

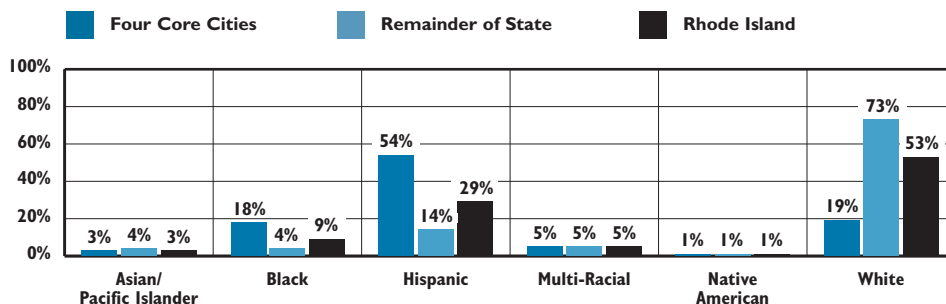
Issue Brief

Racial and Ethnic Disparities in K-16 Education in Rhode Island

Racial and ethnic diversity has increased in Rhode Island over the last decade.^{1,2} In Rhode Island between 2010 and 2020, the Hispanic child population grew by 22% while the non-Hispanic white child population declined by 22%.^{3,4} In 2020, 47% of children in Rhode Island were Children of Color, up from 36% in 2010.⁵ In Rhode Island, children are more likely to be People of Color than adults.

- ◆ In October 2021, 53% of Rhode Island public school students were white, 29% were Hispanic, 9% were Black, 5% were Multi-Racial, 3% were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% were Native American.⁶ Many schools are working to adapt their practices to be more culturally competent and better serve this increasingly diverse child population.⁷

Rhode Island Public School Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity, October 1, 2021



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, October 1, 2021.

- ◆ On October 1, 2021, 81% of students enrolled in the four core cities (Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket) were Students of Color, compared with 27% in the remainder of state. There are also large percentages of Students in Color in Newport (65%), Cranston (53%), and North Providence (49%).⁸ The diversity of Rhode Island is an asset; however, there are wide, persistent, and unacceptable disparities in K-16 education by race and ethnicity.

“Education systems have a responsibility to identify and dismantle the root causes of educational inequity so that all students, regardless of race, language, socioeconomic status, ability, or other identities, have access to equitable opportunities.”

Rhode Island 2030: Charting a Course for the Future of the Ocean State. Offices of Governor Dan McKee and Lt. Governor Sabina Matos.

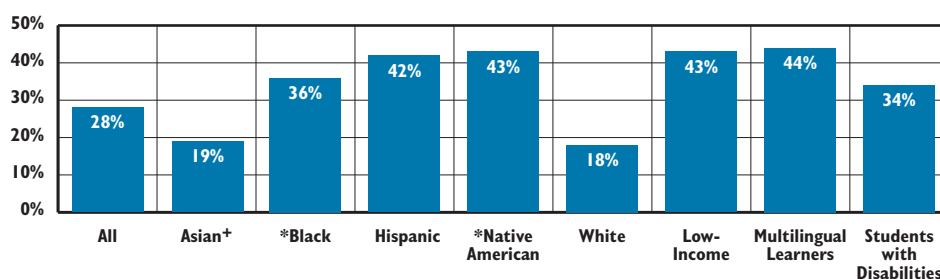
Root Causes of Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Education

- ◆ Racial and ethnic disparities have existed in the United States and Rhode Island from its founding. Removal of Native Americans, several centuries of slavery, a century of Jim Crow laws, and residential segregation created large gaps in academic access and attainment for Students of Color. While policies that created segregated schools ended decades ago, America and Rhode Island have yet to see a truly integrated educational system that produces high-quality educational opportunities for all.^{9,10}
- ◆ In the U.S., Black and Latino students have become increasingly segregated from white students over the last 30 years. Black and Latino students generally attend schools in which students are disproportionately Students of Color and high-poverty, while white students attend schools in which students are disproportionately white and low-poverty.^{11,12}
- ◆ Students in schools with high concentrations of low-income students and Students of Color have unequal educational opportunities when compared with the educational opportunities available to students who attend schools that are more diverse or that have mostly higher-income or predominantly white students because the schools they attend have more absences, lower graduation rates, teachers who have less classroom experience, and more teachers who are teaching outside their subject area of expertise.^{13,14}

Chronic Absenteeism

- ◆ 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.¹⁵
- ◆ A national survey of students found that the most common reasons students report being chronically absent are health-related reasons, transportation barriers, personal stress, preferring activities outside of school, and perceiving that school has little value (i.e., is boring, their parents do not care if they miss school, or a belief that school will not help them reach future goals).¹⁶

K-12 Chronic Absence Rates in Rhode Island by Student Subgroup, 2020-2021 School Year*



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2020-2021 school year. *The definition of absence may differ from prior years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. +Data for Asian students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups.

