

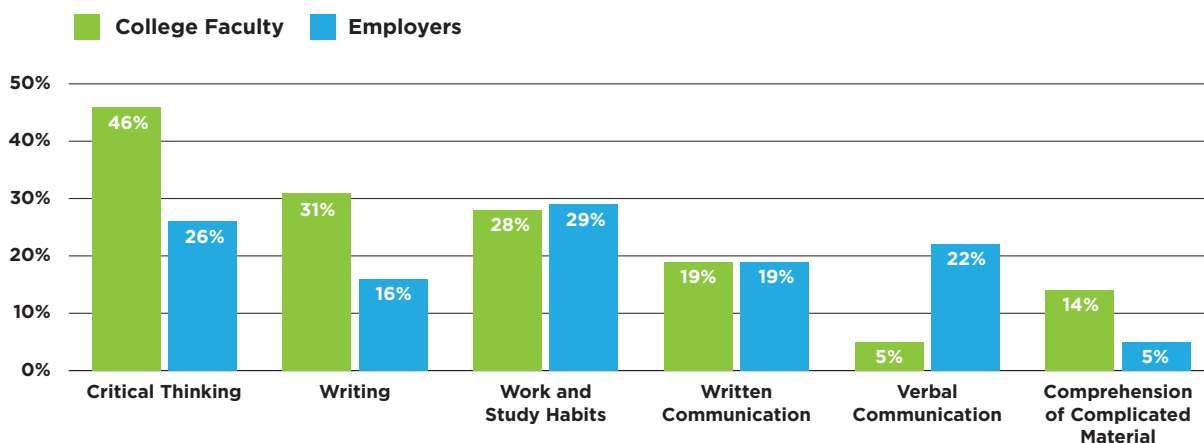
# Preparing Students for College and Career: Policies Supporting Student-Centered Learning in Rhode Island

Adopting student-centered learning practices 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 the important social/emotional, executive function, problem solving, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills, and strong work habits that are essential for success in college and careers.<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>

For these reasons, nationally and in Rhode Island, we are seeing a move toward student-centered learning – learning that is personalized, competency-based, can happen anytime and anywhere, and allows students to take ownership over their own learning.

Student-centered learning includes a range of instructional approaches that are designed to address the skills, knowledge, needs, interests, and aspirations of individual students. Students are encouraged to become actively engaged in their own success and given a voice in decisions that affect their learning at the classroom, school, district, and state levels. Student-centered learning recognizes that learning can occur outside of the traditional school day, or school year, and is not restricted to the classroom but can take place in the larger community. Student advancement is based on mastery of skills and academic content, rather than age, seat time, or hours on task.<sup>5,6</sup>

## College and Career Readiness Skills That College Faculty and Employers Identify as Lacking in Public High School Graduates



Source: *Rising to the challenge: Views on high school graduates' preparedness for college and careers*. (2015). Retrieved February 27, 2018, from [www.achieve.org](http://www.achieve.org). (Note: Question asked "In which ONE or TWO areas, if any, do you most wish U.S. public high schools were doing a better job of preparing their students for the expectations of college/the work world?")

A recent national survey conducted by Hart Research Associates and Public Opinion Strategies found that college faculty and employers believe that as a whole public high schools are not adequately preparing high school graduates to meet the expectations they will face in college and in the workforce. In particular, college faculty and employers report dissatisfaction in how public schools are preparing students in terms of critical thinking, written and verbal communication, work and study habits, problem solving, and comprehension of complicated material.<sup>7</sup>

## A History of Support for Student-Centered Learning

In 2003, Rhode Island became the first state to establish a proficiency-based high school diploma. The initial policy established by the Rhode Island Board of Education established proficiency-based graduation requirements in six content areas – English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, technology, and the arts. Performance-based assessments, such as exhibitions, portfolios, and comprehensive course assessments, were included as a graduation requirement to ensure that students could apply their skills.<sup>8</sup>

### The Met: The First Big Picture Learning School

Rhode Island was the birthplace of Big Picture Learning, a nonprofit organization established in 1995 with the sole purpose of putting students at the center of their own learning.

The first Big Picture Learning School was the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (“The Met”) which is located in Providence, Rhode Island and has been graduating students since 2000.

The Met has since grown to a network of six small, public high schools in Providence and Newport, Rhode Island. Education at The Met includes advisory, individual learning plans, internships, and a college transition program. Advisors work with mentors, parents and students to develop a personalized curriculum built around students’ interests and identify professionals in the community who can help students pursue their interests in the real world.

