

#### **Steps Taken to Date**

- The RI Pre-K program is built upon the quality framework of Head Start and Head Start providers were amongst the first operators of RI Pre-K
- The pilot service delivery models allow Head Start programs to braid existing Head Start funds to make a cohesive preschool system across Head Start and RI Pre-K that is cost effective and supports program sustainability

#### **Recommendations for Expansion**

- Head Start agencies face many of the same workforce and facilities challenges as child care centers, so all recommendations for child care centers are important for Head Start expansion as well
- Collaborate with all Head Start agencies to identify concerns and barriers to applying to become part of RI Pre-K and develop new service delivery models that allow all Head Start seats to become part of the RI Pre-K network
- Ensure the retention of and access to slots for our most vulnerable children and families by further coordinating enrollment between direct Head Start enrollment and RI Pre-K lottery enrollment

## What supports are needed to expand capacity within the Head Starts?

Federal Head Start awards are issued on a five-year grant cycle. In their application, programs estimate operational costs and the total number of children to be served with the funding allocated. At any time, a program can apply to reduce or convert their slots (from either Head Start to Early Head Start, or Early Head Start to Head Start) with justification. Historically, federal funding has been outpaced by inflation, which has made retaining slots challenging. Braiding funding with RI-PreK has been critical to augmenting Head Start's capacity so that they could retain and expand services and increase educator wages.

The Federal Office of Head Start has recently issued [official guidance](#) around strategies to stabilize the workforce and the first recommendation is to permanently increase compensation. Given the funding structure of the program, the most likely scenario to achieve this would be to apply for a reduction in federal slots- as noted in the Information Memorandum. By braiding funding with RI Pre-K the State of Rhode Island could proactively support maintaining all Head Start slots and continue to support the most vulnerable children and families. Without a plan to attract and retain qualified staff through appropriate compensation, federally funded Head Start slots may be in jeopardy.

### Steps Taken to Date

- Implementation of Models 2 and 3 in the service delivery models supports effective layering of funding, braiding RI Pre-K funds with HS to retain and augment Head Start classrooms

### Recommendations for Expansion

- Support Head Start agencies with retaining the number of federally funded Head Start slots and augmenting their capacity through partnership with RI Pre-K through awarding more funding and including additional slots in our mixed-delivery system
- Fund Early Head Start slots to proactively address the shortage of infant/toddler care and ensure equitable access to high-quality early care and education

## Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are the public school system in each district and are locally controlled. LEAs are federally required to provide special education services to children ages three to five through IDEA Part B 619. Although not required to be provided in the school district, most LEAs provide services in district-based special education integrated or self-contained classrooms, with most classes being half day and some only a portion of the week (see *Key Focus 3*). A small number of LEAs offer general education preschool classes. LEAs may charge tuition to students without disabilities.

LEA preschool classrooms located within public schools are licensed by RIDE through the Basic Education Program (BEP). LEAs can apply to be RI Pre-K providers if they have space licensed through BEP for young children. As part of the deliverables for RI Pre-K, they must attain a BrightStars rating.

**Currently, of the 2,364 RI Pre-K seats, 664 are in 7 LEAs, representing 28% of the total RI Pre-K capacity.**

## With current capacity, how many RI Pre-K seats could exist in LEAs?

Across RI, there are approximately 125 LEA classrooms -- mostly special education integrated or self-contained classes -- that are currently serving children ages three- to five- years-old that are not part of RI Pre-K. While these classrooms represent expansion opportunities, many of them may be used for half-day classes and serve multiple groups of children each day, meaning that turning them into full-day Pre-K will reduce the number of children they currently serve.

### Steps Taken to Date

- The Model 5 funding model was created as a way to leverage local funding, as well as the state’s funding formula, to pay for seats, while RI Pre-K funds are layered on top of those funds to pay for the quality materials and supports needed to allow LEAs to move existing LEA classrooms to high-quality Pre-K. Due to the higher teacher salaries in LEA settings, the cost of teachers and teacher assistant’s salaries and benefits in the original Model 1 classrooms left little funding for quality materials

### Recommendations for Expansion

- Support LEAs in transitioning to providing ECSE services in the Itinerant ECSE model and transitioning existing classrooms into general education RI Pre-K with embedded services (see *Key Focus 3*)
- Support LEAs to partner with community-based organizations to deliver RI Pre-K in school facilities that are underutilized

## What supports are needed to expand capacity within the LEAs?

Similar to child care centers, LEAs face barriers to expansion due to facilities. In addition, they too face a challenge in hiring and retaining qualified special educators, therapists, and teaching assistants. LEAs often must consider structural changes to personnel to manage a growing Pre-K program in the general education context. Many existing Pre-K programs are embedded within the Special Education departments, due to the focus on ECSE, rather than their Pre-K programs being a part of general education system.

### Steps Taken to Date

- RI has made significant investments in school facilities through a series of school facility bonds managed by the School Building Authority. These funds can be leveraged to expand or build spaces for early childhood education.

### Recommendations for Expansion

- In future school facilities bonds, consider setting aside funding specifically for early childhood facilities
- Support LEAs/municipalities in using or raising local funds to expand facilities
- Support for organizational restructuring and initial funding for hiring general education coordinator for Pre-K outside of the special education department

## Family Child Care Homes

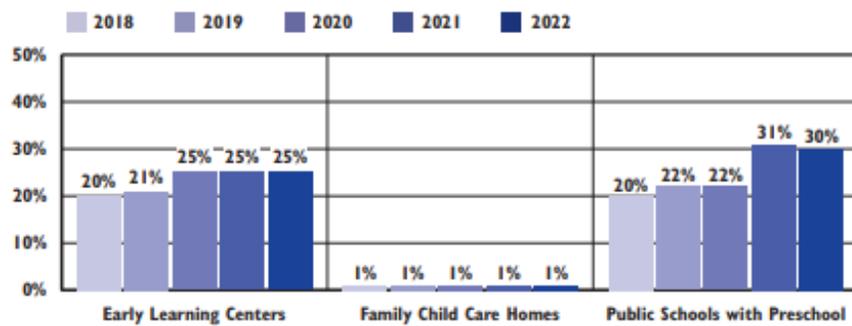
Family Child Care homes (FCC) are a critical part of the mixed-delivery system in Rhode Island. FCC's provide care for one or more unrelated children in a provider’s home setting. They are licensed by DHS and many accept the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) subsidy. In FCCs, children can be in a mixed age group (birth to five and school aged children) with a low adult to child ratio. FCCs are often a provider of choice for families who feel safer sending their child to another home rather than a center or school-based setting for care or need non-standard hour care. In addition, many families prefer programs that speak their home language, and as approximately 69% of FCC’s speak Spanish as a first language.

Currently, RI Pre-K is not offered in FCCs because the grant funding is awarded on a per classroom basis with an award intended to serve between 18-20 four-year-old children. However, FCCs are strongly connected to RI Pre-K and often provide the before/after care for RI Pre-K students who need extended care hours (see *Key Focus 1*).

## What supports are needed to offer RI Pre-K in a Family Child Care Home setting?

*Model Flexibility:* Currently, RI Pre-K’s are awarded on a per classroom model basis and the budget is based on providers having the ability to serve between 18-20 children per classroom as is similar amongst child care centers, Head Starts, and LEAs. This requirement is not something FCC’s licensed capacity can meet, therefore a specific FCC budget template that considers awards based on a per-child model would need to be explored.

**Percentage of Early Learning Centers, Family Child Care Programs,  
and Public Schools with a High-Quality  
BrightStars Rating (4 or 5 Stars), Rhode Island, 2018-2022**



Source: RI Association for the Education of Young Children, Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Rhode Island Department of Education, and RI Early Care and Education Data System (ECEDS), January 2018 – January 2022.

*Quality Supports:* Family Child Care Homes who accept CCAP participate in BrightStars. Achieving quality benchmarks in a home setting is often more challenging than within a center for a variety of reasons. For more information on high-quality early learning programs across Rhode Island’s Early Care and Education System (which is inclusive of RI Pre-K), please see chart from the 2022 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook.<sup>16</sup>

### Steps Taken to Date

#### *Model Flexibility*

- Feedback from the FCC community around their interest in participating in the RI Pre-K has been solicited through a variety of public forums, most recently the Early Learning Council Meeting in September 2022. Considerations for model flexibility were discussed

#### *Quality Supports*

- Similar to child care centers, FCCs are eligible to participate in the DHS sponsored LearnERS program. This program supports providers to learn the Environmental Rating Scale tool which is critical to improving program quality and BrightStars rating
- SEIU Education & Support Fund (ESF) serves CCAP Family Child Care Providers with Professional Development and Technical Assistance programming in both English and Spanish incorporating project-based learning, coaching, and mentoring. Their mission is to provide education and training programs that empower workers, raise standards, and promote high quality jobs
- There are several workforce development initiatives funded by the Department of Human Services for licensed FCC’s. One program of note is the TEACH Scholarship. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Program provides opportunities for child care educators to complete higher education course work in early childhood education while providing sponsoring child care programs an opportunity to develop their workforce. DHS licensed Family Child Care Providers who accept the CCAP subsidy are eligible to apply for this program

### Recommendations for Expansion

#### *Model Flexibility*

- Create a pilot opportunity for Family Child Care Home Providers with a Bachelor’s degree to apply to offer RI Pre-K
- Review existing FCC regulations to determine viability of allowing FCCs to serve only preschool age children and identify the potential impact on supply of infant/toddler seats
- Conduct budget analysis to determine costs of operationalizing RI Pre-K within FCCs
- Consider the opportunity for a staffed FCC network to support FCCs in becoming RI Pre-K providers
- Build partnership between RI FCCs and FCCs in other states that deliver pre-K programming to support readiness and mentorship

#### *Quality Supports*

- Support FCCs in advancing in BrightStars, including facilities-related supports
- Develop PDATA to support FCC readiness to deliver RI Pre-K, including training in the endorsed curriculum models, use of formative assessment, and other tenets of the RI Pre-K program

## Long-term considerations

As noted above, segments of the mixed-delivery system are licensed and overseen by different state agencies. Both RIDE and DHS have roles in reviewing applications, licensing, monitoring, and overseeing early learning programs. Some providers – such as child care centers and Head Start agencies – work with DHS and RIDE to be licensed and to run an RI Pre-K program. As a result, interagency collaboration is vital to supporting an aligned approach across the mixed-delivery system and simplifying processes to enable RI Pre-K expansion. Funded by the PDG B-5 Renewal Grant, RI has taken steps to date to support ease of access for providers by working to design and develop a new data system that, among other functions, will coordinate applications for DHS licensing, CCAP approval, and RI Pre-K. Continued coordinated investments in shared infrastructure are important to ensure that the mixed-delivery system is supported equitably. In addition, RI is developing a report on current early childhood governance structures that may result in future recommendations that impact RI Pre-K governance.

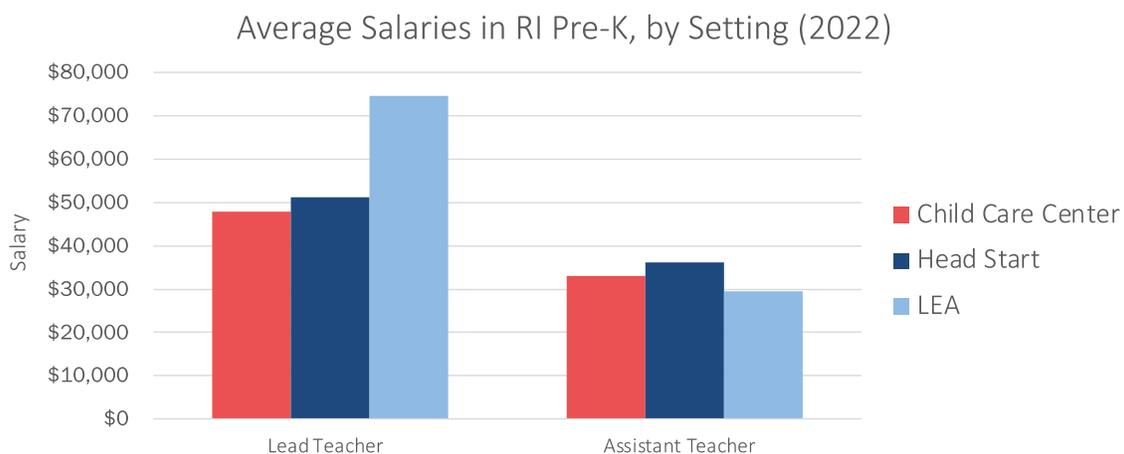
# Key Focus 5: Supporting Early Childhood Educators – Recruiting, Retaining, and Supporting a Highly Qualified Workforce

**GOAL STATEMENT:** As RI Pre-K continues to expand, it is the expectation that all programs regardless of setting will continue to employ, retain, and fairly compensate qualified administrators, education coordinators, Lead Teachers, and Teacher Assistants, as outlined in the regulations on Comprehensive Early Childhood Education (CECE) programs, with intentional coordination with the non-RI Pre-K early childhood care and education (ECCE) workforce system to minimize disruption.

