

Issue Brief

Improving High School Graduation Rates in Rhode Island

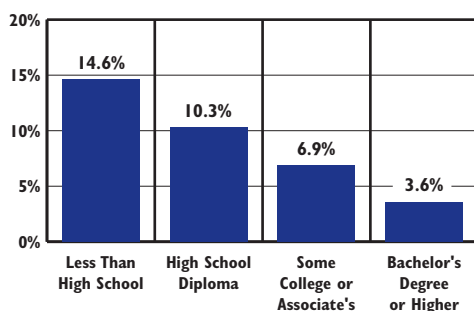
Higher educational attainment increases the likelihood of individual success and leads to positive economic, social, and health outcomes for families and communities. High school graduates are more likely to be employed and have higher incomes. In contrast, adults without diplomas are more likely to live in poverty, receive public assistance, be involved in criminal activity, and have poor physical and emotional health and shorter life spans than graduates.^{1,2} Given the link between educational attainment and family economic status, schools have a critical role to play in preparing children and youth for success in a high-skills economy.

Rhode Island's four-year graduation rate has been steadily increasing from 70% in 2007 to 85% in 2016. However, graduation rates vary substantially by family income and by race and ethnicity. In 2016, 79% of low-income students graduated in four years, compared to 93% of higher-income students. There were similar disparities among different racial and ethnic student subgroups with 92% of Asian students, 88% of White students, 81% of Black students, 79% of Hispanic students, and 78% of Native American students graduating in four years.^{3,4}

Increasing Rhode Island's overall high school graduation rate and closing these gaps is vital to the future of our young people and our state's economy.

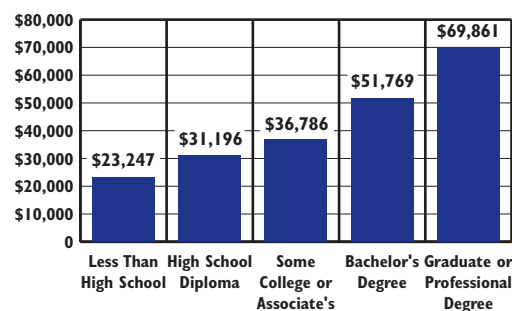
Education: The Key to Economic Opportunity

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BY EDUCATION LEVEL, RHODE ISLAND, 2011-2015



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2015. Table S2301.

MEDIAN EARNINGS BY EDUCATION LEVEL, RHODE ISLAND, 2011-2015



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2015, Table B20004.

- ◆ Between 2011 and 2015 in Rhode Island, adults without a high school diploma were four times more likely to be unemployed as those with a bachelor's degree.⁵ During the same period, the median earnings of adults without a high school diploma or equivalency was \$23,247, compared to \$31,196 for adults with a high school degree, and \$51,769 for those with a bachelor's degree.⁶

Calculating Graduation Rates in Rhode Island

- ◆ The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) began calculating graduation rates using a cohort formula starting with the Class of 2007. This methodology is acceptable for federal *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* accountability reporting, adheres to the National Governors Association (NGA) compact that all 50 states have signed, and enables graduation and dropout data to be compared across states.
- ◆ RIDE uses a unique state-assigned student identification number (SASID) to track students from 9th grade through the end of high school. The four-year graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who graduate within four years by the total number of students in the cohort with adjustments for students who transfer into and out of the system. Beginning with the Class of 2008, RIDE has used the four-year cohort rate formula to determine whether schools have met their annual targets. Rhode Island also calculates five- and six-year graduation rates to recognize the graduation accomplishment regardless of the time it takes. High proportions of five- and six-year graduates are students with disabilities and English Language Learners.

$$\text{4-Year Graduation Rate} = \frac{\text{\# of students in cohort who graduate in 4 years or fewer}}{\text{[\# of 1st time entering 9th graders] - transfers out + transfers in}}$$

Rhode Island's Requirements for Graduation

In order to graduate, Rhode Island students up through the Class of 2020 must:

- Demonstrate proficiency in English language arts, math, science, social studies, the arts, and technology
- Complete at least 20 courses, including four English language arts courses, three math courses and one math-related course, three science courses, three social studies courses, and six other courses
- Complete two performance-based assessments, such as exhibitions, portfolios, or comprehensive course assessments

In order to graduate, Rhode Island students in the Class of 2021 and later must:

- Demonstrate proficiency by meeting high school content standards in English language arts, math, science, social studies, the arts, and technology
- Complete at least 20 courses, including four English language arts courses, four math courses, three science courses, three social studies courses, and six other courses
- Complete at least one performance-based assessment, demonstrating applied learning skills and proficiency in one or more content areas

Starting with the Class of 2021, Rhode Island high school graduates will be eligible to earn the following Council designations:

- **Commissioner's Seal:** proficiency in English language arts and math
- **Seal of Biliteracy:** proficiency in English and one or more other world language
- **Pathway Endorsements:** deep learning in a chosen area of interest and preparedness for employment or further study

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education.

