Issue Brief

Opportunity Youth in Rhode Island:
Recommendations and Resources for Reconnection

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Opportunity youth are youth and young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 who find themselves disconnected from school or work. According to national estimates, there are nearly five million opportunity youth in the U.S., just over 12% of youth and young adults. After a decade of success through targeted efforts to reduce youth disconnection, the COVID-19 pandemic turned back significant progress in school enrollment and unemployment, leaving the largest number of opportunity youth since the Great Recession.[1,2]

Research shows that school and work help youth and young adults acquire the skills, knowledge, experience, and supports they need to become productive adults. Youth who do not continue their high school education, move on to postsecondary education, or become a part of the workforce are at risk of experiencing long-term negative outcomes as they transition from adolescence to adulthood.[3] Opportunity youth can become disengaged from school and work for a variety of reasons, including physical and mental health conditions, child welfare or juvenile justice involvement, lack of access to health care, unstable housing, family responsibilities, and lack of affordable or reliable transportation.[4,5,6] There is both an individual and societal cost to youth disconnection. The disconnection of youth ages 16 to 24 results in over $93 billion in lost earnings, tax revenues, and government spending annually and over $1.6 trillion over their lifetimes.[7,8]

The period of emerging adulthood presents an opportunity window to engage young people in creative ways that tap into their potential, engage their independence, help them explore where their passions and skills intersect, and provide a foundation for their career pathway and trajectory. It is important to view this group through a lens of opportunity, possibility, and progress rather through a deficit lens.[9] **Reframing "disconnected youth" as "opportunity youth" shifts the responsibility back to the community** to create engagement pathways for connection and to address the factors that contribute to disconnection, including many barriers that are systemic and will require comprehensive reform.[10]

The Importance of Centering Youth Voice

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is committed to amplifying the voices of youth with lived experience so they can lead on policies that directly impact their lives and futures. The topics and recommendations raised in this Issue Brief were informed in part by a focus group with youth ages 16 to 24 who have lived experience in Rhode Island's child welfare system and who are actively seeking education, work, and the opportunity to inform policies for their peers and the youth who may enter the system after them.

Rhode Island's Opportunity Youth

◆ Between 2017 and 2021, 2,728 (4.3%) youth ages 16 to 19 in Rhode Island were not in school and not working. Among these youth, 60% were male and 40% were female. Sixty-nine percent of these youth were high school graduates, and 31% had not graduated from high school. In 2021, Rhode Island had the lowest percentage of teens who were not in school or working in the nation.[11]

Teens Ages 16 to 19
Not in School and Not Working

	2021
RI	3%
US	7%
National Rank*	1st
New England Rank**	1st

*1st is best; 50th is worst. **1st is best; 6th is worst.

Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org

Youth and Young Adults Ages 16 to 24
Not in School and Not Working

	2021
RI	8%
US	12%
National Rank*	5th
New England Rank**	2nd

*1st is best; 50th is worst. **1st is best; 6th is worst.

Source: Lewis, K. (2023). *Ensuring an equitable recovery: Addressing COVID-19's impact on education.* New York: Measure of America, Social Science Research Council.

◆ In 2021, 8.1% (11,500) of youth ages 16 to 24 in Rhode Island were not in school and not working. The rate was 8.3% for males and 7.9% for females. Rhode Island had one of the lowest rates of youth ages 16 to 24 not in school and not working.[12] However, rates varied by county. From 2016-2020, 9.7% of youth in Providence County, 8.9% in Kent County, and 4.9% in Washington County were disconnected.[13]

Racial and Ethnic Disparities

◆ Opportunity youth are disproportionately People of Color and face institutional racism as an entrenched barrier to success.[14]

◆ In 2020 among U.S. youth ages 16 to 24, rates of disconnection were the highest among Native American and Black youth. One in four Native American young men were not in school and not working, the highest rate of disconnection in the U.S.[15]

◆ When Asian youth are disaggregated by subgroup, we see disparities in rates of disconnection with the highest rates among Cambodian (13%) and Hmong (15%) youth.[16]

◆ Young men were more likely than young women to experience disconnection, with the highest rates among Native American and Black men.[17]

Percentage of U.S. Youth Ages 16 to 24, Not in School and Not Working, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, 2020
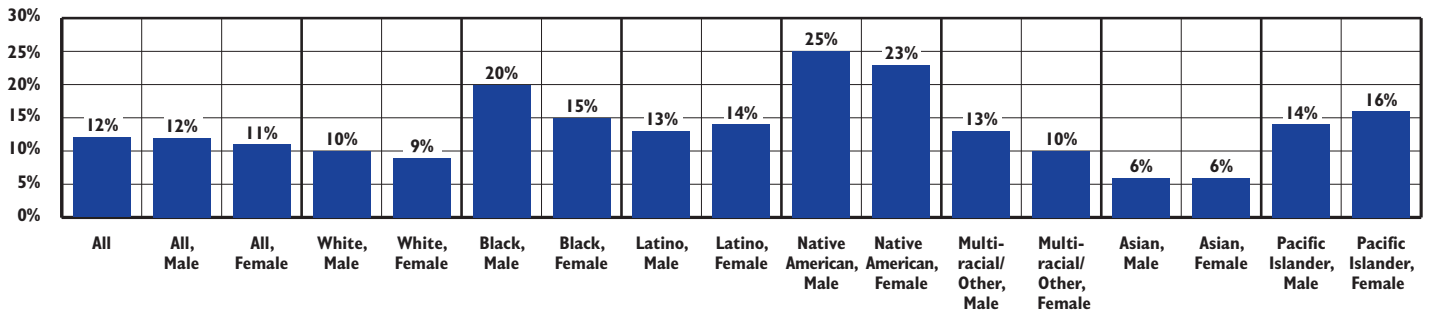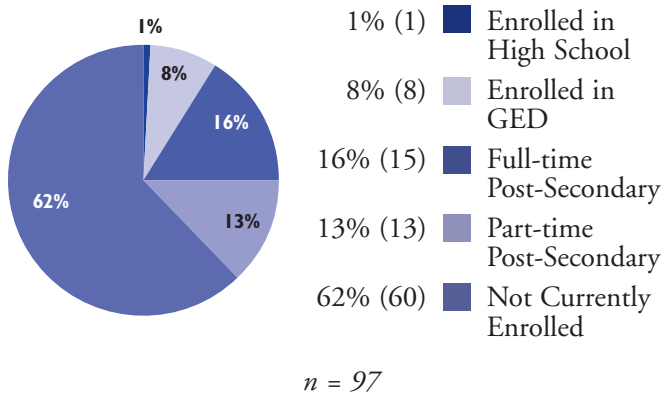

