



**Testimony Re: H-8130 Relating to Education – Rhode Island Prekindergarten Education Act – Lottery and Enrollment**  
**House Education Committee**

**April 2, 2026**

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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports the intent of Representative Giraldo’s bill, H-8130**, to codify the enrollment process for the state-funded RI Pre-K program through a state-managed lottery and to remove geographic restrictions based on child residence that would prevent otherwise eligible children from enrolling in RI Pre-K classrooms that have openings.

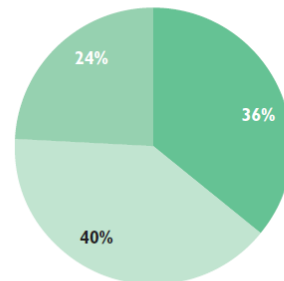
It is particularly important to provide opportunities for children who have been attending licensed child care/early learning programs to be able to remain enrolled in the same facility for RI Pre-K and to allow children to enroll in RI Pre-K in the same licensed child care/early learning facility where they have a sibling enrolled.

**About three-quarters of the state-funded RI Pre-K classrooms in RI are operated by a licensed child care center or Head Start program.** Only 24% are operated by public school districts.



**RI Pre-K Classrooms by Setting, Rhode Island, 2025**

- 36% (55) ■ Head Start Agency
- 40% (61) ■ Child Care Center
- 24% (37) ■ Public School



*n* = 153

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, October 2025.

All private preschools and Head Start programs in Rhode Island are licensed as a child care center by the Department of Human Services. These centers serve a wide age range of children from infancy up through age 12 and very few, if any, restrict enrollment based on residence of the child.

Head Start programs have geographic catchment areas, but in many cases these catchment areas are quite large and cross municipal lines. Many children attend Head Start classrooms in facilities located in cities/towns that are not in the same community where they live. In addition, some Head Start children are enrolled in a program outside of their official catchment area to meet the needs of the family.

**Data provided by RIDE show that the RI Pre-K program already allows children to enroll outside of their city/town of residence**, particularly since Head Start agencies that operate RI Pre-K classrooms are encouraged to braid funding. RIDE also allows programs to convert child care classrooms to RI Pre-K classrooms without displacing previously enrolled children who have no other options to continue enrollment in the center. Children are also allowed to remain in the same RI Pre-K classroom if their family moves out of the city/town they were living in.

**We suggest the following revisions to this bill to improve clarity and help ensure the intention of the bill is realized:**

- Change page 2 line 9 to read *“Participating in the state prekindergarten program” means a licensed child care program, licensed preschool, or school district that receives funding from the state....*” FYI, municipalities do not receive state prekindergarten funding from the state.
- Change page 2 line 12-13 to read *“Families shall be permitted to identify their preferred program(s) from a list of state-funded prekindergarten programs that accept children regardless of child/family residence.”* We think the word “not” may have been an error in bill drafting? Also, it is important to ensure language does not require school districts participating in the state prekindergarten program to enroll children out of district because local tax dollars support the public schools but do not support licensed child care or preschool facilities.
- Change page 2 line 20 to read *“A resident of a community identified by the state for participation in the state prekindergarten lottery.”*
- Change page 2 line 21 to read *“Age three (3) or four (4) of the lottery year as specified by the state each year when the lottery is opened.”* This language will allow the state to expand the lottery and enrollment to include three-year-olds in the future. FYI, there are currently some three-year-olds enrolled in RI Pre-K classrooms through braided funding with Head Start.
- Change page 2 line 24 to read *“Siblings that are already enrolled in a particular licensed child care center or preschool program operating a state-funded prekindergarten classroom.”*
- Add new language to section on considerations for the lottery to read *“the continuity of enrollment for the child to remain in the same licensed child care or preschool program they have been attending in the year(s) prior to becoming eligible for the state prekindergarten lottery.”*
- Change page 2 lines 31-32 to read *“any state-funded prekindergarten program operated by a licensed child care or preschool facility located in any municipality may accept students into their program who are not residents of the municipality in which the program operates...”* We do not think the state can or should require public schools that have state-funded prekindergarten classrooms to accept students from outside the municipality because local tax dollars help to fund public schools but do not fund licensed child care or preschool programs.
- Change page 3 line 7-8 to read *“No student shall be excluded from a state-funded prekindergarten program operated by a licensed child care or preschool a facility who has a sibling enrolled in that licensed child care or preschool facility.”*

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. Please find below information about 2025-2026 enrollment in the state-funded RI Pre-K program as well as the mostly federally-funded Head Start program in Rhode Island. Note that over 300 children are dually enrolled in both RI Pre-K and Head Start (including 17 three-year-olds) through braided funding and some mixed age classrooms. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Table 35.

