



**The Road to Universal Pre-K in Rhode Island**  
Governor Gina M. Raimondo's  
Prekindergarten Expansion Plan

## Section 1: Executive Summary

### Overview

This document outlines the State of Rhode Island’s initial approach to fulfill Governor Raimondo’s commitment to make high-quality prekindergarten (Pre-K) available to all four-year-olds in Rhode Island.

This document describes:

- The vision for and benefits of universal Pre-K in Rhode Island;
- The path to significantly and equitably expand access to Pre-K to achieve this vision;
- A phased approach to providing universal Pre-K by 2023, including:
  - A detailed proposal for requisite action and investment to begin executing this vision immediately, in school year 2019-2020; and
  - Initial investment and planning for school years 2020-2023.

This plan was developed in consultation with a consortium of education and policy implementation professionals and stakeholders representing multiple state agencies, schools, and community centers in Rhode Island.

*Governor Raimondo’s Commitment: Every child deserves a shot at a bright future, and there is no better preparation for a child’s future than a high-quality education, beginning in Pre-K.*

### Establishing Key Concepts

#### *Defining Universal Pre-K*

The definition of Universal Pre-K in Rhode Island is the availability of high-quality, publicly-funded Pre-K to all students and families regardless of zip code or socio-economic status. State-funded Pre-K is defined as at least 6 hours daily for a 180-day school year for 4-year-old children.

#### *Quantifying Universal Pre-K in Rhode Island*

A survey of other state Pre-K expansions predicate that universal access to Pre-K is achieved when the supply of seats amounts to 70% of the total number of children; in Rhode Island, that equates to 7,000 4-year-olds. As of 2018-19, the State of Rhode Island provides high-quality, state-funded Pre-K to 1,080 4-year-olds in 60 classrooms. To achieve Universal Pre-K as quantified above, the state needs to add nearly 6,000 seats.

#### *Seats and Mixed Delivery Model*

Each “seat” signifies one 4-year-old in a classroom. In a mixed delivery model, seats may exist in several

provider types. In Rhode Island, the most predominant provider types are public schools, Head Start centers, and child care centers.

### *Defining High Quality Pre-K*

A summary of research suggests that well-designed, high-quality Pre-K programs that prepare children for Kindergarten, elementary school, and beyond should possess the following components:

- Teachers who have earned a bachelor’s degree and who receive specialized training and professional development in early childhood education;
- Teacher-child ratios of at least 1:10 and class size of no more than 20;
- Research-based curriculum aligned to K-12 standards;
- At least 6 hours per day;
- Engaged families; and
- A focus on the whole child, with wraparound supports to ensure the health and well-being of the child.

Rhode Island’s well-deserved reputation for high-quality Pre-K programming is evidence of the state’s alignment to these components over several decades of development. As the state begins to implement universal Pre-K, we will continue to align the state’s quality standards with national standards and best practices.

### **Understanding the Need for Pre-K Expansion in Rhode Island**

In 2018, Rhode Island students in grades 3-8 took the Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS) assessment, which is the same test administered in Massachusetts. Only 34% of students met expectations in ELA, and only 27% met expectations in math. Rhode Island students did not come within ten percentage points of Massachusetts students in any grade level in either subject. Subgroups also reveal stark areas for improvement: only six percent of English learners are proficient in ELA, and only nineteen percent of students in poverty meet or exceed expectations. While many factors contribute to these outcomes, Rhode Island has an opportunity to improve student achievement by better preparing students to be Kindergarten-ready at age 5.<sup>1</sup>

*Key takeaway: Rhode Island must invest in Pre-K to close our achievement gaps and better prepare our youngest learners to be ready for kindergarten.*

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/Assessment/AssessmentResults.aspx>

## The Value Proposition for Universal State Funded Pre-K

Participation in Pre-K for 4-year-olds has an immensely positive impact on children, families, the community, and the economy.

In 2016, Governor Raimondo announced an ambitious goal to double the number of students reading on grade level by the end of third grade. By 2025, the state aims to have at least 75% (three out of four) third graders reading on grade level. Reading proficiently by the end of third grade is a crucial indicator in a child's development. An investment in high quality Pre-K ensures children enter Kindergarten educationally and developmentally ready to succeed, putting them on a path to read proficiently by the end of third grade.

