

### IMPROVING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES IN RHODE ISLAND

Education is essential preparation for adult life. Higher educational attainment increases the likelihood of individual success and leads to positive economic and social outcomes for families and communities. Given the link between educational attainment and family economic status, schools have a critical role to play in preparing children and youth for post-secondary education and employment in a high-skills economy.

According to *Diplomas Count 2009*, an *Education Week* special report, data from the class of 2006 show that 73% of Rhode Island students graduated from high school on time with a regular diploma, higher than the U.S. rate of 69%. Rhode Island ranks 24th among the states on this measure, with 1st being best and 50th worst.<sup>1</sup>

#### REDUCING POVERTY AND INCREASING ECONOMIC SECURITY

Education has an impact on the likelihood of finding and maintaining employment. Adults without a high school diploma in Rhode Island are almost five times as likely to be unemployed as those who receive a bachelor's degree.<sup>2</sup> In Rhode Island in 2008, the median income of adults without a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) certificate was \$23,302 compared to \$31,058 for people with a high school degree, and \$48,596 for those with a bachelor's degree.<sup>3</sup>

High school graduation is also the minimum requisite for college and most employment. Higher education is fast becoming a necessity for the majority of workers in the growing high-tech economy. According to U.S. Department of Labor projections, about 90% of the fastest-growing jobs in the U.S. will require some post-secondary education or training.<sup>4</sup>

High school dropouts are more likely to have a range of negative social outcomes as compared to people who graduate from high school, including living in poverty, receiving public assistance, incarceration, having poor health, being divorced, and being single parents of children who also drop out of school.<sup>5</sup>



## CALCULATING GRADUATION RATES IN RHODE ISLAND

- ◆ The Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) calculates graduation and dropout rates using a cohort formula. This methodology is acceptable for federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability reporting and adheres to the National Governors Association (NGA) compact that all 50 states have signed. The NGA compact is an agreement by all states to use the cohort calculation method for graduation rates. This method is considered best practice and enables graduation and dropout data to be compared across states.
- ◆ The cohort graduation rate shows the percentage of students from an entering 9th grade cohort who graduate with a standard diploma within four years. This new method uses a student roster tracking method based on unique student identifier data. Because the cohort rate is based on individual student data that is tracked over time, it now accounts for every student who enters the public high school system in Rhode Island.
- ◆ To calculate the 4-year graduation rate, RIDE used the state-assigned student identification numbers (SASID) to track students from 9th grade through the end of high school. The graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who graduate within four years by the total number of students in the cohort. The size of the cohort is adjusted for students who transfer into and out of the system. The formula for the 2008 graduation rate is:

$$2008 \text{ Graduation Rate} = \frac{\text{\# of students in cohort who graduate in four years or fewer}}{[\text{\# of 1st time entering 9th graders in 2004–05}] - \text{transfers out} + \text{transfers in}}$$

- ◆ The cohort dropout rate is calculated the same way as the graduation rate, but the numerator is the number of students who drop out or whose status is unknown at the end of four years. Separate rates are also calculated for the percentage of students who are retained in high school and therefore are taking more than four years to graduate and for the percentage of students who received their GED within four years instead of graduating with a traditional diploma.
- ◆ Beginning with the class of 2008, RIDE uses the 4-year cohort rate formula to determine whether schools have met their annual NCLB targets. RIDE also publishes 5-year graduation rates.

### RHODE ISLAND GRADUATION AND DROPOUT RATES FOR THE CLASS OF 2008

◆ More than 2,000 Rhode Island high school students who were part of the class of 2008 dropped out of school during the four years after they started 9th grade.	Graduation Rate . . . . . 74%
	Dropout Rate . . . . . 16%
	Students Still in School . . . . . 7%
	Completed GED . . . . . 3%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.