- ◆ In Rhode Island during the 2020-2021 school year, Native American (43%), Hispanic (42%), and Black (36%) K-12 students had higher rates of chronic absence than Asian (19%) and white (18%) students. Chronic absence rates were also higher for Multilingual Learners (44%), students in families with low incomes (43%), and students with disabilities (34%) than for all students (28%).¹⁷
- ◆ The students with the highest levels of chronic absence were also in the populations hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rhode Island's Southeast Asian Children and Youth

- ◆ The Asian American community is diverse, the fastest-growing, and the most economically divided racial and ethnic group in the United States.¹⁸ Southeast Asian children and youth identify with one or more ethnic groups originating from countries in Southeast Asia including Burma, Cambodia, the Philippines, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. Cambodians make up the largest Southeast Asian population in Rhode Island. Providence has the eighth highest Cambodian population (8,000) in the United States.¹⁹
- ◆ The disparity across Asian subgroups can be attributed to differences in immigration origins, educational attainment, occupations, and generational wealth. The lack of disaggregated data for the Asian population contributes to the misperception that all Asian Americans are excelling, resulting in underrepresentation in equity initiatives, especially for Southeast Asians where the largest disparities are found.^{20,21,22}
- ◆ In 2017, The Rhode Island General Assembly passed the *All Students Count Act* which requires the Rhode Island Department of Education to collect and publicly report disaggregated education data on the many subgroups within the Asian American and Pacific Islander population and requires disaggregation of this data by gender, disability, and English proficiency.²³ Rhode Island was the third state in the country to pass this law.²⁴ The Rhode Island Department of Education does not currently report disaggregated data for Asian students by ethnic group.
- ◆ In 2022, The Rhode Island General Assembly passed the *Asian American and Pacific Islander History Act* which requires all public schools to provide at least one unit of instruction on Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander history and culture.²⁵

Increasing Visibility of Arab and Iranian Students

- ◆ Middle Eastern and North African communities are racially and ethnically diverse. The U.S. Census Bureau considers people descended from the Middle East and North Africa to be white. Middle Eastern, North African, Arab, and Iranian communities have spent decades advocating for the U.S. Census Bureau to create a separate category for themselves. Because Arab and Iranian students are not demographically identified, they are often overlooked and underrepresented in equity initiatives.²⁶
- ◆ National studies show that Arab American adolescents are more likely to be targets of systematic oppression and inequality compared to other Students of Color. They experience discrimination and are often adversely viewed by their teachers and classmates, which has heightened due to the political climate since September 11th.²⁷

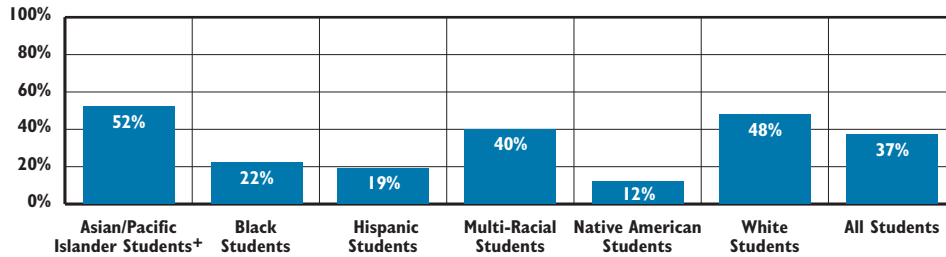
The White Advantage

- ◆ Efforts to address racial and ethnic disparities often focus on Asian, Black, Hispanic, and Native American students and families and give less attention to white students and families. Achievement gaps by race often provide advantages to white students and disadvantages to non-white students.²⁸
- ◆ White families and Families of Color often have the same hopes and dreams for their children, however, more white families have access to assets that allow them to make different decisions about where to live, where to send their children to school, and to secure resources that help them advocate for their children.²⁹
- ◆ Economic, social, and cultural capital can help white families access and maintain educational advantages. White, college-educated parents with higher incomes are more likely to intervene in the school context, customize their children's school experiences, and expect schools to respond to their specific needs, resulting in better outcomes for their children.³⁰

Grade-Level Reading

- ◆ Students who have not achieved reading proficiency by the end of third grade struggle in the later grades and are four times more likely to drop out of high school than their proficient peers.³¹
- ◆ Interventions for students who struggle with reading are more successful when implemented before third grade and when they are culturally relevant. When intervention is delayed until after third grade, most children never catch up to their grade-level peers.^{32,33,34}

Third Graders Meeting Expectations on the RICAS English Language Arts Assessment by Race and Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2022



