

SCHOOL CHOICE MATTERS

Rhode Island Policy Report

Introduction

PURPOSE

A combination of well-designed policies give all students access to the broadest range of educational opportunities, including key core policies and helpful policy enhancers. The purpose of this document is to provide insight to how well your state is doing at implementing the Ecosystem of School Choice Policies. This state report summarizes evidence across the seven policy buckets, with each policy component detailed in individual cells.

CORE POLICIES

Key policies expand student opportunities.



[Open Enrollment](#)



[Charter Schools](#)



[Private School Choice](#)



[Homeschooling](#)

POLICY ENHANCERS

Supporting policies enhance those opportunities.



[Part-time Enrollment/Course Access](#)



[Learn Everywhere](#)



[Transportation](#)

CORE POLICIES



Open Enrollment in Rhode Island

POLICY	RATING	POLICY OVERVIEW
Transfers Between Districts	<p>LIMITED</p> <p>Sending and/or receiving districts have discretion over transfers</p>	<p>Rhode Island law gives school committees discretion to provide for students to attend school in a city or town in an adjoining city or town when it is “more convenient or expedient” for the student.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-2-19 Children attending in adjoining cities or towns)</p>
Transfers Within Districts	<p>LIMITED</p> <p>School officials can block transfers</p>	<p>Rhode Island law gives school committees discretion to provide for students to attend school in a city or town in an adjoining city or town when it is “more convenient or expedient” for the student.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-2-19 Children attending in adjoining cities or towns)</p>
Year-round Transfer Window	<p>NO</p> <p>No policy</p>	<p>Rhode Island policy does not provide for transfer windows for open enrollment students.</p>
Tuition-Free Public Schools	<p>YES</p> <p>Prohibition on parent tuition</p>	<p>Where a school committee finds it is more convenient or expedient for a child to attend school in an adjoining city or town, the committee from the student’s district of residence would pay for the tuition of the student out of the city or town appropriation for public schools. The amount paid must be used for school purposes only.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-2-19 Children attending in adjoining cities or towns)</p>

<p>School Capacity Transparency</p>	<p>NO No transparency policy</p>	<p>School districts are not required to publicly report capacity by school and grade level.</p>
<p>Transfer Data Transparency</p>	<p>NO No transparency in data reporting</p>	<p>Rhode Island policy does not require the state to collect and publicly report district-level open enrollment data.</p>
<p>Transparent Appeal Process</p>	<p>NO</p>	<p>Rhode Island does not provide for an appeal when a district denies a transfer.</p>

SOURCE CITATIONS

Statutes

[R.I. Gen. Laws 16-2-19 Children attending in adjoining cities or towns](#)



Charter Schools in Rhode Island

POLICY	RATING	POLICY OVERVIEW
<p>Multiple Charter Authorizers</p>	<p>LIMITED</p> <p>No real authorizer options</p>	<p>District Charter Schools Rhode Island provides for district charter schools – persons or entities eligible to establish a district charter school may submit proposals to the commissioner and the school committee of the district where the district charter school will be located.</p> <p>The commissioner or the school committee are to decide whether or not to recommend the granting of the charter to the Board of Regents. If the commissioner or the school committee recommend granting the proposal, it will be referred to the Board for final approval.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.2-2 Procedure for creation of district charter schools)</p> <p>District charter schools are created by existing public schools, groups of public school personnel, public school districts, or a group of school districts.</p> <p>(Rhode Island Dept of Education, Rhode Island’s Charter Public Schools)</p> <p>Independent Charter Schools For the creation of independent charter schools, Rhode Island policy explains that proposed charters will be submitted to the commissioner for approval. If the commissioner approves of the proposed charter, the commissioner will send the application to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, which will either grant or deny the charter.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.3-2 Procedure for creation and expansion of independent charter schools)</p> <p>Independent charter schools are schools created by: (1) Rhode Island nonprofit organizations provided they have existed for 2 years and must exist for a substantial reason other than to operate a school; or (2) colleges or universities within the state.</p> <p>(Rhode Island Dept of Education, Rhode Island’s Charter Public Schools)</p>