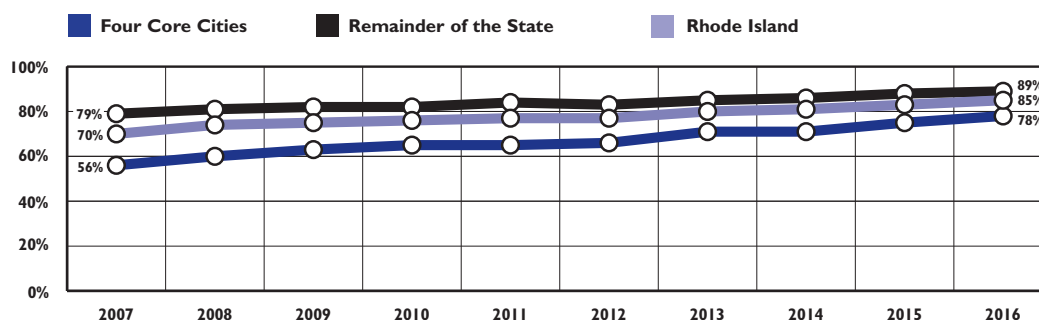
Rhode Island Four-Year High School Graduation and Dropout Rates, by Student Subgroup, Class of 2016

	COHORT SIZE	DROPOUT RATE	% COMPLETED GED	% STILL IN SCHOOL	FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATE
Female Students	5,347	6%	1%	4%	88%
Male Students	5,437	10%	2%	5%	83%
English Language Learners	734	17%	<1%	6%	77%
Students With Disabilities	1,676	18%	2%	17%	63%
Students Without Disabilities	9,108	7%	1%	3%	89%
Low-Income Students	5,700	13%	2%	7%	79%
Higher-Income Students	5,084	4%	1%	2%	93%
White Students	6,779	6%	2%	4%	88%
Asian Students	310	3%	1%	4%	92%
Black Students	936	10%	1%	8%	81%
Hispanic Students	2,390	13%	1%	6%	79%
Native American Students	85	13%	1%	8%	78%
ALL STUDENTS	10,784	8%	2%	5%	85%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2016. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- ◆ The Rhode Island four-year graduation rate for students entering the ninth grade during the 2012-2013 school year and graduating in 2016 was 85%, and the dropout rate was 8%. Low-income students (13% dropout rate) were more than three times more likely to drop out than higher-income students (4% dropout rate). Students of color were more likely than White students to drop out. Male students were more likely than female students to drop out.⁷
- ◆ For the Class of 2015, Rhode Island's four-year high school graduation rate was 83%. Rhode Island ranked 29th in the U.S. and 6th in New England (1st is best).⁸

Rhode Island Four-Year Graduation Rate by District Type, 2007-2016



- ◆ In Rhode Island, the four-year graduation rate increased from 70% to 85% between 2007 and 2016. The four-year graduation rate for the four core cities continues to be lower than the remainder of the state, but the four core city rate has increased from 56% in 2007 to 78% in 2016, a much steeper increase than in remainder of the state districts, where the graduation rate increased from 79% in 2007 to 89% in 2016.⁹
- ◆ Pawtucket (37 percentage point increase), Central Falls (26 percentage point increase), Johnston (26 percentage point increase), and Newport (25 percentage point increase) have experienced the largest increases in high school graduation rates in the state from 2007 to 2016.¹⁰

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2007-2016 cohorts. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Rhode Island Four-Year High School Graduation and Dropout Rates by District and School, Class of 2016

