

# Rhode Island Early Learning Council Recommendations Related to Early Learning for the State's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Plan

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The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) highlights **early learning as a strategy to address education equity, eliminate disparities in student achievement, and support students' success in school.**

By incorporating the following policies into Rhode Island's ESSA plan, the state can:

- Advance the development of a coherent system of early learning from birth through third grade.
- Establish early and strong family support and engagement strategies that promote children's learning and development.
- Promote evidence-based approaches that help children read at grade-level by the end of third grade.

**Accountability System/State and Local Report Cards.** Include accountability indicators in State and LEA report cards that reflect the importance of children's early years and the early grades. Specifically, state and district report cards should include measures of:

- Chronic absenteeism rates of children in grades PK-3.
- Suspension/expulsion rates of children in grades PK-3.
- BrightStars quality ratings of infant/toddler, preschool, and after school programs (both community-based and school-based) and, when available, % of children enrolled in early learning programs by BrightStars rating,
- Number of young children receiving evidence-based home visiting services.
- % of children under age 3 receiving developmental screenings (state level data).
- % of children ages 3 through K entry receiving Child Outreach developmental screenings.
- % of children under age 3 receiving Early Intervention services.
- % of children ages 3 through through K entry and in Grades K-3 participating in and receiving special education services within general early childhood programs (inclusive settings).
- % of low-income 4-year-olds (up to 200% FPL) served by State Pre-K or Head Start (for state report card).
- Number of young children in foster care and young children experiencing homelessness and efforts to provide them with consistent, high-quality early learning opportunities.

**Accountability System/Support & Improvement for Low Performing Schools.** Promote investment in early education as an improvement strategy for low-performing schools:

- Use Title I funds to improve and **expand access to high-quality early childhood programs** (both community-based and school-based). The state should provide guidance on assessing the local early childhood landscape, model Memoranda of Understanding between districts and early childhood programs, requirements to participate in BrightStars, and strategies to improve the quality of early learning programs.
- Use Student Support and Enrichment Grants, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center grants and other supplemental grant funds to support **summer learning for children ages 3 through Grade 3.**

**Supporting Excellent Educators.** Develop a **birth-to-eight professional development system** that ensures teachers and administrators have the skills and knowledge to support young children's learning. The State Plan should support and specify that Title II ESSA funds should be used to:

- Improve professionals' knowledge and application of appropriate developmental expectations of young children and the components of high quality birth-through-eight early learning environments.
- Provide joint professional development to community-based early educators and public school PK-3 educators to promote shared knowledge and approaches to teaching and learning.

- Develop principals' and school leaders' knowledge of child development, high quality early learning and best practices in prekindergarten through third grade classrooms.
- Identify evidence-based strategies and resources for birth-to-eight professionals to help families support the social and emotional development of children. Promote the unique developmental and learning needs of babies.
- Use developmental and early learning standards that cross the range of domains for children from birth through third grade.

**Supporting All Students.** Ensure that young children learn in environments and through practices that are developmentally appropriate and support their success in school, including learning through play.

- Require LEAs to adopt **developmentally-appropriate curriculum and teaching practices for use in PK through Grade 3** classrooms. Provide state guidance and technical assistance to districts to support implementation.
- Require LEAs to use **evidence-based family partnership strategies** to support children's learning and development in early childhood and the early grades. Provide state guidance and professional development, including strategies to partner with families who speak languages other than English and families who are homeless or engaged with the foster care system.
- Require LEAs to **create transition plans** in collaboration with community stakeholders that create shared understanding among families, early childhood programs, and schools to support smooth transitions for children as they begin school and through the early grades. Provide state guidance, including model transition plans.
- Support and incentivize the use of the state's **Kindergarten Entry Profile (KEP)** as a tool to inform kindergarten instruction, promote family engagement, and connect public schools to community-based early learning programs.

**Supporting All Students.** State and local plans should demonstrate a focus on **building early language and literacy skills in early childhood and the early grades:**

- Include the state's goal of ensuring at least **75% of third graders are reading on grade level by 2025.**
- Include **indicators of language and literacy progress** for children in PK through third grade as part of the accountability system so that struggling readers can be identified early and given intervention.
- Provide **professional development and coaching** focused on early language and literacy, social-emotional development, and high-quality interactions to early childhood educators in public schools and community-based programs. Language development is built on relationships and positive, nurturing, and enriching interactions beginning at birth.
- Create targeted **family partnership** strategies to support social-emotional and early language and literacy development at home beginning at birth.
- Ensure that young **English Language Learners** have access to high-quality early literacy supports in early childhood through Grade 3. Promote the development of literacy in home language(s) as well as English language acquisition.
- Disseminate funds through the **LEARN grants in ESSA** to community-based organizations working in partnerships with schools to support early language and literacy practices for children, families, teachers, and other school leaders.
- Increase the percentage of PK-Grade 3 educators who hold **a reading specialist certificate.**

**Supporting All Students.** Establish a clear, quantifiable and actionable goal as part of the state ESSA plan to **increase participation in high-quality preschool**, such as "By 2025, 75% of low-income 4-year-olds (defined as those in families with incomes up to 200% FPL) and 100% of high-risk 4-year-olds are in high-quality preschool (state PreK/Head Start)."