

# 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 2019 and 2029, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certificate are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring less education.<sup>1</sup> Between 2015 and 2019 in Rhode Island, adults with high school diplomas were almost three times more likely to be unemployed as those with bachelor's degrees or higher, and the median annual income for adults with high school diplomas was \$36,009, compared to \$56,642 for adults with bachelor's degrees.<sup>2,3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup>

Students who participate in AP courses are likely to attend and succeed in college.<sup>5</sup> In 2020, 6,398 Rhode Island public school students took an AP course and 41% of twelfth graders took an AP exam, more than double in 2010 and above the national average.<sup>6,7</sup>

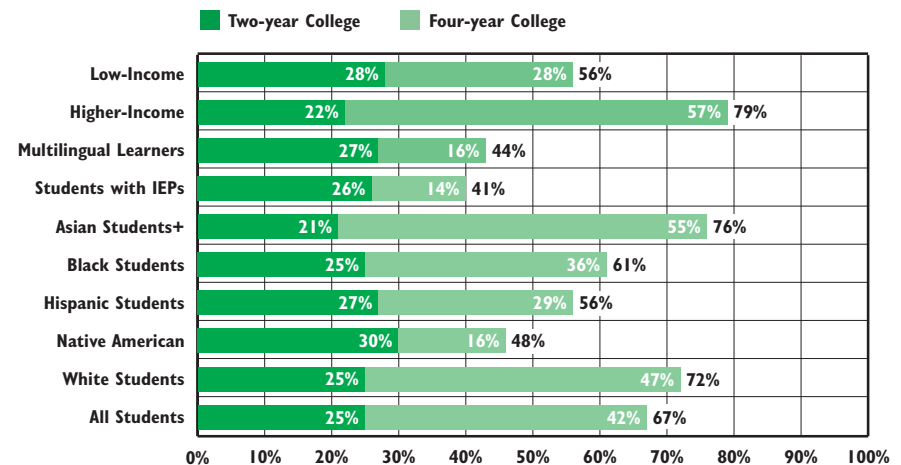
Rhode Island covers the cost for all public high school students to take the SAT during the school day in eleventh grade as a key strategy to increase college access.<sup>8</sup> In 2019, 95% of 11th graders completed the SAT. Statewide, 51% of 11th graders met expectations in English language arts and 31% met expectations in math.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup> During the 2020-2021 cycle, Rhode Island ranked fifth in the U.S. for the number of high school seniors completing the FAFSA.<sup>11</sup>

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, and/or successful completion of AP tests. Starting with the Class of 2021, this indicator will be expanded to include the Seal of Biliteracy and the Pathway Endorsement.<sup>12</sup>



**Immediate College Enrollment by Family Income, Race, Ethnicity, and Type of College, Class of 2019, Rhode Island**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2019. 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.

◆ Sixty-seven percent of Rhode Island students who graduated from high school in the Class of 2019 immediately enrolled in college. However, there are large gaps in college access, particularly four-year college enrollment, between low- and higher-income students as well as by race and ethnicity, language status, and disability. Compared to the class of 2016, before the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship was available, the overall college enrollment rate has increased from 59% to 67%, the two-year college enrollment rate has increased from 16% to 25%, and the four-year college enrollment rate has decreased from 43% to 42%.<sup>13</sup>

◆ 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.<sup>14</sup> Rhode Island has 420 students for every school counselor, far above the recommended ratio of 250 to one.<sup>15</sup>

◆ 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

Table 55. College Preparation and Access, Rhode Island

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL GRADE 12 ENROLLMENT OCT. 2019	% OF GRADE 12 STUDENTS PLANNING TO ATTEND COLLEGE, 2020	% OF STUDENTS WHO FILLED OUT THE FAFSA, 2020
Barrington	333	*	70%
Bristol Warren	243	24%	55%
Burrillville	198	64%	56%
Central Falls	196	46%	43%
Chariho	243	64%	67%
Coventry	386	59%	63%
Cranston	873	47%	58%
Cumberland	357	60%	68%
East Greenwich	175	*	68%
East Providence	332	62%	56%
Exeter-West Greenwich	142	57%	70%
Foster-Glocester	179	40%	60%
Johnston	255	54%	59%
Lincoln	228	75%	67%
Middletown	163	62%	64%
Narragansett	105	*	62%
New Shoreham	15	73%	67%
Newport	133	36%	54%
North Kingstown	370	63%	68%
North Providence	266	65%	72%
North Smithfield	128	83%	73%
Pawtucket	508	47%	45%
Portsmouth	254	65%	73%
Providence	1,725	47%	63%
Scituate	98	47%	74%
Smithfield	191	47%	76%
South Kingstown	234	71%	69%
Tiverton	148	67%	62%
Warwick	699	30%	54%
West Warwick	213	53%	58%
Westerly	214	43%	59%
Woonsocket	402	57%	40%
<i>Beacon Charter High School</i>	55	16%	69%
<i>Blackstone Academy</i>	92	66%	75%
<i>Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy</i>	91	35%	80%
<i>Paul Cuffee Charter School</i>	62	*	81%
<i>The Greene School</i>	44	43%	66%
<i>Highlander Charter School</i>	36	36%	58%
<i>RI Nurses Institute Middle College</i>	59	*	68%
<i>Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy</i>	38	100%	58%
<i>Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts</i>	32	94%	100%
<i>Village Green Virtual Public Charter School</i>	38	97%	100%
<i>William M. Davies Jr. Career &amp; Technical Center</i>	185	58%	58%
<i>Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center</i>	184	73%	53%
<i>DCYF</i>	15	NA	NA
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	2,831	48%	55%
<i>Remainder of State</i>	7,178	49%	63%
<i>Rhode Island</i>	10,946	49%	61%



## Educational Opportunity Audit

◆ In Rhode Island, high school graduation requirements and college admission requirements are misaligned. In 2020, an audit of 2,253 Rhode Island high school student transcripts found 14% of ninth graders were already off track for college eligibility.<sup>17</sup>

◆ Audit findings showed that 78% of Black students and 76% of Latinx students were not college or career ready compared to 44% of white students.<sup>18</sup>



## Impact of COVID-19 on the Class of 2020

◆ In March 2020 school buildings and SAT testing centers closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the U.S. Department of Education waived assessments for all states for the 2019-2020 school year and Rhode Island schools did not administer the 2020 SAT exam.<sup>19,20</sup>

◆ Nationally, 20% of high school seniors reported they are not likely to immediately enroll in college because of the pandemic while others reported changing their plans of attending a four-year college to instead attend community college.<sup>21</sup> Disparities in immediate college enrollment by income and race increased significantly, jeopardizing the equity gains of the previous year.<sup>22</sup>

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Total 12th grade enrollment is from the Rhode Island Department of Education as of October 1, 2019.

% of 12th grade students planning to attend college is from the 2019-2020 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. 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 2020-2021 cycle through June 2020. Retrieved April 9, 2021, 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, 2019.

\* Data are not reported because district response rate for students was <5%. NA indicates that data are not collected. Rhode Island School for the Deaf are not reported because data reported would reflect fewer than 10 students. These students are included in the remainder of state and Rhode Island 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. (2021). *Employment, wages, and projected change in employment by typical entry-level education*. Retrieved April 10, 2021, from www.bls.gov
- U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-2019. Table S2301.
- U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014-2018. Table B20004.

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