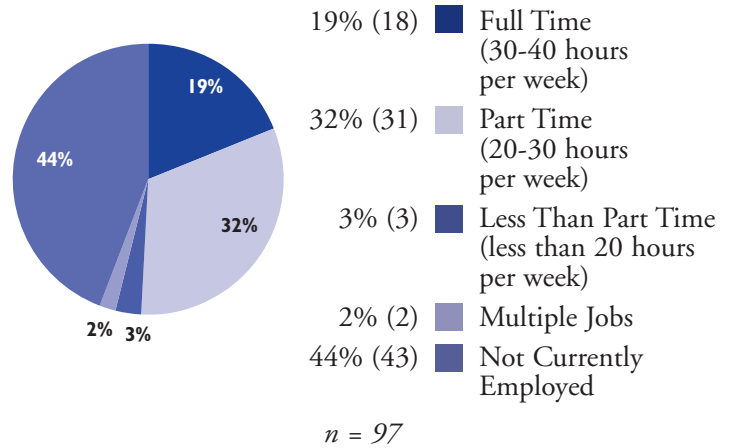Source: National Equity Atlas, Disconnected Youth, nationalequityatlas.org

Youth in the Child Welfare System

◆ Youth who age out of foster care are at risk for low educational attainment, homelessness, and unemployment.[18] Among the Class of 2022, 83% of Rhode Island students graduated high school in four years, compared to 52% of students in foster care.[19] Less than 1% of youth in foster care in Rhode Island obtain a college degree.[20] Nearly 50% of foster youth who drop out of college do so because they cannot afford to continue.[21] To combat this financial barrier, 37 states have tuition waiver programs for students who experienced foster care.[22] Rhode Island currently has a Higher Education Incentive fund but does not have a tuition waiver program.

◆ In 2018, Rhode Island established the Voluntary Extension of Care (VEC) program, allowing youth in foster care ages 18 to 21 the option of continuing to receive services. VEC helps youth in care transition to adulthood by supporting them in making decisions about housing, education, employment, and health and social services. Youth must meet education or employment requirements.[23] VEC works with the Governor's Workforce Board to connect young adults to a career pathway. In 2023, VEC began collaborating with the Community College of Rhode Island to provide an opportunity for youth to participate in CNA training with a path to employment.[24]

◆ On November 30, 2022, 97 youth ages 18 to 21 were enrolled in VEC with approved court petitions.[25]

Education for Youth in VEC

1% (1) ■ Enrolled in High School
8% (8) ■ Enrolled in GED
16% (15) ■ Full-time Post-Secondary
13% (13) ■ Part-time Post-Secondary
62% (60) ■ Not Currently Enrolled

n = 97

Employment for Youth in VEC

19% (18) ■ Full Time (30-40 hours per week)
32% (31) ■ Part Time (20-30 hours per week)
3% (3) ■ Less Than Part Time (less than 20 hours per week)
2% (2) ■ Multiple Jobs
44% (43) ■ Not Currently Employed

n = 97

Justice Engaged Youth and Young Adults

◆ The Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) operates the Rhode Island Training School, a secure facility for adjudicated youth and youth awaiting trial.[26] In 2022, the average age of youth at the Training School was 16, however, students' math and reading skills were on average at a fourth-grade level at entry. Average grade levels for math and reading increased by about one year by release.[27,28]

◆ During the 2021-2022 school year, 14 youth at the Training School either graduated with a high school diploma or earned a GED. Four youth received postsecondary education services, 11 youth completed driver's education certification, landscape design, and/or barbering training, and 69 youth completed a culinary program.[29]

◆ Making the transition from learning in secure detention back into a local school district is often difficult. In 2022, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) revised their enrollment protocols so that youth who are in secure detention remain enrolled in their local school district.[30]

◆ Mentoring programs, case managers who help youth navigate resources, transitional jobs, and paid internships help youth form connections before and during reentry that provide the best outcomes for success.[31]

Multilingual Learners and Immigrant Youth

◆ Across the U.S., the population of Multilingual Learners (MLLs), are the fastest growing group of students.[32] The number of MLL students in Rhode Island has nearly doubled (increased by 88%) from the 2011-2012 to 2021-2022 school years.[33] These students may be working multiple jobs or working third shifts while also going to school full-time, living with distant relatives or alone, or lacking basic needs.[34] Nationally, nearly one in five (18%) MLL youth ages 16 to 24 are disconnected from school or work compared to 12% of youth with English language fluency.[35]

◆ The key to engagement among MLL students is through an asset-based approach that supports their linguistic capabilities, celebrates the rich culture they bring to the classroom through materials that reflect their identities and experiences, and creates a culture where their multilingualism is viewed as a strength and educators expect success.[36]

◆ Forty percent of undocumented youth drop out of high school, compared to 8% of documented students.[37] The disconnection rate among youth ages 16 to 24 who are noncitizens is 16% compared to 12% for youth with citizenship status.[38]

