

Working Draft Report and Preliminary Recommendations on RI Pre-K Expansion

October, 2022

DRAFT

Introduction to the Working Draft Report and Preliminary Recommendations on RI Pre-K Expansion

Thank you for taking the time to read and provide feedback on the Working Draft Report and Preliminary Recommendations on RI Pre-K Expansion. The FY23 Enacted State Budget Article 10 charged the RI Department of Education (RIDE), the RI Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Children’s Cabinet with developing an RI Pre-K expansion plan to reach 5000 RI Pre-K seats by 2028. The RI Interagency Pre-K team has developed this Working Draft Report and Preliminary Recommendations on RI Pre-K Expansion for public comment and feedback. This report has been developed with input from providers, families, advocates, and stakeholders as well as prior reports and national research. The goal of this document is to provide a working draft for the community to react to and provide feedback on to inform the final report.

This draft document includes an initial set of recommendations and policies for the expansion of RI Pre-K to 5000 seats by 2028, including seats for children who are three years old. The report includes discussion of the importance of high-quality preschool, an overview of the RI Pre-K program, and deep dive discussions on key components of an expansion plan. These key focus areas include:

- Equitable Access to RI Pre-K
- Expanding RI Pre-K to Three-Year Olds
- Ensuring Equitable Access to RI Pre-K for Children with Disabilities
- Expanding RI Pre-K in the Mixed Delivery System
- Supporting Early Childhood Educators: Preparing, Recruiting, Retaining a Highly Qualified Workforce
- Supporting Strong Transitions to Kindergarten
- Sustaining and Growing the Infant/Toddler Sector

Importantly, this working draft does not include a proposed year over year growth plan for the number of RI Pre-K seats. Before a growth trajectory can be determined, we need your input and feedback on the key considerations that are included in this draft. For example, community feedback is needed on *Key Focus 1: Equitable Access to RI Pre-K* regarding the proposed approach to geographical expansion – the recommendation in this section will impact the rate of the growth trajectory.

We encourage everyone to read the report and share your feedback. To compile all feedback and finalize the report before the December 31, 2022 due date, **all input and feedback needs to be received by Friday, November 18th**. There are multiple ways to share your thoughts, ideas, and feedback on the Working Draft:

- Submit written **feedback via an online survey form**: <https://forms.gle/xRW4H1SB9PmeUr666>
- Send written **feedback via email** to the interagency team. Kayla Rosen, Director of Early Childhood Strategy, Governor’s Office, will compile all emails received: kayla.s.rosen@governor.ri.gov
- Participate in upcoming **public feedback sessions** about the plan via Zoom:
 - Tuesday, November 1, 2022 @ 3-4PM EST
 - Wednesday, November 16, 2022 @ 9-10AM EST
 - Zoom Meeting Information: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84654314291>

We look forward to your comments and input and to working with you to ensure all Rhode Island children have equitable access to high-quality early childhood education.

RI Pre-K Interagency Team – Department of Education, Department of Human Services, and Children’s Cabinet:

- Amanda Blazka, Education Specialist, Early Learning, RIDE
- Nicole Chiello, Assistant Director, Child Care, DHS
- Ruth Gallucci, Part B 619 Coordinator, RIDE
- Catherine Green, Head Start Collaboration Director, DHS
- Meg Hassan, PDG Grant Manager, Governor’s Office
- Zoe McGrath, Education Specialist, Early Learning, RIDE
- Lisa Nugent, Early Learning Coordinator, RIDE
- Kayla Rosen, Director of Early Childhood Strategy, Governor’s Office / Children’s Cabinet

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Executive Summary

What is RI Pre-K? RI Pre-K is a tuition-free, inclusive, high-quality standards-based program, built on the existing early childhood education infrastructure and aims to strengthen the birth through five system as a whole. Currently, RI Pre-K serves 2,364 students who are 4-years old in 127 classrooms across 18 communities through a mixed delivery system.

Goals of this Report: The RI Department of Education (RIDE), RI Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Children’s Cabinet were charged in the FY23 Enacted Budget to develop a plan to reach 5000 RI Pre-K seats by 2028. This preliminary working draft provides an in-depth review of the current state and operations of RI Pre-K and the potential considerations, recommendations, and investments needed to reach the ambitious expansion goal.

This report organizes the discussion of the expansion of RI Pre-K into several key focus areas that must be addressed to determine a growth plan for RI Pre-K that centers equity, family choice, and early childhood system sustainability. The summary of the goals, considerations, and preliminary recommendations are below:

Key Focus 1: Equitable Access to RI Pre-K

Goal	Every age-eligible child has equitable access to RI Pre-K. Our goal is to remove any structural barriers that would exclude a family from RI Pre-K.
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How could the structure – i.e. times, locations, application, lottery, etc. – of the program increase equitable access? • How could the delivery – teaching, instruction, curriculum, wraparound supports, etc. – of the program increase equitable access? • How can we equitably expand RI Pre-K across Rhode Island communities?
Recommended Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide grants for grassroots organizations to support families in signing up for the lottery • Invest in multilingual family engagement and navigator staff capacity at RIDE to coordinate all family engagement and be a point of contact for all families in the program • Build on efforts to provide specialized professional development and technical assistance (PDTA) to support programs in implementing multilingual classrooms • Conduct a family survey to understand where families would want RI Pre-K options to be geographically located across the state