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL	COHORT SIZE	DROPOUT RATE	% COMPLETED GED	% STILL IN SCHOOL	FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATE
Barrington	210	1%	<1%	3%	95%
Barrington High School	207	1%	<1%	1%	97%
Bristol Warren	235	3%	3%	4%	90%
Mt. Hope High School	231	3%	3%	3%	91%
Burrillville	180	12%	2%	4%	82%
Burrillville High School	164	9%	0%	2%	89%
Central Falls	181	19%	0%	9%	72%
Central Falls Senior High School	181	19%	0%	9%	72%
Chariho	282	8%	1%	2%	88%
Chariho Regional High School	270	5%	1%	2%	91%
The RYSE School	10	70%	0%	10%	20%
Coventry	374	3%	2%	3%	93%
Coventry High School	372	3%	2%	2%	93%
Cranston	801	3%	2%	6%	88%
Cranston High School East	322	5%	1%	0%	94%
Cranston High School West	382	2%	1%	<1%	97%
NEL/CPS Construction and Career Academy	42	5%	7%	14%	74%
Cumberland	327	3%	1%	4%	92%
Cumberland High School	315	3%	0%	2%	96%
East Greenwich	200	1%	1%	3%	96%
East Greenwich High School	196	1%	1%	1%	98%
East Providence	405	10%	1%	3%	86%
East Providence High School	391	9%	1%	2%	88%
Exeter-West Greenwich	137	1%	1%	3%	94%
Exeter-West Greenwich Regional High School	132	1%	0%	2%	98%
Foster-Glocester	184	7%	1%	3%	90%
Ponaganset High School	184	7%	1%	3%	90%
Johnston	249	4%	2%	5%	89%
Johnston Senior High School	235	4%	<1%	1%	94%
Lincoln	250	4%	1%	2%	93%
Lincoln Senior High School	247	3%	1%	2%	94%
Middletown	152	7%	3%	4%	86%
Middletown High School	144	5%	2%	3%	90%
Narragansett	98	5%	1%	5%	89%
Narragansett High School	96	5%	1%	3%	91%
Newport	163	12%	2%	1%	85%
Rogers High School	152	9%	0%	1%	91%
North Kingstown	354	5%	2%	6%	87%
North Kingstown Senior High School	331	3%	1%	3%	93%
North Providence	271	3%	3%	1%	93%
North Providence High School	260	2%	0%	1%	97%
North Smithfield	134	4%	1%	0%	94%
North Smithfield High School	130	3%	1%	0%	96%
Pawtucket	525	10%	1%	5%	85%
Charles E. Shea High School	219	9%	<1%	5%	86%
William E. Tolman Senior High School	244	11%	<1%	5%	83%
Jacqueline M. Walsh School for the Performing and Visual Arts	47	0%	2%	0%	98%
Portsmouth	240	10%	<1%	2%	88%
Portsmouth High School	235	9%	<1%	1%	89%

continued next page

**Rhode Island Four-Year High School Graduation and Dropout Rates
by District and School, Class of 2016 (continued)**

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL	COHORT SIZE	DROPOUT RATE	% COMPLETED GED	% STILL IN SCHOOL	FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATE
Providence	1,659	14%	1%	6%	79%
Academy for Career Exploration (ACE)	41	7%	7%	7%	78%
Dr. Jorge Alvarez High School	101	14%	1%	4%	81%
Central High School	321	18%	<1%	4%	78%
Classical High School	277	0%	<1%	<1%	99%
E-Cubed High School	90	13%	2%	3%	81%
Hope High School	251	12%	1%	12%	75%
Juanita Sanchez Educational Complex	180	26%	1%	6%	68%
Mount Pleasant High School	236	20%	3%	13%	64%
Providence Career and Technical Academy	123	8%	1%	2%	89%
Times2 Academy	21	14%	0%	0%	86%
Scituate	129	3%	0%	3%	94%
Scituate High School	129	3%	0%	3%	94%
Smithfield	196	5%	1%	1%	93%
Smithfield Senior High School	194	4%	1%	1%	94%
South Kingstown	293	7%	1%	4%	88%
South Kingstown High School	292	7%	1%	3%	89%
Tiverton	151	7%	1%	5%	87%
Tiverton High School	145	7%	1%	1%	90%
Warwick	706	6%	3%	4%	87%
Pilgrim High School	236	8%	1%	3%	87%
Toll Gate High School	221	4%	1%	4%	91%
Warwick Veterans Memorial High School	207	3%	1%	0%	96%
West Warwick	252	10%	2%	2%	87%
West Warwick Senior High School	245	9%	<1%	2%	89%
Westerly	208	3%	0%	7%	90%
Westerly High School	195	3%	0%	2%	96%
Woonsocket	395	21%	2%	7%	70%
Woonsocket High School	391	21%	2%	6%	71%
Independent Charter Schools					
Beacon Charter High School for the Arts	57	4%	0%	0%	96%
Blackstone Academy	40	0%	0%	0%	100%
Paul Cuffee Charter School	65	9%	0%	3%	88%
The Greene School	33	3%	0%	3%	94%
Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts	25	0%	4%	0%	96%
Village Green Virtual Public Charter School	54	13%	0%	7%	80%
State-Operated Schools					
William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School	183	5%	1%	0%	95%
DCYF Schools	55	53%	33%	7%	7%
Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center	194	6%	1%	1%	92%
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>2,760</i>	<i>15%</i>	<i>1%</i>	<i>6%</i>	<i>78%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>7,191</i>	<i>5%</i>	<i>2%</i>	<i>4%</i>	<i>89%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>10,784</i>	<i>8%</i>	<i>2%</i>	<i>5%</i>	<i>85%</i>

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2016 (those students who entered high school as 9th graders in the 2012-2013 school year and therefore would be part of the Class of 2016 if they graduated on time in four years). Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Publicly funded students placed in collaboratives and 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.

Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College and Sheila Skip Nowell Leadership Academy are not reported because these students generally complete their course of study in more than four years. New Shoreham and Rhode Island School for the Deaf are not reported because there are fewer than 10 students in these cohorts. These students are included in the state total.

