

College Preparation and Access

DEFINITION

College preparation and access is the percentage of Rhode Island high school seniors who graduate and go on to college (i.e., enroll in a two-year or four-year college) immediately or within six months of graduation.

SIGNIFICANCE

Between 2021 and 2031, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certificate are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring less education.¹ Between 2018 and 2022 in Rhode Island, adults with high school diplomas were more than twice as likely to be unemployed as those with bachelor's degrees or higher, and the median annual income for adults with high school diplomas was \$41,968, compared to \$66,011 for adults with bachelor's degrees.^{2,3}

Many students, especially low-income students, face barriers to college enrollment and success, such as insufficient academic preparation, difficulty navigating the application and financial aid processes, and the high cost of college. States can help address these barriers by ensuring that all students have access to advanced coursework; take college entrance exams; complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); get adequate counseling; and target financial aid to students with the greatest needs.⁴

In 2022, Rhode Island's Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approved new *Secondary School Regulations* for the class of 2028, establishing college and career-ready coursework as the expectation for all students.⁵ Students who participate in AP courses are more likely to attend and succeed in college.⁶ In Rhode Island, more than one-third (34%) of the Class of 2022 took an AP exam. Over the past 10 years, Rhode Island has seen particularly large gains in the percentage of Black students who take an AP exam.⁷

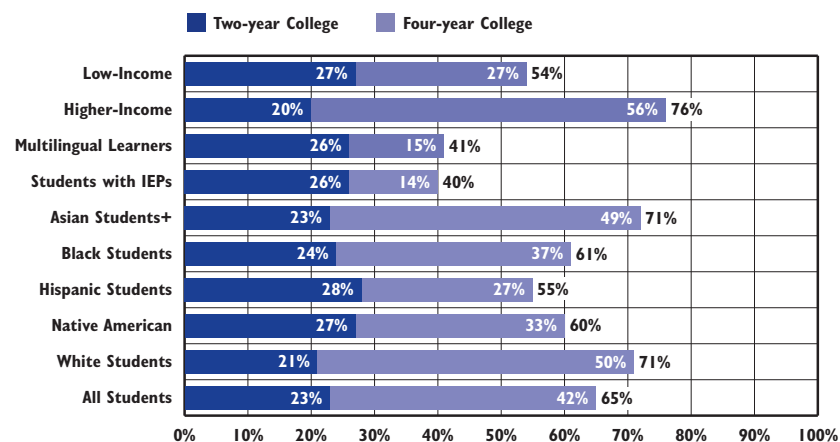
Rhode Island covers the cost for all public high school students to take the SAT during the school day in eleventh grade as a key strategy to increase college access.⁸ In 2023, 94% of 11th graders completed the SAT.⁹

Seniors who have completed a FAFSA by May and been accepted to a four-year college are 50% more likely to enroll than students who have not completed their FAFSA.¹⁰ In Rhode Island during the 2022-2023 cycle, 64% of high school seniors completed the FAFSA.¹¹

Rhode Island's *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* state plan includes a Post-Secondary Success Indicator that measures the percentage of students that graduate with a career and technical education industry-approved credential, college credits through dual or concurrent enrollment, successful completion of AP tests, or Seal of Biliteracy and the Pathway Endorsement.¹²



Immediate College Enrollment by Family Income, Race, Ethnicity, and Type of College, Class of 2023, Rhode Island



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2023. 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.

★ **There continue to be large gaps in college access, particularly four-year college enrollment, between low- and higher-income students as well as by language status and disability.¹³ In 2023, the Rhode Island General Assembly enacted the *Rhode Island Hope Scholarship Pilot Program Act*, which provides a two-year scholarship covering tuition and fees to eligible juniors and seniors who attended Rhode Island College during their freshman and sophomore years.¹⁴**

★ **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.¹⁵ Rhode Island has 374 students for every school counselor, far above the recommended ratio of 250 to one.¹⁶**

★ **For states, improving college access will require improvements at all points in the early education to college education system, including increasing access to high-quality preschool, implementing research-driven dropout prevention programs, improving the quality of the K-12 education system and aligning it with college admission requirements and career expectations, simplifying the college admission process, and making college affordable.¹⁷**

Table 55.

