



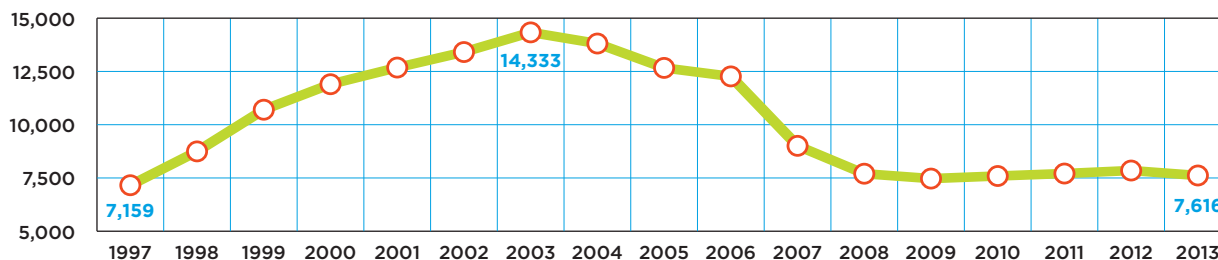
EARLY LEARNING FACT SHEET

Promoting early learning and development Birth to 8

Focus on the Child Care Assistance Program

Families need child care in order to work and to provide the early education experiences necessary to prepare their children for school. Yet the high cost of child care puts quality care out of reach for many low-income families. State child care subsidy programs help low-income, working families enroll their children in licensed child care programs.¹ In 1996, Rhode Island established an entitlement to child care assistance for families with incomes up to 185% of the federal poverty level (FPL) as a key component of welfare reform. In 1998, Starting Right legislation was enacted expanding eligibility for families with incomes up to 225% FPL and requiring that rates paid to child care providers be adjusted biennially in order to improve access to high-quality child care. In 2007, eligibility for child care subsidies was reduced to 180% FPL (\$35,622 for a family of three in 2014) and eligibility for children ages 13-15 was eliminated. In 2008, the requirement to adjust rates biennially was repealed, and rates have been frozen since. In 2013, Rhode Island passed a pilot "cliff effect" policy which allows currently enrolled families to keep child care subsidies as their income rises to 225% FPL.²

CHILD CARE SUBSIDIES, RHODE ISLAND, 2001-2013



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, December 1997-December 2013.

- Enrollment in the Rhode Island Child Care Assistance Program peaked in 2003 and then began to decline as co-payments increased and eligibility requirements were tightened. In 2013, there were 7,616 child care subsidies for children birth to 12, a 47% decrease since 2003.³

KEY FACTS

- **1,796** children receiving child care subsidies were under age three, **2,826** were ages three to five, and **2,994** were ages six to twelve.
- **79%** of child care subsidies were used by low-income, working families, **12%** were used by families enrolled in Rhode Island Works, **9%** were used by children in the care of the RI Department of Children, Youth and Families.
- **75%** of children receiving subsidies were enrolled in a child care center, **24%** were enrolled in a family child care home, **1%** were in license-exempt care.

Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, December 2013.

Child Care Quality and Affordability

The quality of child care programs varies and can range from rich learning experiences to mediocre, custodial care. Children who attend high-quality child care programs demonstrate stronger language, cognitive, and social skills than children who attend low-quality programs. **BrightStars**, Rhode Island's Quality Rating and Improvement System for child care and early learning programs, measures and supports program quality improvement in partnership with the **Center for Early Learning Professionals**.⁴

Rhode Island ranks among the least affordable states for child care affordability. Average child care costs for two children rival the average mortgage payment and costs for an infant in child care exceed the average tuition at state colleges. In general, high-quality child care with smaller groups of children, more qualified staff, and enriching curriculum costs more than low-quality child care.⁵

AVERAGE ANNUAL COST FOR FULL-TIME CHILD CARE, RHODE ISLAND, 2013

PROGRAM TYPE	COST PER CHILD
Child Care Center (infant care)	\$12,097
Child Care Center (preschool care)	\$9,587
Family Child Care Home (preschool care)	\$8,715
School-Age Center-Based Program (child age 6 - 12)	\$6,786

Source: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT analysis of average weekly rates from Bodah, M. M. (2013). *Statewide survey of child care rates in Rhode Island*. Kingston, RI: University of Rhode Island.

Recommendations

- Adopt a permanent “cliff effect” policy for the Child Care Assistance Program and work to restore eligibility for the Child Care Assistance program to families earning up to 225% FPL.
- Improve the continuity of care for children and families by streamlining eligibility and renewal policies and practices.
- Develop and implement a tiered reimbursement model for the Child Care Assistance Program with increased rates paid to programs achieving higher BrightStars quality ratings. Thirty-three states have tiered child care reimbursement rates with higher quality programs receiving higher rates.

References

¹ Schulman, K. & Blank, H. (2013). *Pivot point: State child care assistance policies 2013*. Washington, DC: National Women's Law Center.

² Mitchell, A. W. (2005). *Success stories: State investment in early care and education in Illinois, North Carolina and Rhode Island*. Raleigh, NC: Smart Start's National Technical Assistance Center.

³ Children Receiving Child Care Subsidies. 2014 *Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook*. Providence, RI: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

⁴ Early Learning Programs Participating in BrightStars. 2014 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook. Providence, RI: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

⁵ *Parents and the high price of child care: 2013 report*. (2013). Arlington, VA: Child Care Aware of America.



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