A rich set of independent and academic longitudinal studies firmly demonstrate the value of high-quality Pre-K. The Abecedarian Project was a comprehensive early education program for young children at risk for developmental delays and lack of school readiness. The program operated at a single site in North Carolina between 1972 and 1985, with numerous assessments of long-term impact on participants in the decades that followed. In this program, positive outcomes ranged from higher achievement rates on tests in K-12 to lower rates of teenage pregnancy and drug use at age 21.<sup>2</sup>

In his comprehensive 2016 study “Early Childhood Education: Quality and Access Pay Off,” economics Nobel laureate and Distinguished Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago, James J. Heckman, underscored five key findings:<sup>3</sup>

1. Pre-K is most advantageous to those most in need. *“Disadvantaged children benefit the most from early childhood interventions and **society receives a higher return from targeted investments.**”*
2. Head Start works. *“**Head Start had significant beneficial effects**, was as good as other available center-based alternatives and was much better than what disadvantaged children would have received at home or with a relative.”*
3. Quality matters. *“**High quality programs produce high quality outcomes.... Despite their costs, they more than pay for themselves in increased productivity and reduced social spending.**”*
4. High-quality Pre-K has a lasting effect. *“**Quality early childhood education provides persistent boosts in socio-emotional skills...Positive later-life effects are consistent across other programs with long-term follow up and speak to the need to invest in programs that develop the whole child with a full range of skills.**”*
5. Policymakers should invest in quality and access. *“Today’s economic pressures force poor and middle-income parents alike to spend more time away from their children to make ends meet. **The need for quality early childhood education is intensifying**, the costs are increasing, and many more*

<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=132>, accessed 12/27/18.

<sup>3</sup> Source: <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/early-childhood-education-quality-and-access-pay-off/>, accessed 12/15/18.

*parents will find themselves without the means to provide it. **Every child needs quality early childhood education.** Those most in need should receive the most help from policy makers."*

Putting a price tag on the value of Pre-K is common practice in the analysis of expansion across the country. Investment in preschool delivers long-term economic benefit measured by such outcomes as:

- **Reduced** need for special education services;
- **Improved** high school graduation rates;
- **Higher** career earnings; and
- **Less** criminal activity in adulthood.

In her 2016 published study “The Economic Returns to Early Childhood Education,” economist Lynn Karoly concluded that the investment in early learning returned a present discounted value (PDV) of **as high as \$17 for every dollar invested.**<sup>4</sup>

*The bottom line: Few state policies yield as overwhelming and sustained return on investment as high-quality Pre-K.*

### A 2-Phased Approach

The following document describes a 2-phased approach to achieve universal Pre-K in Rhode Island:

- **Phase I** leverages opportunities within the current infrastructure to achieve a 50% expansion in the first year while conducting needed assessment and planning for Phase II; and
- **Phase II** achieves long-term, systemic expansion through facilities and workforce growth.

**Table 1.1: Overview of RI Expansion Planning by Phase**

Phase	Duration	Seats Added	Key Elements
Phase I	FY20	540	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansion within current infrastructure</li> <li>• Assessment and planning for Phase II</li> </ul>
Phase II	FY21-FY23	5,380	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workforce and facility capacity growth</li> <li>• Optimization of governance structures</li> <li>• Engaging families across the state</li> <li>• Accelerated expansion across mixed delivery system</li> </ul>
<i>Current state:</i>		<i>1,080 seats</i>	
<b>Total by 2022-2023:</b>		<b>7,000 seats</b>	

<sup>4</sup> Source: The Economic Returns to Early Childhood Education, Lynn A. Karoly, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1118537.pdf>, accessed 12/15/18.