Monitor Early Warning Signs and Intervene Early

- ◆ Dropping out is almost always a long process rather than a sudden event. Early warning signs can begin as early as elementary school and include not reading proficiently by the end of third grade, being chronically absent (i.e., missing at least 10% of school days), two or more behavioral or disciplinary infractions, course failure in English or math in sixth through ninth grades, and/or failure to earn on-time promotion to the tenth grade.
- ◆ Schools can decrease dropout rates by establishing early warning systems that identify students at risk for dropping out and then implementing multiple strategies to support each student on their path to graduation.

Source: Bruce, M., Bridgeland, J. M., Fox, J. H., & Balfanz, R. (2011). *On track for success: The use of early warning indicator and intervention systems to build a Grad Nation*. Retrieved February 23, 2017, from <http://new.every1graduates.org/>

Importance of Reading by the End of Third Grade

- ◆ Educators and researchers have long recognized the importance of achieving reading proficiency by the end of third grade. Students who do not read proficiently by third grade often struggle in the later grades and are four times more likely to drop out of high school than their proficient peers.¹¹
- ◆ In 2016, 40% of Rhode Island third graders met expectations on the *Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)* English language arts assessment.¹²

Third Graders Meeting Expectations on the PARCC English Language Arts Assessment, Rhode Island, 2016

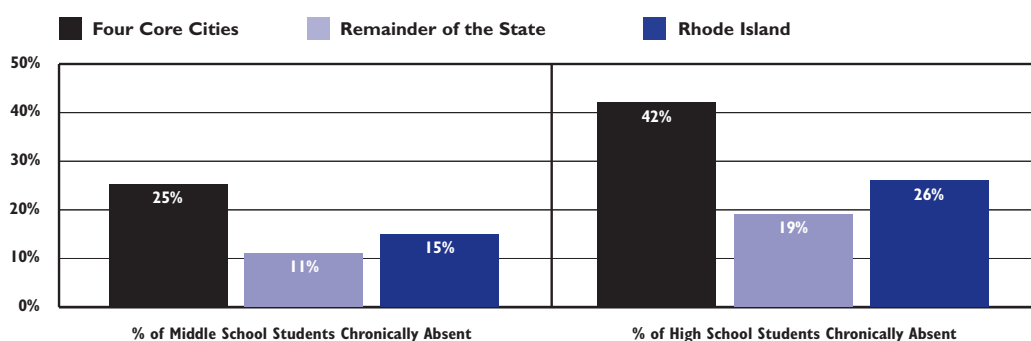
SUBGROUP	2016
Female Students	45%
Male Students	35%
English Language Learners	13%
Students With Disabilities	10%
Students Without Disabilities	44%
Low-Income Students	25%
Higher-Income Students	56%
White Students	49%
Asian Students	49%
Black Students	26%
Hispanic Students	24%
Native American Students	15%
ALL STUDENTS	40%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)*, 2016.

- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2016, 25% of low-income third graders met expectations, compared to 56% of higher-income third graders.¹³
- ◆ The national Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and the Rhode Island campaign, *Rhode Island Reads*, focus on improving the reading proficiency of low-income children and include three core components – improving school readiness, reducing chronic early absence (the percentage of students in grades kindergarten through third grade who miss 10% or more of the school year, including excused and unexcused absences), and increasing access to high-quality summer learning programs.^{14,15}
- ◆ Policymakers can increase third-grade reading proficiency by increasing access to high-quality early care and education programs (including child care, Head Start, Pre-K, and full-day kindergarten), supporting programs that engage parents as partners in their children’s early language and literacy development, and encouraging cross-agency partnerships.¹⁶

Chronic Absence, a Risk Factor for Dropping Out

Chronic Absence Rate by District Type, Middle and High School, 2015-2016 School Year



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015-2016 school year.

- ◆ Chronic absence is defined as missing at least 10% of the school year, which, in Rhode Island, translates to missing 18 days or more in a 180-day school year, including excused and unexcused absences.¹⁷
- ◆ In Rhode Island, during the 2015-2016 school year, the chronic absence rate among middle (25%) and high (42%) school students in the four core cities was more than twice as high as the rates among middle (11%) and high (19%) school students in the remainder of the state.¹⁸
- ◆ Students miss school for a variety of reasons, including physical and mental health problems, substance abuse, lack of access to health care, unstable housing, child welfare or juvenile justice involvement, work or family responsibilities, and lack of reliable transportation. Students may also stay away from school to avoid bullying, harassment, disciplinary actions due to tardiness, or embarrassment associated with lack of clean or appropriate clothing or literacy or other academic problems.^{19,20,21}
- ◆ Schools and districts, together with community agencies, can improve student attendance by developing systems that provide frequent reports on student absenteeism and reasons for the absenteeism, problem solving to address reasons for absenteeism, building and sustaining relationships with students and their families, recognizing and rewarding good attendance, and developing a community response that involves adults who interact with students outside of school.^{22,23}
- ◆ Chronic absence in sixth grade is one of three early warning signs that a student is likely to drop out of high school, and by ninth grade, a student's attendance is a better predictor of dropout risk than eighth-grade achievement test scores.²⁴

