

Solve the Early Educator Staffing Crisis 2023

[H-5094](#) (Casimiro) & [S-492](#) (Cano)

[H-6169](#) (Diaz) & [S-377](#) (DiMario)

[H-5983](#) (Giraldo) & [S-523](#) (Gallo)



Right from the
Start

High-quality early childhood programs have effective educators who work with children and families to support young children's rapid brain development. Rhode Island is experiencing a significant staffing crisis for as effective professionals are leaving for better paying jobs. **The workforce that supports young children's early learning and development is made up almost exclusively of women (and disproportionately women of color) and has among the lowest wages in the state @ \$13.26 per hour for child care educators and @ \$14.08 per hour for preschool educators** – in the same range or lower than fast food workers, dishwashers, laundry workers, animal caretakers, and retail sales workers. The staffing crisis is negatively impacting children and families.

Evidence of the Early Educator Staffing Crisis in Rhode Island

- Even with extensive waiting lists, many early care and education programs have had to close classrooms because they cannot find qualified staff willing to work at the wages available. **Currently, almost 30% of Rhode Island's high-quality Early Head Start and Head Start classrooms are closed because of staffing challenges.**
- Children, families, and programs experience **high turnover of educators which disrupts relationships that are essential to promote healthy child development and learning.**
- Early Intervention, a public education program required under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* to serve infants and toddlers with developmental challenges, has had a waiting list since November 2021. Since November 2022, **the state has transferred almost 1,200 infants and toddlers from the statewide list to individual Early Intervention agencies to manage enrollment from the lists while also managing new referrals.** Even with the rate increase in 2022, the waiting list for Early Intervention continued to grow as programs struggled to attract and retain qualified professionals.
- Family Home Visiting programs often must **suspend enrollment when staff resign.**
- School districts are beginning to report that **some preschool children with developmental delays and disabilities are not receiving required IEP services because of staffing programs.** In addition, school districts are struggling to conduct screenings (66% of children ages 3 to 5 did not receive a screening) and evaluations (39% of children referred for evaluation did not receive one) to identify children who have delays and disabilities.

Legislative Proposals to Address Early Educator Staffing Crisis

1. **RI Early Educator Investment Act (H-5094/Casimiro & S-492/Cano)** requires the Children's Cabinet to establish cross-departmental goals and wage benchmarks for the early childhood program sector, funds the Child Care WAGE\$ model wage supplement program, and mandates annual reporting on the early educator workforce.
2. **Child Care for Child Care Educators (H-####/Diaz & S-377/DiMario)** implements a strategy developed in Kentucky to attract and retain child care educators by providing categorical eligibility to the Child Care Assistance Program for all child care staff regardless of family income and with no copayments.
3. **Recruit and Retain Early Intervention Professionals by Helping with Student Debt Repayment (H-5983/Giraldo & S-523/Gallo)** sets aside up to 10 Wavemaker Fellowships for Speech Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, and Physical Therapists working in Early Intervention, with priority for bilingual professionals.