## Introduction

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) workforce is a key driver of Rhode Island’s economy. Without a workforce of early educators, private and public early childhood care and education settings would not be able to operate, parents would have greater difficulty sustaining employment, and our state would not be able to function. Despite the ECCE workforce’s importance to economic stability in the state, these educators face a pay penalty for working with children between the ages of birth-to-five years. Approximately 25% of early educators across Rhode Island live in poverty, compared to approximately 4% in the K-8 teacher workforce.<sup>17</sup> Despite original RI Pre-K design goals to ensure pay parity with kindergarten teachers with the same credentials, there are discrepancies in compensation between RI Pre-K teachers and kindergarten teachers, which threatens RI Pre-K’s ability to attract and retain educators with the requisite credentials.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, due to RI Pre-K awards not adjusting with inflation, Lead and Assistant Teachers across the mixed-delivery system in RI Pre-K now experience pay discrepancy.



However, even with the discrepancies in compensation, staff in RI Pre-K programs often earn more than their peers in non-RI Pre-K funded early learning classrooms, which can cause disruption in the rest of the birth-to-age five system. The state is committed to expanding RI Pre-K in a way that strengthens the entire birth-to- five system. **This section will focus on the pipeline, attraction, and retention of RI Pre-K staff members and Key Focus 7 includes further discussion of strategies to strengthen infant/toddler care, including retention of educators.**

A key driver of RI Pre-K’s nationally recognized quality is the requirements for educator qualifications. RI Pre-K educator and administrator credential requirements are embedded within the Comprehensive Early Childhood Education (CECE) Program Standards for Approval of Preschool and Kindergarten Programs. [CECE program approval](#) is equivalent to a five star [BrightStars \(QRIS\) rating](#) on a classroom level (as opposed to a program-level rating). Applying for, receiving, and maintaining CECE approval is currently one of the deliverables for new and existing RI Pre-K programs.

The regulations on CECE-approved programs are pursuant to RI General Laws Chapter 16-48 and 16-87 and set specific requirements of staff qualifications. These CECE requirements are built upon the 10 National Institute for Early Education Research's ([NIEER](#)) quality benchmarks which are considered the essential ingredients of preschool education. Required educational qualifications by staff role include:

| Assistant Teacher:  | Lead Teacher:   | Education Coordinator:  | Administrator:   |
|---|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have documentation of a high school diploma or general equivalency</li> <li>• A RIELDS certificate relevant to this position</li> <li>• AND have completed one of the following options at the time of employment:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful completion of a Teacher Assistant Training Program approved by RIDE</li> <li>• A minimum of 12 credit hours of college coursework relevant to the early childhood education program setting</li> <li>• A Child Development Associate (CDA) credential AND 9 credit hours of college coursework relevant to the early childhood education program setting</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold a current RIDE Pre-K-2 teaching certificate</li> <li>• OR a Bachelor's or Master's in Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood Special Education, Human Development, or Child Development from an accredited or approved IHE and achieve the appropriate RIDE Pre-K-2 certificate within 7 years of employment</li> <li>• A RIELDS certificate relevant to this position</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold a current appropriate RIDE Pre-K-2 teaching certificate</li> <li>• And/or a Bachelor's or Master's degree in a related field with twenty-four (24) credits in Early Childhood Education from an accredited or approved institution of higher education (IHE)</li> <li>• A RIELDS certificate relevant to this position</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold a RIDE administrator certificate</li> <li>• OR meet the requirements of the role of Child Care Administrator required by DHS Child Care Center and School Age program Regulations</li> </ul> |

**Consideration 1: Accessible Pathways to RI Pre-K-2 Certification: How can RI support (educationally and financially) prospective Lead and Assistant Teachers with meeting the educational qualifications required of RI Pre-K educators?**

Per RI Pre-K deliverables and CECE regulations, RI Pre-K Lead Teachers must possess a bachelor's degree with Pre-K-2 certification – the same certification as is required for kindergarten teachers in public schools -- and/or commit to earning certification within 7 years. According to the [2019 ECCE Workforce Needs Assessment](#), there are a sufficient number of individuals in Rhode Island with the requisite degree to staff an expansion of RI Pre-K.<sup>19</sup> However, RI Pre-K would need to compete with other programs – such as elementary schools – to attract these individuals. In addition, in line with the focus on equity and opportunity, it is vital that the incumbent workforce that are skilled in working with young children have equitable opportunities to become RI Pre-K teachers.

Many current early educators do not have the requisite degrees to become RI Pre-K Lead or Assistant Teachers. As of 2022, 65% of RI Pre-K Lead Teachers hold their Pre-K-2 certification. RI Pre-K teachers who have a bachelor's degree but no teacher certification (35%) are given a seven-year grace period to enroll in the necessary educator preparation program to earn this Pre-K-2 certification. Among all early educators, 34% of all center-based lead teachers do not have Bachelors' degrees which makes them ineligible to become RI Pre-K lead teachers.<sup>20</sup> In addition, 82% of current Center-Based Assistant Teachers do not have bachelor's degrees, 60% do not have associate's degrees, and 36% do not have 12 college credits in early childhood education. This poses barriers not only for individual educators to become RI Pre-K teachers and assistant teachers, but also for prospective RI Pre-K providers in attaining high enough BrightStars ratings to become eligible to apply for RI Pre-K.

Currently, Rhode Island's higher education pathways for gaining the necessary credentials to earn a bachelor's degree and Pre-K-2 teacher certification are intended for students exiting high school and do not often have the supports in place to support working professionals. Current teachers may receive a certificate through [Expert Residency](#) or [Emergency Certification](#); this is temporary in nature and educators are still expected to enroll in an education preparation program to fulfill the requirements of receiving a full Pre-K-2 certification.

Education Coordinators for RI Pre-K also must attain either a Pre-K-2 certification or a bachelor's or master's degree in a related field with 24 credit hours in early childhood. RI Pre-K Education Coordinators provide teaching staff with regular and ongoing supportive supervision and feedback, promoting professional reflection, growth and guidance on the instructional cycle and classroom practices. RI Pre-K Education Coordinators participate actively in monthly PD/TA and Community of Practice opportunities.

As RI Pre-K continues to expand, it is necessary to create pathways to earning a Pre-K-2 certification that are tailored to the needs of the incumbent workforce. Such considerations include, but are not limited to: accessible course timing and delivery (after work hours, weekends, virtual), individualized program duration (part-time/full-time), student teaching in candidate's place of employment (if applicable), potential credit for prior learning, tutoring and wraparound supports, postsecondary credit transfer and articulation, student financial aid and assistance, employer supports (for working student; e.g., substitutes), and pathway sustainability.

### Steps Taken to Date

- The State has taken steps to address gaps in the educator pipeline by leveraging several federal grants, including the Preschool Development Birth through Age 5 Renewal Grant (PDG B-5) and the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds
- RI has extended the timeline for a Lead Teacher to earn a Pre-K-2 teaching certificate to 7 years. Many Bachelors' levels teacher's working in child care centers do not have an active RI-Pre-K-2 certification and have significant barriers to obtaining one within the current educator preparation program infrastructure
  - Current Initiatives: Rhode Island began to address the needs of the workforce by investing in the creation of early childhood education pipelines through postsecondary pathway infrastructure that is accessible and addresses the needs of the incumbent workforce, with funding from the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) and the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) fund grant
  - RI has invested in T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood scholarship models for the State of Rhode Island to financially support prospective RI Pre-K teachers in the incumbent workforce in earning their associate's and/or bachelor's degree in early childhood education. T.E.A.C.H. provides comprehensive scholarships to enable early educators to take courses leading to credentials and degrees. Concurrently, T.E.A.C.H. helps states leverage financial resources necessary to provide access to higher education and support for the ECE workforce, as it creates new and diverse teacher and program leaders. T.E.A.C.H. scholars and their respective employers are able to access a variety of scholarship benefits – a list of which can be accessed [here](#).
  - T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood RI is managed by the RI Association for the Education of Young Children and funded through the Department of Human Services. T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood RI provides a

### Recommendations for Expansion

- In addition to existing T.E.A.C.H. pathways, invest in the Teacher Certificate-Only T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship Model
  - T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood RI's existing scholarship models do not support students with earning a Pre-K-2 certification. A student's education is subsidized through coursework leading to a bachelor's degree; however, the scholarship does not currently subsidize expenses incurred for a student's student teaching
  - The Teacher Certification Only Scholarship Model would offer students a living stipend, tuition support, and substitute reimbursement to the employing/sponsoring program while the recipient is student teaching for the duration of the teacher certification program. T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood RI would act as the intermediary by generating and paying out the living stipend directly to the scholarship recipient/student teacher and reimbursing the sponsoring center/employer for the costs of the substitute. Tuition would also be paid out directly to the college/teacher preparation program
- Increase funding for the URI and RIC pathways leading to Pre-K-2 certification for the incumbent workforce
  - Funding for projects related to the development of Rhode Island College's and University of Rhode Island's educator preparation programs leading to a bachelor's degree and/or Pre-K-2 certification targeted for the incumbent workforce is set to expire during the Fall of 2023. Funding through RIDE and the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner for these pathways is only intended to support the activities leading to the launch of the pathways including the

variety of scholarship opportunities to support the incumbent workforce with earning an associate's degree, bachelor's degree, CDA, Infant-Toddler Certificate, and/or ECE Certificate (24 college credits). T.E.A.C.H Early Childhood RI currently supports programs of study at all three state institutions including: the Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, and the University of Rhode Island. In FY23, RI invested SFRF funding to double the number of T.E.A.C.H scholarships available

- RI is investing in postsecondary pathway infrastructure leading to a bachelor's degree with Pre-K-2 that is accessible and addresses needs of incumbent workforce. Current early childhood education pathways are not accessible to the full-time working birth-5 educator; existing pathways typically place students in K-2 classrooms for student teaching, require full-time student enrollment, and offer coursework synchronously and on-site during the standard work day
  - Current Initiatives: In the Fall of 2023, the University of Rhode Island will launch two new educator preparation programs targeted for the incumbent and prospective ECCE workforce. With built in features allowing for more flexibility (e.g., virtual asynchronous and synchronous learning; student teaching in classroom of employment; part-time enrollment), prospective students will be able to get the bachelor's degree with Pre-K-2 certification (for those with associate's degrees), or a Pre-K-2 certificate-only (for those with bachelor's degrees). Additionally, Rhode Island College is developing a post-baccalaureate pathway that will lead to dual Pre-K-2 ECE/ECSE certification, utilizing a competency-based curriculum to accommodate early educators with a bachelor's degree, including those with foreign degrees

planning, design, program-approval process, and recruitment for the pathways

- Funding could support program sustainability as to cover program operational costs and subsidized student tuition through T.E.A.C.H. early childhood scholarships

### **Consideration 2: RIELDS Accessibility – how can RI build capacity to support educators in attaining RIELDS training and certification?**

The [Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards \(RIELDS\)](#) articulate the State's baseline expectations for what young children should know and be able to do at different age milestones. The RIELDS provide a common language for measuring progress toward achieving specific goals for children birth through age five. RIDE offers professional development that supports administrators and classroom professionals to implement curriculum, child assessment, and family engagement systems aligned with the standards. These courses are aligned with the state's quality rating continuum, including child care licensing regulations, BrightStars, and RIDE's CECE standards; therefore, Education Coordinators, and Lead and Assistant Teachers need to take RIELDS professional development courses applicable to their job requirements.