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

Goal	RI Pre-K will serve children who are age 3 by September 1 of the year they are applying for RI Pre-K (i.e. are 2 years away from entering Kindergarten, or “K-2”).
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are changes to the RI Pre-K instructional approach needed to support 3-year olds in RI Pre-K classrooms? • How will transitions between age 3 and age 4 work for children enrolled in RI Pre-K at age 3? • What changes to the lottery are needed to support incorporating 3-year olds into RI Pre-K?
Recommended Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure grant awards for RI Pre-K cover the cost of the classroom as a whole, functionally creating a higher cost per pupil rate for 3-year olds who cannot be in a classroom with more than 18 children • Invest in PDTA for providers to deliver high-quality instruction for 3-year olds and support for operational readiness for the new program • Enhance the RI Pre-K lottery system infrastructure with increased configurability to add new conditions and requirements as the program expands

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

Goal	Children found eligible for early childhood special education (ECSE) services will have equitable access to RI Pre-K classrooms and will receive embedded services within the general education setting.
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can RI Pre-K ensure that children receiving special education services and their families are aware of and know how to access RI Pre-K? • How can RI Pre-K support providers to meaningfully include and support children receiving special education services? • How can RI Pre-K meaningfully support children as they transition from other settings such as Early Intervention?
Recommended Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide dedicated resources for families to understand their rights • Provide dedicated PDTA to providers and programs to promote inclusive education and embedded instruction • Explore changes to RI’s funding formula to provide financial support to local education agencies (LEA) for providing special education and related services, regardless of setting in the mixed delivery system • Support children with disabilities in transitioning across services and programs

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

Goal	RI Pre-K will continue to be offered through a nationally recognized mixed delivery model, which includes Community Based Organizations (CBO), Head Starts (HS), and Local Education Agencies (LEA). This will position RI to build on the state’s current system to continue to strategically braids funding to ensure a sustainable system that promotes family choice and equity.
Considerations	<p>For each provider type in the mixed delivery system – Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Head Start Agencies (HS), and Local Education Agencies (LEA) -- it is vital to understand the current capacity and specific needs for expansion readiness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
Recommended Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support enhanced PDTA to support organizational readiness to support new RI Pre-K classrooms and plan business practices • Invest in the expansion of new facilities across the mixed delivery system • Address workforce pipeline, attraction, and retention across the mixed delivery system • Explore opportunity for FCCs to become RI Pre-K providers through piloting new models of delivery

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

Goal	As RI Pre-K continues to expand, all programs will continue to employ 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.
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will RI develop accessible Pathways to RI Pre-K-2 Certification to support (educationally and financially) prospective Lead and Assistant Teachers with meeting the educational qualifications required of RI Pre-K educators? • How can RI build grow capacity to support educators in attaining RI Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) training? • How can RI strengthen the retention of the RI Pre-K Lead and Assistant Teacher workforce across the mixed delivery service model? • 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?

Recommended Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in the Teacher Certificate-Only T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship Model Increase funding for the URI and RIC pathways leading to Pre-K-2 certification for the incumbent workforce Increase funding to support RIDE capacity to offer all RIELDS courses in English and Spanish. Increase funding to ensure pay parity between Lead Teachers and Teacher Assistants across mixed delivery RI Pre-K settings on a district-by-district basis Increase funding for the early childhood mental health support services (SUCCESS) to ensure continued access to supports for RI Pre-K programs, children, and families Increase access to comprehensive social emotional development trainings through Conscious Discipline for all early childhood educators
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Key Focus 6: Supporting Strong Transitions to Kindergarten

Goal	All children in RI Pre-K 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.
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can we support families in understanding how to prepare their child for kindergarten? How do families experience and understand the kindergarten registration process? What supports do educators need to successfully support effective transitions? How can we support children with disabilities and multi-lingual learners in transitions?
Recommended Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in summer learning opportunities for children to ensure readiness for kindergarten classroom expectations, including for children who did not attend RI Pre-K Enhance kindergarten registration and outreach processes across the state, including through a statewide calendar and centralized public awareness campaign. Support families in understanding how to prepare children for a successful and positive transition to kindergarten Invest in specific supports for students with IEPs and students who are multi-lingual 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.

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

Goal	Growth and stability of the infant/toddler (I/T) sector will not be hindered by the expansion of RI Pre-K.
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can the state prevent the reduction of infant/toddler slots while expanding RI Pre-K as regularly seen when implemented across the nation? How can the state prevent qualified staff working with infants and toddlers from leaving their positions for RI Pre-K, or other preschool positions which often offer higher salaries? How can the State augment programs’ capacity to offer high quality care and education and achieve a high quality BrightStars rating while expanding?
Recommended Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider 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 Augment programs’ financial stability through the issuance of incentive grants to RI-Pre-K’s serving I/T Allocate funding dedicated to Infant/Toddler programs to support sustainability and quality Consider continuation of retention bonus programs beyond FY24 targeted to infant/toddler workforce

After feedback on the draft report and recommendations is received, the state will develop a proposed year over year growth plan aligned to the community-informed recommendations.

