

Right from the Start

Candidate Guide: Early Childhood Policy priorities

ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

Right from the Start is a legislative and budget campaign led by eight organizations to advance equitable state policies for babies, young children, and families in Rhode Island. While we have made significant progress recently, more policy reforms and investments are needed to ensure *all* young children, regardless of race, ethnicity, family income, or zip code get off to the right start in life!



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Child Care is Essential

Help more families access reliable, affordable child care through the [Rhode Island Child Care Assistance Program](#) by **expanding family eligibility** to at least 250% of the federal poverty level at the entrance (\$57,575 for a family of three) – an eligibility level that was enacted in the 1998 RI Starting Right law – and up to at least 350% of the federal poverty line at the exit (\$80,605 for a family of three), so all families with income at or below the current federal eligibility benchmark can get help paying for child care. **Nine out of 10 families in Rhode Island cannot afford the cost of care.** High-quality, affordable, and reliable child care is needed for a successful state economy.



Increase provider rates for all ages of children in all settings so they meet or exceed the federal equal access standard. Low rates restrict access to safe, high-quality care.



Remove the outdated requirement for families to establish paternity/parentage and file for child support to be eligible for the Child Care Assistance Program, a requirement only a handful of states impose.



Pay providers based on child enrollment (not attendance), a practice common in the private market that will help improve the financial stability of child care programs.

Early Educator Investment



Establish compensation benchmarks for early educators statewide and develop a plan to increase rates and funding to programs so they can pay more competitive wages to staff and recruit/retain highly-skilled educators that reflect the diversity of the child population.



Continue wage supplements for child care educators and establish a progressive wage supplement model like the [Child Care WAGES](#) program to provide additional resources to help keep skilled educators working with our youngest children and in our most challenged communities. Child care educators in Rhode Island earn close to the minimum wage.



Remove systemic barriers in the higher education system that delay and prevent early educators from earning degrees and credentials while working in the field and continue to invest in the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood workforce development program.

RI Pre-K & Head Start



Restore state funding to provide [Head Start](#) to at least 400 low-income three- and four-year old children statewide. State funding for Head Start was significantly reduced in 2008. Head Start is the foundation of RI's high-quality Pre-K system.



Ensure that all current [RI Pre-K](#) seats for FY24 are sustained in the 2023-2024 school year. There are 800 RI Pre-K seats/40 RI Pre-K classrooms at risk of closure when federal funding expires in the summer of 2023.



Begin expanding RI Pre-K in diverse delivery settings (child care, Head Start, and public schools) while maintaining research-based quality standards to reach at least 5,000 3- and 4-year-olds statewide by 2028.



Invest at least 33% of new, expansion funds in infant/toddler early care and education programs so they can provide high-quality early learning opportunities and services are not displaced as Pre-K grows.



Ensure all early educators serving children from birth through age 5, including Head Start, RI Pre-K, and child care have **compensation parity with similarly qualified public K-12 educators.**



Ensure family child care programs can be included in the high-quality RI Pre-K delivery system.

Paid Family Leave/Temporary Caregivers Insurance



Increase the [Temporary Caregivers Insurance](#) wage replacement rates during leave for all beneficiaries, but particularly for individuals with low wage jobs, so that all eligible families can afford to take leave when needed. At approximately 60% of wages, **Rhode Island has the lowest wage replacement rate in the U.S.**, and is lower than wage replacement for low-wage workers in both Massachusetts (95%) and Connecticut (80%).



Extend Temporary Caregivers Insurance to cover at least 12 weeks, the minimum recommended length of leave to care for newborns, adoptive, and foster children. At 6 weeks starting in January 2023, **Rhode Island has the fewest number of weeks in the U.S.**, lower than both Massachusetts and Connecticut that provide 12 weeks.

Early Intervention & Preschool Special Education



Ensure recent rate increases are adequate to recruit and retain qualified staff in [Early Intervention](#) and monitor the 650+ infants and toddlers currently on the waiting list to ensure they receive services as quickly as possible and the waiting list is eliminated.



Significantly increase the percentage of young children who receive Early Intervention and [Preschool Special Education](#) to reach levels experts suggest are appropriate. Launch and sustain a multi-lingual public awareness and outreach campaign with a multi-lingual helpline to help families access services.



Design and fund a workforce development pipeline to help bilingual people and people of color earn degrees, credentials, and professional licenses to provide Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education services.



Provide more flexibility for families to access Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education including non-traditional hours and expand access to preschool special education service delivery in community-based early childhood programs, both inside and outside of district borders.

First Connections



Permanently increase Medicaid rates for [First Connections](#) home visiting so programs can recruit/retain skilled nurses, social workers, and community health workers to reach at least 60% of all babies born each year and help families connect to essential services, including Early Intervention.

Maternal & Child Health and Mental Wellness



Adopt at least 12-month continuous [Rite Care/Medicaid](#) eligibility for children through the existing federal option, like 24 other states have done, to stabilize access to health care and mental health care by reducing administrative churn. Consider following in the footsteps of Washington and Oregon by pursuing continuous Medicaid eligibility for young children through age six. Approximately 50% of babies and young children in RI have Rite Care/Medicaid insurance.

Revenue



Increase state general revenue through equitable strategies to provide sustained and expanded access to services and programs young children need to thrive, including high-quality child care, Pre-K, Early Intervention, family home visiting, and Rite Care health insurance coverage.

Right from the Start Steering Committee

Beautiful Beginnings
Economic Progress Institute
Latino Policy Institute
Parents Leading for Educational Equity
Rhode Island Association for Infant Mental Health
Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children
Rhode Island Head Start Association
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT