

2023 -- H 5094

LC000228

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2023

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR INVESTMENT ACT

Introduced By: Representatives Casimiro, Noret, Spears, Cotter, Vella-Wilkinson, Diaz, Shallcross Smith, Donovan, Hull, and C Lima

Date Introduced: January 12, 2023

Referred To: House Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by  
2 adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 112

4 RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR INVESTMENT ACT

5 **16-112-1. Short title.**

6 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Rhode Island Early Educator  
7 Investment Act."

8 **16-112-2. Legislative findings and purpose.**

9 The general assembly hereby finds that:

10 (1) Young children's healthy brain development and learning depends on consistent,  
11 nurturing care and enriching learning opportunities at home and in early care and education settings.  
12 Starting at birth, day-to-day interactions with family members and early educators shape children's  
13 brain architecture upon which all future learning and development is built.

14 (2) Many of the early educators and early childhood professionals in Rhode Island earn  
15 very low wages even when they achieve credentials equivalent to kindergarten through grade  
16 twelve (K-12) teachers and demonstrate effective practices. Child care, family home visiting, early  
17 head start, head start, Rhode Island Pre-K, and Early Intervention (Part C of the Individuals with  
18 Disabilities Education Act) programs across the state report difficulty attracting, developing, and

1 retaining effective early childhood professionals.

2 (3) A 2019 statewide survey of early childhood professionals in Rhode Island found that  
3 over forty percent (40%) of infant/toddler educators worry about having enough food to feed their  
4 family and fifty percent (50%) worry about having enough money to pay for housing.

5 (4) The 2019 statewide survey also found that almost one-third (1/3) of early educators had  
6 a second job to help make ends meet and almost two-thirds (2/3) reported that they plan to leave  
7 their early education job if the compensation does not improve. And yet, most report that they enjoy  
8 working with children and families and many have earned college credits and degrees in child  
9 development and early education.

10 (5) A landmark report issued by the National Academy of Science in 2015 found that  
11 educators of young children, including infants and toddlers, need the same high level of knowledge  
12 and competencies as teachers of older children and that educational qualifications and  
13 compensation of early educators should be equivalent to those of kindergarten through grade twelve  
14 (K-12) teachers.

15 (6) According to 2021 data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median wage for  
16 a child care teacher in Rhode Island was thirteen dollars and twenty-six cents (\$13.26) per hour and  
17 the median wage for a preschool teacher in Rhode Island was fourteen dollars and eight cents  
18 (\$14.08) per hour, in the same range or below the hourly wages of fast food workers, dishwashers,  
19 laundry workers, animal caretakers and retail sales workers.

20 (7) By enacting this chapter, the general assembly acknowledges the need to establish goals  
21 and develop strategies to improve the compensation of early educators in order that programs can  
22 attract, develop, and retain effective staff to care for and educate young children and provide  
23 family-focused services.

24 **16-112-3. Establishment of cross-departmental compensation benchmarks for early**  
25 **educators.**

26 (a) The children's cabinet established in § 42-72.5-1 shall work in collaboration with the  
27 department of human services, the department of health, the executive office of health and human  
28 services, and the department of education to establish goals to improve compensation, including  
29 cross-departmental compensation benchmarks for early educators linked to education levels above  
30 high school and demonstrated competence working with children and families.

31 (b) The compensation benchmarks for early educators shall be developed to apply to  
32 educators working in child care centers, family child care homes, Rhode Island Pre-K classrooms,  
33 Rhode Island Head Start and early head start programs, family home visiting programs, and Early  
34 Intervention (Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) programs. The cross-

1 departmental compensation benchmarks for early educators shall promote parity with  
2 compensation of kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) public school teachers for individuals  
3 with similar credentials.

4 (c) In developing this cross-departmental compensation benchmarks for early educators,  
5 the children's cabinet may consider the findings and recommendations provided in the 2019  
6 Moving the Needle on Compensation Task Force's report "Improving the Compensation and  
7 Retention of Effective Infant/Toddler Educators in Rhode Island" and Rhode Island occupational  
8 wage data available through the U.S. Department of Labor and the Rhode Island department of  
9 labor and training.

10 **16-112-4. Developing strategies to increase compensation of early educators.**

11 (a) Once the compensation benchmarks for early educators have been established, the  
12 children's cabinet shall design strategies and estimate the cost to close the gap between current  
13 wages and the cross-departmental compensation benchmarks for early educators, including parity  
14 with public school teaching staff or individuals with similar credentials. In developing the plan, the  
15 following components shall be considered:

16 (1) Continuation and expansion of the existing statewide, comprehensive, research-based  
17 early childhood workforce development scholarship program established under § 16-87-4 to  
18 include stronger and ongoing support for compensation, such as implementation of wage  
19 supplements or regular stipends for early educators to lift annual income to meet or exceed the  
20 compensation benchmarks for early educators.

21 (2) Proposals to increase rates paid to early childhood programs that are adequate to enable  
22 programs to pay early educators wages that meet or exceed the levels in the cross-departmental  
23 compensation benchmarks for early educators.

24 (3) Contracts to early childhood programs to expand the availability of high-quality  
25 services for young children and families with educators in the program paid wages that meet or  
26 exceed the levels in the cross-departmental compensation benchmarks for early educators.

27 (4) Registered apprenticeships for early educators that support completion of college  
28 coursework and attainment of college credentials while providing opportunities to develop high-  
29 quality practices through regular on-the-job coaching by master early educators. Apprenticeships  
30 shall be designed and funded to enable successful participants to earn wages that meet or exceed  
31 the levels in the cross-departmental compensation benchmarks for early educators.