Why Invest in High-quality Pre-K

Goal: 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 for all children ages 3 and 4 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 less likely to have behavioral issues in elementary and middle school, more likely to graduate high school, and more likely to attend and graduate from college. 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.¹ 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 RI Pre-K program meets key national quality benchmarks, showing the 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. Furthermore, we know that when young children have opportunities and thrive, it makes Rhode Island a great place to grow up and raise kids.

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: Right now, 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.² That not only hurts individual families, but the state as a whole, as generations of children are not getting the strong start that they deserve and 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 on 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 abilities.

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

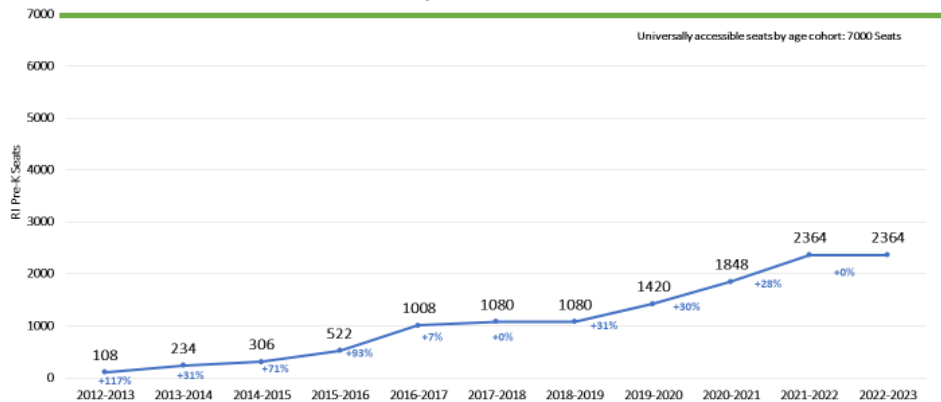
...built on the existing early childhood education infrastructure: RI Pre-K is delivered through the mixed delivery system including Local Education Agencies, Community Based Organizations, Head Starts, and Family Child Care.

...aims strengthen the birth through five system as a whole: RI Pre-K supports increased quality, access, and stability for the entire birth through age 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.

RI Pre-K Seats, by School Year 2012-2023



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 to 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 RI Pre-K 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 free, universal access to high-quality preschool by supporting existing preschool settings 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 community-based child care programs, Head Starts, 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.

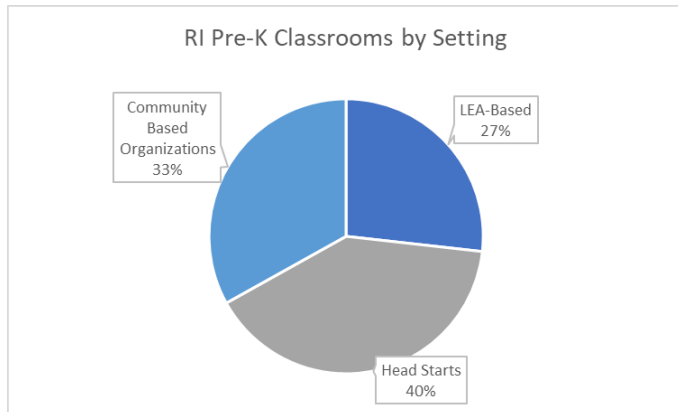
RI Pre-K is nationally recognized for quality, and we must expand in a way that maintains this quality. RI Pre-K is a nationally recognized leader in delivering high-quality programming and instruction. The program meets all ten quality criteria of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), one of only 6 states to do so. Despite the 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.³

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 all RIDE **monitoring and professional development / technical assistance** activities.

To support access and system sustainability, RI Pre-K is provided across the mixed delivery system in Community Based Organizations (i.e. center-based child care), Local Education Agencies, and Head Start Agencies.



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

Programs have become RI Pre-K providers over time by applying through RIDE’s competitive grant application and selection process. Providers must meet certain foundational requirements to be considered – such as 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 CCAP, 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 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’s Pre-K is open and free to all children regardless of income, the lottery process ensures that RI Pre-K classrooms reflect the economic makeup of the community. As is true for enrollment in elementary school, 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 (for more information on 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 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.⁴

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 high rates of poverty, using a lottery system to ensure that classrooms' socioeconomic makeup 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.

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) (Reported by programs, N =2520)	All RI Children, 2020 Census Data (RI KIDS COUNT Factbook, 2022) ⁵
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. In particular, 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) (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 – i.e. 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.⁶ 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 on a paper form to be entered into the RI Pre-K lottery. The online form and the paper form are both very 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. 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 providers. RIDE finalizes grant agreements with new and ongoing RI Pre-K programs for the upcoming school year. Through this process, RIDE identifies the exact number of seats in each program that are available for the lottery and uploads the list of available programs in each community into the lottery.
- **April-July:** The application window for families to apply for the lottery is between April and June. Families can select and rank their preferences for RI Pre-K programs when they submit their applications.
- **Early July:** RIDE runs the lottery which is weighted to develop classrooms that reflect the socioeconomic make-up of the community they are in 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.
- **September:** RI Pre-K classes begin.

