

College Enrollment and Completion

DEFINITION

College enrollment and completion is the percentage of Rhode Island public high school graduates who enroll in a two- or four-year college within five years of high school graduation who earn a college diploma (an associate's degree or bachelor's degree) within six years of enrollment.¹

SIGNIFICANCE

By 2020, 71% of jobs in Rhode Island will require post-secondary education beyond high school, and yet only 34% of Rhode Island adults between the ages of 25 and 64 have a bachelor's degree or higher, and an additional 29% have some college or an associate's degree.^{2,3} Between 2011 and 2015 in Rhode Island, 10.3% of adults with a high school diploma were unemployed, compared to 6.9% of those with some college or an associate's degree and 3.6% of those with a bachelor's degree or higher.⁴ During that same period, the median annual income for adults with a high school diploma was \$31,196, compared to \$36,786 for adults with some college or an associate's degree and \$51,769 for adults with a bachelor's degree.⁵

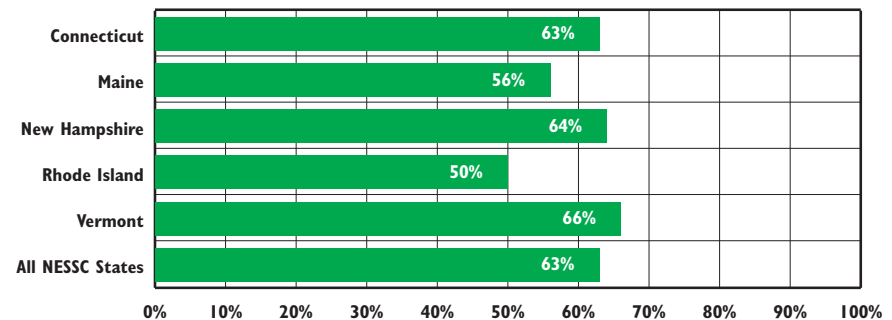
Students must complete college and earn a degree to accrue the benefits of a college education, in terms of increased income and reduced unemployment. While college enrollment rates have

doubled in recent decades, there are still large gaps in the percentage of students who enroll in college, the types of colleges students enroll in, and the percentage who attain college degrees across different income groups.⁶ In the U.S., two-thirds of low-income students attend community colleges and for-profit institutions, many of which have low completion rates. Low-income students are also more likely to delay going to college and to have breaks in enrollment, both of which lower their chances of completing their college degrees.⁷

Fifty-nine percent of Rhode Island students who graduated from high school in the Class of 2015 immediately enrolled in college, but by the third semester of college, only 46% of these high school graduates were still enrolled in college.⁸

Low-income and first-generation college students often arrive at college less academically prepared than other students. They can benefit from a wide range of academic and social supports, including summer transition programs, peer-mentored and peer-facilitated programs that offer tutoring and other academic support, learning communities that allow a group of students to enroll in two or more classes together so they can establish faculty and peer relationships that support their success, personal and career counseling, mentoring, and/or referrals to social services.^{9,10,11}

College Completion, New England Secondary School Consortium States (NESSC), 2009 Cohort



Source: *Common Data Project: 2016 annual report, school year 2014-2015*. (2016). Retrieved December 13, 2016, from <http://newenglandssc.org>

- ◆ Fifty percent of Rhode Island public high school graduates who enrolled in a two- or four-year college in 2009 earned a college diploma within six years. Rhode Island's completion rate is the lowest of all of the states in the New England Secondary School Consortium. In Rhode Island, there are large gaps in college completion between low-income and higher-income students, with 29% of low-income students completing college within six years, compared to 59% of higher-income students.¹²
- ◆ Many students who enroll in college do not complete their degree. Improving college access and completion will require that states make improvements at all points in the early education to college education system, including increasing access to high-quality preschool, implementing research-driven dropout prevention programs, aligning the K-12 education system with college and career expectations, simplifying the college admission process, making college affordable, and providing student support programs that increase college completion rates.¹³ State policies that reward colleges for meeting performance goals, transform remediation practices, encourage full-time college attendance, help students balance work and school, and support on-time graduation could further increase college completion rates.¹⁴
- ◆ In 2017, at least 15 governors, including Rhode Island's, identified college affordability as a key priority, outlining plans to control tuition rates, expand scholarships, and offer free community college and technical college.¹⁵

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Table 56.