College Preparation and Access, Rhode Island

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL GRADE 12 ENROLLMENT OCT. 2022	% OF GRADE 12 STUDENTS PLANNING TO ATTEND COLLEGE, 2023	% OF STUDENTS WHO FILLED OUT THE FAFSA, 2023	% OF GRADE 11 STUDENTS TAKING THE SAT DURING THE SCHOOL DAY, 2023	% OF SAT TAKERS PROFICIENT IN ELA, 2023	% OF SAT TAKERS PROFICIENT IN MATH, 2023
Barrington	282	92%	65%	100%	84%	69%
Bristol Warren	270	29%	71%	95%	77%	36%
Burrillville	186	70%	55%	97%	53%	33%
Central Falls	191	64%	47%	88%	10%	<5%
Chariho	241	40%	75%	96%	66%	40%
Coventry	318	84%	63%	97%	53%	27%
Cranston	900	84%	65%	97%	49%	20%
Cumberland	354	86%	68%	97%	64%	37%
East Greenwich	190	92%	65%	96%	80%	63%
East Providence	404	76%	55%	94%	41%	16%
Exeter-West Greenwich	133	41%	72%	100%	68%	44%
Foster-Glocester	242	80%	68%	98%	67%	37%
Johnston	205	94%	56%	90%	37%	15%
Lincoln	236	83%	81%	94%	70%	46%
Middletown	163	75%	60%	97%	65%	32%
Narragansett	139	90%	66%	99%	61%	40%
Newport	165	65%	45%	98%	43%	16%
North Kingstown	355	84%	71%	98%	78%	51%
North Providence	258	85%	74%	97%	53%	22%
North Smithfield	133	88%	68%	97%	65%	43%
Pawtucket	610	76%	40%	88%	25%	8%
Portsmouth	198	84%	80%	96%	71%	44%
Providence	1,623	71%	62%	91%	28%	13%
Scituate	91	90%	78%	100%	66%	34%
Smithfield	184	81%	77%	97%	66%	36%
South Kingstown	215	91%	64%	95%	75%	41%
Tiverton	108	88%	71%	98%	53%	26%
Warwick	571	80%	61%	95%	48%	19%
West Warwick	272	84%	65%	93%	36%	19%
Westerly	182	88%	73%	97%	57%	26%
Woonsocket	335	73%	43%	83%	25%	6%
Beacon Charter High School	56	74%	48%	88%	57%	12%
Blackstone Academy	87	88%	73%	98%	32%	12%
Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy	115	91%	84%	97%	51%	34%
Charette Charter	43	75%	81%	97%	11%	<5%
Paul Cuffee Charter School	66	90%	70%	96%	25%	8%
The Greene School	54	68%	64%	96%	44%	18%
Highlander Charter School	51	83%	65%	94%	32%	13%
RI Nurses Institute Middle College	58	86%	100%	98%	42%	<5%
Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy	26	85%	57%	91%	7%	<5%
Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts	27	NA	96%	100%	26%	7%
Village Green Virtual Public Charter School	57	71%	100%	100%	26%	<5%
William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical Center	185	79%	61%	100%	46%	16%
Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center	186	86%	68%	98%	38%	8%
YouthBuild	34	21%	NA	NA	<5%	<5%
Four Core Cities	2,759	72%	54%	89%	26%	10%
Remainder of State	7,004	83%	66%	98%	59%	32%
Rhode Island	10,815	81%	64%	94%	49%	25%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Total 12th grade enrollment is from the Rhode Island Department of Education as of October 1, 2022.

% of 12th grade students planning to attend college is from the 2022-2023 administration of *SurveyWorks!*, based on responses to the question, "What do you think you will do after you finish high school?" and includes students who responded that they planned to go to a community college, two-year college, or four-year college. The data are from the Rhode Island Department of Education.

% of 12th graders completing the FAFSA is from the Rhode Island Department of Education.

% of SAT takers proficient in ELA and math and % of 11th graders taking the SAT is from the Rhode Island Department of Education.

NA indicates that data are not available either because data were not collected or reported or because the number of students was too small to report. These students are included in the remainder of the state and state totals as appropriate.

New Shoreham and the Rhode Island School for the Deaf are not reported because there are fewer than 10 students in these cohorts.

Little Compton students attend high school in Portsmouth, and Jamestown students can choose to attend high school in Narragansett or North Kingstown.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

YouthBuild is the YouthBuild Preparatory Academy.

References

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- U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2018-2022. Table S2301.
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- Miller, A., Valle, K., Engle, J., & Cooper, M. (2014). *Access to attainment: An access agenda for 21st century college students*. Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy.

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