

# College Preparation and Access

## DEFINITION

*College preparation and access* is the percentage of Rhode Island high school seniors who graduate and immediately go on to college (i.e., enroll in a two-year or four-year college anywhere in the country in the fall of the year they graduate from high school).

## SIGNIFICANCE

Post-secondary education and/or training are increasingly critical in today's job market. Three-quarters of the job growth in the U.S. requires a post-secondary degree or certificate of some kind.<sup>1</sup> While some students will choose to participate in service learning opportunities, technical training or obtain work experience before attending college, the rate of college entry immediately after high school can be an important measure of college access across states and communities. Just over half (55%) of Rhode Island seniors who graduated from high school in 2006 went directly on to a two or four-year college the next fall, compared with 62% nationally. Rhode Island ranks 43rd in the U.S. and 6th in New England (where 1st is best).<sup>2</sup>

Many students who do enroll in college do not complete their degree. Nationally, three out of four young adults in the top income quartile earn a bachelor's degree, compared with one in ten young adults in the bottom income

quartile. Black and Hispanic youth are less likely than White youth to enroll in and complete college. These differences by race and ethnicity often are the result of differences in family education and income levels and access to rigorous K-12 educational opportunities.<sup>3,4</sup> All students, but especially low-income and traditionally underserved students, need academic, financial and social supports to increase their college enrollment and college completion rates.<sup>5,6</sup>

Higher-income students are almost three times more likely to be academically prepared to succeed in college than their low-income peers.<sup>7</sup> High schools that offer rigorous coursework, support student academic achievement, have high expectations for students, create college-going cultures, and increase access to college and financial aid counseling can improve the college enrollment and completion rates of their students. Another effective strategy for increasing college-going rates is to offer programs that provide high school students with the opportunity to enroll in college classes while still in high school.<sup>8,9,10,11</sup>

College access barriers include insufficient academic preparation, difficulty navigating the college application and financial aid process and the high cost of college relative to available financial aid.<sup>12,13</sup>



## Factors that Influence Students' Access to College

### Attending High Schools with “College-Going Cultures”

◆ Guidance and information about the college application and enrollment process is critical throughout students' high school experiences. Low-income and first-generation college students are significantly more likely to attend college when they attend high schools with strong college-going cultures, in which teachers encourage students to go to college, work to make sure that students are prepared and are involved in helping students with the college application process.<sup>14</sup>

### Taking the SATs in Junior and/or Senior Year

◆ While some colleges do not require the SATs for admission, students limit their choice of colleges when they do not take the SAT exams. In 2008, 74% of Rhode Island high school seniors reported planning to attend college, yet only 51% had taken the SATs.<sup>15,16</sup>

### Accessing Rigorous Academic Coursework

◆ Students who participate in upper-level honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses are more likely to attend selective colleges and are better prepared to succeed in college than students who do not.<sup>17</sup> During the 2007-2008 school year, 15% of Rhode Island public school seniors took at least one AP exam, compared with the national rate of 25%.<sup>18</sup>

### Completing the Application for Federal Financial Aid (FAFSA)

◆ Applying for financial aid is a critical part of the college application process for low-income students. According to a 2008 study of students in Chicago public schools, students who completed the free application for federal student aid (FAFSA) were 50% more likely to enroll in a four-year college than their peers.<sup>19</sup>

### Exploring Multiple Options for College

◆ Applying to multiple colleges increases the likelihood that students will be accepted at two-year or four-year colleges that fit their needs, interests and skills and increases the likelihood that students will succeed in college. High-achieving urban and low-income students frequently do not apply to college at all or enroll in less selective colleges and universities even when they have the qualifications to be admitted at more selective schools.<sup>20,21</sup>

Table 51.