## A 50% Increase in High-Quality Pre-K Seats in Phase I

In the 2019-20 school year, **Rhode Island will add 540 high-quality Pre-K seats**, leveraging existing opportunities in current infrastructure. This will be made possible through the provision of innovations and governance strategies to:

- **Add** classrooms to new and existing schools, Head Start Centers, and child care centers;
- **Allow and incentivize** providers to increase the number of students from 18 to 20 in appropriate classrooms to meet national best practices/benchmarks;
- **Convert** selected half-day Head Start classrooms to full day;
- **Align** state quality measurement tools and invest in classrooms serving CCAP children to increase quality by utilizing resources from CCAP Tiered reimbursement;
- **Align** on a Kindergarten readiness inventory that is calibrated and meaningful; and
- **Expand** BrightStars capacity.

Regardless of provider or funding source, state Pre-K classrooms must achieve a BrightStars rating of 5 stars on a 1-to-5 scale, as well as meet other RIDE requirements. Funding for the current 60 classrooms is administered by RIDE on a per-classroom basis and funded through a combination of state and federal Preschool Development Grant (PDG) funds through FY19. Beginning with FY20, these classrooms will be supported mainly with state funds, with the additional expansion made possible by leveraging federal, state, and local funds.

### Commitment to Quality

Currently, Pre-K classrooms are assessed by multiple entities and criteria, including:

- Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children (RIAEYC) using the BrightStars criteria;
- The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER); and
- RIDE's Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Standards for Approval of Preschool and Kindergarten Programs (CECE), which includes additional measures of quality.

Any expansion of Pre-K must be done equitably and consistent with the level of quality that has become a hallmark of Rhode Island's current State Funded Pre-K. During Phase I, the state will work to align multiple quality standards to realize gains in the number of high-quality Pre-K seats by recognizing existing, high-quality seats.

*The vision: To achieve universal Pre-K in Rhode Island through expansion that is **high-quality, equitable, and cost-sustainable.***

## Section 2: Current Status of State Pre-K

After a decade of coordination and hard work by RIDE and many stakeholders, Rhode Island has created a high-quality state Pre-K program that currently serves 1,080 4-year-olds in 60 classrooms across 11 communities. In 2008, the RI General Assembly enacted legislation directing RIDE to begin planning for a pilot high-quality Pre-K program. In 2009, Rhode Island established the state-funded Pre-K program. The resulting Pre-K design has earned the program a quality rating of 10 out of 10 by NIEER, as well as recognition by U.S. News and World Report as the highest quality Pre-K program in the country.<sup>5</sup>

In 2014, RIDE submitted a winning application for the federal Preschool Development Expansion Grant. RIDE received \$19 million over four years to expand the state Pre-K program. The funding allowed the state to expand access of its high-quality state Pre-K program from 17 classrooms (306 children) in 2014-15 to 60 classrooms (1080 children) in 2018-19. The grant funding was also used to improve processes and supports to ensure the quality implementation of the program, which included monitoring, technical assistance, and the implementation of a rigorous program evaluation. The last year of this grant is FY19. As a result, \$5.76 million in state funds is needed in FY20 to replace the lost federal funds and maintain the current 60 Pre-K classrooms (for a total state investment of \$12 million).

There are many other high-quality early childhood programs serving 4-year-olds that we are not currently counting as a part of our state Pre-K program. With some additional investments to assist these programs to meet the state's high-quality Pre-K standards, we can and will count them as a part of our state Pre-K program. These are existing seats that will now be newly counted under the definition of high quality.

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. News & World Report, "Pre-K-12 Rankings," May 14, 2018. <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/rankings/education/prek-12>

### Section 3: Phase I Expansion Budget

Phase I delivers two key strategies: Rapid expansion leveraging opportunities within the current infrastructure and multi-year planning, investment, execution, and oversight. In total, we estimate Phase I will grow Pre-K in Rhode Island by **540 seats** in school year 2019-20. This requires an investment of **\$5.75M** in state funds to replace expiring federal PDG grants to maintain the current 1,080 seats, as well as an additional investment of **\$4.25M** in state funding. Table 4.1 outlines how the additional \$4.25M will be spent.

