



**Testimony Re: House Bill 8351 Early  
Childhood Components of the School  
Funding Formula Proposal**

**House Finance Committee**

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT coordinates the Right from the Start Campaign, a state policy coalition led by eight organizations to advance state policies and budget priorities that help babies and young children get off to the right start.

**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign would like to voice their strong support for House Bill 8351, the School Funding Formula Proposal.** Early childhood components of this bill include:

- funding a **statewide developmental screening system** to ensure all children ages three, four, and five are screened to identify children who may be eligible for early childhood special education services
- **including preschoolers receiving special education services in a community setting and in RI Pre-K classrooms in a district's average daily membership** which will provide additional dollars to school districts for the delivery of early childhood special education services to support service delivery in public school settings as well as in community-based settings such as RI Pre-K, Head Start, child care programs, and other out-of-district settings
- **establishing a separate commission to design a unified early childhood education and care system** for children from birth through age five years.

Access to developmental screenings, eligibility evaluations, and services vary significantly based on the city or town in which a child lives. Children who live in higher poverty communities are less likely to receive a screening, less likely to be evaluated, less likely to be determined eligible for services, and less likely to receive federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* services in an inclusive early childhood setting. Preschool-age children living in the core cities are less likely to receive a development screening than children living in the remainder of the state. As a result, many children who need preschool special education services are not identified. School districts have a legal obligation to provide preschool special education services but do not currently receive explicit funding for these services in the funding formula.

This proposal would address inadequate funding and systems to screen, evaluate, and deliver early childhood special education services required under the *IDEA*.

We are grateful to Representative McNamara for sponsoring this important legislation and working to ensure that **young children's special education needs are included in the School Funding Formula Proposal**. We strongly urge the committee to pass this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

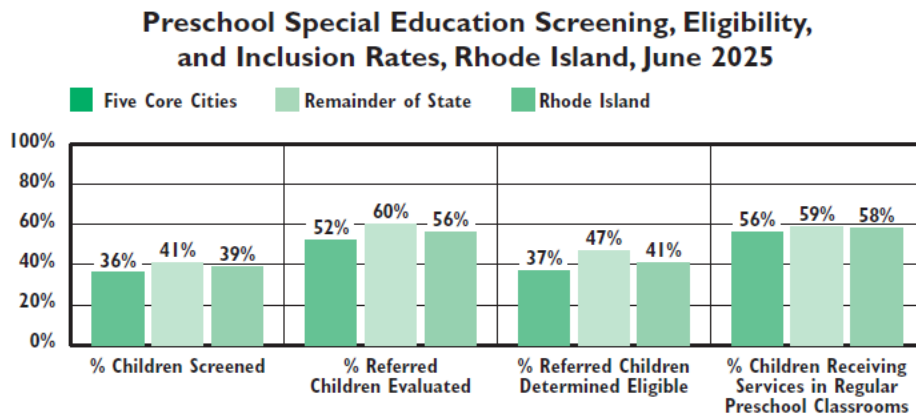
**Early Childhood Components  
in the School Funding Formula Proposal**  
*H-8351 (McNamara) & S-3015 (Gallo)*



**Right from the Start**

Four of the eight organizations leading the RIGht from the Start Campaign were members of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Education Funding to revamp the state’s public education funding formula. We are particularly excited that the proposal addresses inadequate funding and systems to screen, evaluate, and deliver early childhood special education services required under the federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. **The current system provides no funding for screening, evaluation, or preschool special education.**

Access to developmental screenings, eligibility evaluations, and services vary significantly by the city/town where children live, with children in higher poverty communities being less likely to receive a screening, less likely to be evaluated, less likely to be determined eligible for services, and less likely to receive their IDEA services in an inclusive early childhood setting.



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2024-2025 Child Outreach data and June 2025 Special Education Census. The percentage determined eligible is of those children referred for evaluation from Child Outreach screening.

Early Childhood Components of the bills include:

- **Fund a statewide developmental screening system to ensure all children ages 3, 4, and 5 get screened** to identify children who may be eligible for early childhood special education services. In 2024-2025, school districts completed developmental screenings for 39% of children ages 3-5.

Preschool-age children in the four core cities were less likely to receive a developmental screening (33%) than children in the remainder of the state (40%). As a result, many children who need preschool special education services are not identified

- Includes preschoolers receiving special education services in a community setting and in RI Pre-K classrooms in a district's average daily membership which will provide **additional dollars to school districts for the delivery of early childhood special education services** for qualified

children from age three up to kindergarten entry, regardless of setting. School districts have a legal obligation to provide preschool special education services; however, they currently do not receive explicit funding for these services in the funding formula. These funds would **support service delivery in public school settings as well as in community-based settings** such as RI Pre-K, Head Start, child care programs, and other out-of-district settings.

- Establish a separate commission to design a unified early childhood education and care system for children from birth through age five (5) years. The early childhood system directly affects school districts in many ways. Creating a more comprehensive and higher quality early childhood education system for young children across the state would pay substantial dividends in helping districts better serve the children who enroll in kindergarten after they turn age 5.