

College Enrollment and Completion

DEFINITION

College enrollment and completion is the percentage of Rhode Island public high school students who enroll in a two- or four-year college and earn a college diploma (an associate degree or bachelor's degree) within six years of enrollment.¹

SIGNIFICANCE

Between 2023 and 2033, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certificate are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring less education, yet only 39% of Rhode Island adults ages 25 and 64 have a bachelor's degree or higher.^{2,3} Between 2020 and 2024 in Rhode Island, 7.8% of adults with a high school diploma were unemployed, compared to 2.1% with a bachelor's degree or higher.⁴ Students who complete college are more likely to be employed and have higher incomes. Between 2020 and 2024 in Rhode Island, the median annual income for adults with a high school diploma was \$44,395, compared to \$70,290 for adults with a bachelor's degree.⁵

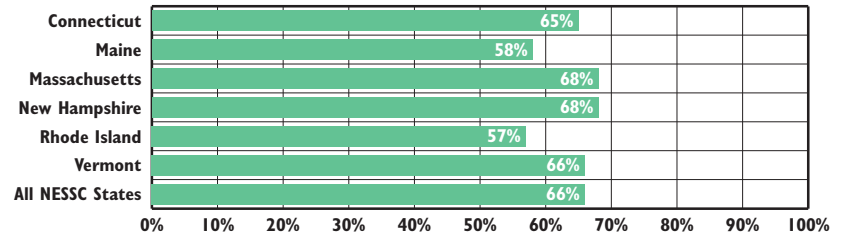
While college enrollment rates for low-income students have doubled in recent decades, there are still large gaps in the percentage of students who enroll in and complete college and the types of colleges students attend. In the U.S., nearly two-thirds of low-income students attend community colleges or for-profit

institutions, many of which have low completion rates. Low-income students are also more likely to delay going to college and to have breaks in enrollment, both of which lower their chances of completing their college degrees.^{6,7}

There are also barriers to attainment for Students of Color impacting college completion outcomes.⁸⁻¹⁰ Low-income students and 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.¹¹⁻¹³

A 2022 national study found that 55% of students considered temporarily withdrawing from a program due to mental and emotional factors, more than any other factor, including the cost of tuition (36%). Improving college completion will require better aligning the K-12 education system with college demands, making college affordable, and providing both mental health and academic supports.^{10,14,15}

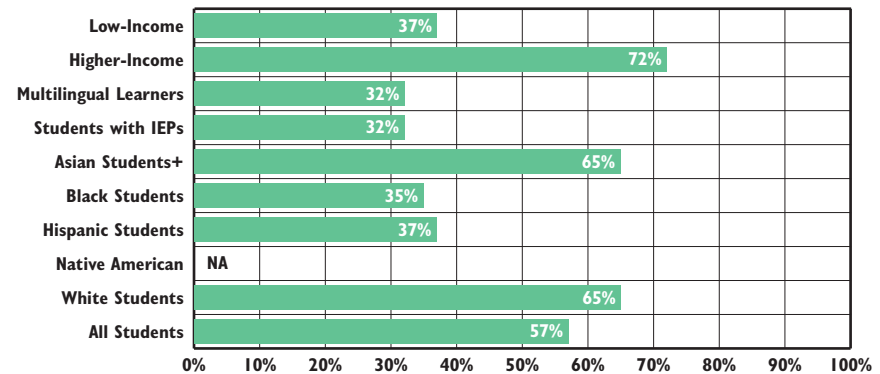

College Completion, New England Secondary School Consortium States (NESSC), 2017 Cohort



Source: New England Secondary School Consortium. (n.d.). *Common data project, annual report, 2024*.
<https://www.greatschoolspartnership.org/data-report/>

◆ Fifty-seven percent of Rhode Island public high school graduates who enrolled in a two- or four-year college in 2017 earned a college diploma within six years.¹⁵


Six-Year College Completion by Student Subgroup, Rhode Island, 2017 Cohort



Source: New England Secondary School Consortium. (n.d.). *Common Data Project, Annual Report, 2024*.
<https://www.greatschoolspartnership.org/data-report/> +Data for Asian students is not disaggregated by ethnic group.
National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups.