There are now more than 65 Big Picture Learning Network schools throughout the United States and others in Australia, Canada, Italy, and the Netherlands that use the Big Picture Learning design, all following the initial model of putting students at the center.<sup>9,10</sup>

## Rhode Island’s Strategic Plan Supports Student-Centered Learning

Rhode Island’s Strategic Plan for Public Education for 2015-2020 continues this strong focus on student-centered learning. Personalized Learning Statewide is one of six priority areas in the strategic plan. The plan identifies three major areas of focus to increase personalized learning:

- Building statewide capacity to personalize
- Blended and digital learning
- Career readiness and pathways

The plan also states that the Rhode Island Department of Education will “establish a policy and fiscal framework that enables student control over the pace, space, and content of their learning while meeting state and local requirements” and includes as a key desired outcome “increased number of schools implementing a school-wide proficiency-based model for instruction and advancement.”<sup>11</sup>



Rhode Island’s policies and statewide strategic plan for education support student-centered learning, but sometimes strong policies are not enough. Ensuring that all Rhode Island students have opportunities for student-centered learning requires the complementary and sustained efforts of a variety of stakeholders including policymakers, state education officials, district and school administrators, school committees, teachers and school personnel, community partners, parents, and students. Each of these stakeholders has a role to play in terms of ensuring that we have strong policies and regulations, adequate financial resources, guidance and professional development, and targeted communications efforts to get the word out about the importance of rigorous and engaging, student-centered learning opportunities that prepare students for success in college and careers.

This report provides an overview of Rhode Island’s policies, initiatives, and practices that support student-centered learning as well as perspectives from students about how these policies, initiatives, and practices are playing out in their classrooms.

## Rhode Island's *Secondary School Regulations* Have Long Supported Student-Centered Learning

For more than a decade, Rhode Island's *Secondary School Regulations* have supported student-centered learning.

- Rhode Island's *Secondary School Regulations* include a requirement that middle schools and high schools implement strategies for creating personalized learning environments.<sup>12</sup>
- 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.<sup>13</sup>

- School districts are responsible for helping students in grades six through 12 develop Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) that describe students' academic, career, and social/personal goals and map out 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 their ILP at least twice each year.<sup>14</sup>

## Revisions to *Secondary School Regulations* Strengthen Student-Centered Learning

When the *Secondary School Regulations* were revised in October 2016, the focus on student-centered learning was strengthened. The new regulations, which went into effect on July 1, 2017 for the graduating class of 2021:<sup>15</sup>

- Clarified that students can meet coursework requirements through courses within state-approved career and technical programs, expanded learning opportunities, dual and concurrent enrollment, online learning,

experiential learning opportunities, and other non-traditional academic and career-readiness learning experiences.<sup>16</sup>

- Included a proposal to award a Council designation or Pathway Endorsement, on high school diplomas to students who complete a rigorous course of study in pursuit of a personal learning goal (e.g., a strong focus on STEM, the arts, or languages).<sup>17,18</sup>

## *Secondary School Regulations* Reinforce and Expand Personalized and Proficiency-Based High School Diplomas

Guidance from the Rhode Island Department of Education released in 2017 and updated in June 2018 builds on the new *Secondary School Regulations* with updated high school graduation requirements.<sup>19</sup>

As part of the new diploma system that starts with the Class of 2021, Rhode Island high school graduates will be eligible to earn diploma designations designed to "validate the achievements of high school students through flexible and personalized high school learning experiences, to allow public recognition of specific skills, and to

incentivize students to meet additional high standards beyond those needed to earn a high school diploma." Diploma designations will include:

- **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:** demonstration of deep learning in a chosen area of interest and preparedness for employment or further study<sup>20</sup>

## Focus Groups Provide Youth Perspectives

In 2017, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and Young Voices, a youth empowerment organization, planned and conducted a series of focus groups with students at several urban high schools to get their perspectives about what teaching and learning looked like in their schools and what experiences they have had with more “student-centered” approaches to learning. Six focus groups were conducted and the results represent the views of 56 students at seven public schools in Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Providence, Rhode Island. The findings from these focus groups provide youth perspectives on how schools could better engage students in their own learning and prepare them for success in college and careers.<sup>21</sup>

### Student Perspectives on the Role of Advisors

Rhode Island's *Secondary School Regulations* require that every middle and high school student be assigned a responsible adult, in addition to a school counselor, who is knowledgeable about that student's academic, career, and social/personal goals. Students value the opportunity to have close working relationships with teachers or advisors who can help them identify and pursue learning opportunities that will help them achieve their academic, career, and social/personal goals.