There are five different RIELDS professional development courses: (1) Foundational: the 9-Domains, (2) Foundational: The Guiding Principles, (3) Curriculum and Planning, (4) The Instructional Cycle, (5) Implementing a Standards based program.

The foundational courses consist of nine hours of professional development (PD) and are offered in both English and Spanish. They are delivered synchronously (via Zoom or in-person) and/or asynchronously (via self-paced online modules)

and are a baseline PD requirement for all staff roles indicated above. The foundational courses target the RIELDS more broadly, and therefore, support all B-5 educators. All other RIELDS professional development is offered only in English and in a synchronous format (via Zoom or in-person) and the modules are offered after work hours so that it is accessible for the incumbent workforce. The higher level RIELDS courses are broken out by either Infant/Toddler or Preschool focus, dive deeply into the implementation of RIELDS in classroom practices (e.g., responsive caregiving, implementing developmentally appropriate curriculum, program improvement), and consist of approximately 12-36 hours.

As RI Pre-K expands, there will be an influx of educators and education coordinators that will need to register for RIELDS PD respective to their position in order for their program to achieve CECE approval, a requirement of RI Pre-K. Supporting a mixed-delivery model, all RIELDS courses will need to be offered in both English and Spanish, and RIDE will need to have greater capacity to provide professional learning.

### Steps Taken to Date

- Developed RIELDS Foundational Courses that are offered in an online self-guided format and available in both English and Spanish
  - Enrollment and certificates in the Foundational RIELDS professional development courses, including the 9-Domains and The Guiding Principles courses, are a basic educational qualification requirement for all levels of RI Pre-K staff (Ed. Coordinators, Lead Teachers, Assistant Teachers), in adherence of CECE standards
- Investing in the training of a new RIELDS facilitator that will build capacity for the delivery of the Foundational Courses in Spanish
  - Presently, there is only one facilitator that has the capacity to deliver the 9-Domains and the Guiding Principles RIELDS trainings in a live-training format. As RI Pre-K continues to expand, there will be greater need to provide RIELDS courses that are accessible to non-English-speaking members of the early childhood workforce across the state. As such, it is crucial that RIDE expand capacity within the RIELDS facilitator team to have more staff that are able to deliver the Foundational courses in Spanish
  - Throughout FY23, RIDE is training an additional Spanish-speaking facilitator for the 9-Domains and Guiding Principles courses. The training process includes a walkthrough of each course module with the master trainer followed by an observed facilitation of each course with the master trainer. By the end of the fiscal year, Spanish-speaking educators will be able to access the foundational coursework either through live-facilitation from one of our two facilitators or through the existing self-paced modules

### Recommendations for Expansion

- Increase funding to support RIDE capacity to offer all RIELDS professional development courses in English and Spanish, including onboarding new RIELDS PD facilitators
- Presently, the Foundational RIELDS courses (The 9-Domains and The Guiding Principles) are delivered in Spanish. Spanish-speaking educators may take this coursework in a self-paced (virtual module) format or in a live (in-person or virtual) training format with a facilitator. While the foundational courses are targeted to all early childhood professionals, the Instructional Cycle and Curriculum and Planning courses are targeted to Lead and Assistant teachers and the Standards-Based Program course is intended for Education Coordinators and/or Administrators. Presently, these higher-level RIELDS courses are offered exclusively in English. With expansion of RI Pre-K and systemically moving early childhood programs to higher quality, RIDE will need to be prepared to offer higher-level RIELDS courses in Spanish to support coursework accessibility for all providers across the mixed-delivery system
- Expanding the Instructional Cycle, Curriculum and Planning, and Standards-Based Program RIELDS professional development courses to delivery in Spanish is a multifaceted process. Existing course materials in English will need to be translated into Spanish by a translating service. Current English-speaking facilitators will need to train Spanish-speaking facilitators for each of the courses, which may require the training of existing and recruitment/training of new Spanish-speaking facilitators to build capacity
- As RI Pre-K continues to expand to new programs across the mixed-delivery system, more staff will need to enroll in RIELDS professional development courses in compliance with CECE regulations for staff qualifications. More funding will be required to offer Foundational RIELDS courses along with upper level RIELDS courses on a quarterly basis, in both English and Spanish

**Consideration 3: RI Pre-K Educator Retention – how can RI strengthen the retention and attraction of the RI Pre-K Lead and Assistant Teacher workforce across the mixed-delivery service model?**

Per CECE regulations, RI Pre-K Lead Teachers are expected to possess a bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education and a Pre-K-2 teaching certificate, which is the same requirement as kindergarten teachers in public schools. Teacher Assistants for RI Pre-K must complete 12 credit hours of college coursework in ECE or a CDA (child care centers and Head Starts), and/or must successfully complete a RIDE-approved Teacher Assistant Program (for all mixed-delivery settings). Despite this standard set for Lead and Assistant Teacher qualifications across RI Pre-K delivery setting (child care center, Head Start, LEA), wage disparities still exist. When considering salaries alone, Lead Teachers in child care centers and Head Starts make approximately \$23,500 - \$26,800 less in annual income than their counterparts in LEAs (**Figure 1**). Despite RI having salary parity as a goal for teachers in child care center and Head Start-based settings, Lead Teachers averaged a lower pay than their peers in LEAs likely due to differences in years and experience (step salary increases annually) and the competitive benefits packages that public school districts offer their staff. Conversely, Assistant Teachers in LEAs make approximately \$3,700 - \$6,850 less in annual income than their counterparts in child care centers and Head Starts. Similar to Lead Teachers in LEAs however, this gap is reversed when adding in the benefits that LEA employees receive.

**Figure 1: Average Salary of RI Pre-K Educators, by Setting:** provides approximate salary averages by Lead or Assistant Teacher role in RI Pre-K classrooms located in child care centers, Head Starts, and LEAs (averages are approximations and may vary based on the hiring of new and returning teachers and other related budgeting impacts)

| Average Salary of RI Pre-K Educators, 2022, by setting |                   |            |          |
|--|-------------------|------------|----------|
|  | Child Care Center | Head Start | LEA      |
| <b>Lead Teacher</b>                                    | \$47,900          | \$51,200   | \$74,700 |
| <b>Assistant Teacher</b>                               | \$33,100          | \$36,250   | \$29,400 |

According to a national survey (*n=7,500 across 46 states*) administered by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in July 2021, 80% of child care centers indicated that they had a staffing shortage, with 78% of respondents indicating low wages as the primary barrier to recruitment of educators, while 81% indicated low wages as the reason for leaving.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, an ongoing staffing shortage exists; the national jobs recovery has bypassed the child care sector such that child care employment is still 8.4% below what it was in February 2020 nationally.<sup>22</sup>

The relationship between wages, retention, and child outcomes is well-established, with research finding that early educator wages are positively associated with program quality and negatively associated with turnover rates.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, research has found that high teacher turnover in Head Start impacted children’s vocabulary and literacy gains, and increased children’s behavioral problems when compared to peers that had continuity with their educators.<sup>24</sup> As RI Pre-K expands, considerations must be made to retain a highly qualified workforce of Lead and Assistant Teachers across all mixed-delivery settings through pay parity which is critical in reducing staff turnover, improving job quality, and bolstering high-quality care and education outcomes. However, this must be done in a way that sustains and supports the birth through five system as a whole (see *Key Focus 7* regarding Infant-Toddler care).

## Steps Taken to Date

- The RI Pre-K Policies and Procedures require program’s staff salaries and benefits to align with salaries in comparable public education positions and reviewed annually. RI Pre-K budgets are required to adjust thoughtfully to disperse funds appropriately across years and line items. When programs develop their budgets, RIDE provides a breakdown of percentages in each cost category that are expected to be maintained (e.g., approximately 68% of the total grant award should be allocated to staff salaries and benefits). In subsequent years of the grant award, salaries are expected to increase for teachers and teacher assistants to account for the cost of living and to continue to compete with pay parity with public school teachers

## Recommendations for Expansion

- Increase classroom funding to ensure parity between Lead Teachers and Teacher Assistants across mixed-delivery RI Pre-K settings and that is competitive with kindergarten teacher salaries. Educators with the same qualifications should have compensation parity across the B-5 system
  - Given the similar credentials and professional learning expectations for Lead and Assistant Teachers across all mixed-delivery settings, there must be salary parity to ensure equity in the RI Pre-K system
  - RI Pre-K classroom awards should be adjusted annually to allow for the designation of similar step-schedules for all Head Start and child care center RI Pre-K programs to ensure gradual wage increases reflective of that in LEAs, by community/district on an annual basis
    - Lead Teachers in RI Pre-K programs located in child care centers and Head Starts must have salary parity with their Pre-K-2 certified counterparts in LEAs
    - Assistant Teachers in RI Pre-K programs located in LEAs must have salary parity with their TA counterparts in child care centers and Head Starts
- Conduct focused strategic planning to address the low compensation for educators and professionals across the birth- to- five system and develop recommendations and strategies to ensure that highly effective, culturally and linguistically diverse professionals are attracted, fairly compensated, and retained in the field across all settings. Recommendations should include a definition of adequate compensation based on qualifications across the birth through five sector. *(Note: RI has applied for funding from the federal Administration for Children and Families to support this planning effort, including a compensation study)*

### **Consideration 4: Social-Emotional Support Capacity – How can RI support current and prospective Lead and Assistant Teachers with having the capacity to provide high-quality social and emotional supports to children in RI Pre-K?**

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and early childhood development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

Children’s social emotional development is critical to their overall health and educational success. Research shows that Social and Emotional Learning can have a positive impact on school climate and promote a host of academic, social, and emotional benefits for students. A recent meta-analysis of 213 rigorous studies of SEL in schools indicates that students receiving quality SEL instruction demonstrated<sup>25</sup>:

- **Better academic performance:** Achievement scores were an average of 11 percentile points higher than students who did not receive SEL instruction

- **Improved attitudes and behaviors:** greater motivation to learn, deeper commitment to school, increased time devoted to schoolwork, and better classroom behavior
- **Fewer negative behaviors:** increase on task behaviors, decreased disruptive class behavior, non-compliance, aggression, delinquent acts, and disciplinary referrals
- **Reduced emotional distress:** fewer reports of student depression, anxiety, stress, and social withdrawal

Children’s healthy social and emotional development is supported by their participation in high-quality preschool programs. When children demonstrate positive social skills and healthy emotional capacities, they engage more successfully in the learning opportunities present within a high-quality preschool program. Yet even in high-quality early childhood education programs, children demonstrate challenging behaviors that negatively impact their cognitive learning and development. Without support, teachers may struggle to identify individualized teaching strategies that reduce challenging behaviors as well as teach children how to successfully engage in and learn within an early childhood environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic greatly disrupted young children’s lives due to their abrupt withdrawal from school, social life, outdoor activities, and routines. Early childhood experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic vary greatly – some children may have experienced high levels of stress due to the absence of daily routines, social behaviors (physical contact, social isolation), and the presence of other traumatic life circumstances, which could potentially trigger short- and long-term physiological, cognitive, and behavioral damages and increase their susceptibility to long-term psychopathological conditions in adulthood (e.g., anxiety and depression).<sup>26</sup>

As RI Pre-K continues to expand, it is important that the prospective and incumbent workforce have the supports and skills to provide high quality social and emotional supports to Pre-K enrolled children. While children whose formative years were during the COVID-19 pandemic may show greater demand for specialized SEL supports, these positive class management techniques and resources will build a stronger and more coordinated system of services for years to come.