Transition from Middle to High School

- ◆ The transition from middle school to high school is a critical phase in students' lives and academic careers when academic challenges and social demands are heightened. Unsuccessful high school transitions contribute to poor achievement, high dropout rates, and low four-year graduation rates. Therefore, it is vital to identify strategies that work to ensure that all students make a successful transition.²⁵
- ◆ Strategies to help students successfully transition from middle school to high school include identifying students who are struggling prior to transition and offering individualized supports, offering accelerated learning programs for students who have been held back a grade, creating opportunities for staff across school levels to collaborate, preparing students to participate in the high school campus and culture before enrollment, helping with course selection, and ensuring that all students feel connected to school.²⁶

Improving Disciplinary Practices and School Climate

- ◆ Suspended students are more likely than their peers to experience academic failure and disengagement from school and to drop out of school. In fact, being suspended even once in ninth grade is associated with a twofold increase in the likelihood of dropping out.^{27,28}
- ◆ Punitive disciplinary practices, including “zero tolerance” policies, are largely ineffective and even counterproductive. Despite this evidence, out-of-school suspension is a widely used disciplinary technique, both nationally and in Rhode Island.^{29,30}

Out-of-School Suspensions by Infraction, Rhode Island, 2015-2016

BY TYPE OF INFRACTION	#	%	BY TYPE OF INFRACTION	#	%
Insubordination/Disrespect	4,084	35%	Alcohol/Drug/Tobacco Offenses	586	5%
Fighting	2,032	17%	Arson/Larceny/Robbery/Vandalism	332	3%
Disorderly Conduct	1,335	11%	Electronic Devices/Technology	190	2%
Assault of Student or Teacher	985	8%	Weapon Possession	207	2%
Harassment/Intimidation/Threat	994	8%	Attendance Offenses	0	0%
Obscene/Abusive Language	867	7%	Other Offenses	124	1%
			<i>Total</i>	<i>11,736</i>	

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015-2016 school year. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. *Harassment offenses include hazing and hate crimes. Assault offenses include sexual assault.

- ◆ During the 2015-2016 school year, out-of-school suspensions accounted for just under one-half (48%) of disciplinary actions. More than one-half of out-of-school suspensions were for non-violent offenses, such as insubordination or disrespect, or disorderly conduct.³¹
- ◆ In Rhode Island and in the U.S., Black, Hispanic, and Native American students and students with disabilities are more likely to be suspended than their peers.^{32,33}
- ◆ Schools and districts can improve school climate and discipline by developing and enforcing policies that set high expectations for student behavior, providing clear, appropriate, and consistent consequences for misbehavior, encouraging the use of alternative disciplinary approaches, such as restorative justice, and ensuring the equitable, appropriate, and limited use of suspensions.³⁴
- ◆ In 2016, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed a law that restricts the use of out-of-school suspensions to situations when a child’s behavior poses a physical risk or serious disruption that cannot be dealt with by other means and requires school districts to identify any racial, ethnic, or special education disparities and develop a plan to reduce such disparities.³⁵

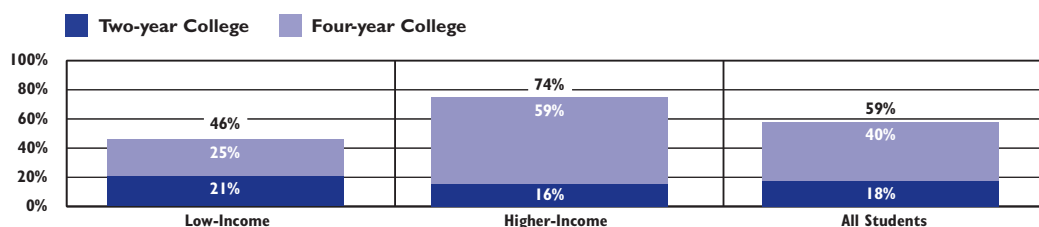
Dropout Recovery Strategies

- ◆ Youth who have dropped out of school often want to return to school and continue their education, but may lack the knowledge or means to do so. Dropout recovery programs re-engage youth and provide them with support and alternative pathways to high school graduation.³⁶
- ◆ Successful dropout recovery programs use a case management model that addresses barriers to high school completion, partner with community organizations to address student needs, allow individualized and flexible academic programs, and focus on students’ career goals. Rigorous and flexible credit recovery options, online learning, and dual enrollment can help youth catch up and begin making progress on postsecondary goals.^{37,38}

College and Career Readiness

- ◆ High school graduation is the minimum requisite for college and most employment, and postsecondary education is fast becoming a necessity for a growing number of workers. By 2020, 71% of jobs in Rhode Island will require education beyond high school.³⁹
- ◆ Fifty-nine percent of Rhode Island students who graduated from high school in the Class of 2015 immediately enrolled in college. There are large gaps in college access, particularly four-year college enrollment, between low- and higher-income students. Among Rhode Island students who graduated from high school in 2015, 46% of low-income students immediately enrolled in college compared to 74% of higher-income students.⁴⁰

Immediate College Enrollment by District Type and Type of College, Class of 2015, Rhode Island



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2015. Percentages may not sum exactly due to rounding.