From community feedback, it is clear that several aspects of the current lottery system are causing barriers to participation and could be improved. Families need a high degree of knowledge to be aware of the opportunity to apply for RI Pre-K and understand whether their child is eligible. In New York City, for the expansion of their universal Pre-K 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.⁷ In addition, 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 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.⁸ 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 for which a provider is scored within 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 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 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.

Draft 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 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
- 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

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

Overview and Current Context:

The current RI Pre-K program 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 designated as MLLs until they enter the K-12 school system where MLL status is assessed. 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.

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.

Draft Recommendations for Expansion

Language Access

- Build on efforts to provide specialized PDTA to support programs in implementing a multilingual classroom
- Make implementation of a multi-lingual classroom a criterion for future RI Pre-K awards within the grant agreement
- Partner with school districts to provide MLL assessment upon entering RI Pre-K to support transition to K-12 MLL supports
- Support Family Child Care in becoming part of the RI Pre-K delivery system, as many FCCs are Spanish-speaking

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.⁹ 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 2700 seats reach the 2028 goal and beyond, it is important that there is a transparent approach to how the program expands with equity. For the foreseeable future, RI Pre-K will continue to require children to attend an RI Pre-K in the school district where they live to ensure access to special education services (see *Key Focus 3*).

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 5000 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.¹⁰

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.

Draft Recommendations for Expansion

- RIDE should continue to have discretion to balance expansion across Rhode Island with the urgency to reach 5000 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.
- 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.

Long-term Considerations:

As RI Pre-K expands beyond 5000 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 serve children who are age 3 by September 1 of the year they are applying for RI Pre-K (i.e. 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 (i.e. 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 3 can only have a maximum of 18 children. In comparison, a classroom with children all age 4 can have a maximum of 20 children based on ratios and classroom square footage.

In addition, it is important to establish clear policies about the new eligibility for the program. For example, enrollment policies will be needed such as whether a child who is enrolled in RI Pre-K at age 3 is guaranteed a seat at age 4. 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 the RI Pre-K program, the program 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

Three-year olds are at a different stage of development compared to 4-year olds. [Rhode Island’s Early Learning and Development Standards \(RIELDS\)](#) explicates 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.

Draft 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 applicant requirements include:
 - 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 potty 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.
- All RI Pre-K programs serving 3-year olds must also have a 4-year old RI Pre-K seats for children to matriculate into.
- 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 ensure the continued capacity of I/T care in RI. RIDE will work with DHS to support the expansion of RI Pre-K within the current ECE 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.

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 4 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

- 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 3 would be guaranteed a seat at age 4 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 eligibility 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. Families apply online or on 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 to select the population to be representative of the community the RI Pre-K program serves and places children into programs based on how families ranked their choices.

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 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 3 and age 4 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.
- Consider developing a clear lottery procedure that is documented and reviewed 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 ECCE system. For example, currently a child turning 3 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. 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 3 and 4 who are eligible to participate in RI Pre-K are eligible for special education services through Early Childhood Special Education (also known as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B, Section 619, ECSE), which is special education for children ages 3-5. In Rhode Island, as of June 2021, statewide approximately 7% of children ages 3-5 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 of 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 moved to embed some or all ECSE services within general education settings across the mixed delivery system. 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 3-5 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 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. Nearly 19% of children receiving special education services in RI Pre-K 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.

Currently, however, there is no specific funding for the provision of ECSE services within 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 not being able to access either their services or 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.

The expansion of RI Pre-K to children age 3 represents new logistical considerations. When children transition from Early Intervention (IDEA Part C), the transition occurs when they turn three-years old. 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 3-, 4- and 5-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 23% of all age-eligible children have been screened. As the rate of children with disabilities increases, RI must be prepared to deliver all children high-quality special education services embedded into general education settings.

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 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. Research shows that children with disabilities have better outcomes when educated alongside their peers in regular education environments and while receiving their special education services distributed and embedded across the 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, 53% of children ages 3-5 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 fully transitioned to the RI-IECSE model, 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.¹¹ Since 2016, RIDE has offered targeted professional development and technical assistance to school districts and community-based staff to support the IECSE service delivery model. To date, RI has supported implementation of the 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 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

Draft 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 Rhode Island LEAs in providing the RI-IECSE model through targeted professional development, technical assistance, and strategic planning grants.
- Consider 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 expanding family choice and potentially decreasing the number of transitions for children.
- Explore Colorado’s model of ECSE delivery where all children 3-5 who have an IEP have access to a general education preschool program through the school district

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 early learning programs. RI Pre-Ks receive support in collaborating with LEAs and ongoing technical assistance from RIDE.

in which the child resides. This is included as part of their IEP, along with the necessary specialized instruction and related services. Districts have access to a portion of dedicated general funding for children receiving ECSE. They 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 an inevitable increase in 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 needed changes to support organizational readiness see *Key Focus 4*.

Currently, children with disabilities who receive services in RI Pre-K classrooms operated by Community Based Organizations 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, this can create funding gaps for LEAs.