## College Preparation and Access, Rhode Island

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL 12TH GRADE ENROLLMENT OCT. 2009	% OF 11TH GRADERS PROFICIENT IN READING, 2009	% OF 11TH GRADERS PROFICIENT IN MATH, 2009	% OF 12TH GRADERS WHO PLAN TO ATTEND COLLEGE	2009 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE	# OF 12TH GRADERS WHO FILLED OUT THE FAFSA	% OF 12TH GRADERS TAKING THE SATs
Barrington	277	95%	66%	85%	96%	116	84%
Bristol Warren	243	85%	33%	72%	85%	217	47%
Burrillville	215	73%	23%	80%	85%	113	40%
Central Falls	188	55%	7%	77%	47%	110	41%
Chariho	266	87%	41%	74%	85%	131	57%
Coventry	440	75%	27%	78%	79%	251	47%
Cranston	875	75%	23%	71%	80%	529	39%
Cumberland	342	82%	34%	70%	83%	231	51%
East Greenwich	191	71%	71%	81%	94%	120	75%
East Providence	470	61%	13%	67%	74%	290	37%
Exeter-West Greenwich	153	70%	28%	79%	87%	113	58%
Foster-Glocester	199	86%	39%	71%	88%	125	62%
Johnston	199	63%	18%	85%	70%	191	39%
Lincoln	248	83%	52%	70%	85%	166	69%
Middletown	135	73%	45%	60%	82%	89	67%
Narragansett	111	93%	54%	81%	86%	118	65%
New Shoreham	3	NA	NA	71%	100%	5	100%
Newport	132	82%	32%	62%	75%	69	57%
North Kingstown	405	84%	43%	69%	92%	218	61%
North Providence	264	77%	22%	77%	81%	198	45%
North Smithfield	135	72%	39%	77%	84%	69	69%
Pawtucket	493	62%	13%	73%	55%	423	41%
Portsmouth	239	87%	58%	69%	83%	152	62%
Providence	1,531	60%	11%	77%	66%	1,107	58%
Scituate	144	88%	42%	75%	85%	111	43%
Smithfield	207	88%	36%	68%	90%	137	64%
South Kingstown	303	85%	51%	83%	87%	187	71%
Tiverton	172	82%	31%	66%	83%	118	58%
Warwick	826	69%	20%	70%	75%	526	45%
West Warwick	215	65%	24%	72%	69%	129	45%
Westerly	238	81%	37%	78%	89%	175	76%
Woonsocket	367	61%	12%	70%	62%	179	35%
<i>Davies Career and Technical</i>	163	85%	27%	NA	59%	NA	19%
<i>DCYF</i>	12	NA	NA	NA	5%	NA	NA
<i>MET School</i>	187	55%	4%	NA	76%	NA	2%
<i>Beacon Charter</i>	57	98%	16%	NA	57%	NA	18%
<i>Blackstone Academy Charter</i>	43	78%	3%	NA	70%	NA	74%
<i>Core Cities</i>	2,926	62%	13%	NA	63%	2,017	50%
<i>Remainder of State</i>	7,300	78%	34%	NA	83%	4,696	54%
<i>Rhode Island</i>	10,688	73%	27%	74%	75%	6,713	51%

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

12th grade enrollment data (October 1, 2009), 11th Grade *New England Common Assessment Program* (NECAP) data, % of 12th graders taking the SATs and high school graduation rates data are all from the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

% of 12th graders who plan to attend college data are from Felner, R. (2008). *2007-2008 student reports of academic expectations* (high school *SALT Survey*). Rock Island, IL: National Center on Public Education and Prevention.

# of 12 graders who filled out the FAFSA data are from the Rhode Island Higher Education Assistance Authority (RIHEAA), and are based on a count of FAFSAs completed by public and private school students who were born in 1990 and who started college during the 2008-2009 school year.

11th grade NECAP reading and math proficiency rates are the percentage of NECAP test-takers who scored at the “proficient” or “proficient with distinction” levels (levels three and four) on the October 2009 *New England Common Assessment Program* (NECAP) test.

The high school graduation rate is the number of students who graduate in four years or fewer divided by the total number of students who started 9th grade in 2005-2006, adjusted for transfers in and transfers out.

The core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

Students from Little Compton attend high school in Portsmouth and students from Jamestown attend high school in North Kingstown. DCYF includes students attending DCYF alternative schools.

### References

<sup>1,5,21</sup> *Increasing college success: A road map for governors*. (2009). Washington, DC: NGA Center for Best Practices.

<sup>2</sup> The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. (n.d.). *College-going rates of high school graduates – directly from high school*. Retrieved March 22, 2010 from [www.higheredinfo.org](http://www.higheredinfo.org)

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