◆ In 2021, legislation passed that allows undocumented students to pay the same tuition and fees as other Rhode Island residents at the state's public higher education institutions.[39]

◆ Barriers to work for immigrant youth and young adults include lack of work permits, visas, and other documentation, lack of exposure to different career paths, and lack of networking and professional communication skills, including limited English language proficiency and lack of knowledge about the professional terminology needed for applications and interviews. Targeted workforce development services including job coaching, job searching, mentorship, and peer navigation, alternative hiring models like paid work-based learning opportunities, and bridging professional gaps in networks and communication can help address these barriers.[40]

Youth With Disabilities

◆ Opportunity youth are more than three times as likely to have a disability compared to their connected peers.[41] Youth who have at least one disability have a disconnection rate of 27% compared to 11% for youth who do not have a disability.[42]

◆ Despite improvements in high school graduation rates and postsecondary school enrollment, students with disabilities are still less likely to graduate from high school and more likely to be suspended than students without disabilities.[43,44]

◆ In Rhode Island, the four-year graduation rate for the class of 2022 was 66% for students receiving special education services, compared to 87% for students not receiving these services. Some students enrolled in special education may take additional time to graduate.[45] Of the 234 Rhode Island students who graduated in five years in 2021, 43% were students receiving special education services and 24% were Multilingual Learners.[46] In 2019, *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* eligibility was extended until a student's 22nd birthday.[47]

◆ Flexible course scheduling, targeted intervention, and enabling students to take greater control of their learning and career planning drive engagement and success among this group.[48,49]

◆ Connecting to work among this population can be facilitated through the Office of Rehabilitative Services (ORS) including access to job coaching, mobile case management, peer navigation, connecting to services, and advocacy.[50] Enacting policies that create safe work environments free of discrimination and ending sub-minimum wages for youth with disabilities can help opportunity youth contribute meaningfully to their community.[51]

Pregnant and Parenting Youth

◆ Young women who are disconnected from school and work are four times more likely to become mothers than their connected peers.[52] In fact, 36% of young mothers are not in school and are not working compared to 9.8% of young women who are not parenting.[53]

◆ Pregnant and parenting students need a different array of resources to remain engaged and active in their education. They often require more than the standard four years to graduate from high school and college, although their grades are comparable to (and in many cases higher than) their non-pregnant and non-parenting peers, particularly at the college level.[54,55,56]

◆ In order to succeed in college, this student population needs financial resources, on-campus child care and other affordable child care options as well as a campus culture that is supportive and not stigmatizing.[57,58] Nationally, over the past 20 years, the number of on-campus child care centers has decreased by 25%.[59] Peer-mentoring supports, family responsive attendance policies, and flexible course scheduling can add to a sense of belonging and well-being among pregnant and parenting students and support degree completion.[60,61]

◆ The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training program (SNAP E&T) can reduce barriers to education by helping student parents who need to meet work requirements for food benefit eligibility.[62]

◆ Adequate paid family leave, high-quality affordable child care, and family-friendly work polices such as flexible work from home hours would help support pregnant and parenting young adults in the workforce.[63,64]

Youth and Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness

◆ One third (33%) of opportunity youth live in poverty. They are about five times as likely to struggle with living independently compared to connected youth.[65] Not earning a high school diploma or GED is one of the most significant risk factors for homelessness among young adults.[66]

◆ Homelessness often has a negative impact on education, employment, and health outcomes for youth and young adults. Homeless youth are more likely than their peers to be chronically absent, face disciplinary actions, be held back, and drop out of school. They are more vulnerable to pregnancy, substance use/misuse, mental health problems, bullying, and suicide than youth with stable housing.[67,68,69,70]

◆ In 2022, 170 youth or young adults stayed at an emergency shelter, or transitional housing facility in Rhode Island, including three unaccompanied minors, 115 unaccompanied young adults ages 18-24, 30 parenting young adults, and 22 young adults who were sheltered with their parents.[71]

◆ There are three primary causes of homelessness among youth and young adults -- family conflict, residential instability resulting from foster care and institutional placements, and economic problems.[72,73] Engaging youth who have experienced homelessness in school and work goes beyond just meeting basic needs, but should also cultivate an environment of safety and stability where they are able to thrive. This begins with creating culturally responsive and affirming programs, permanent supportive housing, and information and coaching on what opportunities are best suited for individual youth.[74]

The Impact of COVID-19 on Youth Disconnection

◆ During the COVID-19 pandemic, youth were navigating the transition to adulthood with record unemployment, housing instability, educational disruption, and mental health crises that continue to impact outcomes for youth.[75] Youth were experiencing mental health challenges before the pandemic, but since the onset of the pandemic and the current aftermath, the number of youth experiencing mental health related issues has remained at an unprecedented level both nationally and in Rhode Island. This significantly impacts how youth engage in their classrooms.[76,77,78] Students with the highest levels of chronic absence were also hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.[79] Nationally, college enrollments in 2021 declined as overall costs increased and more students decided not to continue on to postsecondary education.[80]

Chronic Absence

◆ Chronic absence from school (missing 10% or more of the school year for a 180-day school year) is an early indicator of disconnection and an ideal target for intervention. Students who are frequently absent from school miss critical academic and social learning opportunities and are at risk of disengagement from school, academic failure, and dropping out.[81] Chronic absence in the sixth grade is one of three early warning signs that a student is likely to drop out of high school.[82]

Chronic Absenteeism Rates Are Higher Across All Grade Levels After the COVID-19 Pandemic