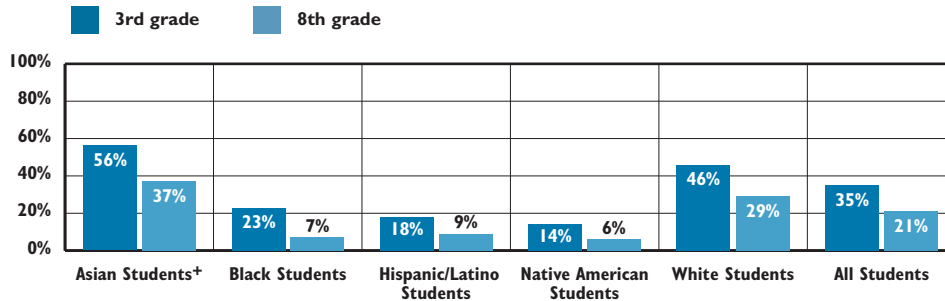
Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, 2021-2022. +Data for Asian students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups.

- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2022, 37% of third graders met expectations on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, English language arts assessment. There were large disparities by race and ethnicity.³⁵

Math Proficiency

- ◆ Researchers anticipate that math proficiency will be needed to fully participate in a 21st century society and economy.³⁶ Strong math skills predict higher college attendance and success rates and increase students' employability, so addressing racial and ethnic disparities in math proficiency is key to closing disparities in college access and completion and employment outcomes.³⁷

Third- & Eighth-Grade Students Meeting Expectations on the RICAS Math Assessment, Rhode Island, 2022

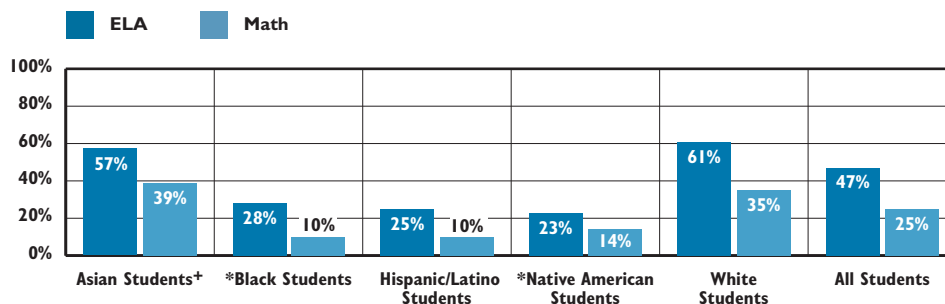


Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, 2021-2022. +Data for Asian students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups.

- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2022, there were large gaps in math proficiency by race and ethnicity, with 56% of Asian and 46% of white third graders meeting expectations, compared with 23% of Black, 18% of Hispanic, and 14% of Native American students. This large gap is also seen in eighth-grade results, with 37% of Asian and 29% of white eighth graders meeting expectations, compared with 9% of Hispanic, 7% of Black, and 6% Native American students.³⁸

SAT

Test Takers Meeting Expectations on the SAT English Language Arts and Math Assessment, Rhode Island, 2022



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, SAT, 2021. ⁺Data for Asian students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups.

- ◆ In Rhode Island, in 2022, 47% of all students were proficient on the *SAT* ELA assessment, with 61% of white students meeting expectations and 57% of Asian students, compared to 28% of Black, 25% of Hispanic/Latino, and 23% of Native American students.³⁹
- ◆ In Rhode Island, in 2022, 25% of all students were proficient on the *SAT* Math assessment, with 39% of Asian and 35% of white students meeting expectations, compared to 10% of Black and Hispanic/Latino, and 14% of Native American students.⁴⁰
- ◆ Scores on the *SAT* test do not adequately predict college success for students beyond the first year of college and are worse predictors for Students of Color. Scores from the *SAT* tests are shown to be better proxies for student family income rather than performance in college.⁴¹

High School Graduation

- ◆ In Rhode Island, Black, Hispanic, and Native American students are less likely to graduate high school compared to white and Asian students.⁴²

Rhode Island Four-Year High School Graduation and Dropout Rates, by Student Subgroup, Class of 2021

YEAR	COHORT SIZE	DROPOUT RATE	% COMPLETED GED	% OF STUDENTS STILL IN SCHOOL	FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATE
Asian Students	315	6%	1%	5%	88%
Black Students	1,006	8%	<1%	10%	82%
Hispanic Students	3,047	12%	1%	10%	77%
Native American	72	13%	0%	11%	76%
White Students	6,346	5%	1%	6%	88%
ALL STUDENTS	11,201	8%	1%	8%	84%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2021. 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.