**Table 4.1: Overview of Expansion**

Action	Description	Estimated Seats Added/Counted	Budgeted Amount
Add 10 new classrooms in public schools, Head Start Centers, and/or child care centers	Create new classrooms through revised RIDE RFP with request for a local match. These funds include funding for the classrooms, as well as professional development and associated costs.	200	\$2,000,000
Allow current pre-K classrooms to serve up to 20 students where appropriate	Provide funding to existing centers to enroll up to 20 students per class, driven by center capacity and demand for seats, thereby adding additional seats in existing high-quality classrooms	60	\$225,000
Convert selected half-day Head Start classrooms to full day Pre-K classrooms with Head Start Expansion Grants	Utilize the network of Head Start centers to increase quality and/or convert existing seats from 4 hours to 6 hours/day and 160 days to 180-days/year (a full academic year)	180	\$792,000
Invest in existing CCAP providers to match quality to state Pre-K standards	Utilize tiered reimbursement for pre-school age children, expand BrightStars QRIS, and provide additional professional development and other supports to child care centers at or near the high-quality Pre-K standards	100	\$801,919
Add additional capacity to support expansion	Four additional FTEs to support Phase I expansion and conduct the needed assessment and planning for Phase II		\$431,081
TOTAL:		540 seats	\$4,250,000

## Section 4: Expansion Within the Current Infrastructure

### *Phase I, Part 1: Expansion of 540 Seats leveraging opportunities within the current infrastructure*

#### **ADD 10 New Classrooms to Public Schools, Head Start Centers, and Child Care Centers.**

The highest priority opportunity to add Pre-K classrooms is to expand the number of classrooms in new and existing schools, Head Start Centers, and child care centers. This system of mixed delivery has yielded strong results for Rhode Island's existing Pre-K system.

While the identification of actual additional classrooms will be determined by the RIDE-administered RFP, we estimate that we can realistically add 10 new classrooms based on several criteria, informed by surveys and other criteria:

- **Facility availability:** In a recent survey, multiple school districts, Head State centers, and child care centers reporting having classroom space ready to meet the current criteria mandated for 4-year-olds, including:
  - A minimum of 700 square feet of indoor space (excluding the bathroom)
  - Access to natural light
  - Access to a bathroom with two toilets
  - Access to two sinks
  - A minimum of 1,500 square feet of outdoor playground space accessible from the classroom
  - Adequate parking for families
- **Existing demand:** We know from previous years which existing programs run a waitlist and which LEAs and cities have not yet offered state-supported Pre-K.

Part of the RIDE RFP process will include the requirement of a local funding commitment from participating school districts. Many school districts are already investing some of their own resources to provide Pre-K. The State intends to incentivize local investments in Pre-K through the RFP process.

#### **ALLOW current State Pre-K classrooms to serve up to 20 students where appropriate.**

Maintaining appropriate class size contributes to quality, strong student outcomes and safety. Traditionally, the State has set a class size limit of 18 students for programs receiving State Pre-K funds. However, this metric was set above even the highest quality rating systems, which benchmark high-quality at a class size limit of 20. As a component of the State's Pre-K expansion strategy, Rhode Island will implement a system in which centers will have the option to enroll up to 20 students in each classroom. Centers will submit an application demonstrating ability to maintain quality and safety while adding additional students. New programs will receive additional points on their proposal's scoring based on admitting twenty students.

*Voluntary Participation*

The increase in class size is supported by current research and policy guidance and is consistent with the trend in other states. However, schools and centers will continue to choose whether or not to increase class size.

*Anticipated Growth in Phase I*

Based on interviews and research in other states using comparable incentive programs, we conservatively estimate the addition of the equivalent of **60 new Pre-K seats** through allowing current Pre-K classrooms to have the option to increase class size from 18 to 20.

*Growth Model Assumptions*

- RIDE currently budgets between \$173K and \$190K per Pre-K class. The actual classroom allotment is determined through an RFP process and is dependent upon several variables.
- The marginal cost of adding up to 2 additional students is minimal;
- The proposed additional classroom allocation for a program to increase class size from 18 will be approximately \$7,500 with a shift to 20 children, but like classroom allotments, will be determined through the RFP process and may vary by classroom/provider; and
- Existing programs can decide whether their classroom capacity should be 18, 19, or 20.