Student-Centered Learning Tenets

- ◆ Adopting student-centered learning practices at the high school level can help students develop meaningful relationships with adults inside and outside of school, increase engagement and achievement for students from a variety of backgrounds and ensure that students graduate from high school with important social and emotional skills, including problem solving, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and strong work habits, that are essential for success in college and careers.^{41,42,43,44}
- ◆ There are four key tenets of student-centered learning: (1) learning that is personalized; (2) learning that is competency-based; (3) learning that happens anytime, anywhere; and (4) learning that allows students to take ownership.⁴⁵

Individual Learning Plans Supporting Personalized Pathways

- ◆ Rhode Island's *Secondary School Regulations* include a requirement that middle and high schools be structured in ways that support personalized learning.
- ◆ All school districts are responsible for helping students in grades 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 develop Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) that describe students' academic, career, and personal/social goals and the path they will take to achieve their goals. ILPs should be developed and revised with the support of school personnel as well as parents. Students should have the opportunity to revise this ILP at least twice each year.
- ◆ Every middle and high school student must be assigned a responsible adult, in addition to a school counselor, who is knowledgeable about that student's academic, career, and social/personal goals. This can be accomplished through student advisories, schools within schools, academies, and/or interdisciplinary teams supporting a group of students.

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education. (2016). *Regulations of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education: Middle and High School Learning Environments and the Rhode Island Diploma System*. Retrieved February 10, 2017, from www.ride.ri.gov

Opportunities to Learn Anytime, Anywhere

- ◆ Beginning in the Fall of 2016, Rhode Island students attending middle and high school in 20 traditional public school districts as well as several charter schools and state-operated schools were able to participate in advanced coursework not normally available at their own school. The *Advanced Coursework Network* allows students to take traditional, online and blended courses and earn middle school, high school, Advanced Placement, and/or postsecondary credit, or progress toward an industry-recognized certificate or credential, depending on the course. Courses are offered by traditional school districts, higher education institutions, charter schools, and community-based nonprofits.^{46,47}
- ◆ *Prepare RI* provides funding for public high school students to take dual or concurrent coursework, that allows them to earn both high school and college credit, at no cost to them or their families. Dual and concurrent enrollment provides advanced coursework options for high-achieving students, reduces the time and expenses required to earn a college degree, and increases high school and college achievement. During the 2015-2016 school year, 3,807 Rhode Island public high school students (9%) participated in dual or concurrent enrollment. Low-income, minority, special education, and male students were less likely to participate than other students.⁴⁸
- ◆ Rhode Island offers career and technical education (CTE) at more than 10 career and technical centers, 54 high schools, and charter schools, postsecondary institutions, and adult programs.⁴⁹ In 2016, the four-year high school graduation rate for CTE concentrators was 96%, compared to 77% for non-CTE concentrators.⁵⁰

Student Voice in School and District Reform and State Advocacy

- ◆ Including student voice in school and district reform and state decision-making provides school, district, and state decision-makers with direct knowledge and perspectives about what happens in schools that they could not obtain any other way.^{51,52}
- ◆ Schools can involve students more deeply by encouraging student participation on school improvement teams, requiring that students make up a certain percentage of voting members on key committees, and/or involving students in the design or redesign of their school.^{53,54,55}
- ◆ The Providence Youth Caucus (PYC), a coalition of youth organizations from across Providence, that includes the Providence Student Union, Young Voices, New Urban Arts, and Youth in Action, provides a forum for youth to work with leaders from the City to improve Rhode Island's largest school district. Currently, the PYC focuses on two key areas: (1) improving school culture and disciplinary practices, and (2) expanding personalized learning and student ownership.⁵⁶
- ◆ In 2014, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed a law that established a Student Advisory Council to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education designed to provide advice from the general student body to the Council. The Student Advisory Council members also elect a chairperson to serve as a non-voting member of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education.⁵⁷
- ◆ Rhode Island has several youth organizations that provide training and support to youth interested in state-level advocacy. These organizations have supported youth in developing and delivering testimony to the General Assembly and Council on Elementary and Secondary Education on high school graduation requirements, the use of suspensions, the state's education funding formula, and other topics.^{58,59}