“Basically, they want to know our personal ideas or what we're passionate about or our understanding of what we want to do in the working world or what we want to do for careers in general.”

“In this school, you get to know people and they help you get better. They have this idea of what you want and listen to what you want. There's at least one teacher you have a solid relationship with, and they help you figure it out.”

“Luckily for me, I have a teacher who has taken an interest in me and has given me the opportunity to, for example, teach a class. Since I want to be a teacher, he gives me these kinds of chances to learn about it.”

However, during focus groups conducted by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and Young Voices in 2017, students reported that not all students have these types of relationships and that often only students who take the initiative and ask for help get assistance developing a plan to meet their goals.

“Not all advisory teachers are the same, but I feel like they should be. I feel like they all should be on the same page and help everybody...It isn't fair for everybody.”

“My advisor doesn't really do anything. We walk in, and we really don't do anything. I don't even think he's ever asked what we want to be or anything like that.”

“I think if you actually care about something enough to talk to someone about it and kind of ask for help most of the adults in this building are willing to take time out and help you.”

“A lot of the positive experiences that people are saying, they are individual examples [that happened] by chance, like survival of the fittest. If you meet a teacher that can be your friend, you're good. If you go to an organization outside of school like Young Voices, you're good. However, there is not some sort of plan implemented by the school system that provides a lot of these positive opportunities for students.”

“I've never had a teacher actually ask me what I want to do. The counselor has only been concerned about what colleges I'm going to. I think she asked me like once [what my academic, career, and personal goals are], but I haven't really gotten any guidance. I've gotten more guidance at Young Voices for what I want to do than at school.”<sup>22</sup>

### Blackstone Academy Charter School's Commitment to Personalization

Blackstone Academy Charter School was founded in 2002 with the goal of offering high school students the opportunity to get a high-quality education in a small school setting that is committed to personalization, civic engagement, and social-emotional growth.

Blackstone Academy believes that its strong advisory program has been a critical component of the school's success. Students have the same advisor for their entire high school career. Advisors are the primary point of contact with students' families. They have time during the school day to get to know students well and support them in whatever ways are needed. There is also designated common planning time during which advisors can set goals, plan events, or evaluate the unique needs of students in collaboration with administrators and other advisors.<sup>23</sup>



## Student Perspectives on Individual Learning Plans

Although state regulations have required that all students have Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) starting in the sixth grade for several years, many students reported that they do not have these plans. Students who did have ILPs often reported that they did not get enough guidance when developing their plans, although plans are supposed to be developed with the support of school personnel.

“One day, we walked into homeroom and get to advisory. They made an announcement [and told us] you have to go to this link. They made everyone pull out their phones. I remind you that not everyone has a phone to do it on, so they didn’t provide the actual resources needed to do it. Basically, you were just required to fill it out, but no one actually tried to see if you completed it. People just filled out very predictable things like I want to graduate from high school, and then I want to go to college.”

“I remember we had this thing we had to do in sophomore year called Richer Picture. It was super

useless, because we had to write down what our goals were, and a lot of us didn’t know what to write down. I basically had to write down graduating from high school, go to college, making money afterwards because that’s everyone’s basic goal in life.”

Other students did not see the value of the ILPs because their schools do not use them as intended (i.e., to help guide students toward opportunities in the classroom and the larger community that will help them achieve their goals).

“There was no follow up. You didn’t meet with your counselor regarding your goals. You didn’t have any guidance from your counselors, and then we never did it again. We just did it one day.”

“They’re not connecting what you said your goals are with helping you with ideas about how to get there unless you ask them.”

“I liked [filling out the career interest inventory] because I could start to see what field I may be talented in, but there was no follow-up to it, so most people just threw the papers away.”<sup>24</sup>

## Revitalizing Individual Learning Plans

Rhode Island education leaders recognize that Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) are “the backbone of personalization and relevance of a student’s education” and are taking several important steps to revitalize these plans and ensure that all students have plans that are meaningful.<sup>25</sup>

