

2020 -- H 7400

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LC003332
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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 -- THE RHODE ISLAND EARLY CHILDHOOD
INNOVATION ACT

Introduced By: Representatives McNamara, Jackson, Vella-Wilkinson, Diaz, and
McEntee

Date Introduced: January 31, 2020

Referred To: House Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. The general assembly finds and declares as follows:

2 (1) The first three (3) years of life are a period of incredible growth in all areas of a
3 baby's development. A child's early relationships with parents and caregivers can promote healthy
4 brain development, build social and emotional skills, and support language and literacy
5 development starting from birth.

6 (2) Children who come from families who are identified as at-risk based on
7 socioeconomic status, parent education level, and limited parent knowledge or experience are
8 significantly less likely to be proficient in reading and math than other students when they enter
9 school, experiencing an education achievement gap (hereinafter referred to in chapter 87.1 as the
10 "achievement gap") which begins at birth and is often further exacerbated as children progress in
11 their education.

12 (3) There is overwhelming evidence that the state of Rhode Island could expect a very
13 high return to the public by investing in high quality early childhood programming for all of our
14 children.

15 (4) Early childhood investments targeted towards program development for
16 disadvantaged children will help to promote both efficiency and educational equality for the
17 children of our state.

18 (5) While recognizing the efforts that have been made through the "Rhode Island

1 prekindergarten education act", chapter 87 of title 16, more effort can and should be expended to
2 reach children at an even younger age.

3 (6) The general assembly seeks to develop a research-based model for children ages three
4 (3) years of age and under and that focuses on low-income and at-risk families to eliminate the
5 achievement gap.

6 (7) The expansion of funding for programs that advance outcomes for children during the
7 early years of life is critical to achieving the state's goal for grade-level reading by the third grade.

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

10 CHAPTER 87.1

11 RHODE ISLAND EARLY CHILDHOOD INNOVATION ACT

12 **16-87.1-1. Short title.**

13 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Rhode Island Early Childhood
14 Innovation Act."

15 **16-87.1-2. Definitions.**

16 As used in this section:

17 (1) "Achievement gap" means the difference in educational success and proficiency in
18 reading and math experienced by children who come from families who are identified as at-risk
19 based on socioeconomic status, parent education level, and limited parental knowledge or
20 experience. These children are significantly less likely to be proficient in reading and math than
21 other students when they enter school, especially in kindergarten, and they experience an
22 education achievement gap which begins at birth and is often further exacerbated as these
23 children progress in their education.

24 (2) "At-risk families" means those who are identified as having one risk factor on the RI
25 newborn health assessment.

26 **16-87.1-3. Innovative fund authorized.**

27 (a) The department of human services shall establish an early childhood innovation fund.
28 The purpose of this fund shall be to support programs that seek to close the achievement gap that
29 currently exists for at-risk children as they enter kindergarten. The general assembly shall allocate
30 one million dollars (\$1,000,000) each year to invest in high quality, evidence informed,
31 voluntary, early childhood models that expand upon the current landscape of programs directed at
32 children from birth to three (3) years of age, and to allow successful existing programs to serve
33 more at-risk families. Recipients of funding may include nonprofit organizations, local
34 governments, universities, and local education authorities.

1 (b) The department of human services, working together with the department of
2 education, shall create a competitive request for proposals process to allocate funding for the
3 fiscal year no later than October 1 prior to the start of the fiscal year for which funding shall be
4 distributed. The request for proposals should fund only programs with evidence of model
5 effectiveness, clear procedures for ensuring program quality and an ongoing commitment to, and
6 plans for, advanced evaluation of results. Priority should be given to those programs that seek to
7 engage and support parents and caregivers as leaders in their child's education.

8 (c) The department of human services shall communicate its efforts through this fund
9 with the home visiting program in the department of health to best ensure coordination of efforts
10 across early childhood. Programs funded through this fund will implement procedures for
11 ensuring that families are referred to other state funded early childhood programs such as, but not
12 limited to, department of health evidence-based home visiting programs from which they would
13 benefit. Programs with demonstrated experience linking families to additional resources should
14 be given priority in the funding competition.

15 **16-87.1-4. Reporting.**

16 On or before October 31, 2021, and annually thereafter by October 31, the department of
17 human services shall report back to the general assembly and the governor on the status and
18 progress of the pilot program authorized by this chapter.

19 SECTION 3. 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 -- THE RHODE ISLAND EARLY CHILDHOOD
INNOVATION ACT

1 This act would establish the Rhode Island Early Childhood Innovation Act. The act
2 would authorize the department of human services to establish an early childhood innovation
3 fund for the purpose of supporting programs designed to narrow the education achievement gap
4 for at-risk children as they enter kindergarten. The act provides the general assembly would
5 allocate \$1,000,000 annually to this fund.

6 This act would take effect upon passage.

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