## RHODE ISLAND FOUR-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND DROPOUT RATES, BY STUDENT SUBGROUP, CLASS OF 2008

DISTRICT	GRADUATION RATE	DROPOUT RATE	% COMPLETED GED	% OF STUDENTS STILL IN SCHOOL
All Students	74%	16%	3%	7%
Females	79%	13%	3%	5%
Males	69%	18%	4%	10%
English Language Learners	59%	27%	1%	13%
Students with Disabilities	56%	25%	4%	15%
Students without Disabilities	79%	13%	3%	5%
Low-Income Students	61%	24%	4%	11%
Higher-Income Students	86%	8%	2%	4%
White	78%	12%	3%	6%
Asian/Pacific Islander	74%	17%	3%	6%
Black	64%	21%	3%	12%
Hispanic	62%	25%	3%	10%
Native American	63%	22%	1%	14%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Class of 2008 four-year rates. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- ◆ The Rhode Island four-year graduation rate for the class of 2008 was 74%, the dropout rate was 16%, 3% of students completed their GEDs within four years of entering high school and 7% were still in school in the fall of 2008. An additional 3% of students from the original class of 2007 cohort graduated in five years with the class of 2008.<sup>6</sup>
- ◆ Poverty is strongly linked to the likelihood of dropping out. Students in the core cities in Rhode Island are two and a half times more likely to drop out of high school than students in the remainder of the state. Minority students are also more likely than White students to drop out of school.<sup>7</sup> However, lower graduation rates in minority communities are mainly driven by higher poverty rates and lower rates of educational attainment among adults in the community.<sup>8</sup>
- ◆ The Rhode Island four-year graduation rate for the class of 2008 was 69% for males and 79% for females.<sup>9</sup> While female students have lower dropout rates than males, national data show that female dropouts are significantly more likely to be unemployed and they earn less on average than male dropouts from the same racial and ethnic groups.<sup>10</sup>
- ◆ Graduation and dropout rates for pregnant and parenting youth and youth in the foster care system in Rhode Island are not available at this time.

### THE FISCAL CONSEQUENCES OF DROPPING OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL IN RHODE ISLAND

- ◆ According to an analysis by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, the projected lifetime earnings of a Rhode Island high school dropout are \$827,438, compared with \$1,206,250 for high school graduates and \$2,150,076 for those with a bachelor's degree.
- ◆ Based on savings from reduced use of public services, lower incarceration rates and increased tax payments, the report estimates that federal, state and local governments would potentially gain \$389,000 for each successful graduate who would otherwise have been a dropout.

Source: Harrington, P. E., Fogg, N. P. & Khatiwada, I. (2009). *The fiscal consequences of dropping out of high school in Rhode Island*. Providence, RI: Prepared by the Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University for the RI Board of Governors for Higher Education, the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of RI, & the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce.

**RHODE ISLAND FOUR-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND DROPOUT RATES  
BY DISTRICT AND SCHOOL, CLASS OF 2008**

