



BrightStars

Recognizing, Improving, Connecting
Quality Care & Learning

**Quality Framework for
Public Schools**
Updated July 2026

Introduction

BrightStars is Rhode Island's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for Early Care, Education, and School-age Programs

Early childhood experience affects the architecture of children's maturing brains. Like the construction of a house, brains are built from the bottom up, with early experiences setting the foundation for the rest of development. This is why high quality child care, education, and school-age programs are so important to Rhode Island.

Through BrightStars, Rhode Island is supporting a sustainable infrastructure of diverse and high quality early care, education, and school-age programs using research-based practices that promote positive outcomes for children and families.



BrightStars' five-level QRIS works to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care, education, and school-age programs. BrightStars meets programs where they are, using a strengths-based approach to continuous quality improvement (CQI).

The **Basic Education Program (BEP)** are the overarching set of regulations for the Rhode Island public education system. These regulations specify the minimum standards that must be met to operate legally and are the first step in a QRIS. Each incremental quality rating recognizes programs for exceeding basic regulatory requirements and implementing best practices that research shows is best for children.

Since its inception, BrightStars has received invaluable guidance and support from the **BrightStars Advisory Committee** that includes representatives from all sectors of the early learning and child care field, state department leaders, early learning programs, local education agencies, and key local experts and advocates.



BrightStars supports programs in six quality domains:

- **Health, Safety, + Nutrition**
- **Enrollment + Staffing**
- **Staff Qualifications + Ongoing Professional Development**
- **Administration**
- **Early Learning + Development**
- **Family Engagement**

BrightStars is a public-private partnership managed by the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children (RIAEYC). Key partners include the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS), the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), the Rhode Island Governor's Office, the Local SEIU Education Support Fund (ESF), and the Center for Early Learning Professionals.



BrightStars

Domains + Standards at A Glance

Health, Safety, + Nutrition



Learning
Environment



Staff-Child
Ratio



Maximum
Group Size

Enrollment + Staffing

Staff Qualifications + Ongoing Professional Development



Teacher
Qualifications



Program
Leadership



Continuous
Quality
Improvement

Administration

Early Learning + Development



Curriculum



Child
Assessment



Special
Education
Practices



Family
Communication
+ Involvement

Family Engagement



Standard One: Learning Environment

Daily activities and interactions show that the program is providing a safe, healthy, and stimulating environment. The program provides indoor and outdoor space to support varied and enriching experiences for children. Daily interactions demonstrate that staff respect, care for, and enjoy working with children. The program supports the inclusion of children with disabilities and developmental delays, responds to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the population it serves, and promotes the acceptance of diversity among staff, families, and children.

Levels 1-2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
• Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance	• Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance PLUS • Avg. ECERS score of 3.0 or Greater with no observed classroom score less than 2.5	• Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance AND • Avg. ECERS score of 4.0 or Greater with no observed classroom score less than 3.0	• Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance AND • Avg. ECERS score of 5.0 or Greater with no observed classroom score less than 3.0



Additional Considerations for Continuous Quality Improvement



- All meals and snacks and their preparation, service, and storage should meet the requirements for meals (7 CFR §226.20) of the child care component of the US Department of Agriculture Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) (1-3).
- Children in care for 8 or fewer hours in 1 day should be offered at least 1 meal and 2 snacks or 2 meals and 1 snack (1).
- A nutritious snack should be offered to all children in midmorning (if they are not offered a breakfast on-site that is provided within 3 hours of lunch) and in mid-afternoon.
- Children should be offered food at intervals at least 2 hours apart but not more than 3 hours apart unless the child is asleep. Children must be awake prior to being offered a meal/snack.
- Children should be allowed time to eat their food and not be rushed during the meal or snack service. They should not be allowed to play during these times.
- Clean, sanitary drinking water should be readily available and offered throughout the day in indoor and outdoor areas.
- Educators should ensure that children are comfortably seated at tables that are between waist and mid-chest level and allow the seated child's feet to rest on a firm surface.

Source: Caring For Our Children 4.2.0.4, 4.2.0.5, 4.2.0.6, 4.5.0.1



Standards Two + Three: Minimum Staff-Child Ratio & Maximum Group Size



Level 1-2	Level 3-5
Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance	Compliance with Staff-Child Ratios - General Education Preschool Classroom: 3yo 1:9 4yo 1:10 - Special Education Integrated/Inclusive Preschool Classroom: 2:15 Staff-Child Ratio Posted
Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance	Compliance with Group Size: - General Education Preschool Classroom: 3yo 18 4yo 20 - Special Education Integrated/Inclusive Preschool Classroom: 15 Group Size Posted

The program ensures that the required number of staff members are available at all times to supervise the children, to support early learning and development, and meet provisions of federal law. These standards reiterate what is expected of programs through compliance with regulation.

Maximum group size is determined by the number of children in a classroom or designated area. Measuring group size ensures that children are educated in a small group, separate from other groups of children in order to promote the development of stable, positive relationships.

*These ratios shall apply unless federal or state law of regulation, such as the IDEA or the RI Regulations Governing the Education of Children with Disabilities, require different ratios, or when determined to be appropriate considering student behavioral health, or educational needs.