- ◆ Early warning and intervention systems use early predictors of dropping out, such as poor attendance, behavior problems, and course failure in math and reading, to identify students who are off-track, so academic supports can be put in place to help students get “on track” for graduation.⁴³

Educators of Color

- ◆ When Students of Color are taught by Educators of Color, they demonstrate long-term academic achievement including higher reading and math test scores, decreased likelihood of dropping out of high school, increased likelihood of going to college, and increased social and emotional development.⁴⁴ In Rhode Island, during the 2021-2022 school year, 12.4% of fully certified educators identified as a Person of Color.⁴⁵

Recruiting

- ◆ The test-based admission requirement for entry into Rhode Island's teacher preparation programs disqualifies many candidates and disproportionately impacts People of Color. In Rhode Island, only 43% of test takers, pass the elementary licensure test (*Praxis*) on their first attempt. Excluding Brown University, less than one-third of Test Takers of Color pass on their first attempt.⁴⁶
- ◆ Rhode Island is one of only 15 states that requires test-based admission for entry into teacher preparation programs.⁴⁷
- ◆ In December 2022, the Rhode Island Department of Education approved a pilot program that waives certain standardized test score requirements for entry into the teacher preparation programs at Rhode Island College.⁴⁸
- ◆ Rhode Island is one of only four states that does not offer any financial incentives (loan forgiveness, scholarships, or bonuses) to help recruit and retain Teachers of Color, teachers in shortage areas, or teachers willing to work in underserved schools.⁴⁹
- ◆ Thirty states, not including Rhode Island, have state-funded Grow-Your-Own programs that are aimed at recruiting high school students, paraprofessionals, and community members to become teachers. Half of the states in the U.S. have legislative initiatives to encourage People of Color to enter the teacher pipeline.⁵⁰
- ◆ Forty states, including Connecticut and Massachusetts, have at least one financial program to recruit teachers to underserved schools or shortage areas. Rhode Island is not one of these states.⁵¹

Retaining

- ◆ Accountability pressures, lack of classroom autonomy and school influence, and lack of resources and support can discourage Educators of Color from staying in the profession.⁵²
- ◆ Nationally, Black teachers report facing racial discrimination and stereotyping in their schools, lack of respect from colleagues, being assigned disciplinary roles instead of leadership roles, increased feeling of responsibility and obligation to provide additional supports to Black students.⁵³
- ◆ Nationally, Latinx teachers report being viewed as inferior to other teachers or only being beneficial for Latinx students and being criticized by other teachers and school leaders for embedding culturally relevant materials into their teaching materials or for speaking Spanish in the classroom. Many bilingual teachers report having a higher workload because of the expectation that they will serve as a translator.⁵⁴
- ◆ The “last-in first-out” policies of the teacher layoff process can disproportionately concentrate layoffs among Educators of Color, who are more likely to be early career teachers and undercut efforts to recruit talented and diverse teachers.⁵⁵
- ◆ In 2019, the Rhode Island House of Representatives passed a resolution to create a commission to study and provide recommendations for encouraging more People of Color to enter the field of education.⁵⁶
- ◆ In 2021, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed legislation that requires education courses in African Heritage and History in elementary and secondary schools beginning in the 2022-2023 school year.⁵⁷
- ◆ The FY2023 budget includes \$200,000 in general revenue to increase access to higher education opportunities for Teachers of Color through the Rhode Island School for Progressive Education.⁵⁸

Parents and Caregivers of Color

- ◆ While the rewards for educational attainment among African Americans have always been limited by labor market discrimination, high educational aspirations have characterized the Black community in every period in U.S. history. National studies have found that Black parents have higher expectations for their children than white parents and are just as involved in their education.⁵⁹
- ◆ In Rhode Island, Families of Color are more likely to report parents being more involved in school improvement at their child's school compared to white families. According to the Rhode Island 2022 *SurveyWorks* results, 39% of all family respondents reported parents being quite or extremely involved in school improvement with 45% of Black and Hispanic, 40% of Asian, 33% of white, and 32% of Native American families responding favorably.⁶⁰
- ◆ Family engagement and school improvement efforts should be centered on the family experience and should provide equitable access to family engagement and leadership opportunities. Such opportunities should work to build families' knowledge of the education system and reform efforts and include information on education terminology, data, evaluation, assessments, and the accountability system. Providing interpretation and translation services, transportation, child care, and home visits when families are unable to attend in-person meetings at school will help more families actively participate in their children's schools.^{61,62}
- ◆ Equitable collaboration between families and schools is characterized by a reciprocal partnership in which families and schools emphasize relationship-building, work together to develop goals, co-develop a strategy for achieving student success, and include parents as experts on their own children. Active family engagement develops in schools where parents and families have a meaningful role in decision-making about issues that affect learning including curriculum, teaching, hiring, and budgeting and is linked to school improvement and student achievement.^{63,64}

Special Education

- ◆ The federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* guarantees a free, appropriate education to every child with a disability and requires that every student should be educated, to the maximum extent appropriate, with children who are not disabled, and special classes, schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment should occur only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child means it cannot be achieved.⁶⁵
- ◆ In Rhode Island in June 2021, 52% of students receiving special education services were white, 29% were Hispanic, 10% were Black, 6% were Two or More Races, 2% were Asian, and 1% were Native American.⁶⁶
- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2019-2020, white students were more likely to be in a regular classroom for 80% or more of the day, than Asian, Black, Hispanic, and Native American students.⁶⁷