		<p>Mayoral Academies Rhode Island also allows for the creation of Mayoral Academies – charter schools created by mayors of cities or towns. Applications for these schools are to be submitted to the commissioner.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.4-2 Procedure for creation and expansion of a mayoral academy)</p> <p>Similar to independent charter schools, for the creation of mayoral academies, proposed charters will be submitted to the commissioner for approval. If the commissioner approves of the proposed charter, the commissioner will send the application to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, which will either grant or deny the charter.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.4-3 Process for consideration of proposed charter or expansion)</p> <p>Mayoral Academies are schools created by a mayor of any city or town within the state, acting by or through a nonprofit organization (regardless of the time the nonprofit is in existence) to establish a mayoral academy.</p>
<p>Charter Appeal Process</p>	<p>NO No appeals process</p>	<p>Rhode Island policy does not provide for an appeal if a charter application is denied. This extends to all types of charter schools, including district charter schools, independent charter schools, and mayoral academies.</p>
<p>Charter Regulatory Flexibility</p>	<p>LIMITED Some or no exemptions</p>	<p>District Charter Schools When a charter is approved upon the recommendation of the commissioner, the Board of Regents is deemed to have authorized all necessary variances from law and regulation.</p> <p>Further, if further flexibility is needed, a variance may be obtained by an affirmative vote of 2/3 of the teachers assigned to the school, agreement by all parties to the collective bargaining agreement, and by an affirmative vote of the Board of Regents upon a recommendation of the commissioner.</p> <p>Rhode Island law relating to the establishment of district charter schools requires the proposal for the charter to include the “provisions of the collective bargaining agreement which will not be applicable to that district charter school subject to agreement by the parties to the collectively bargaining agreement.”</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.2-2 Procedure for creation of district charter schools)</p> <p>District charter schools may not waive certain provisions of the law, including those relating to certification of public school teachers, uniform testing, and other health and safety requirements.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.2-7 Portions of title 16 applicable to district charter schools)</p>

Independent Charter Schools

The application submitted to the commissioner for approval of the charter must include a list of the state statutes, regulations, and sending school district rules from which variances are sought.

[\(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.3-2 Procedure for creation and expansion of independent charter schools\)](#)

The commissioner, with the approval of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, may grant a variance to any provision of title 16, except those enumerated in the charter school law relating to independent charter schools, and to any Department of Education regulation and school district regulation that does not affect the health and safety or civil rights of students in the schools.

[\(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.3-3 Process for consideration of proposed charter or expansion\)](#)

Independent charter schools may not waive certain provisions of the law, including those relating to certification of public school teachers, uniform testing, and other health and safety requirements.

[\(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.3-7 Portions of title 16 applicability to independent charter schools\)](#)

Mayoral Academies

The application submitted to the commissioner for approval of the charter must include a list of the state statutes, regulations, and school district rules from which variances are sought.

[\(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.4-2 Procedure for creation and expansion of mayoral academy\)](#)

The commissioner, with the approval of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, may grant a variance to any provision of title 16, except those enumerated in the charter school law relating to mayoral academies, and to any Department of Education regulation and school district regulation that does not affect the health and safety or civil rights of students in the schools.

[\(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.4-3 Process for consideration of proposed charter or expansion\)](#)

Mayoral Academies may not receive variances from certain areas of the law including uniform testing, certification of public school teachers, compulsory attendance, and other health and safety laws.

[\(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.4-7 Portions of title 16 applicable to mayoral academies\)](#)

