

College Preparation and Access

DEFINITION

College preparation and access is the percentage of Rhode Island high school seniors who graduate and go on to college (i.e., enroll in a two-year or four-year college) immediately or within six months of graduation.

SIGNIFICANCE

Between 2021 and 2031, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certificate are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring less education.¹ Between 2017 and 2021 in Rhode Island, adults with high school diplomas were three times as likely to be unemployed as those with bachelor's degrees or higher, and the median annual income for adults with high school diplomas was \$38,638, compared to \$60,216 for adults with bachelor's degrees.^{2,3}

Many students, especially low-income students, face barriers to college enrollment and success, such as insufficient academic preparation, difficulty navigating the application and financial aid processes, and the high cost of college. States can help address these barriers and improve college access by ensuring that all students have access to advanced coursework; take college entrance exams; complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); get adequate counseling and target financial aid strategically to students with the greatest needs.⁴

Students who participate in AP courses or dual or concurrent enrollment courses are likely to attend and succeed in college.^{5,6} In Rhode Island, in the 2020-2021 school year, 11% of high school students took an AP test and 49% passed the exam. In the Class of 2021, 33% of students took a dual or concurrent enrollment course and 94% earned college credits.⁷

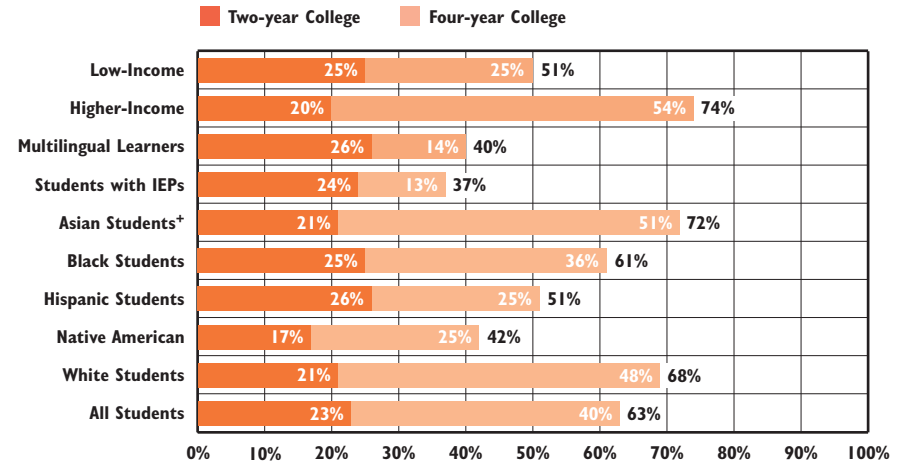
Rhode Island covers the cost for all public high school students to take the SAT during the school day in eleventh grade as a key strategy to increase college access.⁸ In 2022, 92% of 11th graders completed the SAT. Statewide, 47% of 11th graders met expectations in English language arts and 25% met expectations in math.⁹

Seniors who have completed a FAFSA by May and been accepted to a four-year college are 50% more likely to enroll than students who have not completed their FAFSA.¹⁰ During the 2022-2023 cycle, Rhode Island ranked twelfth in the U.S. for the number of high school seniors completing the FAFSA.¹¹

Rhode Island's *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* state plan includes a Post-Secondary Success Indicator that measures the percentage of students that graduate with a career and technical education industry-approved credential, college credits through dual or concurrent enrollment, successful completion of AP tests, the Seal of Biliteracy and/or the Pathway Endorsement.¹²



Immediate College Enrollment by Family Income, Race, Ethnicity, and Type of College, Class of 2022, Rhode Island



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2022. Percentages may not sum exactly due to rounding. *Data for Asian students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups.

- ◆ After increasing when the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship was made available, the college enrollment rate declined during the COVID-19 pandemic from 67% for the Class of 2019 to 61% for the Class of 2020 to 63% for the Class of 2022. There continue to be large gaps in college access, particularly four-year college enrollment, between low- and higher-income students as well as by language status and disability.¹³
- ◆ School counselors have an important role to play in setting students on a path to postsecondary success. In particular, Black students identify their school counselor as the person who had the most influence on their thinking about college.¹⁴ Rhode Island has 414 students for every school counselor, far above the recommended ratio of 250 to one.¹⁵
- ◆ For states, improving college access will require 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, improving the quality of the K-12 education system and aligning it with college admission requirements and career expectations, simplifying the college admission process, and making college affordable.¹⁶

Table 54.