#### Steps Taken to Date

- [SUCCESS](#) (Supporting Children’s Competencies in Emotional and Social Skills) -- funded by both RIDE and DHS -- is a service that pairs early learning programs with Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants to support the social, emotional, and behavioral health needs of identified children. SUCCESS offers consultation services to support children’s social and emotional development and to reduce challenging behaviors in the classroom including brief consultations, feedback and recommendations, collaborative planning, and follow up. Through SUCCESS, early childhood mental health consultants are able to connect families with resources to best support their child. ECMHC is a promising intervention that has been shown to support early childhood educators in addressing the challenging behaviors that inhibit learning. ECMHC also can support suspension and expulsion prevention policies.<sup>27 28</sup> ECMHC has also yielded positive social and emotional outcomes for young children in early childhood settings, including reductions in preschool expulsions.<sup>29</sup>
- RIDE has piloted Coordination teams within select RI Pre-K programs that facilitate discussion about the social emotional supports that might benefit individual children, classrooms, and programs. To support collaborative problem solving, each

#### Recommendations for Expansion

- Increase funding for the early childhood mental health program (SUCCESS) to ensure continued access to supports for RI Pre-K programs, children, and families. SUCCESS continued to pilot the Coordination of Care model within RI Pre-K programs across the 2021-2022 school year; rolling out the program in 3 communities, with a total of 14 programs participating
- Increase access to comprehensive social emotional development trainings through Conscious Discipline for all early childhood educators employed in DHS licensed child care facilities
  - The early childhood care and education field continues to face high staff turnover; therefore, continued funding is necessary to ensure new RI Pre-K Lead and Assistant Teachers have access to Conscious Discipline professional development upon hiring in an RI Pre-K affiliated classroom
  - As the state of Rhode Island’s PK-12 education system has seen a push in Conscious Discipline and other social emotional learning professional development over the past three years, DHS has similarly supported some licensed child care facilities with access to these trainings

Coordination of Care team is multidisciplinary; teams are comprised of RI Pre-K program staff and administrators and are facilitated by an early childhood mental health consultant from SUCCESS

- RI Pre-K staff and administrators have had the opportunity to participate in a Conscious Discipline (CD) professional development series. CD is an “adult first, child second” model designed to develop awareness, shift mindsets, and build fundamental capacities and skills in adults first. This widely recognized professional development technique related to SEL has also been adopted by the state’s training and technical assistance provider, the Center for Early Learning Professionals. RI Pre-K staff have had the opportunity to engage in a 2 day in-person overview of Conscious Discipline facilitated by a master trainer. After the introduction, educators and administrators engaged in a 10-module course developed by Conscious Discipline, with opportunity for 1-hour debriefing communities of practices (following each module), facilitated by the Center for Early Learning Professionals

# Key Focus 6: Supporting Strong Transitions to Kindergarten

**GOAL STATEMENT:** All children will experience a planned and systematic transition to kindergarten which supports family understanding of the registration process and kindergarten year, children’s success in their new classroom, and collaborative relationships between teachers.

## Introduction:

Effective transitions in education can be accomplished with a wide range of practices. Any successful transition must take into consideration the child as well as the families and professionals who support that child. It is important that all RI early learning programs have a plan for how they support children during classroom and school transitions. RI Pre-K programs have a unique opportunity to effectively model and support transition plans and create program policies and practices that ease transitions.

A planned and positive transition benefits children, families, and educators and has lasting benefits for all those involved. Children feel supported when beginning in a new classroom or entering school for kindergarten, families feel welcomed and empowered with the knowledge necessary to help their child have a successful year, and teachers are ready to create and foster an engaging learning environment that best meets each child’s needs. Research also highlights the importance of transitions for educational success. Children, especially those at risk for challenges in school, who experience continuity as they enter kindergarten and elementary school are more likely to sustain gains that were achieved in preschool programs. Positive transition experiences are associated with increased family engagement during kindergarten, enhanced social skills in children, and higher academic performance in math, language, and literacy in kindergarten and beyond. A focus on the transition experience can also help ensure that all children receive the supports they need to be successful, including early intervention, language supports, wraparound services and other resources.

Four essential elements drive the focus for evidence-based transition practices: leadership, relationships, aligned early learning instruction and assessment, and family and community engagement. By focusing on these elements, RI Pre-K programs and receiving schools and teachers obtain content, protocol support, tools and strategies for data sharing, assessment, and instructional alignment between early childhood settings and elementary schools. These practices are in support of the overall goal of providing cohesive and comprehensive high-quality learning experiences with a fluid and sustainable transition from RI Pre-K to kindergarten while honoring the importance of engaging families in the kindergarten registration process and transitional activities within the community.

RI Pre-K providers are already required to complete several annual deliverables related to supporting children and families through the kindergarten transition process. The deliverables and practices are strongly rooted in the following goals:

- Children will experience an aligned curriculum as they transition from Pre-K to K
- Strengthen systems of communication between RI Pre-K & school and family & school
- Foster knowledge and familiarity of the kindergarten setting and people in it for families and children
- Support meaningful collaboration between RI Pre-K teachers and kindergarten teachers to decrease incoming students’ anxiety and apprehension
- Foster the kindergarten teacher’s knowledge and familiarity with incoming kindergarteners and their families
- Facilitate the transition process within the community to improve the kindergarten registration process and conduct various outreach events across the city

In 2018, RI created a transition professional development series which provides access to state RI Pre-K, community, and family child care programs, Head Start agencies, and LEAs to engage in a learning series about recommended preschool to kindergarten transition practices. Communities are able to develop plans that are responsive to their needs and receive coaching on implementation. This work has spurred tremendous collaboration amongst community partners, benefiting children and families throughout the state. Using Preschool Development Grant funds, RI has supported thirteen of the

eighteen RI Pre-K communities through the Transition Professional Development series. RIDE has developed several resources that are available to support schools and programs as they move to complete this work on their own.

### **Consideration 1: How can we support families in understanding how to prepare their child for kindergarten?**

Families are a child's first teachers. Partnering with families so that they can understand commonly held expectations for RI Pre-K and kindergarten can be a powerful tool to support children as they enter school.

#### **Steps Taken to Date**

- Support communities involved in the Transitions Professional Development series to develop and distribute resources

#### **Recommendations for Expansion**

- Provide statewide resources, such as a countdown to kindergarten calendar, that providers can share with families and use to develop appropriate transition activities

### **Consideration 2: How do families experience and understand the kindergarten registration process?**

For many families, navigating the kindergarten registration process can be confusing. Each LEA conducts a different registration process which can result in families enrolling their child late.

#### **Steps Taken to Date**

- As part of the Transition Professional Development Series, support providers in considering registration timelines and supports

#### **Recommendations for Expansion**

- Enhance kindergarten registration and outreach processes across the state, including through a statewide calendar and centralized public awareness campaign

### **Consideration 3: What supports do educators need to successfully support effective transitions?**

From the Transition Professional Development Series, communities consistently work to implement supports for educators to have the knowledge and tools necessary to support transitions. Additional work to make this more broadly available would benefit children, families, and educators across the state.

#### **Steps Taken to Date**

- Educators who are part of the Transition Professional Development series collaboratively identify and implement locally designed and research-based transition policies and procedures
- RIDE piloted a summer transitions program in Summer 2022 with ESSER funding. This opportunity reached 850 children in 11 communities throughout the state representing RI's mixed-delivery system. Using the RIELDS and summative assessment data, children showed growth in demonstrating age-appropriate skills and behaviors across all developmental indicators. Children demonstrated a high level of growth (10-14%) in social and emotional development – specifically on indicators related to relationships and cooperation with peers. Based on family feedback, 93% of families felt that their child is more prepared for kindergarten after attending the program

#### **Recommendations for Expansion**

- Increase alignment and communication between elementary schools / districts with RI Pre-K classrooms and all ECCE programs in their community to support strong transitions. This should include opportunities for children and families to access public school they will be attending earlier to facilitate smooth transition
- Continue to invest in summer learning opportunities for children to ensure readiness for kindergarten classroom expectations, including for children who did not attend RI Pre-K
- Increase requirements or further incentivize joint professional development for child care, Pre-K, Head Start and kindergarten educators, and support staff, as well as afterschool and summer program providers, to have a statewide common knowledge and understanding of the Rhode Island Early Learning & Development Standards and to encourage collaboration and stronger transitions<sup>30</sup>
- Develop a comprehensive approach to sharing data between RI Pre-K teachers and Kindergarten teachers to support child transitions and ensure schools are ready to support every child

#### **Consideration 4: How can we best support children with disabilities and multilingual learners in transitions?**

All children benefit from supportive transitions, including children with disabilities. More information about transitions for children who are age 3 can be found in *Key Focus 2* and more information about considerations for children transitioning from Early Intervention can be found in *Key Focus 3*.

##### **Steps Taken to Date**

- Children with disabilities and multilingual learners continue to be a focus for RI Pre-K providers and communities involved in the Transition Professional Development series

##### **Recommendations for Expansion**

- Invest in specific supports for children with disabilities and students who are multilingual learners to have their services and support plans in place as early as possible, with RI Pre-K teachers supporting families, Kindergarten teachers, and service providers
- Ensure transition supports and programming is accessible in multiple languages

#### **Long-term Considerations**

Rhode Island has piloted a Kindergarten Entry Profile (KEP) in the past with time-limited grant funding but has not invested in a statewide approach to understanding Kindergarten readiness. As RI Pre-K expands, it is important to consider a statewide strategic approach to identifying system quality and effectiveness in advancing kindergarten readiness. Across the country, 34 states have a kindergarten entry assessment system to support transitions, inform instruction in kindergarten, and inform policymakers. A meaningful Kindergarten Entry Profile must be research-based with a clear and sustainable funding source to support ongoing implementation with fidelity.<sup>3132</sup>

# Key Focus 7: Sustaining and Growing the Infant and Toddler (I/T) Sector

**GOAL STATEMENT:** As RI Pre-K expands, the infant/toddler (I/T) sector will also be sustained, grow in capacity, and increase in quality to better serve Rhode Island’s youngest learners.

## Introduction

Infant and toddler care is an essential part of the birth-to-five system. It is crucial to ensure working parents have access to care for their infants as young as six weeks, as parents likely need access to full-day, school-year care for their children well before the age of three. In addition, the earliest years of a child’s life are also some of the most important development time periods. Experts recommend states make investments in high-quality infant/toddler child care, as research shows that investing in infants and toddlers has the greatest impact on children’s development and return on investment over time, due to the number of neural connections made in the first three years of life.

Despite the critical nature of infant and toddler care, finding and affording infant and toddler care is out of reach for most RI families. Based on federal affordability standards, high-quality infant care in Rhode Island is considered unaffordable for 93% of all families. In a recent study by the University of Wisconsin, a Rhode Island family with two children, on average, spends up to 27% of their household income on child care alone.<sup>33</sup> The [Rhode Island 2021 Market Rate Survey](#) found that the average market rate for Infants in Rhode Island was \$265 per week and the average market rate for toddlers was \$255, as compared to \$225 per week for preschool age.<sup>34</sup> The higher cost of care for infants/toddlers is driven by the low ratios of children to educators, as basic health and safety requires more adults to care for younger, more vulnerable and less independent children. The ratios in licensing include an adult to child ratio for infants of 1:4 with a maximum of 2:8 and toddlers have a ratio of 1:6 with a maximum of 2:12. (Children are considered infants from birth through 18 months and toddlers are considered children ages 18-36 months). Importantly, despite the higher cost of I/T care, there are fewer options for public funding assistance for families, as RI Pre-K and Head Start are available only for preschool age children. In addition, similar to many states across the nation, Rhode Island has a shortage of infant/toddler slots- particularly high-quality slots, which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the State has employed several tactics to strategically address the shortage – including stabilization grants, capacity grants for FCC, and Pandemic Retention Bonuses -- it has not outpaced the losses. Given that there is a demonstrated trend on the national level around the reduction in availability of I/T care with the expansion of Pre-K, it is necessary to simultaneously address the I/T capacity challenge while expanding RI Pre-K to avoid exacerbating challenges in an already strained system.<sup>35</sup> Other states are addressing this through embedding an infant/toddler set aside in all funding allocated to Pre-K expansion. In Illinois, for example, 25% of funds are set aside for I/Ts.<sup>36 37</sup>

The considerations and recommendations for expansion in this section represent an initial set of ideas for opportunities to support the infant/toddler sector within the context of RI Pre-K expansion. However, a more dedicated and comprehensive strategic planning effort that is focused specifically on how to increase capacity, sustainability, and quality in the infant/toddler sector is needed to develop a more specific action plan. As a vital part of the system in and of itself for the development of young children and to support working families, a corollary strategic plan that is centered on the infant/toddler sector within the broader early learning landscape would support future planning and investments. *(RI has applied for funding from the Administration of Children and Families for funding to support this strategic planning effort.)*

**Consideration 1: How can the state prevent the reduction of infant/toddler slots while expanding RI-PreK as regularly seen when implemented across the nation?**

The cost of delivering high-quality center based infant and/or toddler care is significantly more expensive than other age groups. In an analysis conducted by the Center for American Progress in 2018, child care for an infant costs 61% more than for a preschooler, yet child care subsidy rates are only on average 27% higher for infants than preschoolers.<sup>38</sup> For an average child care program, it is more economically advantageous to use a 350 square foot classroom for ten preschool children and one teacher (at thirty-five square feet per child) than to use the same classroom for seven infants (at forty-five square feet per child) which requires two teachers.