Legend: 2018-2019, 2022-2023

Grades K-5: 14%, 25%
Grades 6-8: 18%, 29%
Grades 9-12: 27%, 35%
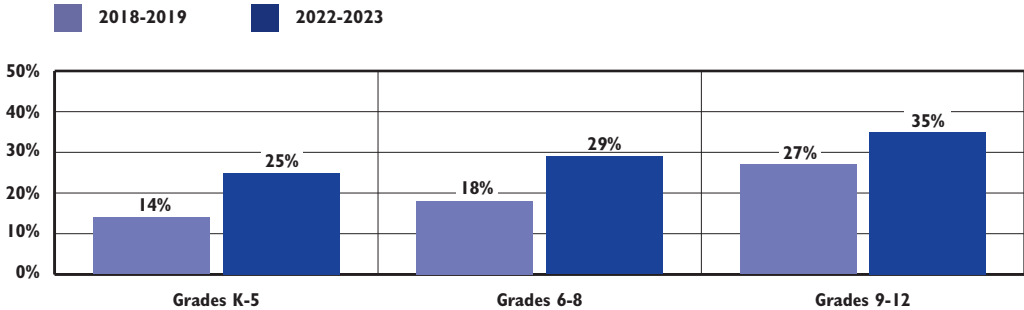
Source: Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council (2023). Empty Seats: Enrollment and Chronic Absenteeism in Rhode Island's Public K-12 Schools.

◆ In Rhode Island during the 2021-2022 school year, Native American (51%), Hispanic (49%), and Black (39%) K-12 students had higher rates of chronic absence than Asian (27%) and white (27%) students. Rates were also higher for Multilingual Learners (46%), low-income students (50%), and students with disabilities (43%) than for all students (35%).[83] The chronic absence rate for all K-12 students in the 2021-2022 school year was 35%, almost double the chronic absence rate before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2018-2019 (19%).[84]

◆ Students miss school for a variety of reasons, including physical and mental health conditions, substance use/misuse, lack of access to health care, unstable housing, child welfare or juvenile justice involvement, work or family responsibilities, and lack of affordable and reliable transportation. Students may also stay away from school to avoid bullying, harassment or embarrassment associated with lack of clean/appropriate clothing, literacy issues, or other academic problems.[85,86,87]

◆ Partnering with students, families, and community partners can help schools re-engage chronically absent students and address lost learning opportunities.[88]

Multiple Pathways to Graduation

◆ Rhode Island requires school attendance until age 18. Rhode Island students over age 16 may obtain a waiver from the attendance requirement if they have an alternative learning plan for obtaining a diploma. Plans can include independent study, private instruction, community service, or online coursework and must be developed in consultation with the student, school counselor, school principal, and at least one parent or guardian. Alternative learning plans must be approved by the district superintendent.[89]

◆ Programs and schools that enable students to acquire work-based skills and/or college credits while working toward their high school degrees can improve high school graduation rates and better prepare students for college completion and careers.[90]

◆ Opportunities for young people to explore other pathways to completing high school diploma requirements in non-traditional settings that include education, hands-on job training, counseling, mentoring, leadership development, and apprenticeship opportunities that build credit toward degree completion increase engagement and have high completion rates.[91,92,93]

High School Graduation Rate

◆ The Rhode Island four-year graduation rate for the Class of 2022 was 83%. The lowest rates were among Multilingual Learners, students receiving special education services, students in foster care, students experiencing homelessness, low-income students, and Hispanic and Native American students.[94]

Rhode Island Four-Year High School Graduation and Dropout Rates, by Student Subgroup, Class of 2022

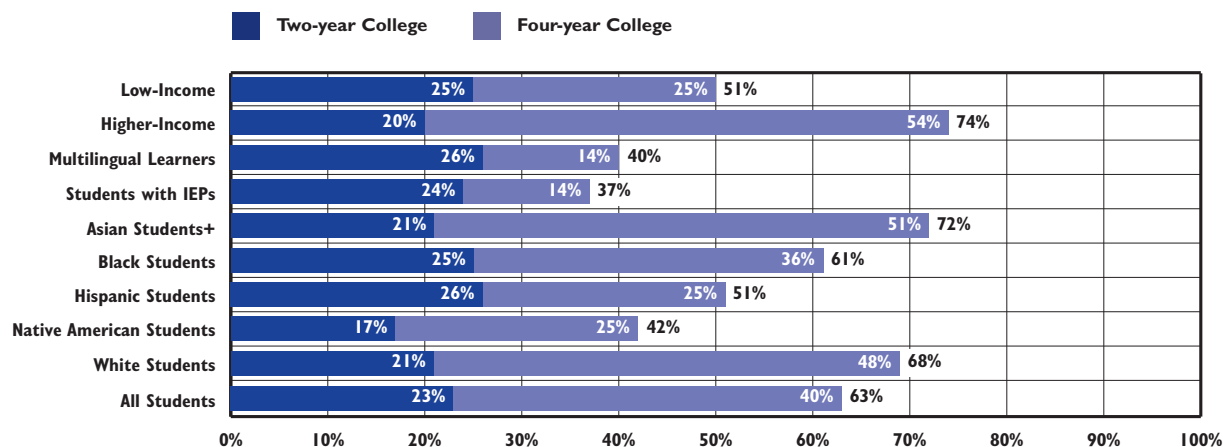| YEAR	COHORT SIZE	DROPOUT RATE	% COMPLETED GED	% OF STUDENTS STILL IN SCHOOL	FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATE
Female Students	5,405	7%	1%	5%	87%
Male Students	5,906	12%	1%	7%	80%
Multilingual Learners/ English Learners	**1,216**	**24%**	**<1%**	**9%**	**68%**
Students Receiving Special Education Services	**1,794**	**14%**	**2%**	**18%**	**66%**
Students Not Receiving Special Education Services	9,527	9%	1%	4%	87%
Low-Income Students	**5,992**	**14%**	**1%**	**8%**	**76%**
Higher-Income Students	5,329	4%	1%	3%	92%
Students in Foster Care	**66**	**29%**	**3%**	**17%**	**52%**
Homeless Students	**207**	**24%**	**2%**	**10%**	**64%**
CTE Concentrators	3,443	5%	1%	3%	92%
Asian Students	336	2%	0%	5%	92%
Black Students	1,055	12%	<1%	8%	80%
Hispanic Students	**3,151**	**14%**	**1%**	**8%**	**77%**
Native American Students	**99**	**27%**	**0%**	**4%**	**69%**
White Students	6,220	7%	1%	4%	87%
ALL STUDENTS	**11,321**	**10%**	**1%**	**6%**	**83%**

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2022. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Data for Asian students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups.