- In 2017, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) convened an **ILP Working Group** made up of a diverse group of education, community, and industry stakeholders. This working group came up with a series of recommendations to help guide the revitalization of the state’s ILP system so that ILPs would be a meaningful tool to connect a student’s academic, career, and social/personal goals and interests with their secondary school experiences.<sup>26,27</sup>
- In May 2018, RIDE released an **Individual Learning Plan Adoption Toolkit** designed to support district and school staff in the adoption and implementation of an ILP system.<sup>28</sup>
- By the 2020-2021 school year, all middle and high schools are expected to have adopted an ILP system from the **state-vetted menu of providers** (i.e., Naviance, Richer Picture, XAP, or Xello) or developed their own ILP system and curriculum model that meets the state’s requirements.<sup>29</sup>
- School districts are required to have an **ILP curriculum** that provides regular opportunities for students to learn about and practice goal setting, planning, and achievement in academic, career, and social/personal domains.<sup>30</sup>
- ILPs should include opportunities for students to set learning goals, explore careers, plan for earning of postsecondary credentials while in high school, and document college and/or training program applications or job or military applications.<sup>31</sup>
- RIDE also hired its first **School Counseling Fellow** who will work with RIDE, schools, and districts to support Individual Learning Plan (ILP) implementation and broader comprehensive school counseling efforts.<sup>32</sup>



## Juanita Sanchez Educational Complex: Career Pathway Opportunities

Through partnerships with Roger Williams University and the University of Rhode Island (URI), students at Juanita Sanchez Educational Complex (JSEC) have the opportunity to choose from four different college credit-bearing pathways:

- (1) **The Biotechnology Pathway** offers students the opportunity to take courses that provide them with industry-recognized skills through a partnership with URI. The Biotechnology program prepares students for a wide range of biologic and health-related fields, including biomedical, the fastest growing field in Rhode Island. Students have industry mentors, including mentors from Lifespan, who inform them about opportunities related to their interests.
- (2) **The Community Development Pathway** introduces students to the intersection of public health, public safety, education, government, economic development, transportation, and housing. Students are required to do an internship to build their skills in addressing current community development issues. Recently, students participating in the community development track at JSEC created a food bank as part of a class about creating and running a nonprofit organization.
- (3) **The Global Systems Thinking Pathway** provides students with a global perspective on community development-related elements and issues and global communities; cultural and ethnic competency for global community practitioners; sustainability and environmental elements and issues; international policy and economic development; and the skills and techniques necessary to support, advocate, and mobilize global communities.
- (4) **The Computer Science Pathway** offers students the opportunity to earn half of a minor in Computer Science at URI upon high school graduation. This pathway provides students with specific skills that lead to a range of diverse careers using technology, coding, and security in industry. Within this pathway, students may choose to study either computer science and networking or network security.<sup>33,34</sup>

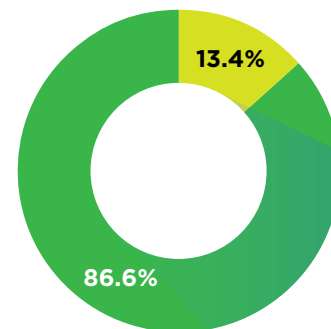
## Student Perspectives on Career Pathways

In focus groups conducted in 2017, some students described opportunities their schools offer students to learn about and prepare for a career they are interested in by taking college courses in that area or by participating in internships or job shadowing experiences.

“I came here last year and straight from the beginning I was encouraged to do internships...I worked with police stations in Central Falls. With my internship I was also involved in a police school at Roger Williams University...They have been giving me all these opportunities that will help me next year for sure.”

“I’m really into marine biology. I want to go to URI in a few years and specialize in marine biology. This school, these people got me an internship in North Kingstown. It was a very fun experience. I was there for six months and went there every week. Every time I went I learned something new about marine biology. There were also people from URI working there so I got information from biologists working there. It was a good experience.”<sup>35</sup>

## Students Participating in Career Pathways While in Middle or High School, December 2017



n = 20,779

Students Participating..... 13.4%  
Students Not Participating..... 86.6%

Source: *Prepare Rhode Island 2018 annual report*. (2018). Retrieved September 12, 2018, from [www.prepare-ri.org](http://www.prepare-ri.org)

■ As of December 2017, 13.4% of Rhode Island eighth and twelfth grade students had participated in career pathways programming during their time in middle or high school.<sup>36</sup>

## PrepareRI

PrepareRI launched in 2016 after Rhode Island was awarded a New Skills for Youth grant from JPMorgan Chase and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). PrepareRI is a strategic partnership between the Rhode Island government, private industry leaders, the public education system, universities, and nonprofits across the state. This collaboration was undertaken to help prepare all Rhode Island youth with the skills they need for jobs that pay. Many of the goals of PrepareRI are aligned with student-centered learning and focused on providing students with personalized learning opportunities that address their skills, knowledge, needs, interests, and aspirations and allow them to pursue their own pathways.