A potential unintended consequence of RI Pre-K expansion is that providers may opt to reduce their I/T slots or choose only to open new preschool rooms. In other states and localities with universal pre-k, there has been an observable decline in available infant/toddler care, such as in New York City.<sup>39</sup> Given the high cost of providing infant and toddler care, community-based child cares are often operating at a loss in their infant/toddler classrooms that it is made up by revenue from preschool classrooms. Providers offer infant/toddler care because of family demand, their dedication to caring for and educating children from birth through age five, and the opportunity to serve families with children of different ages. However, on its own, there is little economic incentive to offer infant/toddler care. As RI Pre-K expands and more reliable funding is available for older children, more providers may consider reducing their infant/toddler offerings and expanding preschool classrooms. This outcome would significantly harm children, families, and RI's economy if families cannot find infant/toddler care for their children.

#### Steps Taken to Date

- The RI Pre-K grant application requires applicants to attest that no children will be displaced by opening an RI Pre-K room. In this way, RIDE has been able to prevent against infant/toddler rooms from being flipped directly into RI Pre-K rooms
- RI Pre-K funding grants include funds to cover a portion of building-wide costs, such as rent, maintenance, administration operations, and more. In this way RI Pre-K is investing in the program as a whole and providing more flexibility for providers to re-invest in the infant/toddler rooms. Several providers in 2021 noted that without their RI Pre-K award, they may have closed their entire programs, including the infant/toddler seats. RI Pre-K can be a strategy to provide programs financial sustainability to allow for the continued provision of I/T care.

#### Recommendations for Expansion

- Similar to Illinois, establish an infant/toddler spending benchmark that is tied to RI Pre-K expansion to ensure aligned investment in the infant/toddler sector as RI Pre-K expands. Funding would be used to increase capacity, sustainability, and quality of the infant/toddler sector through strategies such as:
  - Developing and implementing a specific CCAP rate for infants (as opposed to a combined infant and toddler rate) that is scaled to provide adequate funds to make an infant classroom financially sustainable, including paying fair compensation to educators
  - Augmenting programs' financial stability through the issuance of incentive grants to RI-Pre-K's serving I/Ts
- Conduct a more robust review of future RI Pre-K applications to ensure that no infant/toddler classroom will be shuttered to enable expansion of RI Pre-K and make this an automatic disqualification for RI Pre-K funding

**Consideration 2: How can the state prevent qualified staff working with infants and toddlers from leaving their positions for RI Pre-K positions which currently offer significantly higher salaries?**

Similar to national trends, in RI, early educators who work with infants and toddlers are often paid lower salaries than educators who work with older children (\$32,000 vs. \$40,000 in 2019).<sup>40</sup> Given that children's brains experience the most rapid development in the first three years of life, it is vital that infant and toddler educators have the professional respect and financial compensation they deserve as some of the most impactful individuals in a young child's life. However, given the persistently lower compensation for infant/toddler teachers, many teachers with the requisite credentials will transition to teaching preschool aged children to receive higher compensation. To retain qualified and dedicated educators in infant/toddler classrooms, a comprehensive approach to workforce pipeline and supports is required.

### Steps Taken to Date

- The Pandemic Educator Retention Bonuses offered a first-of-its-kind for RI bonus of up to \$3000/annually for educators across the early childhood system
- Through PDG B-5 Renewal funding, RI has developed and piloted a registered apprenticeship pilot for Infant/Toddler educators which provides structured employment and training designed and driven by employers. Classroom education works hand-in-hand with on-the-job learning and creates an earn-while-you-learn pathway. Apprenticeship opportunities have been identified by the federal government as a key strategy to address the workforce crisis.
- DHS funds a number of [workforce development initiatives](#) through partnering with RI Institutes of Higher Education. All programs include I/T development, but a specific I/T credential has been developed through Rhode Island College to remove language barriers for Spanish-speaking Family Home Care providers by delivering core courses in Spanish paired with contextualized English language learning
- DHS and HS partners are launching a focus group around a state credential similar to a CDA, allowing for expanded options for HS teachers in meeting the Head Start Performance Standards

### Recommendations for Expansion

- Consider continuation of retention bonus programs beyond FY24 targeted to infant/toddler educators
- Introduce pay parity with preschool teaching staff with similar qualifications by developing and investing in strategies to address compensation in the birth through five sector
- Evaluate, enhance, and build upon existing Registered Apprenticeship program

### **Consideration 3: How can the state augment programs' capacity to offer high-quality infant and toddler care and achieve a high-quality BrightStars rating while expanding RI Pre-K?**

As new programs open or programs expand, it is important that new capacity for infant/toddler care is prioritized as well as Pre-K capacity. When thinking about a strong path to universal pre-k, it's crucial to consider the full educational pathway from birth to age five, with infant/toddler care as an essential and co-equal piece of the pathway. Consistency of care is imperative in early childhood programs, and the fewer times a child has to transition to new programs, the easier it is for both the child and the family as a whole. The success of a mixed-delivery system is dependent on looking at the programs holistically. If a child care program with 200 children has only one high-quality classroom, then RI will not be achieving its goals of universal high-quality early learning.

### Steps Taken to Date

- The RI Early Childhood Care and Education Capital Fund (created through a bond initiative) provides priority points for applications that include development or improvement of space for infants/toddlers
- LearnERS, a self-paced, online training system, is providing on-the-job support and training to infant/toddler teachers. Through this intense support, teachers will learn real-life ways to imbed national best practice infant/toddler care in their classroom while also receiving compensation for their work, therefore increasing retention of these staff.

### Recommendations for Expansion

- Allocate funding dedicated to Infant/Toddler programs to support sustainability and quality
- Include center-wide assessments of programs to determine BrightStars quality rating and provide bonuses to programs who focus on whole center movement up the quality continuum
- Consider opportunities to expand the high-quality, research-based Early Head Start model
- Provide PDTA to providers in braiding and blending funding streams to maximize use of existing funds to support sustainability and capacity

- Through PDG funding, RI piloted a model -- called PDG Pathways to Partnership -- based on the [Early Head Start Child Care Partnerships Model](#) (EHS-CCP) which capitalizes on braiding federal and local funding streams to support increased quality in infant/toddler seats. The project focused on improving the quality of infant and toddler classrooms through targeted materials and TA based on their specific needs that were determined by assessment.
- As noted above, develop a comprehensive infant/toddler early childhood education plan that develops a cohesive approach to expanding capacity and increasing quality of I/T care in Rhode Island

### Long-term Considerations

Access to high-quality infant/toddler care is a significant challenge across the country. A key consideration to addressing this challenge is to expand the supply of infant/toddler seats, as discussed above. However, another key strategy is to address demand. Currently, many families must find care for their children 4-6 weeks after giving birth once their paid leave or Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) benefits end. As a result, families are seeking care for infants at 4-6 weeks old, adding to the demand for infant care. Paid leave policy has a direct impact on this system and exploring opportunities to expand paid leave would reduce demand for infant care in these earliest weeks of a child's life, relieve pressure on the system, and support parents' ability to remain stably employed.

# Cost of Delivering High-Quality RI Pre-K

RI Pre-K is consistently recognized as a national leader in quality by the National Institute for Early Education and Research (NIEER) because RIDE requires and supports all RI Pre-K classrooms – regardless of setting in public schools, child care centers, and Head Starts -- to achieve the same high-quality standards and consistent deliverables including the Comprehensive Early Childhood Education (CECE) standards.

To be high-quality, early education requires investments in educators, facilities, and targeted readiness and quality supports. The RI Pre-K program has maintained national recognition for quality in each phase of expansion, since 2009, by ensuring that there was adequate funding to support each of these needed investments.

**High-quality early education requires sufficient investment.** To maintain quality in RI Pre-K, Rhode Island must support and pay for the components that drive quality. This includes competitive salaries that attract and retain Lead and Assistant Teachers and administrators with the requisite credentials; curriculum, materials, and infrastructure; and continuous quality improvements such as professional development and technical assistance.

**Operating RI Pre-K requires investments in the classrooms/programs and the state-level infrastructure:** Operating an RI Pre-K classroom costs approximately \$235,000 annually. The amount is comprised of two components: (1) Direct Classroom Costs and (2) Professional Development and Technical Assistance Costs. In addition, there are ongoing programmatic costs for RIDE to administer, monitor, and support the program as well as manage the enrollment system and family navigation. These activities require significant hands-on support to ensure quality.

## RI Pre-K Classroom Costs:

Chart 1 below details the costs associated with the direct classroom instruction, including classroom costs, program level costs, and professional development costs. To maintain RI Pre-K's quality, the state must continue to offer professional development and coaching for staff, specialized yearly training in Pre-K, and a clear system for continuous quality improvement. These features also ensure that Rhode Island continues to lead the nation in NIEER Pre-K quality benchmarks. RI has a strong system in place that combines third party observations with professional development and technical assistance to provide comprehensive high-quality supports to classrooms that are awarded RI Pre-K grant funds.

In addition to the costs listed below, for new RI Pre-K classrooms, there are startup costs. These include approximately \$20,000 for all furnishings, curriculum, and materials that are necessary to implement research-based curriculum, endorsed by RIDE, with fidelity. In classrooms that have been previously opened, there are necessary annual costs for consumable supplies that are necessary for materials to be refreshed and items to be replaced as needed.

Importantly, 68% of cost for RI Pre-K classrooms is for the salaries and benefits of the Lead and Assistant Teachers. The salaries and benefits included for the early educators in Chart 1 is based on the current median salary across existing RI Pre-K classrooms. As required by CECE and by the NIEER standards, teachers must have a Pre-K-2 teaching certification or a bachelor's degree with a pathway to obtain a Pre-K-2 certification within an agreed upon timeframe. These are the same certification requirements for teachers in elementary schools. As a result, to attract and retain qualified teachers for RI Pre-K, it is vital that RI Pre-K teachers have pay parity with their counterparts in kindergarten classrooms. However, level grant awards for the last decade have led to high teacher turnover across RI Pre-K, especially in child care centers and Head Starts because as classroom costs have risen, salaries outside of LEAs have not been adjusted. Pay parity is a fundamental issue of equity that RIDE continually works on directly with programs; however, without year over year increases to the Pre-K funding similar to the LEA funding formula, RI Pre-K programs are unable to achieve pay parity. For additional considerations about the workforce, see *Key Focus 5*.

**Chart 1: RI Pre-K Program Classroom Costs**

| RI Pre-K Program Classroom Costs  | Cost/Year        |
|---|------------------|
| Direct Classroom Costs  |                  |
| Lead Teacher (Salary + Benefits)  | \$100,000        |
| Assistant Teacher (Salary + Benefits)   | \$60,000         |
| Education Coordinator   | \$22,000         |
| Materials, Food, Equipment  | \$19,750         |
| Facilities - rent, utilities, indirect, mgt   | \$14,000         |
| Professional Development and Technical Assistance   |                  |
| Individualized, embedded on-site PDTA Supports: Various supports including visits, community of practice participation, and targeted coaching supports. | \$10,000         |
| Student Mental Health (SUCCESS): Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation model to support families in crisis.  | \$3,000          |
| Monitoring for CECE compliance: Monitoring funds are held at RIDE for three deliverables.   | \$4,000          |
| Student Assessment (TSG); Formative assessment data on child outcomes for teachers and RIDE   | \$500            |
| Classroom Quality Monitoring (ECERS): ECERS visit, scoring, and written report.   | \$750            |
| CLASS: CLASS reports are used as formative assessments.   | \$500            |
| Facilities Review (LISC)  | \$500            |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>\$235,000</b> |

**RIDE Monitoring, Support, and Oversight Costs:**

RIDE employs staff within its current FTE structure to manage all aspects of RI Pre-K. Currently three staff members oversee vendor contracts, manage the competitive grant application for RI Pre-K expansion, coordinate the lottery, support families in their applications, monitor deliverables throughout the year, and each manage a portfolio of approximately 35 RI Pre-K classrooms including annual on-site classroom visits. This team is also responsible for managing the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) and ensuring that RI’s early learning workforce completes the professional development related to these fundamental standards, managing any federal grants awarded to RIDE for early learning work, partnering with IHEs in the approval process of Pre-K-2 certification pathways, providing support and guidance to LEA’s general education for children age three to third grade and all responsibilities under Title 16:48 for the Department of Education.