<p>Equitable Charter Funding</p>	<p>LIMITED Disparities exist</p>	<p>According to Rhode Island laws, operating costs of a charter school will be the total of the per pupil payments for each student attending the school. The per pupil amount is determined based on the per pupil cost for the district of residence for each student. In no case can the ratio of per pupil funds be less than 30%, minus the 5% of per pupil cost designated for indirect cost support to the student’s school district.</p> <p>According to the laws, the per pupil calculation is provided within Chapter 7.</p> <p>Rhode Island gives school districts additional funds to offset the loss of indirect costs a district has when a student attends a charter school.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.1-2 Operating costs)</p> <p>District Charter Schools & Independent Charter Schools Rhode Island laws relating to district charter schools and independent charter schools provides that funding for these charter schools must consist of state revenue and municipal or district revenue in the same proportions that funding is provided for other schools within the sending school district.</p> <p>All types of charter schools are also eligible to receive other aids, grants, Medicaid revenue, and other revenue according to Rhode Island law, as though it were a school district. Federal aid received by the state must be used to benefit students in the charter school, if the school qualifies for the aid, as though it were a school district.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.2-5 Budgets and funding; R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.3-5 Budgets and funding; R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.4-5 Budgets and funding)</p>
<p>Charter Facilities Funding</p>	<p>LIMITED Some or no facilities funding</p>	<p>If federal funds are not available to pay for start up costs of a charter school, Rhode Island has established interest free loans. These are not to exceed \$150,000 and must be repaid over 5 years.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.1-4 State funds for charter public schools start up costs)</p> <p>Further, public school districts may access state aid for reimbursement of school housing costs for district-sponsored charter schools. Public charter schools not sponsored by a public school district may apply for 30% reimbursement of school housing costs on the basis of demonstrated need.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.1-5 Facilities support for charter public schools)</p>

<p>Options for High-Performing Charters</p>	<p>LIMITED</p> <p>No opportunities for high-performing charter schools</p>	<p>Rhode Island policy does not provide for incentives or favorable regulatory environments for high-performing charter schools.</p>
<p>Charter Zoning Exemptions</p>	<p>YES</p> <p>The same exemptions are provided</p>	<p>Recent case law in Rhode Island found that charter schools are considered public schools for purposes of exemptions from zoning laws.</p> <p>(See City of Woonsocket v. RISE Prep Mayoral Academy)</p>

SOURCE CITATIONS

Statutes	State Department of Education	Other Resources
<p>R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.1-2 Operating costs</p> <p>R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.1-4 State funds for charter public schools start up costs</p> <p>R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.1-5 Facilities support for charter public schools</p> <p>R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.2-2 Procedure for creation of district charter schools</p> <p>R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.2-5 Budgets and funding</p> <p>R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.2-7 Portions of title 16 applicable to district charter schools</p> <p>R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.3-2 Procedure for creation and expansion of independent charter schools</p> <p>R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.3-3 Process for consideration of proposed charter or expansion</p>	<p>Rhode Island Dept of Education, Rhode Island’s Charter Public Schools</p>	<p>City of Woonsocket v. RISE Prep Mayoral Academy</p>

<p>R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.3-5 Budgets and funding</p> <p>R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.3-7 Portions of title 16 applicability to independent charter schools</p> <p>R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.4-2 Procedure for creation and expansion of a mayoral academy</p> <p>R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.4-3 Process for consideration of proposed charter or expansion</p> <p>R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.4-5 Budgets and funding</p> <p>R.I. Gen. Laws 16-77.4-7 Portions of title 16 applicable to mayoral academies</p>		
---	--	--



Private School Choice in Rhode Island

POLICY	OVERALL RATING	PROGRAM OVERVIEW
<p>Universal Eligibility</p>	<p>LIMITED</p> <p>Eligibility less than 100%</p>	<p>Rhode Island allows for tax credits for contributions to scholarship organizations.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 44-62-1 Tax credit for contributions to a scholarship organization – General)</p> <p>Rhode Island laws provide that eligible students are those registered in a qualified school and a member of a household with an annual household income of not more than 250% of the federal poverty guidelines.</p> <p>Qualified school is defined to mean a “nonpublic elementary or secondary school that is located in this state and that satisfies the requirements prescribed by law for nonpublic schools in this state.”</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 44-62-2 Qualification of scholarship organization)</p>
<p>Comparable Student Funding</p>	<p>LIMITED</p> <p>Funding below 90%</p>	<p>The scholarship amount is not provided in policy – this is dependent on the donations received by the scholarship granting organizations.</p> <p>Scholarship organizations must allocate at least 90% of the annual revenue for tuition assistance grants to eligible students.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 44-62-2 Qualification of scholarship organization)</p>
<p>Uncapped Student Access</p>	<p>LIMITED</p> <p>Funding or enrollment cap</p>	<p>The total aggregate amount of all tax credits approved must not exceed \$1.6 million in a fiscal year.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 44-62-3 Application for tax credit program [Effective January 1, 2024])</p> <p>The credit may not exceed \$100,000 annually per business entity.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 44-62-5 Limitations)</p>