32 **16-112-5. Reporting.**

33 The children's cabinet shall report back to the governor and general assembly on or before  
34 December 1, 2023 with the cross-departmental compensation benchmarks for early educators and

1 [initial cost estimates for strategies funding needed in order to close the wage gaps for early](#)  
2 [educators.](#)

3 SECTION 2. Section 42-72.5-2 of the General Laws in Chapter 42-72.5 entitled  
4 "Children's Cabinet" is hereby amended to read as follows:

5 **42-72.5-2. Policy and goals.**

6 The children's cabinet shall:

7 (1) Meet at least monthly to address all issues, especially those that cross departmental  
8 lines, and relate to children's needs and services;

9 (2) Review, amend, and propose all interagency agreements necessary to provide  
10 coordinated services to children;

11 (3) Produce an annual comprehensive children's budget, to be submitted with other budget  
12 documents to the general assembly;

13 (4) Produce, by December 1, 2015, a comprehensive, five (5) year statewide plan and  
14 proposed budget for an integrated state child service system. This plan shall be submitted to the  
15 governor; the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the senate, and updated  
16 annually thereafter;

17 (5) [Deleted by P.L. 2015, ch. 141, art. 5, § 21].

18 (6) Develop a strategic plan to coordinate and share data to foster interagency  
19 communication, increase efficiency of service delivery, and simultaneously protect children's  
20 legitimate expectations of privacy and rights to confidentiality. This shall include data-sharing with  
21 research partners, pursuant to data-sharing agreements, that maintains data integrity and protects  
22 the security and confidentiality of these records. Any such data-sharing agreements shall comply  
23 with all privacy and security requirements of federal and state law and regulation governing the use  
24 of such data. Any universal student identifier now in use by the state or developed in the future  
25 shall not involve a student's social security number; [and](#)

26 [\(7\) Establish and maintain updated cross-departmental compensation benchmarks for early](#)  
27 [educators working in child care, Rhode Island Pre-K, Rhode Island Head Start and early head start](#)  
28 [programs, family home visiting, and Early Intervention \(Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities](#)  
29 [Education Act\) programs that aligns with compensation of similarly qualified kindergarten through](#)  
30 [grade twelve \(K-12\) educators. Compensation benchmarks shall be posted on the Children and](#)  
31 [Youth Cabinet of R.I. website and updated annually using available data on wages.](#)

32 SECTION 3. Title 40 of the General Laws entitled "HUMAN SERVICES" is hereby  
33 amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

34 **CHAPTER 6.7**

1 CHILD CARE AND EARLY EDUCATOR REGISTRY

2 **40-6.7-1. Child care and early educator registry.**

3 (a) On or before December 1, 2023, the department of human services shall implement a  
4 child care and early educator registry that meets the recommended guidelines of the National  
5 Workforce Registry Alliance, and includes information about staff who work directly with children  
6 in all licensed child care centers and family child care homes in the state. The registry shall be  
7 designed to support communication of important information and opportunities, including training  
8 opportunities and opportunities to receive a wage supplement, directly to front-line child care and  
9 early educators. The registry shall also be designed to help the state gather and maintain information  
10 about the demographics and annual turnover of child care educators by key factors including  
11 educational qualifications and age category of children they teach.

12 (b) Annually, beginning on or before March 31, 2024, the department of human services  
13 shall produce an annual report on the status of the child care educator registry and the characteristics  
14 of the child care workforce, including demographic information, qualifications, and turnover data.  
15 The report shall be shared with the general assembly, the children’s cabinet, all licensed child care  
16 centers and family child care homes, and individuals participating in the registry. The report shall  
17 also be posted on the department’s website for the general public.

18 (c) On or before December 1, 2023, the department of human services shall design and  
19 begin implementation of a five million dollar (\$5,000,000) pilot program to provide regular wage  
20 supplements for child care educators. The program shall be designed to narrow or close the gap  
21 between the actual wages of the child care educators and the compensation benchmarks for early  
22 educators established by the Children and Youth Cabinet of R.I. The department shall consider the  
23 design of the Infant/Toddler Educator Education and Retention Awards demonstration program  
24 recommended in 2019 by the Moving the Needle on Compensation's TaskForce, the national Child  
25 Care WAGE\$@ model, and other wage supplement models implemented by many states. The pilot  
26 shall include child care educators who work in both licensed child care centers and family child  
27 care homes and shall be available statewide, with priority given to child care educators who work  
28 with infants, toddlers and children enrolled in the child care assistance program.

29 SECTION 4. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF  
A N A C T  
RELATING TO EDUCATION -- RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR INVESTMENT  
ACT

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1           This act would charge the Children and Youth Cabinet of Rhode Island with establishing  
2 and annually updating cross-departmental compensation benchmarks for early educators. This act  
3 would also charge the Children's and Youth Cabinet and related state agencies with developing  
4 strategies, and estimating costs to improve the compensation of early childhood educators in order  
5 that publicly-funded early childhood programs can attract and retain a qualified workforce.  
6 Additionally, this act would also direct the department of human services to implement a pilot  
7 program to provide regular wage supplements to child care educators with a focus on attracting and  
8 retaining a qualified workforce to provide high-quality infant and toddler care. Finally, this act  
9 would also direct the department of human services to implement an early educator registry that  
10 meets national standards and produce annual early educator workforce reports with information  
11 from the registry about the characteristics of early educators, staffing trends, and staff turnover  
12 levels statewide.

13           This act would take effect upon passage.

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