*Evidence of Best Practices*

Staff-to-student ratios and class sizes influence student outcomes and overall Pre-K program quality. However, increased class size within an appropriate range for Pre-K students is not associated with decreased program quality. A 2017 meta-analysis of 60 years of early childhood research, led by a senior researcher at Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, “found no significant difference in either cognitive or socio-emotional outcomes based on increases in class size within the range [of 15 to 20].”<sup>6</sup> This and other consistent research combined with the best-practices prescribed by NIEER, BrightStars and Head Start indicate that programs can continue to offer high-quality programming while serving up to 20 students. Grounded in this research, we will allow Pre-K classrooms to expand access to serve up to 20 students, so long as the staff-to-student ratio is at least 1:10.

**Table 5.1: RIDE Standards for Classroom Size Compared to National Standards**

Quality Standard	Current Classroom Size Standard
RIDE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximum of 18 for State-Funded Pre-K 4-year-olds</li> </ul>
NIEER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximum of 20 students</li> </ul>
BrightStars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximum of 20 four-year-olds</li> </ul>
Head Start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15-20 students including both 3- and 4-year-olds</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> Source: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0162373716689489>, accessed 12/15/18.

## **CONVERT Selected Half-day Head Start Classrooms to Full-Day Head Start Classrooms**

One of the first ways New York City and Kentucky added qualifying classrooms as they expanded and established universal Pre-K programs was to expand some Head Start classes from a 4-hour school day to a 6-hour school day, and from 160 days to a full academic year (180 days), therefore enabling those programs to meet the high-quality Pre-K standards and count towards universal Pre-K.

### *Commitment to Quality*

Head Start providers offer strong early childhood education programming for low-income children and have distinct benefits for the entire family by supporting holistic child welfare through family social work, mental health, dental, and other wraparound services.

Most Head Start classrooms closely resemble the existing 60 Pre-K classrooms. As we drive toward universal Pre-K in Rhode Island, we intend to support any Head Start provider who wants to participate in State Pre-K by investing in their programs to help them meet the 10 NIEER quality standards, including, but not limited to:

- A lead teacher with a bachelor's degree;
- An assistant teacher with at least a Child Development Associate credential; and
- 15 professional development hours annually for each adult in the classroom.

Any Head Start classroom that meets all the State's high-quality Pre-K standards will count towards the 7,000-seat goal. Head Start's current alignment to the BrightStars quality improvement system, NIEER, and State Pre-K standards is good, which means there is significant opportunity for existing Head Start seats to quickly meet quality standards to count as part of Pre-K expansion in Rhode Island.

### *Anticipated Growth in Phase I*

**We intend to add 180 Pre-K seats in 2019-2020** via the conversion from half-day Head Start to full-day Pre-K in Head Start centers. This conversion leverages existing Head Start funding for part of the relevant students' per-pupil costs. We anticipate the additional investment required to support Head Start Centers to expand to full-day and meet all the high-quality Pre-K standards is approximately \$4400 per student.<sup>7</sup>

### *Growth Model Assumptions*

- Currently there are approximately 67 Head Start classrooms serving 1,206 4- and 5-year-olds enrolled in Head Start programs in Rhode Island, with an average enrollment of 18 students per class.

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<sup>7</sup> This estimate is based on data from Children's Friend, Head Start centers, Rhode Island's Head Start office, and lessons learned from other national implementations.

- We estimate approximately 36 classrooms currently operating at 4 hours per day have the ability to expand.
- The FY20 estimate includes funding to assist 10-12 classrooms to move from 4-hour to 6-hour days, and from 160 to 180 days.

### **INVEST in Existing CCAP Providers to Match Quality to State Pre-K Standards**

Rhode Island has invested in child care quality through the CCAP tiered reimbursement program. Through this investment, high quality centers who accept CCAP-eligible children earn more per student than centers with lower quality ratings on BrightStars. By expanding Pre-K seats in centers that accept CCAP, the state can utilize CCAP funding to expand access to high-quality Pre-K.

Rhode Island currently uses multiple quality measurement tools across early childhood programming, including:

1. BrightStars Quality Improvement System;
2. National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER); and
3. Comprehensive Early Childhood Education (CECE).