College Enrollment and Completion, Rhode Island

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# OF STUDENTS WHO GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL IN 2015	# OF 2015 HS GRADUATES WHO ENROLLED IN COLLEGE WITHIN 6 MONTHS	# OF 2015 HS GRADUATES WHO ENROLLED IN COLLEGE WITHIN 6 MONTHS WHO PERSISTED (WERE STILL ENROLLED IN COLLEGE BY THEIR THIRD SEMESTER)	% OF 2015 HS GRADUATES WHO ENROLLED IN COLLEGE WITHIN 6 MONTHS	% OF ALL 2015 HS GRADUATES WHO WERE ENROLLED IN A THIRD SEMESTER OF COLLEGE	% OF 2015 HS GRADUATES WHO ENROLLED IN COLLEGE WITHIN 6 MONTHS OF GRADUATION WHO PERSISTED (WERE STILL IN COLLEGE BY THEIR THIRD SEMESTER)
Barrington	279	231	198	83%	71%	86%
Bristol Warren	234	149	121	64%	52%	81%
Burrillville	171	96	79	56%	46%	82%
Central Falls	210	74	42	35%	20%	57%
Charlho	298	171	138	57%	46%	81%
Coventry	384	248	196	65%	51%	79%
Cranston	762	481	355	63%	47%	74%
Cumberland	337	244	199	72%	59%	82%
East Greenwich	193	153	136	79%	70%	89%
East Providence	349	205	145	59%	42%	71%
Exeter-West Greenwich	127	79	71	62%	56%	90%
Foster-Glocester	149	92	78	62%	52%	85%
Johnston	173	103	85	60%	49%	83%
Lincoln	258	180	149	70%	58%	83%
Middletown	162	109	84	67%	52%	77%
Narragansett	117	88	72	75%	62%	82%
Newport	125	57	44	46%	35%	77%
North Kingstown	316	239	218	76%	69%	91%
North Providence	244	155	115	64%	47%	74%
North Smithfield	140	101	91	72%	65%	90%
Pawtucket	480	200	136	42%	28%	68%
Portsmouth	220	167	145	76%	66%	87%
Providence	1,469	676	441	46%	30%	65%
Scituate	112	84	73	75%	65%	87%
Smithfield	158	123	101	78%	64%	82%
South Kingstown	231	165	135	71%	58%	82%
Tiverton	125	82	68	66%	54%	83%
Warwick	657	396	316	60%	48%	80%
West Warwick	218	110	88	50%	40%	80%
Westerly	229	142	117	62%	51%	82%
Woonsocket	325	145	100	45%	31%	69%
<i>Beacon Charter High School for the Arts</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>56%</i>	<i>39%</i>	<i>70%</i>
<i>Blackstone Academy</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>61%</i>	<i>45%</i>	<i>74%</i>
<i>The Greene School</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>70%</i>	<i>45%</i>	<i>65%</i>
<i>RI Nurses Institute Middle College</i>	<i>85</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>51%</i>	<i>25%</i>	<i>49%</i>
<i>Sheila "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>28%</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>*</i>
<i>William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School</i>	<i>196</i>	<i>105</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>54%</i>	<i>41%</i>	<i>76%</i>
<i>Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center</i>	<i>208</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>62</i>	<i>48%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>62%</i>
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>2,484</i>	<i>1,095</i>	<i>719</i>	<i>44%</i>	<i>29%</i>	<i>66%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>6,780</i>	<i>4,457</i>	<i>3,624</i>	<i>66%</i>	<i>53%</i>	<i>81%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>9,994</i>	<i>5,887</i>	<i>4,564</i>	<i>59%</i>	<i>46%</i>	<i>78%</i>

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

of students who graduated from high school in 2015, # of 2015 high school graduates who enrolled in college within six months, and # of 2015 high school graduates who enrolled in college within six months and persisted (were enrolled for a third semester) are all from Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2015. Percentages may not sum exactly due to rounding.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

New Shoreham, Rhode Island School for the Deaf, and Village Green Virtual Public Charter School are not reported because there are fewer than 10 students in these cohorts. Data on Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts are not included because it graduated its first class in 2016. Data on DCYF and Paul Cuffee Charter School were not available.

*Fewer than 10 students are in this category. Actual numbers are not shown to protect student confidentiality. These numbers are still counted in four core cities, remainder of the state, and state totals.

References

- Beginning in 2009, the five state education agencies participating in the New England Secondary School Consortium (NESSC) began collecting, calculating, and reporting key data outcomes using consistent methodologies to allow comparisons. NESSC defines college completion as the percentage of the first-time college freshman cohort (i.e., students who enrolled for the first time in college who earned a high school diploma from a public high school in the state) who earn a two- or four-year college diploma within six years.
- Carnevale, A. P., Smith, N., & Strohl, J. (2013). *Recovery: Job growth and education requirements through 2020 (State report)*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce.
- U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2015. Table B23006.
- U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2015. Table S2301.
- U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2015. Table B20004.

(continued on page 189)