<b>DISTRICT AND SCHOOL</b>	<b>COHORT SIZE</b>	<b>GRADUATION RATE</b>	<b>DROPOUT RATE</b>	<b>% COMPLETED GED</b>	<b>% OF STUDENTS STILL IN SCHOOL</b>
<b>Barrington</b>	239	95%	3%	2%	1%
Barrington High School	235	96%	2%	2%	0%
<b>Bristol Warren</b>	318	80%	11%	2%	7%
Mt. Hope High School	307	80%	10%	2%	7%
<b>Burrillville</b>	230	75%	12%	4%	9%
Burrillville High School	225	76%	12%	4%	7%
<b>Central Falls</b>	305	52%	29%	2%	16%
Central Falls High School	297	52%	30%	2%	15%
<b>Charlho</b>	310	84%	10%	1%	4%
Charlho Regional High School	299	86%	9%	1%	4%
R.Y.S.E. School	11	36%	36%	18%	9%
<b>Coventry</b>	458	83%	11%	2%	4%
Coventry High School	458	83%	11%	2%	4%
<b>Cranston</b>	907	82%	9%	4%	5%
Cranston High School East	350	83%	5%	8%	3%
Cranston High School West	441	89%	7%	1%	3%
New England Laborers' Charter School	103	56%	19%	6%	18%
<b>Cumberland</b>	398	81%	10%	2%	8%
Cumberland High School	386	82%	9%	2%	8%
<b>East Greenwich</b>	196	94%	2%	2%	3%
East Greenwich High School	195	94%	2%	2%	3%
<b>East Providence</b>	541	76%	18%	1%	6%
East Providence High School	530	77%	18%	1%	5%
<b>Exeter-West Greenwich</b>	195	87%	5%	3%	5%
Exeter-West Greenwich Regional High School	193	88%	5%	3%	5%
<b>Foster-Glocester</b>	261	87%	8%	3%	3%
Ponaganset High School	261	87%	8%	3%	3%
<b>Johnston</b>	212	78%	8%	8%	6%
Johnston Senior High School	206	79%	6%	9%	6%
<b>Lincoln</b>	309	83%	12%	2%	3%
Lincoln Senior High School	306	84%	12%	2%	2%
<b>Middletown</b>	158	84%	6%	4%	6%
Middletown High School	152	84%	6%	4%	6%
<b>Narragansett</b>	117	94%	3%	1%	3%
Narragansett High School	113	96%	3%	1%	1%
<b>Newport</b>	192	66%	22%	3%	9%
Rogers High School	186	67%	22%	3%	9%
<b>New Shoreham</b>	15	100%	0%	0%	0%
Block Island High School	15	100%	0%	0%	0%
<b>North Kingstown</b>	384	88%	6%	2%	4%
North Kingstown Senior High School	373	89%	6%	2%	3%
<b>North Providence</b>	289	88%	5%	1%	6%
North Providence High School	285	89%	5%	1%	6%
<b>North Smithfield</b>	124	90%	2%	6%	2%
North Smithfield High School	124	90%	2%	6%	2%
<b>Pawtucket</b>	717	57%	26%	6%	11%
Shea Senior High School	323	57%	27%	2%	15%
William E. Tolman Senior High School	366	58%	24%	9%	8%
<b>Portsmouth</b>	289	86%	4%	6%	4%
Portsmouth High School	283	87%	5%	6%	3%
<b>Providence</b>	2,379	63%	26%	2%	9%
Adelaide High School	29	0%	62%	0%	38%
Alternate Learning Project	4	0%	75%	25%	0%

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**RHODE ISLAND FOUR-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND DROPOUT RATES  
BY DISTRICT AND SCHOOL, CLASS OF 2008 (CONTINUED)**

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL	COHORT SIZE	GRADUATION RATE	DROPOUT RATE	% COMPLETED GED	% OF STUDENTS STILL IN SCHOOL
<b>Providence (continued)</b>					
Central High School	439	63%	29%	1%	6%
Classical High School	272	94%	4%	1%	1%
William B. Cooley/Health Science & Tech. Academy	156	70%	24%	0%	6%
Delsesto High School	9	0%	89%	11%	0%
E-Cubed Academy	105	60%	30%	3%	8%
Educare I	29	48%	31%	0%	21%
Feinstein High School	105	56%	27%	4%	13%
Harrison Street School	20	0%	95%	5%	0%
Hope Arts School	126	51%	38%	4%	7%
Hope Information Technology School	148	49%	39%	3%	9%
Hope Leadership School	133	53%	32%	2%	12%
Mount Pleasant High School	497	63%	22%	2%	13%
Newcomer Academy	7	0%	100%	0%	0%
Providence Academy of International Studies	143	73%	22%	3%	3%
Textron Chamber of Commerce Academy	49	100%	0%	0%	0%
Times2 Academy Charter	30	100%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Scituate</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>4%</b>
Scituate High School	164	84%	9%	4%	4%
<b>Smithfield</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>5%</b>
Smithfield Senior High School	213	89%	6%	1%	4%
<b>South Kingstown</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>4%</b>
South Kingstown High School	302	88%	7%	2%	3%
<b>Tiverton</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>3%</b>
Tiverton High School	198	83%	9%	5%	3%
<b>Warwick</b>	<b>985</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>11%</b>
Pilgrim High School	338	71%	14%	4%	11%
Toll Gate High School	303	77%	13%	3%	7%
Warwick Veteran's Memorial High School	324	70%	12%	5%	12%
<b>West Warwick</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>10%</b>
West Warwick Senior High School	294	68%	19%	4%	9%
<b>Westerly</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>4%</b>
Westerly High School	287	89%	5%	2%	4%
<b>Woonsocket</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>9%</b>
Woonsocket High School	485	60%	28%	3%	9%
<b>Independent Charter Schools</b>					
Beacon Charter School	50	60%	32%	6%	2%
Blackstone Academy Charter School	28	68%	7%	4%	21%
<b>State-Operated Schools</b>					
William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School	189	68%	14%	3%	14%
DCYF Alternative Education Program	193	4%	57%	24%	15%
Metropolitan Regional Career and Tech. Center (The MET)	197	74%	13%	2%	11%
Rhode Island School for The Deaf	6	33%	0%	0%	67%
<b>Core Cities</b>	<b>4,385</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Remainder of State</b>	<b>8,115</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Rhode Island</b>	<b>13,163</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>7%</b>