Out-of-School Time

- ◆ Out-of-school time programs can contribute significantly to children's development and learning.⁶⁸ Youth who participate consistently can show improved competence, caring, and connections.^{69,70}
- ◆ Nationally, the majority of parents report that cost was an important factor in their decision not to enroll their child in an after-school program, but African American and Hispanic parents are more likely than white parents to say that their children did not have a safe way to get to and from after-school programs, that programs' hours of operation and locations presented challenges, and that there were not spaces available in the program they prefer.⁷¹
- ◆ Nationally, for every Black and Latinx child in an after-school program, three more are waiting to get in. Black and Latinx parents are more likely than white parents to connect the supports after-school programs provide to children's school-day learning, including agreeing that programs help children become more excited about learning and interested in school and help parents build connections to their child's school-day education.^{72,73}
- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2020-2021, 3,121 children in grades PK through 12 took part in a 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) program. 21st CCLC grants are the only dedicated federal funding sources that support local communities' after-school and summer programs. Demand for programming in Rhode Island is so great that only half of the program applications were funded during the most recent competition.^{74,75}
- ◆ In Rhode Island, unmet demand for after-school programs has reached an all-time high; nearly 59,000 children would be enrolled in a program if one were available to them.⁷⁶
- ◆ In 2022, the Rhode Island Department of Education allocated \$3.9 million in *American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER)* funds to foster new or expand partnerships between community-based organizations and school districts to provide after-school and out-of-school time programming.⁷⁷

Access to Mental Health Supports

- ◆ In the U.S., Students of Color are more likely to report being victims of unfair treatment because of their race compared to white students. Stress caused by discrimination, stereotype threat, or a feeling of apprehension about confirming negative stereotypes impacts attention, memory, and executive functioning, increases anxiety, anger and depression among Students of Color, and is connected to disparities in academic outcomes.^{78,79,80}
- ◆ While rates of mental health treatment are low for all youth with mental health needs, Youth of Color are significantly less likely to receive treatment. When they do receive treatment, it is more likely to be inadequate due to the lack of a diverse and culturally and linguistically competent workforce.⁸¹
- ◆ Youth of Color were also more likely to have their mental health impacted by the pandemic. These youth were more likely to face COVID-19 related stressors, such as household unemployment, loss of a loved one, and increased isolation.⁸²

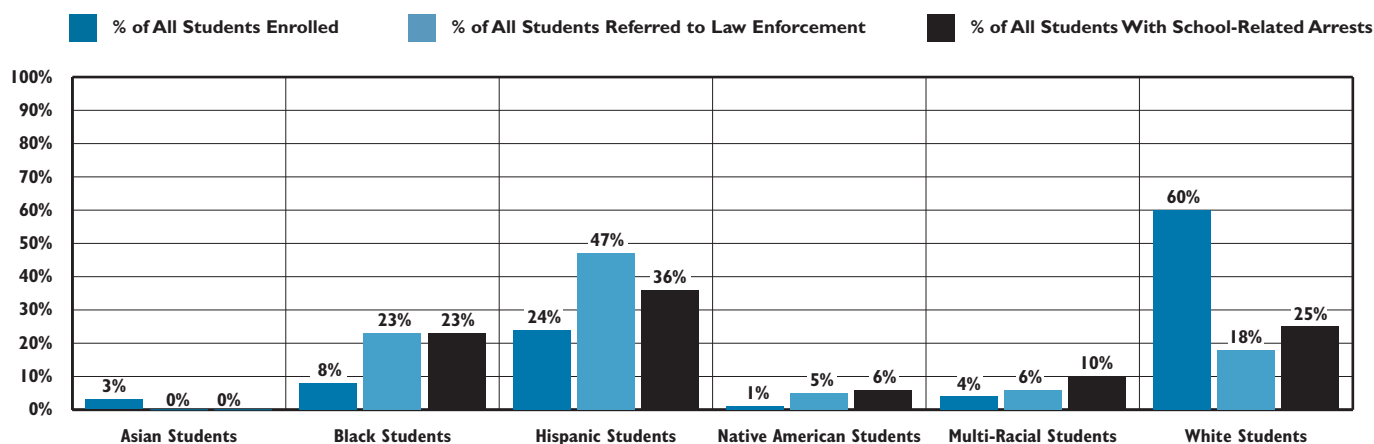
Trauma Informed Schools Act

- ◆ In 2022, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed the *Trauma-Informed Schools Act* which requires all administrators, teachers, and staff in every Rhode Island public school to receive trauma-informed training. These trainings include restorative practices, social-emotional learning, and positive disciplinary practices.⁸³