PrepareRI's goals are that by 2020:

- All career pathway programs will be **aligned to Rhode Island's high-demand career fields**
- All high school students will have access to a **work-based learning experience**, such as an internship in a relevant career field
- All students, starting no later than middle school, will have **career exploration opportunities** and **individualized learning plans** based on their unique strengths and interests
- Over half of high school students will **graduate with college credit or an industry credential**
- Over half of high school students will **participate in career and technical education (CTE)**

Source: PrepareRI. (n.d.). *Prepare Rhode Island*. Retrieved August 17, 2018 from [www.prepare-ri.org](http://www.prepare-ri.org)

## Students Value the Opportunity to Take College Courses While in High School

During focus groups, students talked about how college courses they took through the Advanced Coursework Network and PrepareRI Dual Enrollment Program helped them prepare for the rigor of college courses, pursue deeper knowledge in a subject area of interest, and potentially save money by completing college credits before they even graduate from high school.

"I'm actually taking a college class [in public health], and I think it's really good...It actually gives you a hint about what it's going to be like in college..."

"I was taking two college courses at the same time, and honestly I didn't know if I could do it because it was two college courses and I had a lot of essays and homework to do. [It gave me] a sense of what college homework is like, and it taught me how to manage my time and school and with sports as well."

"Every Tuesday, we had online college classes. I took it in aerospace since that's what I want to study."

"College is expensive and you get the opportunity to take a class that counts as college credit. That is one less college class to pay for."<sup>37</sup>

## Dual and Concurrent Enrollment

- **Dual enrollment** allows students to take courses at a higher education institution and earn both high school and college credit.<sup>38</sup>
- **Concurrent enrollment** allows students to take a college course at their high school and earn both high school and college credit.<sup>39</sup>
- **The PrepareRI Dual Enrollment Fund** provides funding for public high school students to take courses at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI), Rhode Island College (RIC), or University of Rhode Island (URI) and earn both high school and college credit, at no cost to them or their families.<sup>40</sup>
- Dual and concurrent enrollment provides **advanced coursework options** for high-achieving students, reduces the time and expenses required to earn a college degree, and increase high school and college achievement.<sup>41,42</sup>



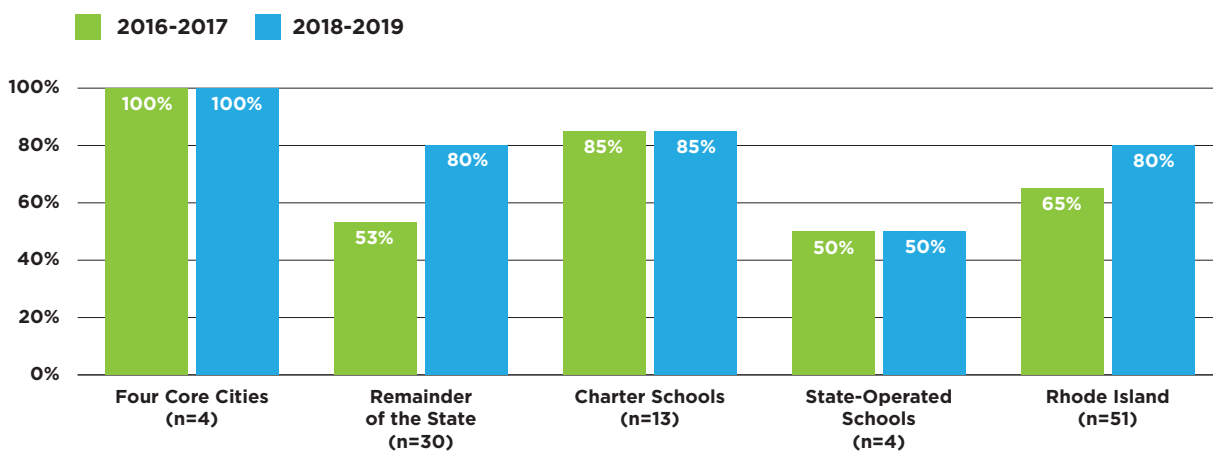
"PrepareRI is a very important initiative for the State of Rhode Island to make sure that students are prepared for postsecondary education and employment through the lens of having high quality career pathways that span secondary and postsecondary education."