Recommendations

- ◆ **Raise awareness** among students, parents, and the general public about the connection between educational attainment and positive outcomes for individual young people and for the state's economy.
- ◆ **Ensure that all children read proficiently by the end of third grade**, focusing on improving school readiness, reducing chronic early absence, and increasing access to high-quality summer learning.
- ◆ **Establish early warning systems** that use data on attendance, behavior, and course performance in middle and high school to identify students at risk of dropping out of high school. Regularly and frequently monitor individual student progress and provide appropriate personalized interventions to get students back on the path to graduation.
- ◆ **Reduce chronic absence at all school levels** by producing frequent reports on student absenteeism and reasons for absenteeism, problem solving to address reasons for absenteeism, building and sustaining relationships with students and their families, recognizing and rewarding good attendance, and developing a community response that involves adults who interact with students outside of school.
- ◆ **Improve school climate and disciplinary practices** by developing and enforcing policies that set high expectations for student behavior, providing clear, appropriate, and consistent consequences for misbehavior, encouraging the use of alternative disciplinary approaches, such as restorative justice, and ensuring the equitable, appropriate, and limited use of suspensions.
- ◆ **Help students transition from middle school to high school** by identifying students who are struggling prior to the transition and offering them individualized supports, offering accelerated learning programs for students who have been held back a grade, creating opportunities for staff across school levels to collaborate, preparing students to participate in the high school campus and culture before enrollment, helping with course selection, and ensuring that all students feel connected to school.
- ◆ **Focus on closing achievement gaps** between low-income and higher-income students and White and minority students. Collect and report data on high school graduation rates for special populations, including ELLs, pregnant and parenting teens, youth in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, and homeless and runaway youth, and offer special support to these students.
- ◆ **Continue providing dedicated funding for English Language Learner instruction** in the education funding formula.
- ◆ **Provide multiple pathways to graduation** for all students who need them, including rigorous and flexible credit recovery programs, online learning, dual enrollment programs, and individualized supports.
- ◆ **Offer all students a rigorous and engaging curriculum** aligned with standards and tied to college access, career pathways, and vocational exploration opportunities, including dual and concurrent coursework, career and technical education, and expanded learning opportunities that allow students to receive credit for rigorous, hands-on, individualized learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom.
- ◆ **Ensure equitable access to advanced coursework** by providing easy-to-access information about the *Advanced Coursework Network*, dual and concurrent learning opportunities, AP courses, career and technical education, and expanded learning opportunities and by reducing barriers to participation.
- ◆ **Ensure that all middle and high school students have robust Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)** and that these plans are regularly reviewed and updated to support students' academic, career, and social/personal goals and the path they will take to achieve their goals.
- ◆ **Provide opportunities for students to provide input and participate in decision-making** that affects their individual learning as well as their larger school community.