Steps Taken to Date

- RI Pre-K programs currently supports children with disabilities and welcomes embedded special education services and collaboration with LEAs.
- RIDE offers an Introduction to the IECSE service delivery model to RI PreK 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 and how they can best support parents in accessing high-quality

Draft Recommendations for Expansion

Workforce Pipeline and Readiness:

- Support Institutions of Higher Education in offering course work that is aligned with national best practices on embedded instruction within general early childhood settings
- Increase capacity to provide additional dedicated professional development and technical assistance to providers and programs to promote inclusive education and embedded instruction
- Investigate 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

Equitable Funding

- programs with embedded special education services
- With PDG B-5 Renewal funding, provided funding to two institutions of higher education (IHE) for aligning IECSE practices with current coursework.
- 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 3rd 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 3rd 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 CCAP to matriculate from their age 3 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 ECSE supports across district lines, RI must work to ensure 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.

Draft 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
- Ensure that children matriculating from a child care program into an RI Pre-K classroom are in their district of residence
- If RI Pre-K pilots the matriculation of students outside of their district of residence, ensure clear guidance and procedures for the delivery of special education services

Long-term Considerations

The section above outlines key considerations for immediate implementation to reach 5,000 seats. As we expand beyond 5,000 seats to reach universal numbers 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:** As we reach universal 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:** As RI Pre-K expands, the State needs to 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 3rd birthdays 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. If that change were to occur, careful planning would be required to ensure that children with disabilities were being equitably served.

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 in Rhode Island through a mixed delivery model. This will position us to enhance our current system that strategically braids funding to ensure a sustainable ECCE system that allows for family choice and equity.

Introduction

High quality early learning happens in all settings: community-based child care, Head Start, school districts, and home-based care. From the outset, RI Pre-K has been delivered by investing in 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 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.¹²

Recognized as a best practice, strengthening RI's mixed delivery system has benefits across the entire birth through 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. Preschool enrollment is critical to sustaining small business operations, because 3-5 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 the cost of offering slots for solely infants and toddlers (I/T) is not sustainable. By expanding RI Pre-K through the mixed delivery system, RI supports sustaining the 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.

Expanding 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 cost effectively. In 2021, in collaboration with stakeholders, RI piloted new [service delivery models](#) that created new opportunities for providers to apply for existing classrooms to become RI Pre-K classrooms by braiding and blending 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 4-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 fifteen (15) new classrooms (300 seats). Using the pilot models, twenty-seven (27) classrooms were opened or brought into RI Pre-K, representing new 516 seats in the RI Pre-K program.

To achieve 5000 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) Community-Based Organizations (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 – Community Based Organizations (CBOs), 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?

Community Based Organizations

Community-based organizations (CBO) are private entities, including both profit and not for profit, that offer center-based child care. Rhode Island General Law requires all CBOs to be licensed by the Department of Human Services. 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. CBOs may provide care to children of any age from infancy to school age. To be eligible applicants to provide RI Pre-K, CBOs 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 CBOs, 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
- 6 classrooms using Model 4, where age-eligible students who utilize CCAP and were already students at the CBO 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. (see *Cost of RI Pre-K* discussion of service delivery models)

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

Based on BrightStars ratings and preschool-aged licensed capacity as of September 2022, there are approximately 2,700 CBO-based seats that not currently part of the RI Pre-K system or Head Start. This current capacity represents a prime opportunity for expansion for RI Pre-K, because the CBOs 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 employment and hiring of 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 CBOs- especially those operating for 12 hour days to meet the varying scheduling demands of working families.

Steps Taken to Date

Educator Workforce:

- 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

Draft 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 PDTA 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

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 CBO colleagues, but typically still earn less than educators with the same qualifications within public schools.

Organizational Readiness:

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

What supports are needed to expand capacity within the CBOs?

According to data from September 2022, there are 6,964 licensed preschool-aged seats in CBOs 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.¹³ For RI Pre-K to continue to be based in school district, 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 CBOs 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 CBOs and educators on the ERS quality rating tools. This is a training to support programs in understanding and utilizing the evidence-based valid and reliable assessment tool utilized to assess overall program quality in early care and education settings known as the Environmental Rating Scale or ERS
- 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 CBOs (including HS agencies) to

Draft 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 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.

prepare required materials for facilities expansion, such as architectural plans, environmental reviews, and other requisite capital planning.

- 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 CBOs to support existing classrooms to become RI Pre-K without displacing children and without needing an entirely new room.

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. 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 program is a nationally recognized leader in the field of early childhood education for providing innovative, high-quality services to the 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.

Since its beginning, HS 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 well being and economic success. Economists consider investing in Head Start to be the highest ROI for public spending with an average return of 7-12%- the highest being in the earlier years, infant and toddler care.¹⁴

Local HS 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 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

HS programs are designed to prioritize enrollment for those most in need. HS programs 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 HS

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.

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.
- 6 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.
- 5 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 HS Agencies?

As of September 2022, there are approximately 1000 HS 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 HS could include either new Model 1 rooms – where an entirely new classroom is created and staffed within the HS 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.

