

Early Childhood IDEA Task Force 2025

[H-5164](#) (Carson) & [S-0231](#) (Valverde)



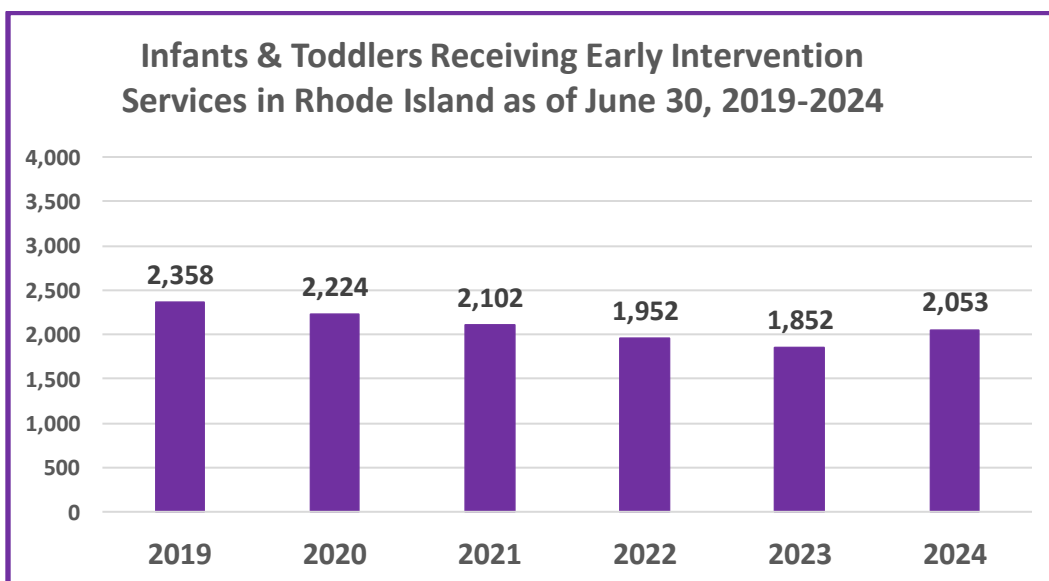
Right from the
Start

The federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* makes states responsible for delivering Early Intervention services to infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities, and it makes states and school districts responsible for overseeing and delivering special education services to young children from age three to kindergarten entry. In Rhode Island, the Early Intervention program is overseen by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services and delivered by 9 certified Early Intervention agencies. Preschool special education is overseen by the Rhode Island Department of Education and delivered by 35 school districts, one state-operated school and one charter school.

Both the Early Intervention and the Preschool Special Education systems in Rhode Island have been **experiencing financial and staffing problems that limit babies' and young children's access to early childhood IDEA services.**

Early Intervention (Infants and Toddlers) Challenges:

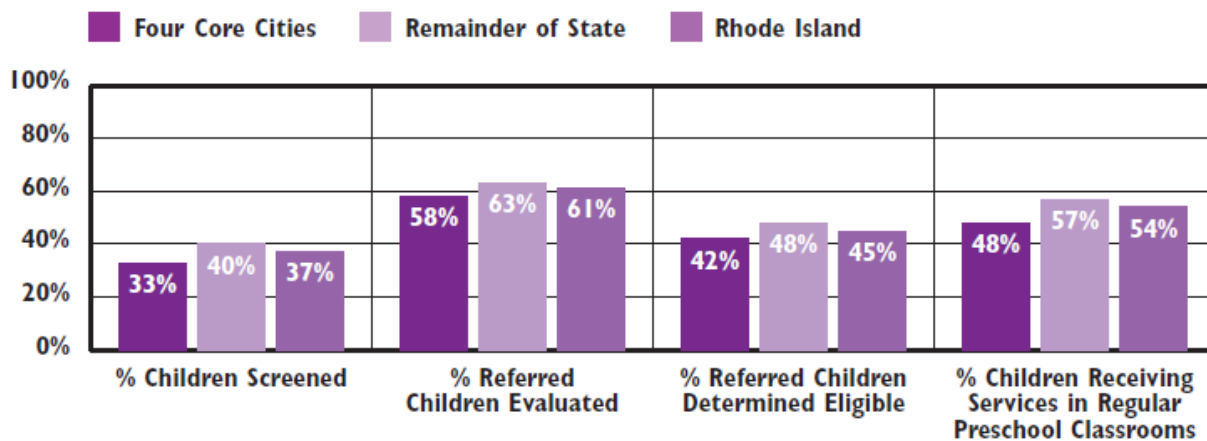
- Recent Medicaid rate increases following decades of frozen rates have helped address the Early Intervention staffing crisis, but providers in **Rhode Island continue to struggle to attract and retain qualified EI staff**, particularly physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech therapists.
- More than three years after the state established a waiting list for Early Intervention, children are still not receiving on time evaluations. **As of February 2025, there were 246 infants and toddlers on the waiting list.** The average wait for these children was 111.3 days.
- In 2024, the **U.S. Department of Education determined that the Rhode Island Early Intervention program “needs substantial intervention” to meet federal IDEA requirements**, the lowest category of compliance which only one other state received. Rhode Island received a score of zero on both child performance data elements indicating that child outcome results data were low when compared to national child outcome data.



Preschool Special Education (Ages 3 to K entry) Challenges

- School districts **struggle to attract and retain qualified teachers and clinical staff** which cause disruptions and delays in early childhood IDEA evaluations and services.
- Rhode Island’s **school funding formula does not adequately consider the resources needed for school districts** to locate, screen, evaluate, and provide special education services in high-quality, inclusive settings for children ages 3 to Kindergarten entry.
- As of 2025, a court-appointed monitor continues to oversee the Providence Public School District/Rhode Island Department of Education’s plan to correct “**systemic failure to comply with federal law**” to provide critical IDEA services to children ages 3 to K entry.
- Statewide, districts complete developmental screenings for only 37% of preschool-age children and complete evaluations for only 61% of children referred to special education.
- Even though poverty is a strong predictor of developmental delays, **children in the four core cities are less likely to receive a screening, evaluation or be determined eligible for special education services.**
- There is a **great deal of variability across school districts** with Providence at 39% and East Greenwich at 98% of preschool-age children receiving services in an inclusive general education setting.

Preschool Special Education Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion Rates, Rhode Island, June 2024



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2023-2024 Child Outreach data and June 2024 Special Education Census.
The percentage determined eligible is of those children referred for evaluation from Child Outreach screening.

The Early Childhood IDEA Task Force bill requires the state to seek funding to establish and staff a public-private task force which would develop recommendations to strengthen IDEA services for babies and young children with developmental delays and disabilities, from birth up to kindergarten entry (across both Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education). Task force recommendations could inform future revisions to the state’s school funding formula to better help school districts provide IDEA services to eligible children ages 3 to K entry.