

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 2023 and 2033, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certificate are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring less education.¹ Between 2020 and 2024 in Rhode Island, adults with high school diplomas were nearly three times 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 \$44,395, compared to \$70,290 for adults with bachelor's degrees.^{2,3}

Barriers to college enrollment and success include 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 (39%) of the Class of 2025 took an AP exam. Over the past 10 years, Rhode Island has had one of the largest increases in the percentage of graduates taking an AP exam during high school in the country.⁷

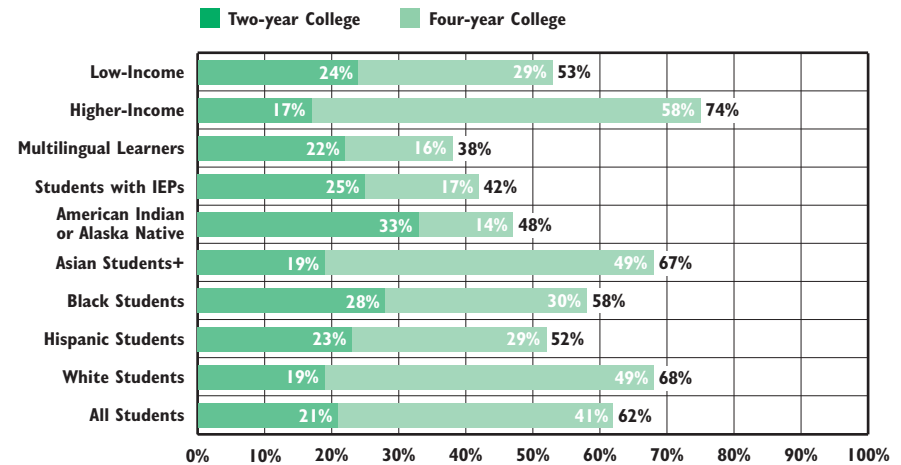
Rhode Island covers the cost for all public high school students to take the SAT during the school day in 11th grade as a key strategy to increase college access.⁸ In 2025, 96% of 11th graders completed the SAT.⁹

Seniors who have completed a FAFSA by May and been accepted to a four-year college are 50% more likely to enroll than those who have not completed a FAFSA.¹⁰ In Rhode Island during the 2024-2025 cycle, 61% of high school seniors completed the FAFSA.¹¹

Rhode Island's *Every Student Succeeds Act* 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 2025, Rhode Island



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2025. 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.

◆ Large gaps in college access are pervasive in Rhode Island, particularly for 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 and low-income students often rely on their school counselor for navigating the college application process.¹⁵ Rhode Island has 361 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 53.

College Preparation and Access, Rhode Island

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL GRADE 12 ENROLLMENT OCT. 2024	% OF GRADES 9-12 STUDENTS PLANNING TO ATTEND COLLEGE, 2025	% OF STUDENTS WHO FILLED OUT THE FAFSA, 2025	% OF GRADE 11 STUDENTS TAKING THE SAT DURING THE SCHOOL DAY, 2025	% OF SAT TAKERS PROFICIENT IN ELA, 2025	% OF SAT TAKERS PROFICIENT IN MATH, 2025
Barrington	319	92%	70%	98%	86%	70%
Bristol Warren	207	78%	65%	98%	83%	39%
Burrillville	162	68%	55%	99%	57%	25%
Central Falls	212	60%	39%	94%	14%	<5%
Chariho	238	72%	67%	99%	70%	43%
Coventry	319	72%	60%	95%	56%	20%
Cranston	969	79%	62%	98%	51%	16%
Cumberland	376	79%	66%	97%	70%	34%
East Greenwich	185	92%	67%	99%	87%	70%
East Providence	388	73%	59%	97%	50%	13%
Exeter-West Greenwich	105	74%	59%	99%	75%	28%
Foster-Glocester	245	77%	65%	98%	70%	35%
Johnston	216	74%	52%	96%	41%	10%
Lincoln	256	88%	61%	97%	74%	49%
Middletown	153	80%	60%	94%	67%	30%
Narragansett	108	84%	61%	100%	83%	52%
Newport	167	62%	49%	97%	45%	10%
North Kingstown	351	86%	74%	94%	76%	50%
North Providence	287	77%	73%	98%	50%	30%
North Smithfield	149	79%	61%	100%	79%	47%
Pawtucket	607	64%	40%	91%	26%	6%
Portsmouth	193	85%	69%	98%	77%	44%
Providence	1,780	64%	52%	93%	30%	14%
Scituate	106	82%	63%	100%	70%	29%
Smithfield	215	85%	72%	97%	67%	27%
South Kingstown	190	84%	72%	97%	79%	43%
Tiverton	142	70%	65%	100%	56%	21%
Warwick	592	70%	57%	95%	52%	15%
West Warwick	306	72%	53%	98%	50%	17%
Westerly	162	78%	69%	98%	66%	42%
Woonsocket	485	68%	48%	93%	33%	10%
Achievement First Rhode Island	68	76%	90%	94%	49%	15%
Beacon Charter High School	45	72%	60%	100%	68%	24%
Blackstone Academy	92	75%	67%	99%	36%	9%
Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy	99	NA	90%	100%	53%	32%
Charette Charter	43	71%	86%	100%	25%	<5%
Paul Cuffee Charter School	58	82%	86%	97%	40%	15%
William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical Center	213	69%	68%	100%	59%	19%
The Greene School	39	75%	75%	92%	64%	21%
Highlander Charter School	50	74%	43%	97%	34%	5%
Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center	225	76%	79%	99%	38%	<5%
RI Nurses Institute Middle College	101	88%	93%	97%	27%	5%
Segue Institute for Learning	NA	67%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy	53	61%	50%	<5%	<5%	<5%
Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts	28	80%	86%	100%	41%	12%
Village Green Virtual Public Charter School	54	69%	95%	96%	21%	<5%
YouthBuild	17	60%	<5%	42%	9%	<5%
Five Core Cities	3,251	64%	48%	93%	29%	10%
Remainder of State	6,939	78%	63%	97%	63%	30%
Rhode Island	11,396	74%	61%	96%	52%	23%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Total 12th grade enrollment is from the Rhode Island Department of Education as of October 1, 2024.

% of 9th through 12th grade students planning to attend college is from the 2024-2025 administration of Survey Works!, 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. It cannot be compared to previous Factbooks that reported only the percentage of 12th grade students.

% 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. RISE Prep and the Segue Institute are not included in these data because they have not had a graduating cohort yet.

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.

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

YouthBuild is the YouthBuild Preparatory Academy.

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Source of Data for Table/Methodology for Chronic Absence, Middle School and High School

*Fewer than 10 students are in this category. Actual numbers are not shown to protect student confidentiality. These numbers are still counted in district totals and in the five core cities, remainder of the state, and state total.

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Source of Data for Table/Methodology for Suspensions

State-operated includes Wm. M. Davies Jr. Career-Technical High School, Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center, Sheila "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy, and Rhode Island School for the Deaf.

Collaboratives include Urban Collaborative (UCAP) and YouthBuild Preparatory Academy.

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