During Phase I, the State will work to align quality standards across the mixed delivery system to facilitate expansion while preserving Rhode Island's top-quality ranking.

A summary of the potential alignment changes include:

- **Review at the Classroom Level:** BrightStars currently executes at the center level and CECE/NIEER at the classroom level. BrightStars would begin reviewing and providing data for 4-year-old Pre-K classes at the classroom level to identify rooms that align to CECE/NIEER standards.
- **Increase training requirements:**
  - Require teachers in 4-year-old classrooms to participate in Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) training.
  - Require 15 professional development hours annually for all teachers. This number aligns with the NIEER standards.
- **Align curriculum:** Require use of a curriculum from a RIDE-approved list and ensure RIDE maintains this list and updates it annually;
- **Align quality improvement and observation tools:** Require use of Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) tool in lieu of other environmental rating systems;
- **Increase opportunities for competency-based certification:** Open a competency-based expert-residency certification pathway for non-credentialed PK-2 educators; and
- **Improve preparation for Teacher Assistants:** require Teacher Assistants to complete 12 credit hours in early childhood education.
- **Encourage high quality CCAP providers to take CCAP funded 4-year-olds.**

*Anticipated Growth in Phase I*

Achieving this degree of alignment between ratings systems will allow current 5-star rated centers providing high-quality educational programming to four-year-olds to be newly counted, provided they meet the state's high-quality Pre-K standards.

*Growth Model Assumptions*

During Phase 1, we estimate 100 seats can be added. While these seats will be newly counted under the definition of high-quality, they are existing seats.

*Expand BrightStars Capacity*

Every program eligible to receive state Pre-K funding must be rated by BrightStars. As we expand the number of classrooms to be rated annually by RIAEYC on the BrightStars framework, the number of professionals trained to assess classrooms and to coach to improvement needs to be increased. This expansion would include additional staff members and an extension of the BrightStars tools, site, and support materials.

## Section 5: Laying the Groundwork for Phase II

### **Phase 1, Part 2: Laying the Groundwork for Phase II**

The second objective for Phase I is to invest in and plan for Phase II, laying the groundwork for the growth to come. This will be accomplished through the addition of staff capacity to support expansion and with support and investment of new federal funds. Table 4.2 outlines specific areas of focus requiring attention in Phase I to achieve significant, equitable, high-quality growth.

**Table 4.2: Phase II Expansion Critical Growth Enablers**

<b>Growth Opportunity</b>	<b>Key Action Items</b>
Governance	Design a sustainable system of governance to focus on quality, incorporate core responsibilities of different agencies, and scale to handle oversight of Pre-K classrooms. Align quality standards across the mixed delivery system
Workforce	Collaborate with training organizations and employers to support development, training, and continuous improvement of Pre-K directors, teachers, teaching assistants (TAs), and other relevant human resources
Facilities	Utilize available spaces for Pre-K classrooms, and work with state agencies, local education agencies (LEAs), child care centers, Head Start centers, and others to build, furnish, and maintain suitable classrooms and outdoor spaces for Pre-K students
Family engagement	Expand awareness and demand for state Pre-K through coordination of branding, messaging, and messengers

Rhode Island recently received a **\$4.2M** federal Preschool Development Grant (PDG) that will be used, in part, to support system readiness for Pre-K expansion, including:

- Conducting a facilities assessment to identify availability and potential expansion opportunities for early childhood classroom space;
- Conducting a workforce assessment to gauge the quality and scale of existing preparation, coaching, and professional development programs for teachers and teaching assistants;
- Conducting a funding stream analysis to better align and optimize federal, state and local funding sources;
- Coordination of data systems, including interaction between ECEDS and the Exceeds website, and handoffs among ECEDS and other early childhood data systems;
- Development of an early childhood brand and communications materials in English and Spanish;
- Outreach to families and communities about high-quality Pre-K options to drive enrollment;
- Supporting successful transitions between Pre-K and Kindergarten;
- Training, support, and coaching related to the Kindergarten readiness assessment, TS Gold; and
- Analysis and expansion of capacity of BrightStars to rate additional classrooms and centers and coach for continuous improvement.