<p>Extended Application Window</p>	<p>LIMITED Application period or periods</p>	<p>Scholarship granting organizations establish application periods.</p>
<p>Student Testing Options</p>	<p>LIMITED Rigid mandates, multiple tests, or no accountability</p>	<p>Assessment requirements are not provided in policy.</p>
<p>School Autonomy</p>	<p>LIMITED Silent language or adverse regulations</p>	<p>Rhode Island policy relating to this tax credit program does not address nonpublic school autonomy.</p>
<p>Accessible School Participation</p>	<p>YES No accreditation requirement</p>	<p>Qualified school is defined to mean a “nonpublic elementary or secondary school that is located in this state and that satisfies the requirements prescribed by law for nonpublic schools in this state.” (R.I. Gen. Laws 44-62-2 Qualification of scholarship organization)</p> <p>Rhode Island does not require nonpublic schools to be accredited. Rhode Island laws do require approval. (R.I. Gen. Laws 16-19-2 Approval of private schools – Requirements – Review)</p>
<p>ESAs and Parent-Directed Spending</p>		
<p>Freedom to Customize</p>	<p>NO No ESA or microgrant program</p>	<p>Rhode Island does not have an education scholarship account or microgrant program.</p>
<p>Freedom to Access</p>	<p>NO No ESA or microgrant program</p>	

<p>Carry-Over Funding</p>	<p>NO No ESA or microgrant program</p>	
<p>Tax Credits</p>		
<p>Full Tax Credit</p>	<p>LIMITED Credit value below 100%</p>	<p>Rhode Island allows for tax credits for contributions to scholarship organizations.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 44-62-1 Tax credit for contributions to a scholarship organization – General)</p> <p>The tax credit totals 75% of the total voluntary cash contribution made by the business entity.</p> <p>Entities may also choose a two-year contribution plan, which is based on the written commitment of a business entity to provide the scholarship organization with the same amount of contribution for 2 consecutive tax years. When a 2-year contribution is in place, the tax credit will be 90% of the total voluntary contribution made by the business entity.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 44-62-4 Calculation of tax credit and issuance of tax credit certificate)</p> <p>The credit may not exceed \$100,000 annually per business entity.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 44-62-5 Limitations)</p>

SOURCE CITATIONS

Statutes

- [R.I. Gen. Laws 16-19-2 Approval of private schools – Requirements – Review](#)
- [R.I. Gen. Laws 44-62-1 Tax credit for contributions to a scholarship organization – General](#)
- [R.I. Gen. Laws 44-62-2 Qualification of scholarship organization](#)
- [R.I. Gen. Laws 44-62-3 Application for tax credit program \[Effective January 1, 2024\]](#)
- [R.I. Gen. Laws 44-62-5 Limitations](#)
- [R.I. Gen. Laws 44-62-4 Calculation of tax credit and issuance of tax credit certificate](#)

Other Resources

- [Rhode Island Division of Taxation, Tax Credits for Contributions to Scholarship Organizations](#)



Homeschooling in Rhode Island

POLICY	RATING	POLICY OVERVIEW
<p>Homeschool without Prior Approval</p>	<p>NO</p> <p>Permission required</p>	<p>Students in Rhode Island are excused from the state’s compulsory attendance requirements if participating in at-home instruction that has been approved by the school committee of the town where the child resides.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-19-1 Attendance required)</p> <p>To be approved, the at-home instruction must provide for a period of attendance that is “substantially equal” to that required by law in public schools. Parents must keep registers relating to the attendance of students. And parents must provide education in the following subjects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Writing • Geography • Arithmetic • The history of the United States • The history of Rhode Island • The principles of American Government <p>The laws further provide that if the school committee refuses to approve at-home instruction, the parent may appeal the action to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.</p> <p>(R.I. Gen. Laws 16-19-2 Approval of private schools – Requirements – Review)</p>
<p>No Extra Homeschool Notifications</p>	<p>YES</p> <p>One-time or no notification</p>	<p>Rhode Island policy does not require annual notification of the intent to homeschool.</p>