Draft Recommendations for Expansion

- Head Start agencies face many of the same workforce and facilities challenges as CBOs, so all recommendations for CBOs are important for HS 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 HS to Early Head Start (EHS) or EHS to HS) 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 HS

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 HS classrooms

Draft 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 3-5 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 3-5 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, 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.

Draft 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 CBOs to deliver RI Pre-K in school facilities that are underutilized

What supports are needed to expand capacity within the LEAs?

Similar to CBOs, 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.

Draft 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 the Department of Human Services (DHS) and many accept the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) subsidy. In FCCs, children can be in a mixed age group (birth to 5 + 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. In addition, many families prefer programs that speak their home language, and as approximately 69% of FCC's speak Spanish as a first language, FCCs are a provider of choice.

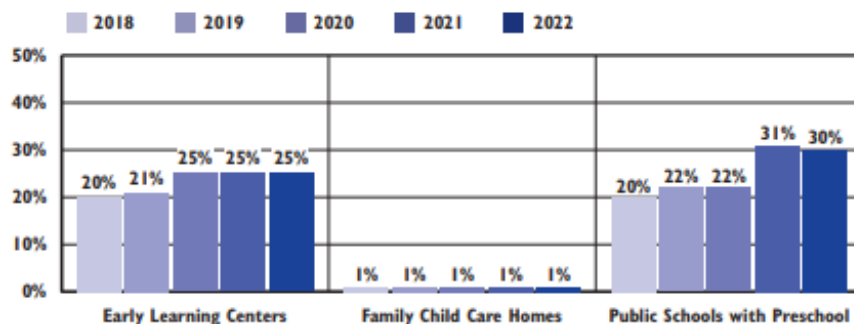
Currently, RI Pre-K is not offered in FCCs because the grant funding is awarded on a "per classroom" basis with an award intended to serve between 18-20 four-year-old children. However, FCCs are strongly connected to RI Pre-K and often provide the before/after care for RI Pre-K students who need extended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

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.¹⁵

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.

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 over the years, most recently the Early Learning Council Meeting in September 2022. Considerations for model flexibility were discussed.

Quality Supports

- Similar to CBOs, FCCs are eligible to participate in the DHS sponsored LearnERS program. This program supports providers to learn the ERS 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.
- DHS Funded Workforce Development Programs: 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 workers 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.

Draft Recommendations for Expansion

Model Flexibility

- 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 operational 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

- Explore opportunities to support FCCs in advancing in BrightStars
- Create a pilot opportunity for Family Child Care Home Providers with a Bachelor's degree to apply to offer RI Pre-K
- 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 CBO and HS providers – 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 will continue to employ 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 0 to 5 years. Approximately 25% of early educators in the state live in poverty, compared to approximately 4% in the K-8 teacher workforce.¹⁶ Despite original RI Pre-K design goals to ensure pay parity with Kindergarten teachers, 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.¹⁷ In addition, due to RI Pre-K awards not adjusting with inflation, Lead and Assistant Teachers across delivery models in RI Pre-K now experience pay discrepancy. However, even with the discrepancies in pay, staff in RI Pre-K programs often earn more than their peers in non-RI Pre-K funded classrooms, which can cause disruption in the rest of the birth through age 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 protect and strengthen infant/toddler care.

The Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Standards for Approval of Preschool and Kindergarten Programs (CECE) reflect the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s commitment to central elements of high-quality early childhood education. [CECE program approval](#) represents the highest bar in the state’s early learning “quality continuum” which begins at [DHS licensing](#), progresses through [BrightStars \(QRIS\)](#), and culminates in RIDE CECE approval. Applying for, receiving, and maintaining CECE approval is a mandatory deliverable 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"> • Have documentation of a high school diploma or general equivalency • A RIELDS certificate relevant to this position • AND have completed one of the following options at the time of employment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful completion of a Teacher Assistant Training Program approved by RIDE • A minimum of 12 credit hours of college coursework relevant to the early childhood education program setting • A Child Development Associate (CDA) credential AND 9 credit hours of college coursework relevant to the early childhood education program setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold a current RIDE Pre-K-2 teaching certificate • 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 • A RIELDS certificate relevant to this position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold a current appropriate RIDE Pre-K-2 teaching certificate • 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) • A RIELDS certificate relevant to this position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold a RIDE administrator certificate • OR meet the requirements of the role of Child Care Administrator required by DHS Child Care Center and School Age program Regulations

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 CECE regulations, RI Pre-K Lead Teachers must possess a Bachelor's degree with Pre-K-2 certification 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.¹⁸ 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 that have a Bachelor's degree but no teacher certification (35%) are given a 7-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 Bachelor's Degrees which makes them ineligible to become RI Pre-K lead teachers.¹⁹ 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 workforce members 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 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.

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 CBO's do not have an active RI-Pre-K-2 certification and have significant barriers to obtaining one with 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](#).
 - Current Initiatives: T.E.A.C.H Early Childhood RI is currently 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 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 current 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

Draft Recommendations for Expansion

- 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 endured for a student's student teaching.
 - The Teacher Certification Only Scholarship Model offers students a living stipend, tuition support, and substitute reimbursement to the employing/sponsoring center 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 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.