◆ In Rhode Island, there are large gaps in college completion between low-income and higher-income students, with 37% of low-income students completing college within six years, compared to 72% of higher-income students. There are also large disparities by race and ethnicity, language status, and disability.¹⁵

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Table 54.

College Enrollment and Completion, Rhode Island

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# OF STUDENTS WHO GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL IN 2025	# OF 2025 HS GRADUATES WHO ENROLLED IN COLLEGE WITHIN 6 MONTHS	% OF 2025 HS GRADUATES WHO ENROLLED IN COLLEGE WITHIN 6 MONTHS	# OF STUDENTS WHO ENROLLED IN COLLEGE IN 2024	# OF 2024 COLLEGE ENROLLEES WHO PERSISTED (ENROLLED FOR A THIRD SEMESTER)	% OF 2024 COLLEGE ENROLLEES WHO PERSISTED (ENROLLED FOR A THIRD SEMESTER)
Barrington	297	219	74%	264	248	94%
Bristol Warren	179	115	64%	160	136	85%
Burrillville	143	79	55%	100	80	80%
Central Falls	161	65	40%	94	65	69%
Charlho	237	151	64%	197	163	83%
Coventry	283	199	70%	219	178	81%
Cranston	801	532	66%	670	547	82%
Cumberland	340	258	76%	295	260	88%
East Greenwich	171	135	79%	170	162	95%
East Providence	356	216	61%	226	168	74%
Exeter-West Greenwich	92	57	62%	81	69	85%
Foster-Glocester	232	163	70%	170	146	86%
Johnston	175	96	55%	124	98	79%
Lincoln	223	158	71%	192	164	85%
Middletown	133	98	74%	104	87	84%
Narragansett	102	69	68%	90	72	80%
New Shoreham	*	*	*	*	*	*
Newport	127	66	52%	95	78	82%
North Kingstown	311	254	82%	280	250	89%
North Providence	252	178	71%	209	162	78%
North Smithfield	127	91	72%	84	68	81%
Pawtucket	422	189	45%	247	169	68%
Portsmouth	179	128	72%	175	149	85%
Providence	1,388	652	47%	947	658	69%
Scituate	98	65	66%	85	73	86%
Smithfield	196	137	70%	168	145	86%
South Kingstown	164	119	73%	188	156	83%
Tiverton	128	82	64%	89	75	84%
Warwick	517	363	70%	422	341	81%
West Warwick	227	131	58%	140	109	78%
Westerly	144	91	63%	122	110	90%
Woonsocket	330	133	40%	169	105	62%
Beacon Charter High School	38	17	45%	32	22	69%
Blackstone Academy	76	56	74%	66	49	74%
Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy	88	73	83%	60	48	80%
Charette Charter School	39	18	46%	21	11	52%
Paul Cuffee Charter School	59	45	76%	44	29	66%
William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School	202	119	59%	145	111	77%
The Greene School	37	24	65%	27	22	81%
Highlander Charter School	36	NR	NR	47	33	70%
Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center	223	142	64%	159	98	62%
RI Nurses Institute Middle College	89	65	73%	35	28	80%
Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy	*	*	18%	16	*	*
Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts	26	19	73%	19	*	*
Village Green Virtual Public Charter School	52	26	50%	24	16	67%
YouthBuild Preparatory Academy	*	*	*	*	*	*
Five Core Cities	2,428	1,105	46%	1,552	1,075	69%
Remainder of State	6,116	4,187	68%	5,031	4,223	84%
Rhode Island	9,537	5,900	62%	7,289	5,784	79%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

of students who graduated from high school in 2025, of 2025 high school graduates who enrolled in college within six months, # of students who enrolled in college in 2025, and # of 2024 college enrollees who persisted (were enrolled for a third semester) are all from Rhode Island Department of Education. The # of 2024 college enrollees who persisted may include students enrolled directly after high school or afterwards. Percentages may not sum exactly due to rounding.

Five core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

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

The following districts/schools had fewer than 10 students in the cohort and are not reported separately but are included in Rhode Island totals: DCYF, Jamestown, Little Compton, Rhode Island School for the Deaf.

* Fewer than 10 students are in this category. Actual numbers are not shown to protect student confidentiality. These numbers are still counted in Rhode Island totals.

NR Data not reported due to data quality issues

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