References

- ¹ Child Trends Data Bank. (November, 2015). *High school dropout rates: Indicators on children and youth*. Retrieved February 21, 2017, from www.childtrends.org
- ² Egerter, S., Braveman, P., Sadegh-Nobari, T., Grossman-Kahn, R., & Dekker, M. (April, 2011). *Exploring the social determinants of health: Education and health*. Retrieved February 21, 2017, from www.rwjf.org
- ^{3,7,9,50} Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2016 four-year cohort graduation rates.
- ⁴ Graduation rates are calculated using the cohort formula which shows the percentage of students from an entering ninth grade cohort who graduate within four years.
- ⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey, 2011-2015. Table S2301.
- ⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey, 2011-2015. Table B20004.
- ⁸ National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). *Table 1*. Retrieved February 17, 2017, from www.nces.ed.gov
- ¹⁰ Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2007-2016 four-year cohort graduation rates.
- ¹¹ Hernandez, D. J. (2012). *Double jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- ^{12,13} Rhode Island Department of Education, *Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)* results, 2016.
- ¹⁴ The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. (n.d.). *Third-grade reading success matters*. Retrieved February 21, 2017, from www.gradelevelreading.net
- ¹⁵ Rhode Island Reads. (n.d.). *Our goal: By 2025, we will double the number of Rhode Island 3rd graders reading at grade-level*. Retrieved February 23, 2017, from www.rireads.org
- ¹⁶ *A Governor's guide to early literacy: Getting all students reading by third grade*. (2013). Washington, DC: National Governors Association.
- ^{17,21,22} Balfanz, R. & Byrnes, V. (May, 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.
- ^{18,31,32} Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015-2016 school year.
- ¹⁹ Sundius, J. & Farneth, M. (2008). *Missing school: The epidemic of school absence*. Baltimore, MD: Open Society Institute.
- ²⁰ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (2016). *The relationship between school attendance and health: Health policy snapshot*. Retrieved February 10, 2017, from www.rwjf.org
- ²³ Attendance Works and the Everyone Graduates Center. (2016). *Preventing missed opportunity: Taking collective action to confront chronic absence*. Retrieved February 9, 2017, from www.attendanceworks.org
- ²⁴ Attendance Works. (2014). *The attendance imperative: How states can advance achievement by reducing chronic absence*. Retrieved February 15, 2016, from www.attendanceworks.org
- ²⁵ Herlihy, C. (2007). *Easing the transition to high school: Research and best practices designed to support high school learning*. Retrieved November 15, 2013, from www.betterhighschools.org
- ²⁶ Parrish, T., Poland, L., Arellanes, M., Ernandes, J., & Vilorio, J. (2011). *Making the move: Transition strategies at California high schools with high graduation rates*. Sacramento, CA: California Comprehensive Center at WestEd.
- ^{27,29} Sundius, J. & Farneth, M. (2008). *Putting kids out of school: What's causing high suspension rates and why they are detrimental to students, schools, and communities*. Baltimore, MD: Open Society Institute – Baltimore.
- ²⁸ Losen, D. J. & Martinez, T. E. (2013). *Out of school & off track: The overuse of suspensions in American middle and high schools*. Los Angeles, CA: The Center for Civil Rights Remedies.
- ³⁰ Losen, D. J. (2011). *Discipline policies, successful schools, and racial justice*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center.
- ³³ *2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection a first look: Key data highlights on equity and opportunity gaps in our nation's public schools*. (2016). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights.
- ³⁴ *Guiding principles: A resource guide for improving school climate and discipline*. (2014). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- ³⁵ Rhode Island General Law 16-2-17. Enacted by the General Assembly as H-7056 Sub A in 2016.
- ^{36,37} Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy. (November 2012). *Forgotten youth: Re-engaging students through dropout recovery*. Retrieved November 15, 2013, from www.rennicenter.org
- ³⁸ Almeida, C., Steinberg, A., Santos, J., & Le, C. (2010). *Six pillars of effective dropout recovery: An assessment of current state policy and how to improve it*. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future.
- ³⁹ Carnevale, A. P., Smith, N., & Strohl, J. (2013). *Recovery: Job growth and education requirements through 2020 (State report)*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce.
- ⁴⁰ Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2015.
- ⁴¹ *Centered on results: Assessing the impact of student-centered learning*. (2015). Quincy, MA: Nellie Mae Education Foundation.
- ⁴² *Beyond school walls: Earning credit for expanded learning opportunities*. (May, 2016). Boston, MA: Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy.
- ⁴³ Yonezawa, S., McClure, L. & Jones, M. (2012). *Personalization in schools*. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future.
- ⁴⁴ Balfanz, R., et al. (2014). *Building a grad nation: Progress and challenge in ending the high school dropout epidemic*. Retrieved February 17, 2016, from www.americaspromise.org
- ⁴⁵ Nellie Mae Education Foundation. (n.d.). *Our vision*. Retrieved February 27, 2017, from www.nmefoundation.org
- ⁴⁶ Rhode Island Department of Education. (n.d.). *Advanced Coursework Network*. Retrieved February 23, 2017, from www.ride.ri.gov
- ⁴⁷ *Frequently asked questions: Advanced Coursework Network information for district/school leaders, families/students*. Retrieved February 23, 2017, from www.ride.ri.gov
- ⁴⁸ *Prepare Rhode Island – Making college affordable & accessible: Dual enrollment annual report, academic year 2015-16*. (n.d.). Providence, RI: Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner & Rhode Island Department of Education.
- ⁴⁹ Rhode Island Department of Education. (n.d.). *Career and technical education*. Retrieved February 27, 2017, from www.ride.ri.gov
- ^{51,53} Toshalis, E. & Nakkula, M. J. (2012). *Motivation, engagement, and student voice*. Retrieved November 10, 2016, from www.studentsatthecenter.org
- ^{52,54} SoundOut. (2015). *Student voice toolbox: Why student voice? A research summary*. Retrieved December 20, 2016, from <https://soundout.org>
- ⁵⁵ Reif, G., Shultz, G., & Ellis, S. (2016). *A qualitative study of student-centered learning practices in New England high schools*. Quincy, MA: Nellie Mae Education Foundation.
- ⁵⁶ Providence Youth Caucus. (n.d.). Providence Youth Caucus. Retrieved February 27, 2017, from www.pvdyouthcaucus.org
- ⁵⁷ Rhode Island General Law 16-60-2. Enacted by the General Assembly as H-7133Aaa in 2014.
- ⁵⁸ Young Voices. (2016). *State-level change*. Retrieved October 28, 2016, from www.youngvoicesri.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.

Primary funding for Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is provided by The Rhode Island Foundation, United Way of Rhode Island, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Prince Charitable Trusts, Alliance for Early Success, DentaQuest Foundation, Nellie Mae Education Foundation, Hasbro Children's Fund, Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island, Delta Dental of Rhode Island, UnitedHealthcare Community Plan, van Beuren Charitable Foundation, CVS Health and other corporate, foundation and individual sponsors.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Staff

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director
Jill Beckwith, Deputy Director
Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst
Jim Beasley, Policy Analyst
Dorene Bloomer, Finance Director
Jennifer Capaldo, Program Assistant
Katy Chu, Communications Manager
Kara Foley, Policy Analyst
W. Galarza, Executive Assistant/
Office Manager
Stephanie Geller, Senior Policy Analyst
Dalma Diaz, Intern, Brown University
Suellen Rizzo, Intern, Rhode Island College
School of Social Work

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

One Union Station
Providence, RI 02903
401-351-9400
rikids@rikidscount.org
www.rikidscount.org



We are grateful to the Nellie Mae Education Foundation for its support of this Issue Brief.