Currently the team sits within the Teaching and Learning Division under the Office of Instruction, Assessment and Curriculum. As RI Pre-K becomes a larger program within RIDE, this governance structure – in concert with other ECCE-related governance systems analyses – should be reviewed. As the RI Pre-K program grows, and with the addition of three-year-olds, additional FTEs will be needed to support program monitoring and family navigation. To maintain the current level of quality, RIDE estimates that a new FTE is needed for every 35 RI Pre-K classrooms.

In addition, RIDE infrastructure includes the data systems that enable RI Pre-K. This is comprised of the lottery system that families apply to each year to access RI Pre-K seats and manage enrollments as well as the system to accept program applications to open RI Pre-K rooms and monitor RI Pre-K programs. RIDE is currently partnering with DHS to develop a new data system to accept and review program applications for RI Pre-K and utilizes a system built in-house to support the RI Pre-K lottery. These systems will need to be supported and enhanced to enable an expansion of RI Pre-K.

**RI Pre-K Approach to Braiding and Layering Federal, State, and Local Funds**

***While there is little opportunity to find cost efficiencies in funding for RI Pre-K, there are opportunities to braid and layer funding streams to maximize existing funding within the ECCE system.*** While the actual cost of maintaining the high-quality of RI Pre-K is fixed, RIDE and DHS have worked across agencies to layer and braid funding within early childhood to maximize use of different fund streams.

From 2009 to 2020, the full cost of an RI Pre-K classroom was covered entirely from RIDE through state Early Childhood Categorical Fund and, when available, various time-limited federal grants, such as Preschool Development Grants. In

2021, the interagency RI Pre-K team [developed new service delivery models for RI Pre-K classrooms](#) across the mixed-delivery system to leverage a mix of federal funding and local funding in addition to state general revenue funding (see Chart 2 below). **In this way, RI Pre-K funds were layered on top of federal and local funding sources to support quality, provide professional development and technical assistance, and share child and program outcomes under one umbrella** (see *Key Focus 4* for additional discussion of benefits for the mixed-delivery system).

While these service delivery models are still being piloted, there has been some success shown in the ability to open more classrooms in 2021-2022 than could have been done with the traditional funding model (Model 1). In 2021-2022 the state had access to \$3M in alternate funding for expansion. **While the original model of fully funding classrooms from RI Pre-K would have yielded 15 new classrooms (300 seats), using the new pilot models, 27 classrooms were opened, representing 516 seats.**

**Chart 2: Overview of Fund Streams Leveraged, by Service Delivery Model**

|                         | Model 1:                           | Model 2:          | Model 3:          | Model 4:           | Model 5:                                |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---|
| Eligible Provider Type  | LEA, Head Start, Child Care Center | Head Start Agency | Head Start Agency | Child Care Centers | LEA                                     |
| Other funding leveraged | None                               | Head Start        | Head Start        | CCAP               | Funding formula or other district funds |

**Model 1: Traditional Model (Eligible Providers: All Provider Types)** RIDE funds the full cost of the RI Pre-K program leveraging the Early Childhood Categorical Funding and any available federal funding, such as the Preschool Development Grant. To ensure no displacement of children, providers needed to have an empty classroom available to deliver RI Pre-K. The award amount from the Pre-K categorical in this model is based on the total cost of the classroom and not per pupil.

**Models 2 and 3: Braid Funding with Head Start to Extend Duration or Fill Unused Head Start Seats (Eligible Providers: Head Start Agencies):** RI Pre-K and Head Start have a strong collaboration, built on mutual respect and aligned goals. In both models, the goal is to use the federal grant awards first, and then layer RI Pre-K funding on top to support duration or enrollment.

- **Model 2** supports Head Start programs that wish to extend their typical four (4) hour day to six (6) hours and add an extra ten (10) days of instruction to align with the duration of RI Pre-K. RIDE provides additional funding to Head Start programs to meet these duration requirements and Head Start programs continue to complete all RI Pre-K related-deliverables.
- **Model 3** funds above-income students to join a Head Start classroom to fill seats that would otherwise be unenrolled. This allows Head Start the ability to enroll a more socio-economically diverse classroom that are more reflective of the communities that they serve. In addition, Model 3 protects Head Start federal dollars that are awarded to the Head Start grantees by ensuring slots are not removed from the RI program by the federal government.

**Model 4: CCAP Supplemental (Eligible Providers: Child Care Centers):** RI Pre-K strives to support RI's birth to 5 system and a families ability to remain in a setting of their choice. Due to the original Model 1 directive that programs may not displace children to offer RI Pre-K, and due to many of RI's small business childcare operations having under enrolled classrooms this rule was a barrier for small business that wanted to apply for RI Pre-K. Model 4 was designed to allow child care centers to apply for RI Pre-K while also continuing the enrollment of families already in their care. In this model, families with a CCAP voucher are encouraged to matriculate into the RI Pre-K classroom at their child care center where they are already enrolled. Any co-pay is then covered by Early Childhood Categorical funding as RI Pre-K is free for all families. Any unenrolled seats within the classroom are then enrolled through the RI Pre-K lottery to ensure a fully enrolled classroom. The cost of the children enrolled through the lottery is paid for with RI Pre-K funds. This classroom, now a RI Pre-K, receives all of the support and is held to the same standards and requirements as all other RI Pre-K classrooms.

**Model 5: Supplementing Local Funds (Eligible Providers: LEAs):** In the LEA model of blending funding, capitalizing on the funding formula is a key strategy. By using the base funding formula to open and operate the classroom, categorical RI

Pre-K funding is dedicated to the high-quality components that are often underfunded within public schools. LEA's have the highest paid teachers in the RI Pre-K community, and when funded solely through the categorical, salaries and benefits leave little room for supplies, materials, and curriculum purchases. These grants, awarded to LEAs, provide enough funds to the program at the classroom level to purchase all of the needed materials and allow for oversight and monitoring of each classroom by RIDE.

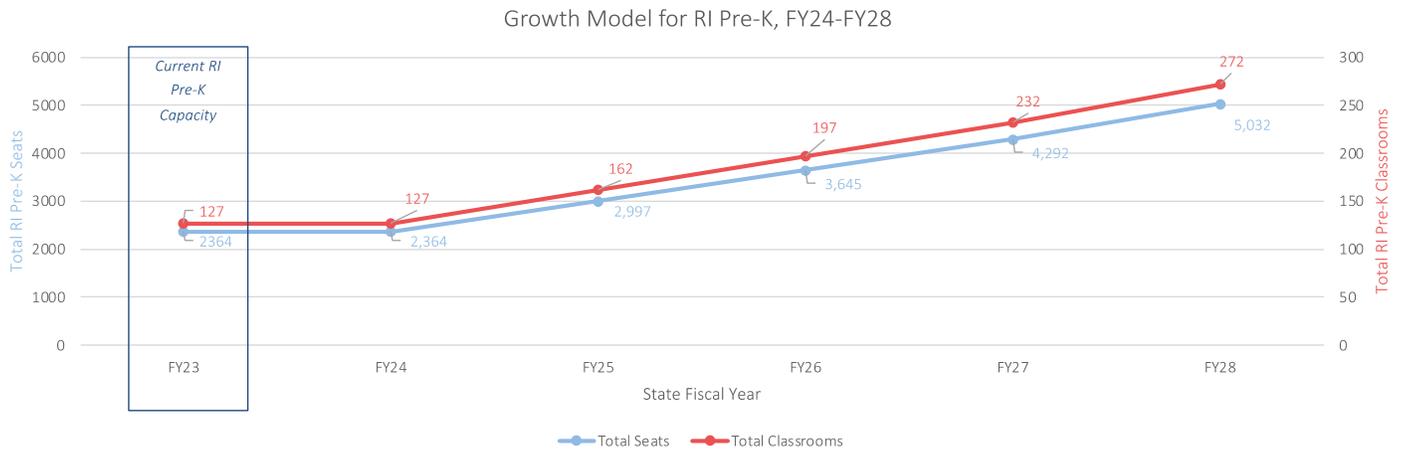
### Current Funding for RI Pre-K

Currently, direct RI Pre-K funding is a mix of state funds and time-limited federal funds. Direct RI Pre-K Funding for 2022-2023, summarized in the table below, includes almost \$7M in time-limited funding for direct classroom costs.

| Fund Source   | Amount for SY22-23 | Notes                                |
|---|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Pre-K Categorical Funds (State)                       | \$14,850,000       | <i>Level funded since FY20</i>       |
| Preschool Development Grant Funds (Federal)           | \$5,042,000        | <i>Grant funds end after SY22-23</i> |
| Governor's Emergency Education Relief Funds (Federal) | \$1,000,000        | <i>Grant funds end after SY22-23</i> |
| CRRSA CCDBG Direct Award Funds (Federal)              | \$650,000          | <i>Grant funds end after SY22-23</i> |

# Annual Growth Plan and Budget Projections

To reach the goal of 5,000 RI Pre-K seats by 2028, RI will need to maintain all existing seats in FY24 and expand RI Pre-K by approximately 35-40 classrooms per year – or approximately 650 seats – beginning in FY25.



## Growth Model for RI Pre-K

To develop the growth plan and associated projected annual budgets, the state has developed a growth model that includes several assumptions about the cost inputs and drivers. While these assumptions are based on available data and agency expertise, the growth model includes both lower and higher cost estimates to account for the variability possible in these cost inputs and cost drivers. It is difficult to predict the actual cost of program expansion after the initial years. However, this model provides a baseline for future budgeting discussions.

The growth model includes both cost inputs and cost drivers for expansion, pipeline development, and invest in infant/toddler capacity. See Figure 1 for a visual summary of the model.

Figure 1: Growth Model Inputs

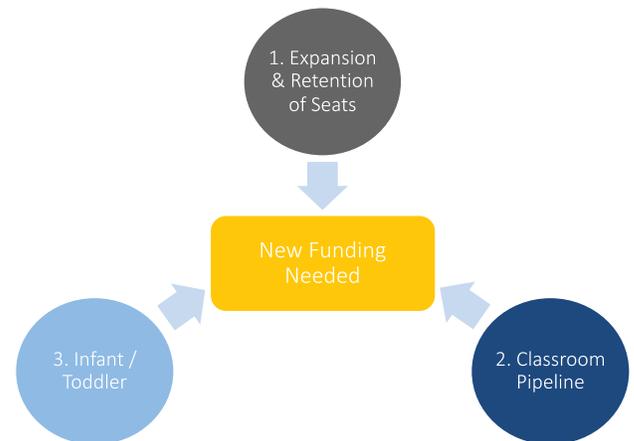


Chart 1: Summary of Growth Model Components, Inputs, and Assumptions

| Component of Expansion   | Rationale   | Investment inputs  | Assumptions driving investment amount   |
|--|---|--|---|
| <b>1. Expansion and Retention of Seats:</b> Investments to expand and sustain RI Pre-K                 | Cost of new seats, retention of existing seats, and administrative capacity   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cost per classroom (including quality supports)</li> <li>Average # of students</li> <li>ECSE supplemental</li> <li>Administrative capacity</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>% of classrooms braiding/blending funding</li> <li>% inflation adjustment</li> <li>% students eligible for ECSE</li> </ul> |
| <b>2. Classroom Pipeline:</b> Investment to cultivate a pipeline of new providers to reach 5,000 seats | Costs of professional development, facilities, teacher training, etc. to meet RI Pre-K standards and be eligible to apply | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cost per classroom for PDTA</li> <li>Cost for educators to attain RI Pre-K required credentials</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>% of classrooms needing high vs. low readiness supports</li> <li>% of teachers with requisite degrees</li> </ul>           |

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <b>3. Infant/Toddler:</b><br>Investment to ensure a strong system exists to care for RI's youngest children | Support infant/toddler care in parallel with RI Pre-K expansion, per national best practice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Total RI Pre-K investment amount per year</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>% set aside (high or low set aside)</li> </ul> |
|---|---|---|---|

## 1 Investments to Expand and Sustain RI Pre-K:

Expansion investments reflect the anticipated investments that would need to be sustained as a result of expanding and maintaining all RI Pre-K seats to reach 5,000 seats by 2028.