Children Enrolled in Head Start and/or RI Pre-K, Rhode Island, 2025

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# CHILDREN AGES 3 AND 4	% LOW-INCOME CHILDREN	ESTIMATED # LOW-INCOME CHILDREN AGES 3 AND 4	AGE 3		AGE 4				ESTIMATED % OF LOW-INCOME CHILDREN AGE 3 OR 4 IN HEAD START OR RI PRE-K	ESTIMATED % OF ALL CHILDREN AGE 3 OR 4 IN HEAD START OR RI PRE-K
				ENROLLED IN HEAD START ONLY	DUAL ENROLLED IN RI PRE-K & HEAD START	ENROLLED IN HEAD START ONLY	DUAL ENROLLED IN RI PRE-K & HEAD START	ENROLLED IN RI PRE-K ONLY LOW-INCOME	ENROLLED IN RI PRE-K ONLY HIGHER-INCOME		
Barrington	404	14%	57	1	0	0	1	0	0	4%	0%
Bristol	263	38%	100	7	0	1	10	10	2	28%	11%
Burrillville	321	44%	141	4	0	8	1	0	0	9%	4%
Central Falls	673	89%	599	14	0	13	0	151	11	30%	28%
Charlestown	104	30%	31	3	0	0	1	0	0	13%	4%
Coventry	692	38%	263	15	0	2	18	38	20	28%	13%
Cranston	1,617	52%	841	49	0	42	41	121	90	30%	21%
Cumberland	815	24%	196	2	0	3	0	0	0	3%	1%
East Greenwich	299	13%	39	2	0	0	0	0	0	5%	1%
East Providence	871	55%	479	36	0	13	4	124	85	37%	30%
Exeter	120	22%	26	0	0	1	0	3	6	15%	8%
Foster	53	31%	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Glocester	188	23%	43	1	0	1	0	0	0	5%	1%
Hopkinton	160	30%	48	0	0	0	1	0	0	2%	1%
Jamestown	62	11%	7	0	0	1	0	0	0	15%	2%
Johnston	540	61%	329	7	1	12	4	28	21	16%	14%
Lincoln	469	33%	155	1	0	1	0	33	21	23%	12%
Little Compton	55	20%	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Middletown	365	38%	139	12	0	0	6	48	18	48%	23%
Narragansett	139	24%	33	0	0	1	1	0	0	6%	1%
New Shoreham	22	45%	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Newport	440	72%	317	23	3	2	21	2	10	16%	14%
North Kingstown	534	24%	128	2	2	10	0	7	9	16%	6%
North Providence	602	45%	271	14	0	14	8	9	18	17%	10%
North Smithfield	215	26%	56	0	0	1	0	0	0	2%	0%
Pawtucket	1,781	75%	1,336	46	0	44	9	188	83	21%	21%
Portsmouth	347	18%	62	4	0	0	0	9	9	21%	6%
Providence	4,364	86%	3,753	223	0	279	18	528	85	28%	26%
Richmond	159	30%	48	0	0	0	2	0	0	4%	1%
Scituate	164	28%	46	1	0	1	0	0	0	4%	1%
Smithfield	337	24%	81	1	0	4	1	17	18	28%	12%
South Kingstown	412	23%	95	0	2	1	8	1	0	13%	3%
Tiverton	266	38%	101	9	6	0	0	0	0	15%	6%
Warren	174	38%	66	5	0	0	4	18	8	41%	20%
Warwick	1,522	52%	791	42	0	3	37	35	18	15%	9%
West Greenwich	94	22%	21	1	0	0	0	13	13	68%	29%
West Warwick	668	62%	414	18	0	2	28	26	36	18%	16%
Westerly	388	45%	175	9	3	2	11	22	18	27%	17%
Woonsocket	1,122	72%	808	82	0	74	106	133	65	49%	41%
Five Core Cities	8,380	81%	6,788	388	3	412	154	1,002	254	29%	26%
Remainder of State	13,441	38%	5,108	246	14	124	187	562	410	22%	11%
Rhode Island	21,821	54%	11,783	634	17	536	341	1,564	664	26%	17%