



Early Childhood IDEA Programs in Rhode Island: KEY CHALLENGES

EARLY INTERVENTION FOR INFANTS & TODDLERS

- Only 6% of infants and toddlers are receiving Early Intervention, while experts estimate that at least 13% need services.
- Anticipating their first rate increase in 20 years, Early Intervention programs have been struggling to recruit and retain qualified staff and to enroll eligible children from a statewide waiting list.
- Hispanic children and low-income children experience delays qualifying for and enrolling in EI, receive services less consistently, and then make less developmental progress.



PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN AGES 3-5

- Only 7% of children are receiving special education services, while experts estimate that up to 17% need services.
- Only half of children referred to a school district for developmental concerns receive an evaluation.
- As a city with a very high-needs population, it is troubling that Providence has among the lowest rates of young children receiving a developmental screening or qualifying for preschool special education services.
- Children of color are less likely to receive their preschool special education services in an inclusive early childhood program with typically developing children.



Early Childhood IDEA Programs in Rhode Island: Challenges Families Face



MANY RHODE ISLAND FAMILIES:

- **Don't know how to access Early Intervention or Preschool Special Education** and often do not receive reliable information or support from people in the community— including health care providers, child care providers, and school districts.
- **Don't know that they can call** an Early Intervention provider or their school district directly to **request a screening or evaluation whenever they have concerns** about their child's development.
- **Have scheduling challenges and struggle to access** services because they are working long hours and have very limited paid time off.
- **Don't see people from their own culture/race** or meet people who **speak their home language** providing Early Intervention or preschool special education services.
- **Have great difficulty finding and paying for quality child care** for children with special needs.

Right from the Start

Early Childhood IDEA Programs in Rhode Island: Priorities to Improve Access to Early Intervention



RHODE ISLAND POLICYMAKERS SHOULD:

- **Ensure Medicaid rates and funding for Early Intervention and First Connections are sufficient** so programs can pay competitive wages, eliminate waiting lists, and help more infants and toddlers with developmental challenges.
- **Launch and sustain a multi-lingual public awareness and outreach campaign** to educate new parents, child care programs, and community members about Early Intervention and how to access services.
- **Create and staff a multi-lingual statewide helpline** for families that need help getting evaluations, starting, or maintaining access to early childhood IDEA services.
- Take concrete steps to **increase and maintain diversity in the Early Intervention workforce**, including designing and funding an education pipeline to help bilingual people and people of color to earn degrees, credentials, and professional licenses needed to deliver services.
- Fix problems that lead to inequitable access by **providing flexible schedules** and **offering services during non-traditional hours**, helping families communicate with their employers about scheduling needs, and strengthening partnerships with formal and informal child care systems.



Early Childhood IDEA Programs in Rhode Island: Priorities to Improve Access to Preschool Special Education

RHODE ISLAND POLICYMAKERS SHOULD:

- Make sure school districts have **adequate funding and staffing** to **complete screenings for all children, complete evaluations of all children with developmental concerns,** and **deliver high-quality services to all eligible children** in an inclusive setting based in the community or in the district.
- Launch and sustain a **multi-lingual public awareness and outreach campaign** to educate parents, child care programs, and community members about Preschool Special Education and how to access services.
- **Create and staff a multi-lingual statewide helpline** for families that need help getting evaluations, starting, or maintaining access to early childhood IDEA services.
- Take concrete steps to **increase and maintain diversity in the Preschool Special Education workforce,** including designing and funding an education pipeline to help bilingual people and people of color to earn degrees, credentials, and professional licenses needed to deliver services.
- **Fix problems that lead to inequitable access** by providing services across district lines in child care, preschool, Head Start, and Pre-K programs chosen by families. **Expand public funding for child care and early learning programs** so all three- and four-year-olds have access to a high-quality, affordable early learning program.