<p>No Certification to Homeschool</p>	<p>YES No certification requirement</p>	<p>Rhode Island policy does not require homeschool parents to possess teacher certification.</p>
<p>Flexible Assessment Options</p>	<p>YES Flexible academic accountability</p>	<p>Rhode Island policy does not include information on assessing student academic progress.</p>

SOURCE CITATIONS

<p>Statutes</p> <p>R.I. Gen. Laws 16-19-1 Attendance required</p> <p>R.I. Gen. Laws 16-19-2 Approval of private schools – Requirements – Review</p>	<p>State Department of Education</p> <p>Rhode Island Dept of Education, Home Schooling</p>
--	---

POLICY ENHANCERS



Part-time Enrollment in Rhode Island

POLICY	RATING	POLICY OVERVIEW
Resident Course Access	<p>NO</p> <p>No policy</p>	<p>Unable to locate policies from Rhode Island relating to part-time enrollment, outside of virtual opportunities discussed below</p>
Nonresident Course Access	<p>NO</p> <p>No program</p>	<p>Unable to locate policies from Rhode Island relating to part-time enrollment, outside of virtual opportunities discussed below.</p>
Virtual Course Access	<p>YES</p> <p>The state has one or more fully accessible virtual providers</p>	<p>Rhode Island has created the All Course Network (ACN) which gives students access to a statewide course catalog, that includes free courses at colleges, schools, or online.</p> <p>The ACN makes a proportional number of seats available for homeschool, non-public school, and public school students based on the ratio of non-public to public school students in the state.</p> <p>(Rhode Island Dept of Education, All Course Network)</p>

Extracurricular Access

LIMITED

Access denied to some resident students, or students must take at least one class in a public school

Rhode Island’s webpage relating to Home Schools provides that the Commissioner of Education has encouraged all school districts to allow homeschool students to participate in public school programs and public school extracurricular activities. Local school districts have the discretion to allow this participation.

[\(Rhode Island Dept of Education, Home Schooling – Frequently Asked Questions\)](#)

Rhode Island policies are silent on private school student participation and charter school student participation.

The Rhode Island Interscholastic League requires student athletes to be enrolled in the school for which they participate.

The League does provide for the participation of charter school students, so long as certain requirements are met.

[\(Rhode Island Interscholastic League, Article 3 Eligibility\)](#)

SOURCE CITATIONS

State Department of Education

[Rhode Island Dept of Education, All Course Network](#)

[Rhode Island Dept of Education, Home Schooling – Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Citation Group Heading

[All Course Network \(ACN\)](#)

[Rhode Island Interscholastic League, Article 3 Eligibility](#)



Learn Everywhere in Rhode Island

POLICY	RATING	POLICY OVERVIEW
Provider Qualification Standard	NO No program	Rhode Island has not adopted a Learn Everywhere program.
Course Credit Standard	NO No program	
Core Course Opportunities	NO No program	
Central State List	NO No program	



Transportation in Rhode Island

POLICY	RATING	POLICY OVERVIEW
Open Enrollment Transit	<div style="background-color: red; width: 10px; height: 20px; display: inline-block;"></div> NO	Rhode Island does not have a statewide open enrollment program.
Fair Transportation Access	<div style="background-color: gold; width: 10px; height: 20px; display: inline-block;"></div> LIMITED Equitable transportation offered to some charter OR private students	Rhode Island requires school districts to provide transportation for private school students to and from school, except for private schools that are operated for profit, who reside “so far from the public or private school that the pupil attends as to make the pupil’s regular attendance at school impractical and for any pupil whose regular attendance would otherwise be impracticable on account of physical disability or infirmity.” (R.I. Gen. Laws 16-21-1 Transportation of public and private school pupils)
Vehicle Flexibility	<div style="background-color: green; width: 10px; height: 20px; display: inline-block;"></div> YES	Rhode Island law does provide for motor vehicles with as few as 8 allowable passengers, when the transportation is being provided to only small numbers of students. (R.I. Gen. Laws 31-22.1.1 Pupil transportation vehicle – Definition)

SOURCE CITATIONS

Statutes

[R.I. Gen. Laws 16-21-1 Transportation of public and private school pupils](#)

[R.I. Gen. Laws 31-22.1.1 Pupil transportation vehicle – Definition](#)

