

2021 -- H 5062

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2021

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A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- THE RHODE ISLAND EARLY CHILDHOOD
INNOVATION ACT

Introduced By: Representative Joseph M. McNamara

Date Introduced: January 22, 2021

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 baby's
3 development. A child's early relationships with parents and caregivers can promote healthy brain
4 development, build social and emotional skills, and support language and literacy development
5 starting from birth.

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

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

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

15 (5) While recognizing the efforts that have been made through the "Rhode Island
16 prekindergarten education act", chapter 87 of title 16, more effort can and should be expended to
17 reach children at an even younger age.

18 (6) The general assembly seeks to develop a research-based model for children ages three

1 (3) years of age and under and that focuses on low-income and at-risk families to eliminate the
2 achievement gap.

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

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

7 CHAPTER 87.1

8 RHODE ISLAND EARLY CHILDHOOD INNOVATION ACT

9 **16-87.1-1. Short title.**

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

12 **16-87.1-2. Definitions.**

13 As used in this section:

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

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

23 **16-87.1-3. Innovative fund authorized.**

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

32 (b) The department of human services, working together with the department of education,
33 shall create a competitive request for proposals process to allocate funding for the fiscal year no
34 later than October 1 prior to the start of the fiscal year for which funding shall be distributed. The

1 request for proposals should fund only programs with evidence of model effectiveness, clear
2 procedures for ensuring program quality and an ongoing commitment to, and plans for, advanced
3 evaluation of results. Priority should be given to those programs that seek to engage and support
4 parents and caregivers as leaders in their child's education.

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

12 **16-87.1-4. Reporting.**

13 On or before October 31, 2022, and annually thereafter by October 31, the department of
14 human services shall report back to the general assembly and the governor on the status and
15 progress of the pilot program authorized by this chapter.

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

6 This act would take effect upon passage.

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