

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2020

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION - EDUCATIONAL SERVICES TO VERY YOUNG
CHILDREN

Introduced By: Senators Cano, Metts, Crowley, Quezada, and Seveney

Date Introduced: February 27, 2020

Referred To: Senate Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. The general assembly hereby finds that:

2 (1) Young children's healthy brain development and learning depends on consistent,
3 nurturing care and enriching learning opportunities at home and in early care and education settings.
4 Starting at birth, day-to-day interactions with family members and early educators shape children's
5 brain architecture upon which all future learning and development is built.

6 (2) Many of the early educators and early childhood professionals in Rhode Island earn
7 very low wages even when they achieve credentials equivalent to K-12 teachers and demonstrate
8 effective practices. Child Care, Family Home Visiting, and Early Intervention programs across the
9 state report difficulty attracting, developing, and retaining effective early childhood professionals.

10 (3) A 2019 statewide survey of early childhood professionals in Rhode Island found that
11 over forty percent (40%) of infant/toddler educators worry about having enough food to feed their
12 family and fifty percent (50%) worry about having enough money to pay for housing.

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

18 (5) A landmark report issued by the National Academy of Science in 2015 found that

1 educators of young children, including infants and toddlers, need the same high level of knowledge
2 and competencies as teachers of older children and that educational qualifications and
3 compensation of early educators should be equivalent to those of K-12 teachers.

4 (6) According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median wage for a child
5 care teacher in Rhode Island in 2018 was twelve dollars and fifteen cents (\$12.15) per hour, well
6 below the state median wage of twenty dollars and twenty-one cents (\$20.21) per hour and
7 significantly below the level of kindergarten teachers who had an average annual salary of sixty-
8 five thousand five hundred thirty dollars (\$65,530). Rhode Island state agency data show that
9 median wages for Early Intervention providers and family home visitors range from thirteen dollars
10 and fifty cents (\$13.50) per hour to twenty dollars (\$20.00) per hour.

11 (7) By enacting this law, the General Assembly acknowledges the need to develop and
12 implement strategies to improve the compensation of early educators so programs can attract,
13 develop, and retain effective staff to care for and educate young children and provide family-
14 focused services.

15 SECTION 2. Chapter 16-48 of the General Laws entitled "Educational Services to Very
16 Young Children" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

17 **16-48-10. Compensation of early educators.**

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

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

26 (c) In developing this target wage scale, the executive office of health and human services
27 and the department of education may consider the findings and recommendations provided in the
28 2019 Moving the Needle on Compensation Task Force's report "Improving the Compensation and
29 Retention of Effective Infant/Toddler Educators in Rhode Island."

30 (d) Once the target wage scale has been established, the executive office of health and
31 human services and the department of education shall design strategies and estimate the cost to
32 close the gap between current wages and the target wage scale, including parity with public school
33 teaching staff or individuals with similar credentials. In developing the plan, the following
34 components shall be considered:

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

8 (2) Proposals to increase rates paid to early childhood programs that are adequate to enable
9 programs to pay early educators wages that meet or exceed the levels in the target wage scale.

10 (3) Contracts to early childhood programs to expand the availability of high-quality
11 services for young children and families with educators in the program paid wages that meet or
12 exceed the levels in the target wage scale.

13 (4) Registered apprenticeships for early educators that support completion of college
14 coursework and attainment of college credentials while providing opportunities to develop high-
15 quality practices through regular on-the-job coaching by master early educators. Apprenticeships
16 shall be designed and funded to enable successful participants to earn wages that meet or exceed
17 the levels in the target wage scale.

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

21 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 - EDUCATIONAL SERVICES TO VERY YOUNG
CHILDREN

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2 educators so programs can attract, develop, and retain effective staff to care for and educate young
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