◆ Adopting student-centered learning practices at the high school level encourages deeper engagement by personalizing learning, allowing students to take ownership over their work, and pacing learning to match the student's mastery of the content.[95] High-quality postsecondary and workforce engagement opportunities can also increase high school graduation rates and college and career readiness.[96] Among the Class of 2022, the four-year high school graduation rate for students enrolled in career and technical education (CTE) programs was 92%, compared to 80% for non CTE concentrators.[97]

College Preparation, Enrollment, and Completion

◆ Between 2021 and 2031, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certificate are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring less education, yet only 37% of Rhode Island adults ages 25 and 64 have a bachelor's degree or higher.[98,99]

◆ Many students, especially low-income students, face barriers to college enrollment and success, such as insufficient academic preparation, difficulty navigating the applications and financial aid processes, and the high cost of college.[100]

◆ Completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a key marker for both college enrollment and completion. Vulnerable student groups like youth experiencing homelessness and youth exiting foster care may have difficulty completing the FAFSA. Although the *FAFSA Simplification Act* was enacted to remove these barriers, implementation has lagged at the federal level.[101]

◆ The Rhode Island Promise Scholarship made college more affordable and accessible to students by allowing students coming out of high school to attend CCRI for two years for free. More recently, legislation was passed to create a Rhode Island Hope Scholarship pilot program at Rhode Island College which provides a two-year scholarship covering tuition and fees for eligible juniors and seniors.[102,103,104]

◆ 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, disability, and race/ethnicity.[105]

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

■ Two-year College   ■ Four-year College

Group	Two-year College	Four-year College	Total
Low-Income	25%	25%	51%
Higher-Income	20%	54%	74%
Multilingual Learners	26%	14%	40%
Students with IEPs	24%	14%	37%
Asian Students+	21%	51%	72%
Black Students	25%	36%	61%
Hispanic Students	26%	25%	51%
Native American Students	17%	25%	42%
White Students	21%	48%	68%
All Students	23%	40%	63%

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.

◆ Fifty-eight percent of Rhode Island public high school graduates who enrolled in a two- or four-year college in 2015 earned a college diploma within six years.[106]

◆ In Rhode Island, there are large gaps in college completion between low-income and higher-income students, with 43% of low-income students completing college within six years, compared to 75% of higher-income students. There are also large disparities by race and ethnicity, language status, and disability.[107]

Unemployment

◆ Limited educational attainment is a barrier to sustained employment. Between 2017 and 2021 in Rhode Island, adults without a high school diploma were more than three times as likely to be unemployed as those with a bachelor's degree.[108]

◆ Between 2017 and 2021 in Rhode Island, 10.4% of adults without a high school diploma were unemployed compared to 6.5% of adults with a high school diploma and 3.1% with a bachelor's degree or higher.[109] During that same period, the median annual income for adults without a high school diploma was $30,340, compared to $38,638 for adults with a high school diploma and $60,216 for adults with a bachelor's degree.[110]

◆ In 2022, youth ages 16-24 had the highest unemployment rate across age groups at 8.9% compared to the overall unemployment rate of 3.5%. Young men between the ages of 16 to 24 are more likely to be unemployed (11.2%) than young women of the same age group (6.8%).[111]

Workforce Development

◆ One of the most impactful ways for opportunity youth to engage with and contribute to their communities is by connecting to the workforce. Workforce development programs that outline career pathways that prepare youth for the job market beyond immediate lower wage positions not only improve their sense of self-security, self-sufficiency, and belonging, but also contribute to the growth of our economy.[112]

◆ Early work experience during the teen years improves youth mental health, well-being, and school attendance and increases productivity, employability, and wages into adulthood.[113] Summer work and internship programs may increase college aspirations and preparation for future employment.[114] In 2017, Rhode Island launched PrepareRI, which aimed to close the gap between what youth learn in school and what they need to be prepared for higher-income job opportunities. The PrepareRI Internship Program provided paid summer internships for high school juniors and provided opportunities for more than 1,282 students across the state from 2017 to 2021.[115]

◆ Expanding work-based learning opportunities can help more youth in Rhode Island successfully transition into college and careers. These types of programs can help to motivate students, teach them critical skills, connect them with mentors and positive adult role models, and help them to make informed decisions about their future. Many work-based learning programs allow youth to receive school credit and/or earn money while gaining important workplace experience. In Rhode Island, the Governor's Workforce Board promotes work-based learning opportunities including internships, service-learning programs, school-based enterprise opportunities, industry projects, and apprenticeships.[116]

◆ Apprenticeship programs are an effective program model for opportunity youth because they combine paid work with education as well as mentorship opportunities that allow youth to gain structured hands-on learning without having to choose between school or work. Apprenticeships also have structural benchmarks that include wage increases as new skills are developed and mastered that incentivize advancement.[117,118]

◆ In 2023, Rhode Island passed the *Apprenticeship Pathways to Earning a Bachelor's Degree Act* which requires the University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, and the Community College of Rhode Island to create plans for "nontraditional pathways" to implement apprenticeship-for-credit programs beginning in the 2024 academic year.[119]

◆ **Provide access to high-quality, affordable early childhood education** to prepare children for academic success and reduce disparities by income and race.