### *Investment Inputs:*

| Summary of Investment Inputs for Expanding and Sustaining RI Pre-K Seats |           |
|--|-----------|
| Grant award amount for RI Pre-K Classrooms – no braided funding          | \$235,000 |
| Grant award amount for RI Pre-K Classrooms – with braided funding        | \$160,000 |
| Early Childhood Special Education Supplement                             | \$5,500   |
| RIDE Capacity (@ 5% of classroom costs)                                  | \$11,750  |
| Average number of students per classroom                                 | 18.5      |

- Grant award amount for RI Pre-K Classrooms – no other funding:** As discussed in the *Cost of RI Pre-K* section, the cost of an RI Pre-K classroom is approximately \$235,000 in RI Pre-K funding.
- Grant award amount for RI Pre-K Classrooms – with other funding:** As discussed in the *Cost of RI Pre-K* section, through the various service delivery models, programs across the mixed-delivery system can leverage other early learning funding streams to braid and blend funding and bring more classrooms into the RI Pre-K program. In this way, for example, RI Pre-K can supplement existing Head Start programs to support extended duration or support enrollment in the classroom. To support calculations, based on existing classrooms leveraging braided funding, the average braided funding classroom requires an investment of \$160,000 in RI Pre-K funding.
- Early Childhood Special Education Supplement:** As noted in *Key Focus 3*, RI Pre-K is successful at identifying and supporting embedded services for children with special needs. While districts are responsible for the provision of ECSE services for all children in their district, currently, districts do not receive additional funding for students in ECSE who are enrolled in community-based settings. Special education law calls for children with disabilities to be served in the child's least restrictive environment, which many times is a general education setting with embedded services to support the child to be successful. Districts do not receive additional funding for students in ECSE who are enrolled in community-based settings, such as child care centers or Head Start. This supplemental funding would address this gap. The calculation anticipates a \$5,500 ECSE supplemental investment per child for students enrolled in community-based classrooms, which is assumed to be 66% of classrooms (similar to current balance within the RI Pre-K program). The supplemental amount per student is derived from the median salary of an Early Childhood Special Education teacher divided by the recommended caseload of 14 students. Programs and districts would be able to leverage the ECSE supplement to ensure students with special needs can equitably access RI Pre-K across the mixed-delivery system.
- RIDE Capacity:** As noted in the *Cost of RI Pre-K* section, RIDE requires significant staff time and data infrastructure to maintain the nation-leading quality of RI Pre-K. In addition, as noted in *Key Focus 1* and *Key Focus 3*, additional capacity to support functions such as family navigation are needed for the continued success of the program and to ensure equitable access for families. To account for the increased support needed from RIDE as the program expands, the growth model incorporates a 5% administrative cost. Of note, this model does not specify the

number or types of FTEs needed at RIDE to administer the program, but it is anticipated that additional FTEs would be required in the future.

- **Average number of students per classroom:** RI Pre-K costs are calculated on a per classroom basis, rather than a per pupil basis, because the program operates at the classroom level. The number of classrooms needed to reach 5,000 students by 2028 is driven by the number of students each classroom can hold. Currently, the average classroom capacity in RI Pre-K is 18.6 students (meaning that a majority of the classrooms are 18 students, with some classrooms teaching 19 or 20 students). With the addition of 3-year olds, who can only be in classrooms of 18 students or less, the average will likely decrease. For this reason, the growth model incorporates an assumption that there will be 18.5 students per classroom, requiring an expansion of 35-40 classrooms per year to reach 5,000 students by 2028.

**Investment Drivers:**

| Investment Drivers                      |                            |                           |                            |  |                            |
|---|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| % Classrooms Leveraging Blended Funding |                            | % Inflation Adjustment    |                            | % of Students in Early Childhood Special Education |                            |
| Lower Investment Estimate               | Higher Investment Estimate | Lower Investment Estimate | Higher Investment Estimate | Lower Investment Estimate                          | Higher Investment Estimate |
| 40%                                     | 5%                         | 1%                        | 4%                         | 11%  | 20%                        |

- **Percent of classrooms leveraging additional funding:** The rate of classrooms that are able to braid and layer other funding into the classroom impacts the investment needed from RI Pre-K funding. The higher the number of classrooms that can braid other fund sources, the lower the investment required from RI Pre-K.
  - *Lower investment estimate:* The lower investment estimate assumes that 40% of classrooms are braiding in other fund sources and requesting an average of \$160,000 from RI Pre-K funding and 60% of classrooms would require the higher investment of \$235,000 to open a new RI Pre-K room.
  - *Higher investment estimate:* The higher investment estimate assumes that 5% of classrooms are braiding in other fund sources and requesting an average of \$160,000 from RI Pre-K funding and 95% of classrooms would require the higher investment of \$235,000 to open a new RI Pre-K room.
- **Percent yearly inflation adjustment:** As noted in the *Cost of RI Pre-K* section, RI Pre-K has provided a stagnant baseline classroom grant since 2011 to RI Pre-K grantees. During the same time period, public schools have received an average of a 3.3% per pupil funding increase each year through the school funding formula. This has resulted in salary disparities between community-based and LEA-based RI Pre-K classrooms and has led to significant staff turnover as RI Pre-K competes for educators with the same credentials required to teach kindergarten. To achieve pay parity for educators with the same credentials, a similar annual adjustment to the funding formula is needed for RI Pre-K.
  - *Lower investment estimate:* The lower investment estimate includes a 1% annual adjustment for all RI Pre-K classrooms.
  - *Higher investment estimate:* The higher investment estimate includes a 4% annual adjustment for all RI Pre-K classrooms.
- **Percent of students enrolled in ECSE:** As noted in *Key Focus 3*, currently 11% of students in RI Pre-K have an Independent Education Plan (IEP). However, given the impacts of the pandemic on young children and the likely increase in the need for developmental supports, a higher percentage of students may need ECSE in the future. As a result, the model includes low and high estimates for provision of ECSE services in community-based settings:
  - *Lower investment estimate:* The lower investment estimate anticipates that 11% of all RI Pre-K students are enrolled in ECSE, similar to the RI Pre-K student body in 2021-2022.
  - *Higher investment estimate:* The higher investment estimate anticipates that 20% of all RI Pre-K students are enrolled in ECSE. This is based on an anticipated increased need for ECSE in the cohorts of children raised during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pipeline development investments reflect the anticipated investments needed to prepare a pipeline of programs/classrooms and educators to support the expansion of RI Pre-K programs in future years. Of note, in the last RI Pre-K grant competition in 2021, 48 applications were received for more than 100 classrooms. Nineteen programs were awarded one or more classrooms and thirteen programs were deemed by the review committee “not yet qualified,” meaning they did not meet all the criteria in the application, such as a Bright Stars rating of 3 stars or higher. The remaining sixteen (16) programs met the quality threshold of operating a RI Pre-K classroom but there was not enough funding to award the classrooms. This demonstrates that there are at least 16 classrooms ready to deliver RI Pre-K and 13 programs interested in becoming RI Pre-K providers, but that will require additional support to meet all RI Pre-K quality criteria. However, these potential 29 classrooms are not sufficient to reach the goal of adding 2,700 seats. Additional recruitment and support will be needed to develop a pipeline of programs between now and 2028 (see *Key Focus 4*). Importantly, developing the pipeline of programs must occur prior to each RI Pre-K expansion grant application cycle. As a result, the Growth Model assumes that RI is investing in both expansion of new seats each fiscal year and investing in a pipeline of potential future new seats simultaneously.

| Investment Drivers for Classroom Pipeline |                            |                           |                            |
|---|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Classroom/program pipeline                |                            | Educator Pipeline         |                            |
| Lower Investment Estimate                 | Higher Investment Estimate | Lower Investment Estimate | Higher Investment Estimate |
| \$15,000                                  | \$70,000                   | \$10,000                  | \$50,000                   |

#### Investment Inputs:

- **Classroom/program pipeline:** Investments associated with supporting a classroom/program to be ready to deliver RI Pre-K. This could include purchasing and training on new curriculum; purchasing new furniture; supporting PDTA for the program; or addressing requirements to reach a rating of 3 stars on BrightStars.
- **Educator pipeline:** Investments associated with supporting the educator pipeline are a range depending on the prior experience and credentials of the potential RI Pre-K teacher. While some teachers may only need minimal supports, others may require support to attain their Bachelors’ degree or teacher certification.

#### Investment Drivers:

- **Scale of supports needed for classroom/program pipeline:**
  - *Lower investment estimate:* Assumes \$15,000 per classroom, which is the average start-up cost for curriculum, materials, and other classroom readiness.
  - *Higher investment estimate:* Assumes \$70,000 per classroom, which includes potential facilities enhancements and retrofitting, as well as PDTA, curriculum, or other readiness requirements.
- **Scale of supports needed for educator pipeline**
  - *Lower investment estimate:* Assumes \$10,000 per Lead Teacher to access PD, RIELDS, or other readiness supports.
  - *Higher investment estimate:* Assumes \$50,000 per Lead Teacher to access higher education coursework to attain bachelor’s or teaching certificate.

As discussed in *Key Focus 7*, a potential unintended consequence of expanding pre-kindergarten programming can be a reduction in infant/toddler capacity. RI already has a crisis in access and affordability for infant/toddler care and causing greater disruption in this space will lead to significant economic disruption and make it difficult for young parents to participate in the workforce. RI can protect against this outcome by making aligned investments in the proposals within

Key Focus 7 and anticipated future infant/toddler strategic plans. A best practice noted by national experts is to invest in a set-aside funding that scales with the investment in RI Pre-K.

| Infant/Toddler Investment        |                                   |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| % Infant/Toddler Set Aside       |                                   |
| Lower Investment Estimate<br>10% | Higher Investment Estimate<br>30% |

**Investment Inputs:**

- **Total amount of funding for RI Pre-K.** The infant/toddler set aside is a percentage of the total RI Pre-K investment. The key investment input for the infant/toddler set aside is the total amount anticipated to be invested in RI Pre-K in that fiscal year.

**Investment Drivers:**

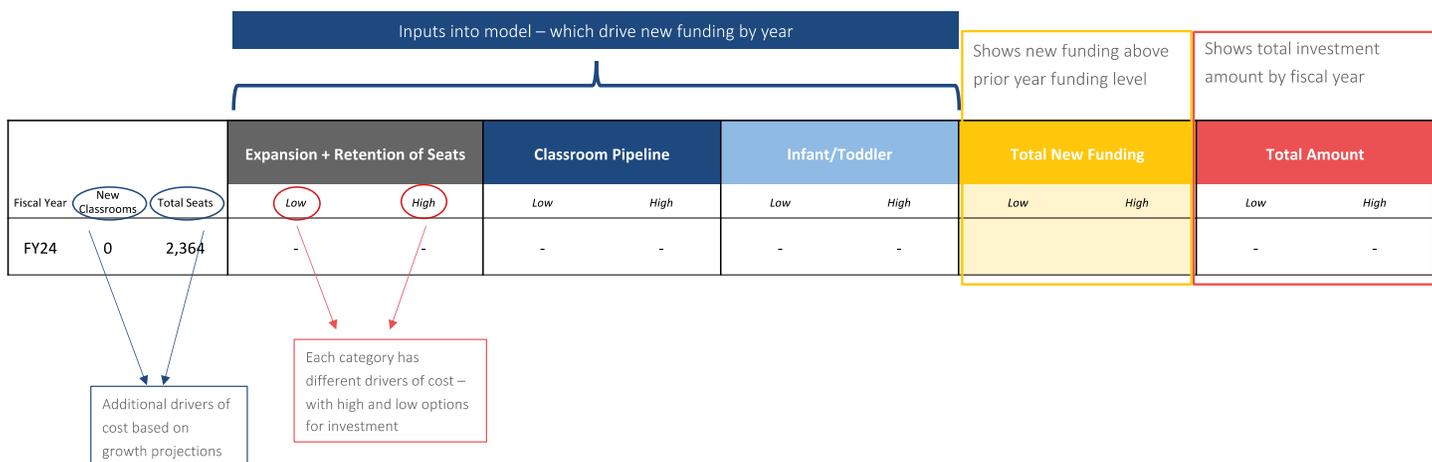
- **Percent of set aside for Infant/Toddler sector:** While a set-aside is noted as a best practice, the percentage of that set-side can vary. The growth model incorporates the following lower and higher set asides:
  - *Lower investment estimate:* The lower investment estimate includes a 10% set-aside.
  - *Higher investment estimate:* The higher investment estimate includes a 30% infant/toddler set aside. Of note, Illinois provides a 25% infant-toddler set aside.