School Discipline

- ◆ Effective school disciplinary practices promote a safe and respectful school climate, support learning, and address the causes of student misbehavior. Punitive disciplinary practices, including “zero tolerance” policies are largely ineffective and even counterproductive, create negative school climate, and contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline.^{84,85,86} Despite this evidence, suspension is a widely used disciplinary technique, both nationally and in Rhode Island. Suspensions are used for minor offenses, such as use of electronics, and for more serious offenses, such as weapon possession.^{87,88,89}
- ◆ Historically, in Rhode Island and nationally, Black, Hispanic, Multi-Racial, and Native American students are more likely to be suspended than their white peers despite the fact that there is no evidence that these students have more serious patterns of rule breaking.^{90,91}
- ◆ A School Resource Officer (SRO) can serve many functions in schools including enforcement of student discipline. Research suggests the presence of law enforcement worsens school climates, increases disciplinary actions, and disproportionately impacts the academic outcomes of Students of Color.^{92,93,94}

Bias in School Discipline by Race/Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2015-2016



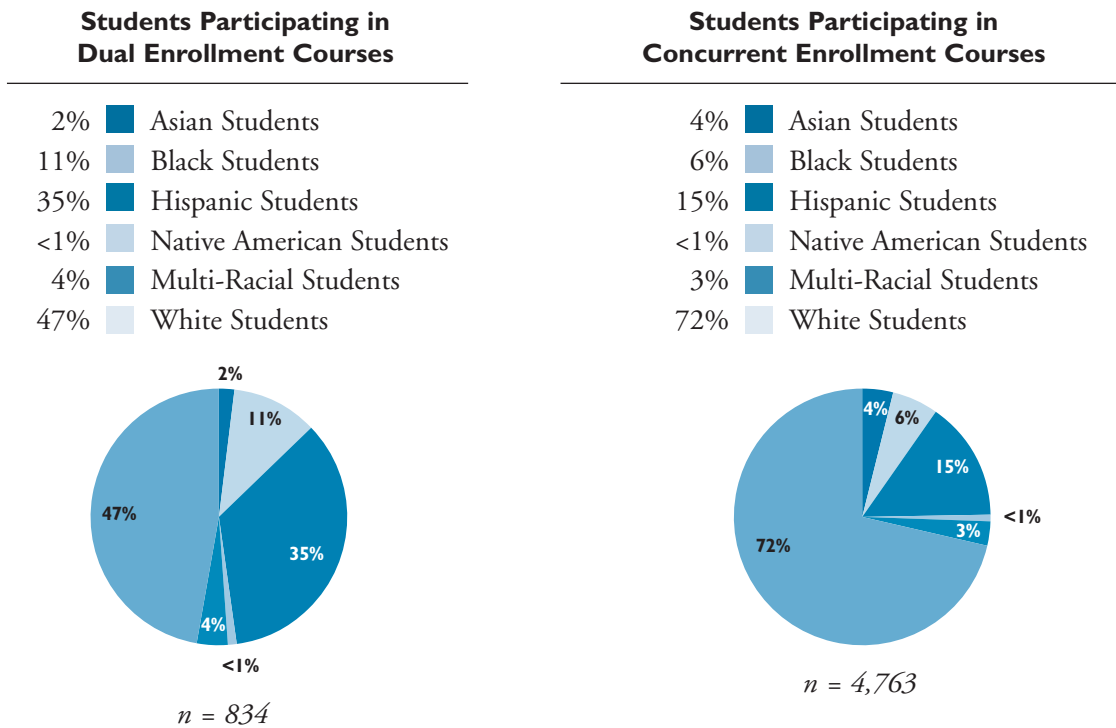
Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2015-2016 school year.

- ◆ In Rhode Island, during the 2015-2016 school year, Black students represented 8% of the student population but represented 23% of students referred to law enforcement and 23% of students with school-related arrests; Hispanic students represented 24% of the student population but represented 47% of students referred to law enforcement and 36% of students with school-related arrests. In comparison, white students represented 60% of students enrolled but represented only 18% of students referred to law enforcement and 25% of students with school-related arrests.⁹⁵
- ◆ Student arrest and juvenile detention increases a student’s likelihood of future arrests, decreases the likelihood of completing high school and may result in long-lasting consequences including restricted eligibility for federal grants and student loans and barriers to college enrollment and employment.⁹⁶

College Preparation

- ◆ Between 2020 and 2030, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certificate are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring less education.⁹⁷
- ◆ Students who participate in Advanced Placement (AP) courses or dual or concurrent enrollment courses are likely to attend and succeed in college.⁹⁸
- ◆ Dual enrollment allows students to take credit-earning college courses on a college campus while in high school at no cost to the student or the family. In the 2020-2021 school year, of all the students enrolled in dual enrollment, 47% were white, 35% were Hispanic, 11% were Black, 4% were Multi-Racial, 2% were Asian, and <1% were Native American.⁹⁹
- ◆ Concurrent enrollment allows students to take credit-earning college courses while in high school in their high school building at no cost to the student or the family.¹⁰⁰ Courses are taught by high school teachers that meet instructional requirements. In the 2020-2021 school year, there were large disparities in student participation in concurrent enrollment with 72% of all enrolled students being white.¹⁰¹