– Dr. Brenda Dann-Messier, Commissioner of Postsecondary Education

## Advanced Coursework Network

- Beginning in the fall of 2016, Rhode Island students attending middle and high school in participating public school districts have been able to participate in advanced coursework not normally available at their own school through the Advanced Coursework Network.<sup>43</sup>
- 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.<sup>44</sup>
- Courses are offered by traditional school districts, private higher education institutions, charter schools, and community-based nonprofits.<sup>45</sup>
- Examples of classes offered include Computer and Networking Fundamentals offered by New England Institute of Technology, Introductory Psychology offered by Roger Williams University, and Downcity Designers: Design Studio offered by Downcity Design.<sup>46</sup>

## Advanced Coursework Network Participation, By District Type, Rhode Island, 2016-2017 and 2018-2019 School Years



Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016-2017 and 2018-2019 school years. Includes only districts serving secondary school students.

- Districts and schools have the option of joining the Advanced Coursework Network as Network Members. Becoming a member allows their students to enroll in coursework offered as part of the Advanced Coursework Network.<sup>47</sup>
- Since the Advanced Coursework Network was established, more and more Rhode Island districts and schools have joined to provide their students with opportunities to participate in a wide range of coursework, including courses that are not normally offered at their own school.<sup>48</sup>

## Need for Increased Communication and Outreach

During focus groups, many students said that they had not heard of opportunities to take courses through the Advanced Coursework Network that allow them to learn outside the traditional classroom setting, engage them in different ways of learning, or even earn college credit or only learned about these opportunities after it was too late for them to enroll.

“I didn’t sign up for any of those classes because I didn’t know about them, but then one of my friends told me about it but it was too late for me to sign up.”

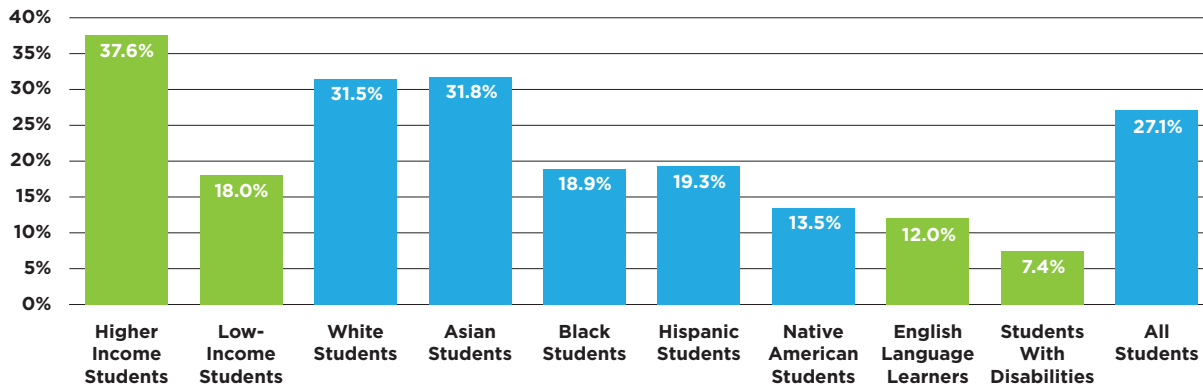
“No one in my class even knew that they could take classes in other organizations, such as a computer science class or something online. They’d never even heard of it. Now that [the school] actually got around to putting it on their website, all the classes are basically full, so no one actually got a chance to sign up for it.”<sup>49</sup>



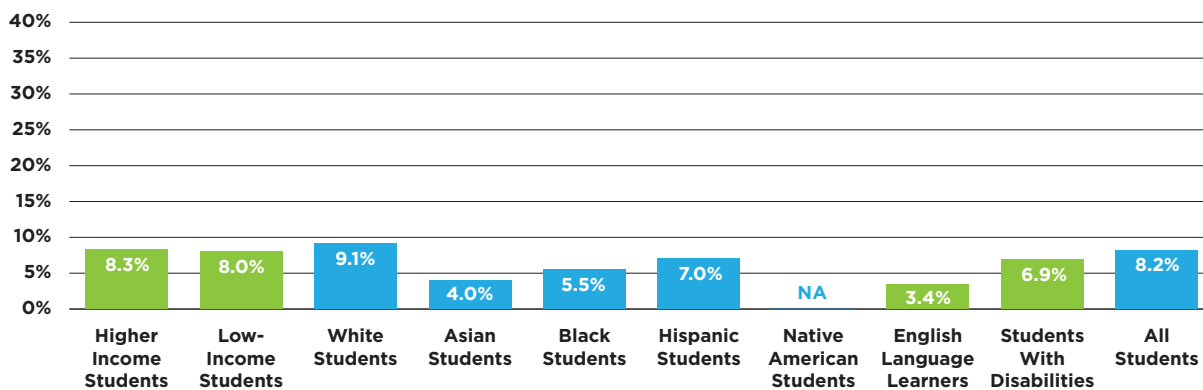
## Gaps in College Credits and Industry-Recognized Credentials Earned by High School Students

