

Rhode Island

Background

Pre-Kindergarten (PreK) Program

Rhode Island offers full-day pre-K to a limited number of students through its state Pre-Kindergarten Program (PreK). The program is open to all four-year-olds who live in an eligible community, primarily based on the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals. The state does not yet fund sufficient spaces to serve all eligible students, so eligible students are enrolled through a lottery system.¹

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) administers PreK as a competitive grant program. Public schools, private child care, and Head Start programs are eligible to apply to offer the program. Charter schools are also eligible to offer PreK.

Charter schools in Rhode Island

There are three types of charter schools in Rhode Island:

- District charter schools can be established by school districts, traditional public schools, or district personnel. A district charter school may be a new school or a conversion of an existing school.
- Independent charter schools are new charter schools. They may only be created by Rhode Island colleges or universities or Rhode Island nonprofit organizations that have existed for at least two years.
- Mayoral academies are charter schools created by a mayor of any city or town within the State of Rhode Island, acting by or through a nonprofit organization.²

The Rhode Island State Board of Education is the only charter authorizer in Rhode Island. The state commissioner of elementary and secondary education recommends a charter applicant prior to it being authorized by the state board.³

Process for Accessing Pre-K Funds

Potential PreK providers apply through a competitive Request for Proposals process, which RIDE administers when there are new or re-competed slots.⁴ Selected grantees receive a three-year contract, at the end of which another competition is held. Only providers in selected communities are eligible to apply for PreK funding.



TOTAL SCORE

31/50

Rhode Island's climate for charter schools to offer pre-K is **somewhat hospitable**

- + There are no state statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K.
- + Compared to K-12 funding levels, pre-K program funding is sufficient to attract charters.
- The size of the pre-K program limits charter access to funding.
- The funding, application, or approval process creates a barrier to charter access.
- + Automatic enrollment from charter pre-K to kindergarten is not prohibited in legislation or practice.



Barriers

Are there any statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K?

+ **No.** The Rhode Island charter legislation explicitly states that a charter public school “may include any grade up to grade twelve (12) or any configuration of those grades, including kindergarten and prekindergarten.” The PreK legislation does not list charters as a potential provider. However, since charter schools are public LEAs in Rhode Island, pre-K legislation enables charters to run pre-K programs, if authorized to do so in their charter.⁵

No charter schools in Rhode Island currently offer pre-K using state PreK funding.⁶

Is the funding level of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

+ **No.** The funding level is not a barrier to charters offering pre-K in Rhode Island. If a charter school were to offer Rhode Island PreK, they would receive at least 79 percent of the per-pupil funding amount that charters receive to serve full-day K-12 students.

Is the size of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

- **Yes.** The size of the program is a barrier to charters accessing state pre-K funds. The program only serves 1 percent of all four-year-olds in the state.

Is the application, approval, and/or funding process a barrier to charter access?

- **Yes.** The application process is a barrier to charter access. Only providers in selected communities are eligible to apply for PreK funding. Even in communities where providers are eligible to apply for funding, none currently access funding.

Is automatic enrollment from pre-K to kindergarten prohibited in legislation or practice?

+ **No.** According to state legislation, each charter school can determine its own enrollment preferences. If a charter school offers pre-K, it can give enrollment preference to children enrolled in the pre-K program, the same as any continuing student in its school.

Recommendations

Rhode Island is currently implementing a ten-year pre-K expansion plan, which will provide state pre-K to 1,080 children by fall 2019.⁷ As Rhode Island expands the number of pre-K slots, it should take the following steps to include charter schools in its pre-K program:

- Improve coordination within the Rhode Island Department of Education between the staff who carry out RIDE’s charter-authorizing responsibilities and the staff who administer the pre-K program, thus ensuring that charter authorizers have a role in making decisions about whether to fund charter-operated pre-K programs and monitoring their quality if approved.
- Ensure state outreach efforts to new providers include charter schools.



| | Pre-Kindergarten Program (PreK) | Charter schools in Rhode Island |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Year created | Launched in 2009 ⁸ | Charter law enacted in 1995 ⁹ |
| Children in state | 24,361 three- and four-year-olds ¹⁰ | 189,575 school-age children ¹¹ |
| Children served | 306 children served 0 percent of three-year-olds 1 percent of four-year-olds ¹² | 6,434 students served 3.3 percent of school-age children Twenty-five charter schools ¹³ |
| Charters offering pre-K | One charter school in Rhode Island offers pre-K. ¹⁴ | Twelve charter schools in Rhode Island offer elementary programs. ¹⁵ |
| Funding | PreK providers receive \$9,278 per pupil. ¹⁶ | Charter schools receive between \$2,301 and \$11,705 per pupil for K–12. ¹⁷ |

Endnotes

1 Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), “Early Childhood Education Programs,” 2015, <http://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/EarlyChildhoodEducation/Programs/tabid/421/LiveTabId/13020/Default.aspx#applications>.

2 RIDE, Office of Charter Schools, “Rhode Island Charter Public Schools: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs),” <http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Students-and-Families-Great-Schools/Charter-Schools/FAQs.pdf>.

3 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS), “Measuring Up: Rhode Island,” <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/law-database/states/RI/>.

4 RIDE, “State Prekindergarten Question and Answer Sheet, 2013–2014,” http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Instruction-and-Assessment-World-Class-Standards/Early-Childhood/Programs/2013-14_State_PreK_FAQs.pdf.

5 Interview with RIDE representative, October 16, 2014.

6 RIDE, “2014–2015 State Pre-Kindergarten Programs: Open House Dates and Times,” http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Instruction-and-Assessment-World-Class-Standards/Early-Childhood/Programs/Pre-K_Program_Open_House_Schedule.pdf.

7 Interview with RIDE representative, October 16, 2014.

8 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013: State Preschool Yearbook” (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2013.pdf>.

9 NAPCS, “Measuring Up.”

10 State population data calculated using ACS 2012 five-year estimates; U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey,” www.census.gov/acs.

11 Ibid., all children in households, three to seventeen years old.

12 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013.”

13 NAPCS, “Measuring Up.”

14 Interview with RIDE representative, October 16, 2014.

15 RIDE, “Rhode Island’s Charter Schools,” 2015, <http://www.ride.ri.gov/studentsfamilies/ripublicschools/charterschools.aspx#19771-list-of-charter-schools>.

16 Interview with RIDE representative, October 16, 2014.

17 RIDE, “FY 2015 Final Formula Calculations,” 2014, <http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Funding-and-Finance-Wise-Investments/Funding-Sources/State-Education-Aid-Funding-Formula/FY-2015-Formula-Calculations-FINAL-6-16-14.pdf>.