Student Enrollment in Dual and Concurrent Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2020-2021



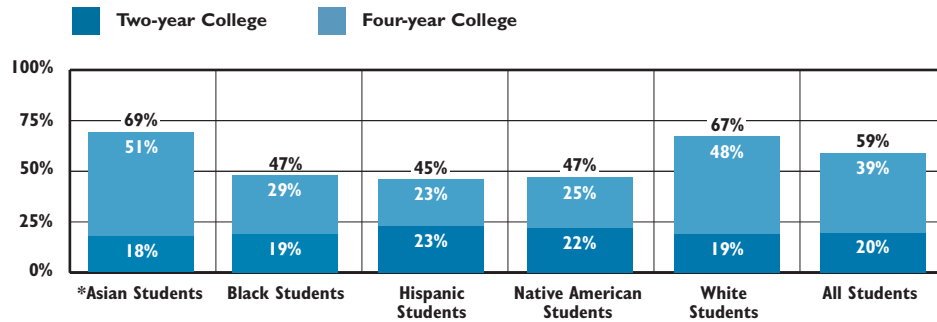
Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2020-2021 school year..

- ◆ In 2020, an audit of 2,253 Rhode Island high school student transcripts found that 78% of Black students and 76% of Latinx students were not college or career ready, compared to 44% of white students.¹⁰²
- ◆ In 2022, the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approved new *Secondary Regulations* for the class of 2028. The revised *Secondary Regulations* establish college and career-ready coursework as the default expectation for every child in Rhode Island regardless of where they live, their parent’s income, the language they speak at home, or their disability status.¹⁰³

College Enrollment and Completion

- ◆ 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.¹⁰⁴ Rhode Island has 420 students for every school counselor, far above the recommended ratio of 250 to one.¹⁰⁵

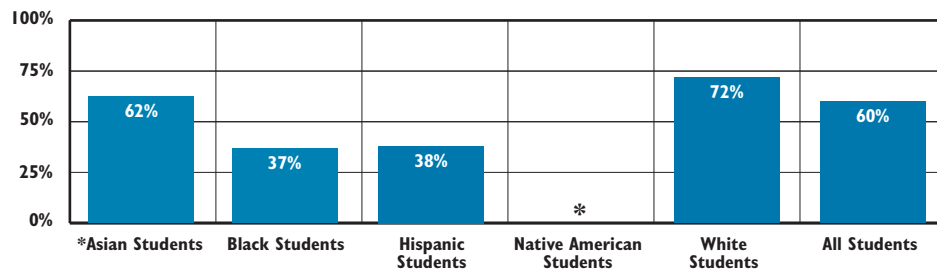
Immediate College Enrollment by Race, Ethnicity, and Type of College, Class of 2021, Rhode Island



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2021. 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-nine percent of Rhode Island students who graduated from high school in the Class of 2021 immediately enrolled in college. There are large gaps in college access, particularly four-year college enrollment, by race and ethnicity.¹⁰⁶

Six-Year College Completion by Race/Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2014 Cohort



Source: New England Secondary School Consortium. (2021). *Common Data Project: 2021 annual report, school year 2019-2020*. Retrieved April 12, 2022, from www.newenglandssc.org. +Data for Asian students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups. * Fewer than 12 students are in this category. Data were not reported to protect student confidentiality.

- ◆ There are large gaps in college completion by race and ethnicity among Rhode Island public high school graduates who enrolled in college in 2014, with 72% of white and 62% of Asian students completing college within six years, compared to 37% of Black and 38% of Hispanic students. Fewer than 12 Native American students completed college within six years.¹⁰⁷
- ◆ Students of Color often arrive at college with academic potential but less academic preparation and social capital than other students. They can benefit from a wide range of supports, including comprehensive assessment and placement, summer transition programs, peer-mentored and peer-facilitated programs that offer tutoring and other academic support, learning communities that allow a group of students to enroll in two or more classes together so they can establish peer relationships that support their success, personal and career counseling, mentoring, and/or referrals to social services.^{108,109,110}