**Growth Model Annual Projections**

Using the investment inputs and drivers for each component of the growth model, the state developed annual projections through FY28 at both the lower and higher estimates. Figure 2 below provides an overview of the growth model chart. The growth model is broken out by fiscal year and demonstrates the assumptions for expanding by the number of classrooms represented in the second column. Each year includes estimates for both a high and low investment driven by the factors described earlier in this section. As RI Pre-K expands, these estimates can be refined to incorporate new data to drive the assumptions built into the model.

RI Pre-K is currently level funded at \$14.85M in General Revenue. This level funding is incorporated into the growth model as the starting point for FY24.

**Figure 2: Overview of Growth Model Chart**



## Year over Year Growth Model, Summary Chart

The FY24 proposed amount represents the investment needed to maintain all existing RI Pre-K seats, as approximately \$7.0M in time-limited federal funds will expire after the current school year. Without additional investment, approximately 800 existing RI Pre-K seats will not have ongoing funding. **For FY24, the recommendation is to ensure continuity of all existing seats.**

Growth Model for RI Pre-K, by Fiscal Year and Low and High Estimate Ranges

| Fiscal Year | New Classrooms | Total Seats | Expansion + Retention of Seats |              | Pipeline     |              | Infant/Toddler |             | Total New Funding |              | Total Amount  |               |
|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
|             |                |             | Low                            | High         | Low          | High         | Low            | High        | Low               | High         | Low           | High          |
| FY24        | 0              | 2,364       | \$7,000,000                    | \$7,000,000  | -            | -            | -              | -           | \$7,000,000       | \$7,000,000  | \$ 21,850,000 | \$ 21,850,000 |
| FY25        | 35             | 2,997       | \$9,089,282                    | \$11,982,055 | \$ 875,000   | \$ 4,200,000 | \$908,928      | \$3,594,616 | \$10,873,210      | \$19,776,671 | \$ 32,723,210 | \$ 41,626,671 |
| FY26        | 35             | 3,645       | \$9,441,307                    | \$12,950,225 | \$ 875,000   | \$ 4,200,000 | \$944,131      | \$3,885,068 | \$11,260,437      | \$21,035,293 | \$ 43,108,647 | \$ 58,461,964 |
| FY27        | 35             | 4,292       | \$9,796,852                    | \$13,957,123 | \$ 1,000,000 | \$ 4,800,000 | \$979,685      | \$4,187,137 | \$11,776,537      | \$22,944,260 | \$ 54,010,184 | \$ 77,206,224 |
| FY28        | 40             | 5,032       | \$11,287,845                   | \$16,337,737 | -            | -            | \$1,128,784    | \$4,901,321 | \$12,416,629      | \$21,239,059 | \$ 65,426,813 | \$ 93,645,283 |

## Administration of Funding

Pending further discussions and recommendations from the Working Group on Early Childhood Governance established in the FY23 Enacted Budget Article 10, this growth plan anticipates distinct budget items with varying management structures. Ongoing collaboration and coordination will be facilitated through the existing interagency working groups across DHS and RIDE:

- **RI Pre-K expansion and retention of seats:** RIDE Early Learning team, in collaboration with DHS Office of Child Care, would administer these funds and implement the recommendations of this expansion plan, building on over a decade of success in developing a nationally top-ranked Pre-K program.
- **Pipeline Supports:** RIDE Early Learning team and DHS Office of Child Care would jointly administer funding to support programs across the mixed-delivery system to be ready to apply for RI Pre-K in future award cycles.
- **Early Childhood Special Education:** RIDE Part B 619 Coordinator and OSCAS would be responsible for administration of funds, with the anticipation of developing a more detailed plan for distribution and administration in FY24 to begin implementation in FY25. RI has applied for a Preschool Development Planning Grant from the Federal Administration for Children and Families to provide funding to support this planning effort.
- **Infant/Toddler Funds:** DHS Office of Child Care would administer the infant/toddler funds, with the anticipation of developing a more detailed plan for distribution and implementation in FY24 to begin implementation in FY25. RI has applied for a Preschool Development Planning Grant from the Federal Administration for Children and Families to provide funding to support this planning effort.

## Additional Investment Considerations

- **Specific geographic expansion plans**– This growth model assumes that the state will fund 35-40 new classrooms a year to begin delivering RI Pre-K, but the model does not speak to where these classrooms will be located. To

address this, the high range for pipeline readiness is based on assumed needs of classrooms with significant facility retrofitting needs and educator pipeline barriers.

- **Facilities Bonds** – This model does not include costs for new facilities, given that the analysis of current capacity in the mixed-delivery system includes sufficient space for 5,000 RI Pre-K seats (see Key Focus 4). However, to reach universal prekindergarten and achieve broader early learning goals, we recommend that the state continue to fund the Early Childhood Care and Education Capital Fund through future bonds.
- **Broader Early Childhood Funding** – While this model incorporates some funding for an Infant/Toddler set-aside, it is likely not a sufficient amount to address the significant investments needed to address gaps and opportunities for other early learning priorities. Additional consideration should be given to raising CCAP rates to meet the equal access standard as set by the Administration for Children and Families, increasing income eligibility for families to access CCAP, and addressing compensation across the entire birth through age five sector. As noted throughout the report, it is recommended that additional strategic plans be developed to address compensation, infant/toddler care, Early Childhood Special Education, and other key areas.

# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/13-roi-toolbox/>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/13-roi-toolbox/>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/#/RI>
- <sup>4</sup> [https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/YB2021\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/YB2021_Full_Report.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-long-term-impact-of-the-head-start-program/>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.rikidscount.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Factbook%202022/Racial%20and%20Ethnic%20Diversity%20FB2022.pdf?ver=2022-05-12-085929-300>
- <sup>7</sup> RI Family Survey on Child Care Experiences, 2022
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.childrensfundingproject.org/cfp-blog/2022/8/16/guest-blog-local-government-can-expand-pre-k-four-lessons-from-new-york-city>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.earlylearningri.org/sites/default/files/site-content/Rhode%20Island%20Pre-K%20Planning%20Design%20Committee%20Report%20-%202009.pdf>
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.earlylearningri.org/sites/default/files/site-content/Rhode%20Island%20Pre-K%20Planning%20Design%20Committee%20Report%20-%202009.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup> [http://kids.ri.gov/cabinet/documents/PDG%20Facilities%20Needs%20Assessment%2011\\_19.pdf](http://kids.ri.gov/cabinet/documents/PDG%20Facilities%20Needs%20Assessment%2011_19.pdf)
- <sup>12</sup> <https://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/EarlyChildhoodEducation/EarlyChildhoodSpecialEducation/ParticipationinGeneralEarlyChildhoodPrograms.aspx>
- <sup>13</sup> <https://www.ececonsortium.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ECEC-Solutions-Paper-Mixed-Delivery.pdf>
- <sup>14</sup> [http://kids.ri.gov/cabinet/documents/PDG%20Facilities%20Needs%20Assessment%2011\\_19.pdf](http://kids.ri.gov/cabinet/documents/PDG%20Facilities%20Needs%20Assessment%2011_19.pdf)
- <sup>15</sup> <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/early-childhood-education-has-a-high-rate-of-return>
- <sup>16</sup> <https://www.rikidscount.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Factbook%202022/High-Quality%20Early%20Learning%20Programs%20FB2022.pdf?ver=2022-05-12-085928-580>
- <sup>17</sup> <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/the-early-educator-workforce/early-educator-pay-economic-insecurity-across-the-states/>
- <sup>18</sup> <https://www.earlylearningri.org/sites/default/files/site-content/Rhode%20Island%20Pre-K%20Planning%20Design%20Committee%20Report%20-%202009.pdf>
- <sup>19</sup> <http://kids.ri.gov/cabinet/documents/PDG%20B-5%20Workforce%20Needs%20Assessment%20Final%20Report%2010-19.pdf>
- <sup>20</sup> <http://kids.ri.gov/cabinet/documents/PDG%20B-5%20Workforce%20Needs%20Assessment%20Final%20Report%2010-19.pdf>
- <sup>21</sup> [https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/user-74/naeyc\\_survey\\_statedatawithquotes\\_sep2021.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/user-74/naeyc_survey_statedatawithquotes_sep2021.pdf)
- <sup>22</sup> <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/brief/child-care-sector-jobs-bls-analysis/>
- <sup>23</sup> <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/16n6j8zz>
- <sup>24</sup> [https://curry.virginia.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/epw/70\\_Teacher\\_Turnover\\_in\\_Head\\_Start.pdf](https://curry.virginia.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/epw/70_Teacher_Turnover_in_Head_Start.pdf)
- <sup>25</sup> <https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>
- <sup>26</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0278584620304875#bb0380>
- <sup>27</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Walter-Gilliam/publication/237336823\\_Early\\_Childhood\\_Consultation\\_Partnership\\_Results\\_of\\_a\\_random-controlled\\_evaluation/links/54d92d400cf24647581d9300/Early-Childhood-Consultation-Partnership-Results-of-a-random-controlled-evaluation.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Walter-Gilliam/publication/237336823_Early_Childhood_Consultation_Partnership_Results_of_a_random-controlled_evaluation/links/54d92d400cf24647581d9300/Early-Childhood-Consultation-Partnership-Results-of-a-random-controlled-evaluation.pdf)
- <sup>28</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S088520060700066X>
- <sup>29</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Eileen-Brennan-2/publication/237650607\\_Addressing\\_Mental\\_Health\\_in\\_Early\\_Childhood\\_Settings\\_The\\_Role\\_of\\_Mental\\_Health\\_Consultation\\_1/links/02e7e53036d445a826000000/Addressing-Mental-Health-in-Early-Childhood-Settings-The-Role-of-Mental-Health-Consultation-1.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Eileen-Brennan-2/publication/237650607_Addressing_Mental_Health_in_Early_Childhood_Settings_The_Role_of_Mental_Health_Consultation_1/links/02e7e53036d445a826000000/Addressing-Mental-Health-in-Early-Childhood-Settings-The-Role-of-Mental-Health-Consultation-1.pdf)
- <sup>30</sup> <https://www.earlylearningri.org/sites/default/files/site-content/RI%20Early%20Learning%20Council%20Early%20Years-Early%20Grades%20Recommendations%20-%20December%202020.pdf>

- 
- <sup>32</sup> <https://www.earlylearningri.org/sites/default/files/site-content/RI%20Early%20Learning%20Council%20Early%20Years-Early%20Grades%20Recommendations%20-%20December%202020.pdf>
- <sup>33</sup> <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/reports/state-reports/2022-county-health-rankings-state-report-data-interactive>
- <sup>34</sup> <https://dhs.ri.gov/media/3066/download?language=en>
- <sup>35</sup> <https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/state-strategies-to-strengthen-infant-toddler-care-as-public-pre-k-expands/>
- <sup>36</sup> <https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/OECD/Documents/Primer%20for%20Early%20Childhood%20Funding%20Commission%20Report%202021.pdf>
- <sup>37</sup> <https://www.thencit.org/see-whats-working/case-study-the-power-of-a-birth-to-three-state-set-aside>
- <sup>38</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/understanding-true-cost-child-care-infants-toddlers/>
- <sup>39</sup> <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2021-05-10-the-unintended-consequences-of-universal-preschool>
- <sup>40</sup> <http://kids.ri.gov/cabinet/documents/PDG%20B-5%20Workforce%20Needs%20Assessment%20Final%20Report%2010-19.pdf>