◆ **Provide equitable access to high-quality K–12 education** by ensuring that schools that serve low-income students and Students of Color have adequate funding and amend the Rhode Island Constitution so all Rhode Islanders must be provided with an education that is adequate and that this right is judicially enforceable.

◆ **Expand access to safe, affordable, high-quality out-of-school time programs and recreational activities** by creating a dedicated funding stream to support these programs.

◆ **Establish attendance teams** in all schools to monitor students' attendance, identify barriers to attendance among individual students, and take action before they are considered chronically absent or truant.

◆ **Strengthen early-warning systems** to identify youth who are at-risk of not graduating and connect them to needed academic and social supports.

◆ **Ensure implementation of the** *Trauma-Informed Schools Act* which requires all administrators, teachers, and staff in every Rhode Island public school receive trauma-informed training that includes effective approaches for addressing student trauma and helping to create positive student-teacher relationships, improve students' sense of belonging, build safe schools, and increase academic outcomes.

◆ **Ensure that flexible learning experiences are available** that allow young people to explore pathways to completing high school diploma requirements in non-traditional settings that include education, hands-on job training, counseling, mentoring, and leadership development, and apprenticeship opportunities that build credit toward degree completion.

◆ **Increase access to youth development programs**, such as mentoring programs, which help youth form relationships with supportive adults and contribute to their community.

◆ **Provide equitable access to high-quality employment training opportunities**, including internships, apprenticeships, and career and technical education programs.

◆ **Offer job locating and training support** for youth of working age (14+).

◆ **Prioritize funding** for early college and career readiness programs.

◆ **Increase the supply of affordable housing** to reduce housing insecurity, and amend the application process for young adults seeking housing without credit scores or work histories.

◆ **Create a Tuition Waiver Program** for current and former foster youth to remove the financial barrier to obtaining a postsecondary degree.

◆ **Improve the financial aid process for homeless and foster care youth** by supporting the enactment of the *Higher Education for Homeless and Foster Youth Act (HEASHFY)* and the *Fostering Success in Higher Education Act (FSHE)*.

◆ **Create a Homeless and Foster Student Liaison position** at Rhode Island public higher education institutions to inform current and prospective students about financial aid and other assistance available to homeless youth and current and former foster youth.

◆ **Support pregnant and parenting students** by making on-campus child care and other affordable child care options available as well as creating a campus culture that is supportive and not stigmatizing for all parents, and especially lactating parents.

◆ **Promote targeted workforce development services for Multilingual Learners and immigrant youth and young adults** including job coaching, job searching, mentorship, and peer navigation.

◆ **Provide transportation** to and from education and work opportunities for opportunity youth who cite transportation as a barrier to continuing their programs.

Programs that offer work-based learning opportunities; provide meaningful, early, paid work experiences; and incorporate adult mentoring with youth development opportunities address the root causes of inequity and decrease the likelihood of youth disconnection.[120,121] Here are some examples of such programs:

College Unbound: A Bachelor's Degree program for returning adult learners who have faced significant barriers to attending college. They also operate a Prison Education Program designed to increase post-secondary graduation rates for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated adult learners.
- (401) 414-7536
- www.collegeunbound.edu/

Comprehensive Community Action Program (CCAP): CCAP's Learn to Earn Employment, Training, and Education Programs provide youth and young adults ages 14 to 24 free education, work readiness/training, and job placement assistance as well as case management to help them reach their education and career goals.
- (401) 467-9610
- www.comcap.org/services/education-job-training/

Mentor Rhode Island: A network of 53 mentoring programs in 37 Rhode Island cities and towns that serves youth in school-, community-, and site-based mentoring programs, Mentor Rhode Island matches youth who may be displaced, seeking supportive adult relationships, or have been involved in the Juvenile Justice system with positive adult mentors.
- (401) 732-7700
- www.mentorri.org/

Nowell Academy: A charter school designed for overage and under-credited youth who are pregnant, parenting, or underserved to earn a high school diploma in a non-traditional setting and develop skills for postsecondary education and career success.
- (401) 751-0405
- www.nowellacademy.org/

PrepareRI: Creates a connected system for college and career readiness, with supports to reengage opportunity youth that get disconnected from the system including internship, career and technical, and apprenticeship opportunities.
- www.prepare-ri.org/

Teen Focus: Operated by Adoption Rhode Island and funded through DCYF, Teen Focus is a support program that assists youth and young adults with child welfare involvement make the transition to adulthood through connecting education pathways, life skills trainings, employment, and building a network post-care. (Referrals made by DCYF/ RI Family Court)
- (401) 865-6000
- www.adoptionri.org/youth-young-adult-services/

Works Wonders®: A nationally recognized and independently evaluated career readiness program operated by Foster Forward, Works Wonders® connects youth ages 14 to 26 who are currently, formerly, or are at-risk of involvement with foster care, juvenile justice or homelessness with skilled training, paid work opportunities, and career coaching.
- (401) 438-3900
- www.fosterforward.net/works-wonders

Year Up: Year Up offers youth and young adults ages 18 to 29 who have a high school diploma or GED and may experience barriers to accessing education and job opportunities an alternative to the traditional college-to-career pathway with hands-on skills-based job training.
- (401) 421-7819
- www.yearup.org/locations/ri-providence

YouthBuild Preparatory Academy: A workforce and career development program for youth ages 16 to 24 who may not have obtained a high school diploma that provides education, training, pre-apprenticeship certifications, and leadership development.
- (401) 273-7528
- www.youthbuildprov.org/

References

[1,12,16,35,38,42,53] Lewis, K. (2023). *Ensuring an Equitable Recovery: Addressing Covid-19's Impact on Education.* New York: Measure of America, Social Science Research Council.

[2] Lewis, K. (2021). A decade undone: 2021 update. Brooklyn, NY: Measure of America.