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.

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 5. 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 childcare 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 (5) different RIELDS professional development courses:

- Foundational courses (The 9-Domains; The Guiding Principles)
- Curriculum and Planning
- The Instructional Cycle
- Implementing a Standards based program

The foundational courses consist of 9 hours of PD, are offered in both English and Spanish and 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 PD is offered only in English and in a synchronous format (via Zoom or in-person) and 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 of PD.

As RI Pre-K expands, there will be an influx of educators 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, through the onboarding of new RIELDS PD facilitators and additional funding.

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 facilitations or through the existing self-paced modules.

Draft Recommendations for Expansion

Increase funding to support RIDE capacity to offer all RIELDS professional development courses in English and Spanish.

- 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 PD 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. Teacher Assistants must complete 12 credit hours of college coursework in ECE or a CDA (CBOs and Head Starts), and/or must successfully complete a RIDE-approved Teacher Assistant Program (all mixed-delivery settings). Despite this standard set for Lead and Assistant Teacher qualifications across RI Pre-K delivery setting (CBO, Head Start, LEA), wage disparities still exist. When considering salaries alone, Lead Teachers in CBOs 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 CBO 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 CBOs 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 CBOs, 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			
	CBO	Head Start	LEA
Lead Teacher	\$47,900	\$51,200	\$74,700
Assistant Teacher	\$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 childcare centers indicated that they had a staffing shortage, and 78% of respondents indicating low wages as the primary barrier to recruitment of educators, while 81% indicating low wages as the reason for leaving.²⁰ Furthermore, to this day an ongoing staffing shortage exists; the national jobs recovery has bypassed the childcare sector such that childcare employment is still 8.4% below what it was in February 2020 nationally.²¹

The relationship between wages, retention, and child outcomes is well-established, with research finding that early educator wages are positive associated with program quality and negatively associated with turnover rates.²² 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.²³ 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.

Draft Recommendations for Expansion

- Increase classroom funding to ensure parity between Lead Teachers and Teacher Assistants across mixed-delivery RI Pre-K settings.
 - Given the similar credentials and professional learning expectations held to Lead and Assistant Teachers in LEAs, there must be salary parity across all mixed delivery settings 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 Community-Based 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 CBOs and Head Starts must have salary parity with their Pre-K-2 counterparts in LEAs
 - Assistant Teachers in RI Pre-K programs located in LEAs must have salary parity with their TA counterparts in CBOs and Head Starts

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 demonstrated²⁴:

- **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 and 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).²⁵

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.^{26 27} ECMHC has also yielded positive social and emotional outcomes for young children in early childhood settings, including reductions in preschool expulsions.²⁸
- 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 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.

Draft 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 3 years, the Department of Human Services has similarly supported some licensed child care facilities with access to these trainings

Key Focus 6: Supporting Strong Transitions to Kindergarten

GOAL STATEMENT: All children in RI Pre-K 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 Pre-K, community, and family childcare 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?

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

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

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?

Steps Taken to Date

- Educators part of the Transition Professional Development series collaboratively identify and implement locally designed and research-based transition policies and procedures.
- 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 transitions²⁹
- 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?

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 multi-lingual 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.

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*.

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. Any Kindergarten Entry Profile must be developmentally appropriate, comprehensive, and inclusive of whole child elements (e.g., social and emotional learning, literacy, numeracy and more). These assessments must be formative and not used for school accountability but to inform policy.³⁰

DRAFT

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

GOAL STATEMENT: Growth and stability of the infant/toddler infrastructure will not be hindered by the expansion of RI-PreK.

Introduction

Infant and toddler care is an essential part of the birth through 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 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 percent of their household income on child care alone.³¹ 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 \$255.³² The high cost of care 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. (Infants are considered children from birth through age 18 months and Toddlers are considered children ages 18-36 months).

In addition, similar to many states across the nation, Rhode Island has a shortage of infant/toddler slots- particularly high-quality slots. This was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the State has employed several tactics to strategically address the shortage, 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 creating challenges in an already strained system.³³ 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.^{34 35}

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.³⁶ 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) and have to staff the same classroom with 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 (NY). 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 program financial sustainability to allow for the continued provision of I/T care.

Recommendations for Expansion

- Consider 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.
- 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.
- Augment programs' financial stability through the issuance of incentive grants to RI-Pre-K's serving I/Ts.

Consideration 2: How can the state prevent qualified staff working with infants and toddlers from leaving their positions for RI-PreK 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).³⁷ 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.

Recommendations for Expansion

- Consider continuation of retention bonus programs beyond FY24 targeted to infant/toddler workforce.
- Introduce pay parity with preschool teaching staff with similar qualifications.
- Evaluate, enhance, and build upon existing 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?

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 and 10 classrooms has 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 Learning Facilities Bond initiative provides priority points for applications that "includes 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 and 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.
- 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.