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2005 Cohort/Class of 2008 (those students who entered high school as 9th graders in the 2004-2005 school year and who are expected to graduate on-time in four years in June 2008). Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Publicly-funded students placed in collaboratives and private special-education schools or programs are included in their home districts' rates. Students who transfer from one school/district to another are only included in the receiving school or district's cohort rate.



## YOUTH AT GREATEST RISK OF DROPPING OUT

High school graduation rates are one achievement measure that can help us to see how well our schools and communities are doing in educating the next generation. In Rhode Island, as in the nation, students in the following sub-populations are completing high school at lower rates than many of their peers.

- ◆ Low-income students
- ◆ Male students
- ◆ Minority students
- ◆ English Language Learners
- ◆ Youth in the foster care system
- ◆ Students with special needs or disabilities
- ◆ Pregnant and parenting teens
- ◆ Youth involved with the juvenile justice system
- ◆ Homeless youth



## WARNING SIGNS FOR STUDENTS AT RISK OF DROPPING OUT

Dropping out is almost always a long process rather than a sudden event. Several risk factors are better predictors of a student’s decision to leave school than demographic characteristics and can help educators identify when to intervene and provide tailored supports to students. These warning signs can begin as early as elementary school, and include:

- ◆ Repeating one or more grades
- ◆ Poor grades and poor achievement on tests
- ◆ Ongoing patterns of absenteeism or tardiness
- ◆ Lack of connection or disengagement in school
- ◆ Multiple suspensions and other behavior problems
- ◆ Failing one or more subjects, particularly in 9th grade (especially English or mathematics)<sup>11</sup>
- ◆ Performing below grade level in 6th grade (or earlier)

◆ It is possible to identify the risk factors that are most predictive of dropping out of high school early on in student's academic careers. Middle level and high schools can decrease dropout rates by having systems in place to identify students at risk for dropping out and then implementing multiple strategies to support each student on their path to graduation. This includes preventative interventions for at-risk populations as well as recovery programs for populations that are off-track for graduation.<sup>12</sup>

◆ Research has shown that the following indicators can be used as early as 6th grade (and sometimes 4th grade) to identify students at risk of dropping out: attendance, behavior and course performance. Other indicators can also be used with high school students to identify more immediate dropout risks, especially course-taking and course-failure patterns.<sup>13</sup>

◆ Poor performing or disruptive students may find it difficult to get the help they need to stay in school. Some students report that they encounter little resistance from those around them when they are frequently absent or make the decision to drop out of school.

### AMERICA’S PROMISE ALLIANCE DROPOUT PREVENTION SUMMITS

◆ In an effort to reduce America’s high school dropout rates, America's Promise Alliance introduced the Dropout Prevention Campaign in April 2008. The Dropout Prevention Campaign is a national initiative spearheaded by America’s Promise Alliance to reduce the number of teens who are dropping out and make sure young people are leaving high school better prepared for college, work and life. By the end of the first quarter of 2010, America’s Promise Alliance will have sponsored 105 Dropout Prevention Summits – one in every state and in 55 targeted cities. More information can be found at [www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Dropout-Prevention.aspx](http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Dropout-Prevention.aspx)



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND SUPPORTS FOR STRUGGLING STUDENTS

- ◆ Provide ongoing monitoring tied with immediate interventions for students who are falling behind beginning in the early grades and middle school to ensure that all students are on course to grade-level achievement.
- ◆ Provide additional supports for struggling students, such as tutoring, credit-recovery programs and summer remediation opportunities, to allow extra time for the mastery of basic skills for students who are already behind.
- ◆ Intervene in ninth grade to provide intensive supports for students who are failing a course or not obtaining sufficient course credits in that crucial year.

### ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Provide access to high-quality early childhood education, pre-kindergarten and full-day kindergarten to prevent the achievement gap early on.
- ◆ Ensure that all students have effective teachers and that all teachers have access to meaningful professional development opportunities focused on effective instructional practice and differentiated teaching methods for a range of learning styles.
- ◆ Offer all students a rigorous and engaging curriculum that is aligned with standards, tied to career pathways and vocational exploration opportunities, and that offers individualized learning opportunities.
- ◆ Provide multiple pathways to graduation (e.g. flexible educational structures and alternative learning opportunities) for all students who need them, including acceleration programs for students lacking credits, newcomer academies, e-learning programs, schools with flexible hours, partnerships with adult education and other community providers, alternative completion models, and others.

- ◆ Improve college preparation and access services and supports so that all students have the opportunity to attend college.
- ◆ Implement an adequate and predictable state education funding formula that reflects the higher costs of educating low-income students.

### SCHOOL CLIMATE

- ◆ Implement effective advisories in all middle and high schools in order to foster meaningful connections between adults and youth and ensure that all youth have school-based relationships with caring adults.
- ◆ Ensure that all school leaders have high expectations for students and staff.
- ◆ Support strategies that promote cultural competence for all school and district staff.
- ◆ Increase access to arts, music and sports programs that help students remain engaged in school.
- ◆ Improve truancy, attendance and discipline policies to increase student engagement and create safe and supportive school atmospheres.

### COMMUNITY AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

- ◆ Offer high-quality after-school and summer enrichment, career development, and internship programs in all low-income schools and communities.
- ◆ Improve communication and partnerships with families, especially when children are falling behind academically.
- ◆ Increase effective partnerships between higher education, community organizations, businesses and schools/districts to improve student access to wrap-around supports and other opportunities to promote educational success.

◆ According to the *Education Week* report *Quality Counts at 10*, “For every 100 American students who enter 9th grade, only 67 graduate from high school; 38 of those enter college, 26 are still enrolled after their sophomore year, and only 18 graduate with either an associate or baccalaureate degree within six years.”



## RHODE ISLAND RESOURCES

### Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Deborah Gist, *Commissioner*  
www.ride.ri.gov  
(401) 222-4600

### Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education

Robert G. Flanders Jr., *Chairman* (401) 222-8435

### Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education

Steven Maurano, *Interim Commissioner*  
www.ribghe.org  
(401) 462-6000

### The Governor's PK-16 Council

Janet Durfee-Hidalgo,  
*Education Policy Advisor,*  
*Office of the Governor*  
www.governor.ri.gov  
(401) 222-8135

### The Urban Education Task Force

Warren Simmons, *Chair*  
(401) 863-7990

### The Annenberg Institute for School Reform

Warren Simmons, *Executive Director*  
www.annenberginstitute.org  
(401) 863-7990

### The College Crusade of Rhode Island

Todd Flaherty,  
*Interim President & CEO*  
www.thecollegecrusade.org  
(401) 854-5500

### Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council

John C. Simmons, *Executive Director*  
www.ripec.com  
(401) 521-6320

### Rhode Island Education Justice Council

Veronika Kot, *Co-Chair*  
(401) 274-2652 x 164  
Elaine Budish, *Co-Chair*  
(401) 351-9400 x17



## NATIONAL RESOURCES

### Alliance for Excellent Education

www.all4ed.org

### The Education Trust

www.edtrust.org

### America's Promise Alliance Dropout Prevention Campaign

www.americaspromise.org

### The Education Week: Diplomas Count Series

www.edweek.org

### National Center for Education Statistics

www.nces.ed.gov

### U.S. Department of Education

www.ed.gov

### National High School Center

www.betterhighschools.org



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- <sup>10</sup> *When girls don't graduate we all fail: A call to improve high school graduation rates for girls*. (2007). New York, NY: National Women's Law Center.
- <sup>11,12,13</sup> Kennelly, L. & Monrad, M. (2007). *Approaches to dropout prevention: Heeding early warning signs with appropriate interventions*. Retrieved September 29, 2009 from the National High School Center at www.betterhighschools.org

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a children's policy organization that provides information on child well-being, stimulates dialogue on children's issues, and promotes accountability and action.

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