Early data on post-secondary readiness suggests that Rhode Island is making progress but that there are large gaps in college credits and industry-recognized credentials earned by high school students by race, ethnicity, income, and special education and English language learner status. Closing these gaps will require a thorough analysis of the barriers students face and what can be done to eliminate barriers and provide equitable access to rigorous and engaging learning opportunities that provide paths to success in college and careers.<sup>50</sup>

### College Credits Earned by Students Enrolled in 12th Grade, 2016-2017



### Industry Recognized Credentials Earned by Students Enrolled in 12th Grade, 2016-2017



Source: *PrepareRI 2018 annual report*. (2018). Retrieved September 19, 2018, from [www.prepare-ri.org](http://www.prepare-ri.org). NA indicates that the data are not available because the number of students was too small to report.

### Need to Address Barriers to Access

During focus groups, students expressed concern that certain groups of students, particularly English language learners, were not told about opportunities to take college courses, perhaps because teachers and administrators did not think they were ready for them or thought they should focus on building their English skills.

“I have heard some students who are English language learners saying they felt like they weren’t getting exposed to as many opportunities as the other English speaking students. They can be kind of segregated from the other part of the school.”

“Some opportunities they only give to the ones in regular classes, and they don’t give them to us that are in ESL.”

Other students talked about the logistical challenges associated with participating in courses offered through the Advanced Coursework Network or PrepareRI Dual Enrollment Program, especially problems with transportation.

“I wanted to do this program on the weekends, but me and my mom struggled to find the right schedule where she could pick me up, so transportation is a problem.”

“When I was taking a course through the Advanced Coursework Network, I had problems with transportation, so they helped by giving us bus passes.”<sup>51</sup>

## Rhode Island's *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* Plan Supports Student-Centered Learning

Rhode Island's *ESSA* plan includes a strong focus on student-centered learning and the connections between student-centered learning and college and career readiness.

- **“Student-Centered Learning Experiences”** is included in the plan as one of the “five categories inherent to a well-rounded education.”<sup>52</sup>
- **Rhode Island’s accountability system includes a Post-Secondary Success indicator** that will measure students’ success in demonstrating achievements beyond those needed to earn a high school diploma, including Career and Technical Education industry-approved credentials, college credits obtained through dual or concurrent enrollment, successful completion of Advancement Placement tests as well as, starting with the Class of 2021, a Seal of Biliteracy or Pathway Endorsement.<sup>53</sup>
- **Proposed School Redesign Models** include small schools of choice that emphasize “student-centered personalized learning programs and relationships between students and adults, a rigorous and well-defined instructional program, long instructional blocks that promote interdisciplinary work, and a focus on post-secondary preparation” as one of the proposed School Redesign Models for schools identified for comprehensive intervention and support.<sup>54</sup>
- **School Improvement Innovation Grants** are designed to support innovative strategies to improve student achievement at low-performing schools with strategic priorities for funding including “increasing student access to pathways and learning opportunities that prepare students for college and career success” and “proficiency-based student-centered learning strategies.”<sup>55</sup>



Dr. Julie Horwitz, Interim-Co-Dean of Rhode Island College, has been working with community and school leaders across Rhode Island to re-design the school. As part of this redesign work, the RIC School of Education received a grant from the Rhode Island Office of Innovation to partner with the Highlander Institute to “look at personalized learning through an academic lens.” Through this work, RIC faculty will further develop and share best practices in personalized and blended learning in their college-level courses. Horwitz says, “Teacher prep across the country needs to teach the way we want students to teach in the field.”

## Recommendations for Redesigning Teacher Preparatory Programs to Support Student-Centered Learning

In 2017, Teach Plus launched the Rhode Island Teaching Policy Fellowship which allows teachers from across the state to study and advocate for personalized learning policies.