Recommendations for Expansion

- Allocate funding dedicated to Infant/Toddler programs to support sustainability and quality
- Review existing FCC regulations to consider opportunities -- within national best practice standards for safety and quality-- to increase the number of infants and toddlers FCCs can serve at one time
- Include center-wide assessments of programs to determine BrightStars quality rating. Provide bonuses to programs who focus on whole center movement up the quality continuum.
- 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

Introduction RI is consistently recognized as a national leader in Pre-K 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, community-based child care programs, and Head Starts -- to achieve the same high-quality standards and achieve consistent deliverables including the Comprehensive Early Childhood Education (CECE) standards.

To be high-quality, early education requires investments in educators, facilities, and targeted supports. The RI Pre-K program has maintained national recognition for quality in each phase of expansion 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 attracts and retains teachers and teaching assistants 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. 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:

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

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

Importantly, 68% of cost for RI Pre-K classrooms is the salaries and benefits of the teachers and teacher assistants. The salaries and benefits included for the early educators in this chart 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 Bachelor's degree and have a Pre-K-2 teaching certification. 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 imperative that RI Pre-K teachers have pay parity with their counterparts in kindergarten classrooms. However, level grant awards for the last decade has led to high teacher turnover across RI Pre-K, especially in CBOs 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 categorical 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*.

RI Pre-K Program Classroom Costs	Cost/Year
Direct Classroom Costs	
Teacher (Salary + Benefits)	\$100,000
Teacher Assistant	\$60,000
Education Coordinator	\$22,000
Materials, Food, Equipment	\$14,750

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.	\$15,000
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
Total	\$235,000

RIDE Monitoring, Support, and Oversight Costs:

RIDE employs staff within its current FTE structure to manage all aspects of RI Pre-K. Currently 3 staff members oversee vendor contracts, manage the competitive grant application for RI Pre-K expansion, coordinate the lottery and 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 supporting the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) and its coordinating Professional Development for all of RI's early childhood workforce, 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 3 to 3rd 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.

While there is little opportunity to find cost efficiencies in funding for RI Pre-K, there are opportunities to braid and blend fund 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, blend, and braid funding within early childhood to maximize use of different fund streams. The interagency RI Pre-K team developed various [funding models for RI Pre-K classrooms](#) that both respond to the needs of providers across the mixed delivery system and leverage a mix of federal funding and time-limited federal grant funding in addition to general revenue funding.

From 2009 to 2020, RI Pre-K classrooms were funded entirely from RIDE through state categorical funding and, when available, various Preschool Development Grants. In the 2021-2022 school year, the service delivery pilot models were introduced for new classroom expansion that braided and blended funding with CCAP funding through DHS, funding formula through RIDE, and Head Start Federal Grants. By blending funding sources, it allowed RIDE to continue providing the same total grant amount to RI Pre-K providers, but for the first time, leveraged other funding streams within the early childhood sector. 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.

While these 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. In 2021-2022 the state had access to \$3M in

alternate funding for expansion. The original formula to solely fund RI Pre-K would have yielded fifteen (15) new classrooms (300 seats). Using the pilot models, twenty-seven (27) classrooms were opened, representing 516 seats)

Pilot Service Delivery Model Overview

	Model 1:	Model 2:	Model 3:	Model 4:	Model 5:
Eligible Provider	LEA, Head Start, CBO	Head Start (CBO)	Head Start (CBOs)	CBOs	LEA
Other funding leveraged	None	Head Start	Head Start	CCAP	Funding formula or other district funds

Pilot Service Delivery Model 1: Traditional Model (Eligible Providers: All Provider Types) RIDE funds the full cost of the RI Pre-K program leveraging the RI Pre-K Categorical Funding and any available federal Preschool Development Grant funding. In order 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 was based on the total cost of the classroom and not per pupil.

Model 2: Braid Funding with Head Start to Extend Duration and Model 3: 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. **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. **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, 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. 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 4: CCAP Supplemental (Eligible Providers: Community Based Organizations): In continued partnership with DHS, Model 4 allows families to use their CCAP voucher for a guaranteed seat in a RI Pre-K, if they so desire. Seats that are not filled through matriculation are filled through the RI Pre-K lottery. While CCAP reimbursement rates are rising, they are still not at a level that would support a high-quality environment. This leads to underpaid staff, even for teachers who have the same qualifications as teachers working in the public schools. RI Pre-K funds are used to layer on top of the CCAP voucher, adding the additional funds to cover the tuition of families that do not qualify for CCAP & the gap between CCAP payments and the cost of an RI Pre-K classroom.

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.

Currently, direct RI Pre-K funding is a mix of state funds and time-limited federal funds.

Direct RI Pre-K Funding, 2022-2023, summarized in the table below, includes almost \$6M in time-limited funding for direct classroom costs. Additional time-limited funds are expiring that support PDTA costs.

Fund Source	Amount for SY22-23	Notes
Pre-K Categorical Funds	\$14,850,000	
Preschool Development Grant Funds - Direct Seats	\$4,000,000	Grant funds end after SY22-23
Governor's Emergency Education Relief Funds	\$1,000,000	Grant funds end after SY22-23
CRRSA CCDBG Direct Award Funds	\$650,000	Grant funds end after SY22-23

Endnotes

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- ⁶ RI Family Survey on Child Care Experiences, 2022
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