

2020 -- H 7271

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2020

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A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION - RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR INVESTMENT ACT

Introduced By: Representatives Casimiro, McNamara, Amore, Donovan, and Ackerman

Date Introduced: January 23, 2020

Referred To: House Health, Education & Welfare

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

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

3 CHAPTER 110

4 RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR INVESTMENT ACT

5 **16-110-1. Short title.**

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

8 **16-110-2. 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
12 settings. Starting at birth, day-to-day interactions with family members and early educators shape
13 children's 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. Childcare, family home visiting, and
17 early intervention programs across the state report difficulty attracting, developing, and retaining
18 effective early childhood professionals.

19 (3) A 2019 statewide survey of early childhood professionals in Rhode Island found that

1 over forty percent (40%) of infant/toddler educators worry about having enough food to feed their
2 family and fifty percent (50%) worry about having enough money to pay for housing.

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

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

13 (6) According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median wage for a
14 childcare teacher in Rhode Island in 2018 was twelve dollars and fifteen cents (\$12.15) per hour,
15 well below the state median wage of twenty dollars and twenty-one cents (\$20.21) per hour and
16 significantly below the level of kindergarten teachers who had an average annual salary of sixty-
17 five thousand five hundred thirty dollars (\$65,530). Rhode Island state agency data show that
18 median wages for early intervention providers and family home visitors range from thirteen
19 dollars and fifty cents (\$13.50) per hour to twenty dollars (\$20.00) per hour.

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

24 **16-110-3. Establishment of a target wage scale.**

25 (a) The Rhode Island executive office of health and human services shall work in
26 collaboration with the Rhode Island department of education to establish goals to improve
27 compensation, including a common target wage scale for early educators linked to education
28 levels above high school and demonstrated competence working with children and families.

29 (b) The target wage scale shall be developed to apply to educators working in childcare
30 centers, family childcare homes, family home visiting programs, and early intervention programs.
31 The target wage scale shall promote parity with kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) public
32 school teachers for individuals with similar credentials.

33 (c) In developing this target wage scale, the executive office of health and human
34 services and the department of education may consider the findings and recommendations

1 [provided in the 2019 Moving the Needle on Compensation Task Force's report "Improving the](#)
2 [Compensation and Retention of Effective Infant/Toddler Educators in Rhode Island."](#)

3 **16-110-4. Developing strategies to increase compensation of early educators.**

4 [\(a\) Once the target wage scale has been established, the executive office of health and](#)
5 [human services and the department of education shall design strategies and estimate the cost to](#)
6 [close the gap between current wages and the target wage scale, including parity with public](#)
7 [school teaching staff or individuals with similar credentials. In developing the plan, the following](#)
8 [components shall be considered:](#)

9 [\(1\) Continuation and expansion of the existing statewide, comprehensive, research-based](#)
10 [early childhood workforce development scholarship program established under § 16-87-4 to](#)
11 [include stronger and ongoing support for compensation, such as implementation of wage](#)
12 [supplements or regular stipends for early educators to lift annual income to meet or exceed the](#)
13 [levels in the target wage scale. Consideration shall be given to the Infant/Toddler Educator](#)
14 [Education and Retention Awards demonstration program recommended by the Moving the](#)
15 [Needle on Compensation's Task Force.](#)

16 [\(2\) Proposals to increase rates paid to early childhood programs that are adequate to](#)
17 [enable programs to pay early educators wages that meet or exceed the levels in the target wage](#)
18 [scale.](#)

19 [\(3\) Contracts to early childhood programs to expand the availability of high-quality](#)
20 [services for young children and families with educators in the program paid wages that meet or](#)
21 [exceed the levels in the target wage scale.](#)

22 [\(4\) Registered apprenticeships for early educators that support completion of college](#)
23 [coursework and attainment of college credentials while providing opportunities to develop high-](#)
24 [quality practices through regular on-the-job coaching by master early educators. Apprenticeships](#)
25 [shall be designed and funded to enable successful participants to earn wages that meet or exceed](#)
26 [the levels in the target wage scale.](#)

27 **16-110-5. Reporting.**

28 [The executive office of health and human services and the department of education shall](#)
29 [report back to the governor and general assembly on or before December 1, 2020 with a target](#)
30 [wage scale and initial cost estimates for public funding to close the wage gaps for early educators.](#)

31 SECTION 2. 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

1 This act would establish the Rhode Island Early Educator Investment Act to develop and
2 implement strategies to improve the compensation of early educators.

3 This act would take effect upon passage.

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