[3,120] Burd-Sharps, S & Lewis, K. (2018). More than a million reasons for hope: Youth disconnection in America today. Brooklyn, NY: Measure of America.

[4,85] Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (2016). The relationship between school attendance and health: Health policy snapshot. Retrieved from www.rwjf.org

[5,81,86] Humm Patnode, A., Gibbons, K., & Edmunds, R. (2018). Attendance and chronic absenteeism: Literature review. Saint Paul, MN: University of Minnesota, College of Education and Human Development, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement.

[6,87] Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2012). The importance of being in school: A report on absenteeism in the nation's public schools. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University, Center for Social Organization of Schools.

[7,113,121] More than just pocket money: Why the surge in youth unemployment should concern us all. (2020). Washington, DC: Urban Alliance.

[8] Opportunity Nation. (n.d.) Youth disconnection. Retrieved March 23, 2023, from www.opportunitynation.org

[9] Youth.GOV. (n.d.). *Opportunity youth.* Retrieved from youth.gov

[10] Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions. (2024). *Who are opportunity youth?* Retrieved from aspencommunitysolutions.org

[11] U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017-2021. Table B14005.

[13] Measure of America. (2023). *Youth disconnection by county.* Retrieved from www.measureofamerica.org/DYinteractive/

[14] Lewis, K. (2020). A decade undone: Youth disconnection in the age of coronavirus. Brooklyn, NY: Measure of America

[15,17] National Equity Atlas. (n.d.). *Disconnected youth.* Retrieved from nationalequityatlas.org

[18] Rosenberg, R. & Abbott, S. (n.d.). Supporting older youth beyond age 18: Examining data and trends in extended foster care. Washington, DC: Child Trends.

[19,45,94,97] Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2022 four-year cohort graduation rates.

[20] Ramsay, A. & Sheppard, S. (2021). *Fostering success: Policy proposals for improving higher education outcomes among Rhode Island's foster youth.* Social Science Institute for Research, Education, and Policy, University of Rhode Island.

[21] Tucker, L.P., Hanson, D., Pergamit, M., Norwitt, J., & Gedo, S. (2023). *Foster care, postsecondary education, and the need for financial aid.* Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

[22] Bustillos, S., Watt, T., & Norton, C. (2022). *Tuition waiver programs for students with experience in foster care: Policy and practice recommendations.* CA: John Burton Advocates for Youth.

[23] Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. (n.d.). Youth Development Services and Voluntary Extension of Care Program. Retrieved from www.dcyf.ri.gov

[24] Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. (2023). Division of Family Services (DFS)

[25] Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Voluntary Extension of Care Program Data, November 30, 2022.

[26] Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. (n.d.) Division of Youth Development: Program mission. Retrieved March 24, 2023, from dcyf.ri.gov

[27] Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST), 2008-2022.

[28,29] Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Training School, Education Services, 2021-2022.

[30] Rhode Island Department of Education. (2022). *Revised enrollment protocols to better serve the students in DCYF care.* Commissioner's Advisories.

[31] O'Sullivan, K., Spangler, D., Showalter, T., & Bennett, R. (2020). Job training for youth with justice involvement: A toolkit. National Youth Employment Coalition.

[32] Tung, R. (2013). Innovations in educational equity for English language learners. Voices in Urban Education (VUE), Summer 2013, 2-5.

[33] Rhode Island Department of Education, 2011-2012 through 2020-2021 school years.

[34] Cardoza, K. (2019). How schools are responding to migrant children. Education Week. Retrieved February 2, 2023, from www.edweek.org

[36] Villalobos, J. (2020). An asset-based approach to support ELL success. Retrieved February 2, 2023, from www.ascd.org

[37] Manspile, E., Atwell , M. N., & Bridgeland, J. M. (2021). Immigrant students and English learners: Challenges faced in high school and postsecondary education. Retrieved February 21, 2023, from eric.ed.gov/

[39] Rhode Island General Laws, Section 16-59-9.3

[40] Vanelli, L. (2022). *Roadblocks to workforce inclusion for young adult immigrants: Charting the path forward.* New York, NY: Upwardly Global

[41,52,65] American Public Health Association (APHA). (2023). Creating the healthiest nation: Opportunity youth. Washington D.C.: APHA Health Equity Fact Sheets, Briefs, Reports and Infographics.

[43] Students with disabilities graduating from high school and entering postsecondary education: In brief. (2017). Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.

[44] Harper, K., Ryberg, R., & Temkin, D. (2019). Black students and students with disabilities remain more likely to receive out-of-school suspensions, despite overall declines. Bethesda, MD: Child Trends.

[46] Rhode Island Department of Education. (2019). *IDEA Eligibility Extended to Age 22.* Commissioner's Field Memos.

[47] Rhode Island Department of Education, 2016-2017 cohort five- and six-year cohort graduation rates.

[48] Lunsmann, C.J. (2023). *Flexible online education for students with disabilities.* Retrieved from www.umgc.edu

[49] Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities at Rhode Island College. (n.d.) *Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction.* Retrieved from www.w3.ric.edu/sherlockcenter

[50,64,74] Duso, M., Adekunle, S., Barnett, S, Bello, F, Chaplin, B., Germano, A., Medina, J., Olubowale, G., Oshinkanlu, E.,Reis, T., Yim, S. (2022). *There's No Place Like Home: A Transformative Coordinated Community Plan to Eradicate Homelessness Among Youth & Young Adults in Rhode Island*

[51,112] Mendoza, M.J. (2022). *After the storm policy recommendations to reconnect opportunity youth during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.* Washington, D.C.: Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions.

[54,57,60,62] Anderson, T. & Green, A.R. (2022). *Roadmap for Change to Support Pregnant and Parenting Students Putting Student-Parent Families at the Center of Recommendations for Practice, Policy, Research, and Investment.* Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute: Student-parent action through research knowledge.