School Funding

- ◆ In recent years, Rhode Island has taken a number of steps to ensure that all children have access to the kind of high-quality education they need to succeed in school, career, and life. These key steps included instituting an education funding formula that is based on five key principles -- equity, adequacy, predictability, accountability, and efficiency. Rhode Island has fully funded the state share of this formula since its inception however, the local contribution to this formula has not kept pace.^{111,112}
- ◆ Disparities in property wealth across Rhode Island contribute to the inequality among cities' and towns' ability to raise funds for education. Increasing local contribution to education is a challenge for municipalities with lower levels of property wealth.¹¹³
- ◆ In FY2020, Pawtucket and Woonsocket did not meet the core minimum per-pupil spending amount. Pawtucket spent \$822 and Woonsocket spent \$1,526 less per student than needed to meet the total foundational cost determined by the education funding formula.¹¹⁴
- ◆ In 2020, Rhode Island received a grade of "B" for its funding efforts and a "B" for its funding level, and an "F" for its funding distribution. Rhode Island was one of 17 states determined to have a "regressive" school funding system, providing less to high-poverty districts than to low-poverty districts.¹¹⁵

COVID-19: ESSER Funds

- ◆ The COVID-19 pandemic impacted children and youth in many ways, from concerns and fears about the illness, grief and loss of loved ones, loss of parental employment and financial stressors -- to school closures and distance learning/hybrid models. These challenges resulted in significant loss of instructional time, increased mental health concerns, and exacerbated inequities. These challenges especially affected low-income students, Multilingual Learners, students receiving special education services, students in the foster care system, students experiencing homelessness, and Students of Color.¹¹⁶
- ◆ COVID-19 recovery funds are critical in helping school districts recover from lost instructional time and building stronger, more equitable education systems.¹¹⁷

Equity Impact Statements

- ◆ Equity impact statements are a tool for lawmakers to evaluate how proposed legislation will impact racial and ethnic disparities prior to adoption and implementation. Similar to fiscal impact statements, equity impact statements assist legislators in detecting unforeseen policy ramifications so they can be modified to avoid worsening existing racial disparities, and ideally, be amended to reduce or eliminate disparities. Nine states (Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, and Virginia) have implemented mechanisms for developing and considering equity impact statements.¹¹⁸
- ◆ In Rhode Island, legislation was introduced that would have required the General Assembly to include combined race, ethnicity, gender and disability impact statements in any legislation related to human services; medical, dental or behavioral health care; disability services; housing or housing assistance; education; employment and labor; land use and transportation; criminal justice; and legislation that will have economic or environmental impacts on communities. The legislation did not pass out of committee.¹¹⁹

Recommendations

- ◆ **Center the voices** of Arab, Asian, Black, Latino, and Native American youth and parents in policy decisions.
- ◆ Ensure that education data is disaggregated by race and ethnicity when possible and **implement the *All Students Count Act***, so that disaggregated data on Asian and Pacific Islander students is publicly available.
- ◆ **Provide equitable access to high-quality early education programs** to minimize the learning disparities that appear early and grow over time.
- ◆ Implement **family-centered approaches** that increase equitable access to family engagement and leadership opportunities by providing appropriate interpretation and translation services, transportation to family engagement events, free child care at school events and meetings, and home visits in cases when families are unable to attend in-person meetings.
- ◆ Build the future teacher candidate supply by **allowing high school students to take college courses and earn credits that they can apply toward a teaching degree and license** and create a loan forgiveness or scholarship program for students who commit to becoming teachers in Rhode Island.
- ◆ Invest in **financial incentives to attract and retain Educators of Color** using targeted financial incentives like loan forgiveness programs, scholarships, and bonuses.
- ◆ Invest in **Grow-Your-Own programs** including TA to BA programs that help to attract and retain Educators of Color.
- ◆ Permanently **remove test-based admission requirements** for teacher preparation programs to expand pathways into the teaching profession.
- ◆ Modify "last-in, first-out" policies of the **teacher layoff** process with equity by expanding the definition of educator quality to include race and multilingual fluency.
- ◆ Increase federal, state, and local investments to **expand access to high-quality after-school and summer programs** and to build and sustain an effective out-of-school time workforce.
- ◆ Increase implementation and sustainable funding of effective models of **school-based mental health care** with clinical strategies.
- ◆ Enforce the legal statute that **restricts the use of out-of-school suspensions** for non-violent offenses, and **end the practice of arresting and referring students to law enforcement** for non-violent offenses.
- ◆ Reallocate funds for School Resource Officers (SROs) and law enforcement to **fund more school and community-based mental health services and school counselors**.
- ◆ **Evaluate and address barriers to offering concurrent enrollment courses** at more schools that Students of Color attend.
- ◆ Provide **academic, financial, and social supports** for college Students of Color to help increase college completion rates.
- ◆ Pass legislation that requires the General Assembly to include **equity impact statements** in any legislation related to education.
- ◆ Adjust the Rhode Island **education funding formula** to ensure funding distribution is more equitable, less reliant on property wealth, and provides targeted funding to meet the needs of low-income students, Multilingual Learners, and high-cost Special Education students.
- ◆ Ensure **ESSER funds are used** to address the impact of COVID-19 on Students of Color.
- ◆ Amend the state's constitution to include a judicially enforceable **right to an equitable, adequate, and meaningful education** to ensure all children receive high-quality educational opportunities.

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