Lower staff-child ratios and smaller group size requirements are encouraged.



Standard Four: Teacher Qualifications

Each group of children shall have a teacher who works under the supervision of the Education Coordinator to care for the children and implement the classroom curriculum. The teacher has the **formal education and professional preparation** to work with children.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
All Teachers have a Rhode Island Early Childhood Teaching Certificate	- All Teachers have a Rhode Island Early Childhood Teaching Certificate PLUS - Professional Growth Goals for all teachers PLUS 25% Complete RIELDS Trainings - The Nine Domains	- All Teachers have a Rhode Island Early Childhood Teaching Certificate PLUS - Professional Growth Goals for all teachers PLUS 25% Complete RIELDS Trainings - The Nine Domains PLUS 25% ECERS-3 Training	- All Teachers have a Rhode Island Early Childhood Teaching Certificate PLUS - Professional Growth Goals for all teachers PLUS 50% Complete RIELDS Trainings - The Nine Domains - Preschool Instructional Cycle - Preschool Curriculum and Planning	- All Teachers have a Rhode Island Early Childhood Teaching Certificate PLUS - Professional Growth Goals for all teachers PLUS 75% Complete RIELDS Trainings - The Nine Domains - Preschool Instructional Cycle - Preschool Curriculum and Planning

Standard Four: Teacher Qualifications

Each group of children shall have a teacher who works under the supervision of the Education Coordinator to care for the children and implement the classroom curriculum. The teacher has the **formal education and professional preparation** to work with children.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
		PLUS • 25% Conscious Discipline or other RIDE approved Social Emotional Learning (SEL) intervention	PLUS • 50% ECERS-3 Training - PLUS • 50% Conscious Discipline or other RIDE approved Social Emotional Learning (SEL) intervention	PLUS • 75% ECERS-3 Training - PLUS • 75% Conscious Discipline or other RIDE approved Social Emotional Learning (SEL) intervention

Standard Four: TA Qualifications

Each group of children shall have a Teacher Assistant who works alongside a Teacher to care for the children and implement the classroom curriculum. The Teacher Assistant has the **formal education and professional preparation** to work with children.

Level 1-2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
R. I. Gen. Laws § 16-11.2 Requirements	R. I. Gen. Laws § 16-11.2 Requirements PLUS 25% RIELDS Trainings - Guiding Principles - The Nine Domains	R. I. Gen. Laws § 16-11.2 Requirements PLUS 25% RIELDS Trainings - Guiding Principles - The Nine Domains PLUS 25% ECERS-3 Training PLUS - Professional Development Plan	R. I. Gen. Laws § 16-11.2 Requirements PLUS 50% RIELDS Trainings - Guiding Principles - The Nine Domain PLUS 50% ECERS-3 Training PLUS - Professional Development Plan

Standard Five: Program Leadership (Principals)

The **Principal** is responsible for overall operations and compliance with BEP, while the **Education Coordinator** is responsible for the development and implementation of the early learning and development program, serving as the program's pedagogical leader. The Principal and Education Coordinator may be assumed by the following, but not necessarily limited to: the administrator, principal, education manager; or may be a stand-alone position.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4-5
RIDE Administrator Certificate	- RIDE Administrator Certificate PLUS - RIELDS Trainings: - The Nine Domains	- RIDE Administrator Certificate - RIELDS Trainings: - The Nine Domains PLUS - ECERS-3 Training PLUS - Conscious Discipline or other RIDE approved Social Emotional Learning (SEL) intervention	- RIDE Administrator Certificate PLUS - RIELDS Trainings: - The Nine Domains - Implementing a Standards-Based Program for Administrators PLUS - ECERS-3 Training PLUS - Conscious Discipline or other RIDE approved Social Emotional Learning (SEL) intervention

Standard Five: Program Leadership (Education Coordinator)

The Principal is responsible for overall operations and compliance with BEP, while the **Education Coordinator** is responsible for the development and implementation of the early learning and development program, serving as the program's pedagogical leader. The Principal and Education Coordinator may be assumed by the following, but not necessarily limited to: the administrator, principal, education manager; or may be a stand-alone position.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4-5
- RI Early Childhood Teaching Certificate OR - RI Early Childhood Special Education Teaching Certificate	- RI Early Childhood Teaching Certificate OR - RI Early Childhood Special Education Teaching Certificate PLUS - Professional Development Plan PLUS - RIELDS Trainings: - The Nine Domains	- RI Early Childhood Teaching Certificate OR - RI Early Childhood Special Education Teaching Certificate PLUS - Professional Development Plan PLUS - RIELDS Trainings: - The Nine Domains PLUS - ECERS-3 Training	- RI Early Childhood Teaching Certificate OR - RI Early Childhood Special Education Teaching Certificate PLUS - Professional Development Plan PLUS - RIELDS Trainings: - The Nine Domains - Preschool Instructional Cycle - Preschool Curriculum and Planning

Standard Five: Program Leadership (Education Coordinator)