In 2018, Rhode Island’s Teach Plus Policy Fellows released a policy brief with their recommendations for successful statewide implementation of personalized learning. One of their primary recommendations was that Rhode Island “rethink and revise teacher preparation and professional learning for educators to support student-centered teaching and provide incentives and supports to encourage this shift.”

The Teach Plus Fellows recommend that teacher preparatory programs instruct teachers in the use of:

- Social-emotional learning
- Cultural competency
- Using data to inform practice
- Technology and blended learning
- Project-based learning through in-school and community-based projects and internships<sup>56</sup>



## The Rhode Island Learning Champions Project: Moving Toward Competency-Based Learning

The Rhode Island Learning Champions project, a joint effort of RIDE and the Great Schools Partnership, is designed to help build the components of a competency-based learning system. The goal of this project, which is funded by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, is to support high-quality, proficiency-based learning from kindergarten through 12th grade in order to ensure that every high school graduate can think critically and has the skills needed for success in college, career, and life.<sup>57</sup>

In 2017, the Rhode Island Learning Champions, a group of 100 educators and administrators, came together to design and build a set of proficiency frameworks in the four core content areas of English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies as well as a set of cross-curricular skills. These Proficiency Frameworks were developed as models for schools and districts to support their work across grade levels and content areas.<sup>58</sup>

## Recommendations

### Assess and support students' academic, career, and social/personal goals.

- **Ensure that all middle and high school students have advisors** who are knowledgeable about their academic, career, and social/personal goals and can guide them in selecting coursework, in-school and out-of-school opportunities, and career pathways that will help them achieve their goals.
- **Ensure that all school districts have adopted an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) curriculum and are using this curriculum to support middle and high school students** by the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year.
- **Ensure that all students have ILPs that include their academic, career, and social/personal goals and that these plans are regularly updated, used, and monitored** by students, parents, teachers, and other school personnel to identify opportunities inside and outside school that will help students achieve their goals.

### Ensure that all students have equitable access to a rigorous and engaging curriculum that allows students to take advanced coursework, explore career pathways, and earn college credit and/or industry-recognized credentials.

- **Ensure that there are adequate financial resources available** to provide all students access to courses through the Advanced Coursework Network and PrepareRI Dual Enrollment Program with a focus on ensuring access for low-income students, English language learner students, and students with disabilities.
- **Encourage the few remaining districts not already participating in the Advanced Coursework Network to join** so their students have access to advanced coursework that may not be available in their own school.
- **Provide easy-to-access information about the Advanced Coursework Network and PrepareRI Dual Enrollment Program** and the benefits of these opportunities to all students, particularly low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, and English language learner students, and their parents and ensure that this information is available in multiple languages.
- **Work to reduce inequities in access to the Advanced Coursework Network and PrepareRI Dual Enrollment Program** by providing funding for transportation to learning sites and by providing information on these opportunities to all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities.

- **Encourage more high schools to develop career pathways** that include opportunities to explore broad career fields through rigorous coursework, internships, and mentorships while obtaining college credits and/or industry-recognized career credentials.
- **Conduct outreach to middle and high school students and their parents** to make them aware of the value of career pathways and the Pathway Endorsements that will be available as diploma designations starting with the Class of 2021.
- **Monitor and take steps to close gaps** in the percentage of students earning college credits and industry-recognized credentials while in high school.

**Revamp teacher preparation programs and professional learning opportunities** to provide both new and more experienced educators with the information and skills they need to implement student-centered teaching.

**Support the move toward a competency-based learning system** by sharing the Proficiency Frameworks developed by the Rhode Island Learning Champions with schools and districts and providing the funding and guidance needed to implement these frameworks.

**Increase understanding of student-centered learning practices and demand for these types of teaching and learning environments among districts, schools, teachers, parents, and students.**

**Provide opportunities for districts and schools already implementing student-centered learning practices to share their experiences and practices with other districts and schools.**

**Encourage schools identified for comprehensive intervention and support to implement a small school of choice model** that emphasizes student-centered, personalized learning programs and relationships between students and adults, a rigorous and well-defined instructional program, long instructional blocks that promote interdisciplinary work, and a focus on post-secondary preparation, as described in Rhode Island's *ESSA* state plan.

**Use School Improvement Innovation Grants to support innovative strategies to improve student achievement,** including increasing student access to pathways and learning opportunities that prepare students for college and career success and proficiency-based learning strategies, as described in Rhode Island's *ESSA* state plan.



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