[55] Cruse, L.R., Holtzman, T., Gault, B., Croom, D. & Polk, P. (2019). *Parents in college by the numbers.* Washington, D.C.: Institute for Women's Policy Research.

[56,58,61] Lewis, N.L. & Polk, P. (2021). *Higher education and student parent supports: The barriers, challenges, and opportunities.* Washington, D.C.: Generation Hope.

[63] Boyens, C., Karpman, M., & Smalligan, J. (2022). *Access to paid leave is lowest among workers with the greatest needs.* Washington, DC: The Urban Institute

[66] RI Youth Action Board. (2022). *Executive Summary: There's No Place Like Home: A Transformative Coordinated Community Plan to Eradicate Homelessness Among Youth & Young Adults in Rhode Island.*

[67,72] Ingram, E. S., Bridgeland, J. M., Reed, B., & Atwell, M. (2016). Hidden in plain sight: Homeless students in America's public schools. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises & Hart Research Associates.

[68,73] Fernandes-Alcantara, A. L. (2019). Runaway and homeless youth: Demographics and programs. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.

[69] SchoolHouse Connection. (2021). Student homelessness: Lessons from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). Retrieved April 2, 2023, from www.schoolhouseconnection.org

[70] Alone without a home: A national review of state laws affecting unaccompanied youth. (2019). Washington, DC: National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty and The National Network for Youth.

[71] Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness, 2022.

[75] Lewis, K. (2022) *A Disrupted Year: How the Arrival of Covid-19 Affected Youth Disconnection.* New York: Measure of America, Social Science Research Council.

[76] The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2022). 2022 kids count data book: State trends in children well-being.

[77] Protecting youth mental health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory. (2021). U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General.

References *(continued)*

[78] AAP-ACAP-CHA Declaration of a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health. (2021). Retrieved October 11, 2022 from www.aap.org.

[79] Attendance Works and Everyone Graduates Center. (2021). *Chronic absence to map interrupted schooling, instructional loss, and educational inequity: Insights from school year 2017-18 data.* Retrieved from www.attendanceworks.org

[80,101] School House Connection. (2022). *"Working harder just to be seen and heard:" Barriers to financial aid for homeless and foster youth.* Retrieved from www.schoolhouseconnection.org

[81] Humm Patnode, A., Gibbons, K., & Edmunds, R. (2018). *Attendance and chronic absenteeism: Literature review.* Saint Paul, MN: University of Minnesota, College of Education and Human Development, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement.

[82] Attendance Works. (2014). The attendance imperative: How states can advance achievement by reducing chronic absence. Retrieved January 25, 2022, from www.attendanceworks.org

[83,84] Rhode Island Department of Education, 2018-2019 and 2021-2022 school years.

[88] Chang, H. N., Bauer, L., & Byrnes, V. (2018). *Data matters: Using chronic absence to accelerate action for student success.* Retrieved from www.attendanceworks.org

[89] Rhode Island General Law 16-19-1.

[90] Jerald, C., Campbell, N. & Roth, E. (2017). High schools of the future: How states can accelerate high school redesign.

[91] American Youth Policy Forum. (2017). *Supporting pathways to long term success for systems involved youth: Lessons learned.* Retrieved from www.aypf.org

[92] McCausland , J., (2018). *The forgotten population: Over-age and under-credited students.* Retrieved from www.ajeforum.com

[93] National Mentoring Resource Center. (2022). *Workforce development guide for opportunity youth.* Washington D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs.

[95] *Centered on results: Assessing the impact of student centered learning.* (2015). Quincy, MA: Nellie Mae Education Foundation.

[96] DePaoli, J. L., Balfanz, R., Bridgeland, J., Atwell, M., & Ingram, E. S. (2017) *Building a grad nation: Progress and challenge in raising high school graduation rates.*

[98] 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

[99] U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017-2021. Table B23006.

[100] Miller, A., Valle, K., Engle, J., & Cooper, M. (2014). Access to attainment: An access agenda for 21st century college students. Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy

[102] Rhode Island Council on Postsecondary Education. (2017). *Rhode Island promise scholarship program: Policies and procedures.* Retrieved from www.riopc.edu

[103] Rhode Island General Laws, Section 16-113-6

[104] Rhode Island College. (2023). *Hope scholarship eligibility requirements.* Retrieved from www.ric.edu

[105] Rhode Island Department of Education, 2022.

[106,107] New England Secondary School Consortium. (2022). *Common Data Project: 2022 annual report, school year 2020-2021.* Retrieved from www.newenglandssc.org

[108,109] U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2016-2020. Table S2301.

[110] U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017-2021. Table B20004.

[111] Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. (2022). *States: Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by sex, race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, and intermediate age, 2022 annual averages.* Retrieved from www.bls.gov

[114] Li, Y., Jackson-Spieker, K., Modestino, A.S., Kessler, J.B., & Heller, S.B. (2022). The promise of summer youth employment programs: Lessons from randomized evaluations.

[115] *PrepareRI 2.0 Action Plan.* (2022). RIOPC, RIDE, & Governor's Workforce Board.

[116] Workforce Guidance. (2018). Cranston, RI: Governor's Workforce Board.

[117] Koller, V., van Docto, C., Wolff, K., Bennett, V. (2023). *Promising approaches for connecting opportunity youth to registered apprenticeships.* Jobs for the Future: Center for Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning.

[118] Apprenticeship RI. (n.d.). *What is apprenticeship?* Retrieved from www.apprenticeshipri.org

[119] Allen, C. (2023, October 13). New law: R.I. public colleges must plan for apprenticeships. *Providence Business News.*

[120] The White House Council for Community Solutions. (2012). *Final report: Community solutions for opportunity youth.* Washington, D.C.: Corporation for National and Community Service.