The **Principal** is responsible for overall operations and compliance with BEP, while the **Education Coordinator** is responsible for the development and implementation of the early learning and development program, serving as the program's pedagogical leader. The Principal and Education Coordinator may be assumed by the following, but not necessarily limited to: the administrator, principal, education manager; or may be a stand-alone position.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4-5
		PLUS Conscious Discipline or other RIDE approved Social Emotional Learning (SEL) intervention	- Implementing a Standards Based Program for Education Coordinators PLUS - ECERS-3 Training PLUS - Conscious Discipline or other RIDE approved Social Emotional Learning (SEL) intervention PLUS - A minimum of two (2) years of early childhood education classroom teaching experience OR two (2) years of early childhood leadership experience

Standard Six: Continuous Quality Improvement

The program conducts a comprehensive self-assessment, at least once a year, to assess compliance with regulations and standards and to determine its effectiveness in meeting the needs of the children and families it serves. The program then uses this information to create program goals to continually improve quality and documents progress towards achieving these goals.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4-5
- Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance PLUS - Quality Improvement Plan completed within 90 days of rating	- Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance PLUS - Quality Improvement Plan completed within 90 days of rating PLUS - Comprehensive Program Self Assessment that includes: - At least 2 sources of evidence OR - School Improvement Plan with specific goals related to preschool	- Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance PLUS - Quality Improvement Plan completed within 90 days of rating PLUS - Comprehensive Program Self Assessment that includes: - At least 2 sources of evidence <i>and</i> - ECERS-3 findings, where applicable OR - School Improvement Plan with specific goals related to preschool	- Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance PLUS - Quality Improvement Plan completed within 90 days of rating PLUS - Comprehensive Program Self Assessment that includes: - At least 3 sources of evidence <i>and</i> - ECERS-3 findings, where applicable OR - School Improvement Plan with specific goals related to preschool

Standard Seven: Curriculum

The program uses curriculum, aligned to the RI Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) and in partnership with the State's Curriculum Framework for Early Learning. Teaching staff have emotional connections with children and respond appropriately to individual early learning and development needs. Classroom schedules and routines maximize time spent in early learning and development activities. The program provides many opportunities for children to learn and practice skills in all domains of the RI Early Learning and Development Standards.

Level 1	Level 2-3	Level 4-5
Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance	- Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance PLUS - Curriculum and Implementation Plan Aligned with the RIELDS	- Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance PLUS - Curriculum and Implementation Plan Aligned with the RIELDS PLUS - RIDE-Endorsed Early Learning Curriculum



Standard Eight: Child Assessment

The program connects families to developmental screenings for their children, and **systematically and routinely** gathers information about each child in order to meet the individual needs of children and provide differentiated learning experiences.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3-4	Level 5
• Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance	• Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance PLUS • Developmental Screening Information	• Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance PLUS • Developmental Screening Information PLUS • The program gathers child assessment information about each child using 2 or more methods (observation, surveys, interviews, videos)	• Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance PLUS • Developmental Screening Information PLUS • The program gathers child assessment information about each child using 3 or more methods (observation, surveys, interviews, videos) PLUS • The program collaborates with Child Outreach to provide on-site developmental screenings PLUS • Written Policies & Procedures that guide Child Assessment practices are shared with families



Standard Nine: Special Education Practices

The program supports the inclusion of children with disabilities and developmental delays and their families. A higher quality program makes appropriate accommodations and modifications to support children and their families, and they collaborate with key partners to support children with developmental delays and disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

Levels 1-2	Levels 3-4	Level 5
• Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance	• Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance PLUS • Special Education Services are embedded in the child’s least restrictive classroom environment.	• Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance PLUS • Special Education Services are embedded in the child’s least restrictive classroom environment. PLUS • The LEA embeds special education services within community-based programs. PLUS • The program provides training and/or professional development to community partners that support children in their district.

Standard Ten: Family Communication and Involvement

The program communicates regularly with families by offering ongoing opportunities for family involvement, and working to build partnerships with families.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4-5
Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance	- Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance PLUS - The program submits a Family Engagement Plan that employs 2 or more strategies to engage all families.	- Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance PLUS - The program submits a Family Engagement Plan that employs 2 or more strategies to engage all families. PLUS - Family Teacher Conference (2x/year)	- Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance PLUS - The program submits a Family Engagement Plan that employs 2 or more strategies to engage all families PLUS - Family Teacher Conference (2x/year) PLUS - Family Survey/Surveyworks Implementation Plan

Accepted Family Communication Strategies in the Family Engagement Plan may Include:

- New Family Orientations
- Monthly Newsletter (3x/year)
- Family meeting, social event, or workshop (4x/year)
- Ideas/suggestions to support learning at home
- Annual Family Survey
- Connect families w/community services
- Advisory Board /PTO that includes preschool families
- Digital Family Communication Apps

Standard Ten: Family Communication and Involvement

The program communicates regularly with families by offering ongoing opportunities for family involvement, and working to build partnerships with families.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4-5
			PLUS • Program Implements Activities to Facilitate the Transition of Children & Families (e.g., program visits prior to enrollment, internal transitions, transitions out of programs)