College Preparation and Access, Rhode Island

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL GRADE 12 ENROLLMENT OCT. 2021	% OF GRADE 12 STUDENTS PLANNING TO ATTEND COLLEGE, 2022	% OF STUDENTS WHO FILLED OUT THE FAFSA, 2022	% OF GRADE 11 STUDENTS TAKING THE SAT DURING THE SCHOOL DAY, 2022	% OF SAT TAKERS PROFICIENT IN ELA, 2022	% OF SAT TAKERS PROFICIENT IN MATH, 2022
Barrington	249	18%	63%	97%	84%	68%
Bristol Warren	250	26%	53%	95%	72%	28%
Burrillville	171	54%	51%	94%	49%	27%
Central Falls	217	24%	28%	79%	10%	<5%
Charlton	251	61%	65%	98%	63%	36%
Coventry	352	62%	59%	95%	47%	26%
Cranston	981	44%	55%	98%	44%	19%
Cumberland	371	51%	66%	98%	57%	38%
East Greenwich	218	70%	63%	97%	85%	63%
East Providence	337	45%	49%	92%	35%	13%
Exeter-West Greenwich	133	14%	57%	98%	73%	42%
Foster-Glocester	230	23%	67%	96%	58%	26%
Johnston	178	47%	53%	97%	44%	21%
Lincoln	250	39%	68%	96%	65%	44%
Middletown	190	46%	49%	98%	60%	32%
Narragansett	138	35%	59%	92%	69%	43%
New Shoreham	NA	78%	89%	NA	NA	NA
Newport	180	26%	48%	94%	37%	17%
North Kingstown	383	52%	65%	95%	74%	56%
North Providence	297	26%	55%	98%	48%	29%
North Smithfield	152	57%	59%	97%	69%	37%
Pawtucket	634	36%	36%	83%	22%	7%
Portsmouth	223	47%	67%	92%	75%	56%
Providence	1,688	36%	53%	87%	29%	13%
Scituate	91	58%	63%	99%	62%	35%
Smithfield	181	51%	76%	97%	62%	36%
South Kingstown	237	32%	65%	87%	75%	54%
Tiverton	134	52%	57%	93%	61%	37%
Warwick	632	49%	49%	92%	50%	21%
West Warwick	216	33%	50%	83%	44%	21%
Westerly	208	11%	60%	100%	58%	35%
Woonsocket	394	54%	31%	85%	23%	6%
Beacon Charter High School	59	34%	46%	96%	49%	9%
Blackstone Academy	79	77%	80%	84%	24%	8%
Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy	92	37%	71%	95%	49%	25%
Charette Charter School	42	19%	79%	88%	8%	<5%
Paul Cuffee Charter School	64	52%	72%	90%	23%	8%
The Greene School	49	67%	71%	98%	36%	15%
Higblander Charter School	68	25%	46%	97%	23%	9%
RI Nurses Institute Middle College	49	61%	80%	98%	31%	10%
Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy	39	56%	49%	72%	8%	<5%
Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts	24	63%	88%	100%	28%	<5%
Village Green Virtual Public Charter School	55	64%	100%	96%	29%	8%
William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical Center	189	38%	60%	98%	51%	12%
DCYF	14	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center	233	65%	55%	97%	28%	7%
RI School for the Deaf	11	36%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Four Core Cities	2,933	38%	45%	85%	25%	10%
Remainder of State	7,244	43%	58%	95%	57%	33%
Rhode Island	11,244	42%	55%	92%	47%	25%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Total 12th grade enrollment is from the Rhode Island Department of Education as of October 1, 2021.

% of 12th grade students planning to attend college is from the 2021-2022 administration of *Survey Works!*, based on responses to the question, "What do you think you will do after you finish high school?" and includes students who responded that they planned to go to a community college, two-year college, or four-year college. The data are from the Rhode Island Department of Education.

The number of 12th graders completing the FAFSA is from U.S. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid, Rhode Island school-level data from the 2022-2023 cycle through June 2022. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from studentaid.ed.gov. The percentage of 12th graders completing the FAFSA is calculated by dividing the number of students completing applications into the number of 12th graders enrolled on October 1, 2021.

% of SAT takers proficient in ELA and math and % of 11th graders taking the SAT is from the Rhode Island Department of Education. % of students taking the SAT varied by district and may have impacted district results. Take caution when comparing between districts.

NA indicates that data are not available either because data were not collected or reported or because the number of students was too small to report. These students are included in the remainder of the state and state totals as appropriate.

Little Compton students attend high school in Portsmouth, and Jamestown students can choose to attend high school in Narragansett or North Kingstown.

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

References

- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023). *Employment, wages, and projected change in employment by typical entry-level education*. Retrieved April 3, 2023, from www.bls.gov
- U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017-2021. Table S2301.

(continued on page 191)