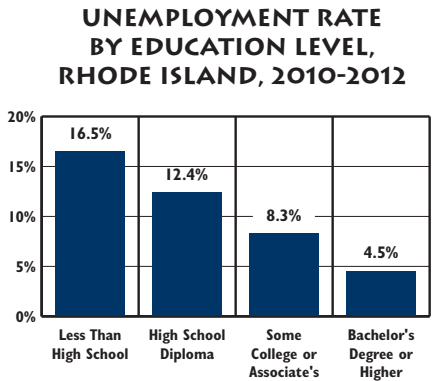## Issue Brief

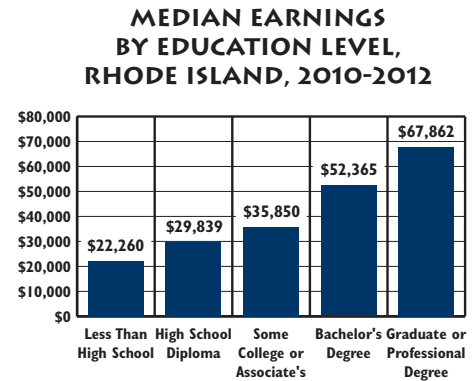# IMPROVING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES IN RHODE ISLAND

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 employment in a high-skills economy.

Rhode Island's four-year graduation rate has been steadily increasing from 70% in 2007 to 77% in 2012. However, graduation rates vary substantially by district, with the lowest graduation rates in the four core cities – Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket – the cities with the highest child poverty rates. While the four-year graduation rate for the four core cities continues to be much lower than the remainder of the state, the core city rate has increased from 56% in 2007 to 66% in 2012, a steeper increase than in the remainder of the state, where the graduation rate has increased from 79% in 2007 to 83% in 2012.[3,4]

EDUCATION: THE KEY TO ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BY EDUCATION LEVEL, RHODE ISLAND, 2010-2012

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010-2012. Table S2301.

MEDIAN EARNINGS BY EDUCATION LEVEL, RHODE ISLAND, 2010-2012

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010-2012, Table B20004.

◆ Between 2010 and 2012 in Rhode Island, adults without a high school diploma in Rhode Island were almost four times as 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 General Education Development (GED) certificate was $22,260 compared to $29,839 for people with a high school degree, and $52,365 for those with a bachelor's degree.[6]

CALCULATING GRADUATION RATES IN RHODE ISLAND

◆ The Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) began calculating graduation rates using a cohort formula starting with the Class of 2007. This methodology is acceptable for federal *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* 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.

◆ The cohort graduation rate shows the percentage of students from an entering ninth grade cohort who graduate with a standard diploma within four years. This method uses a student roster tracking method based on a unique state-assigned student identification number (SASID). Because the cohort rate is based on individual student data that is tracked over time, it accounts for every student who enters the public high school system.

◆ RIDE uses SASIDs to track students from ninth 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 NCLB targets. Rhode Island also calculates five- and six-year graduation rates to recognize the graduation accomplishment regardless of the time it takes.

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

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

RHODE ISLAND'S REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION

Starting with the Class of 2014, Rhode Island students need to meet three types of graduation requirements in order to graduate.

REQUIREMENT 1: COURSEWORK
Complete at least 20 courses, including four English, four math, three science, three social studies, and six others, including physical education, health, arts, and technology.

REQUIREMENT 2: PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENTS
Complete at least two performance-based assessments, such as a portfolio, exhibition (senior project, Capstone, etc.), or comprehensive course assessment.

REQUIREMENT 3: STATE ASSESSMENT
Achieve a minimum level of proficiency on the state's reading and math assessments. This is currently defined as achieving Level 2 (partially proficient) on the eleventh grade *New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP)* test.*

*Students who do not score at least partially proficient in reading and math will be given the opportunity to retake the state test during twelfth grade and must score partially proficient or demonstrate improvement in order to graduate. Alternative tests also may be taken and there is a waiver and appeals process.

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

RHODE ISLAND FOUR-, FIVE-, AND SIX-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND DROPOUT RATES, BY STUDENT SUBGROUP AND DISTRICT, 2007 COHORT

	COHORT SIZE	4-YEAR GRADUATION RATE	5-YEAR GRADUATION RATE	6-YEAR GRADUATION RATE	DROPOUT RATE	% COMPLETED GED	% OF STUDENTS STILL IN SCHOOL
All Students	12,360	77%	4%	1%	13%	4%	2%
Females	6,080	81%	3%	<1%	12%	3%	1%
Males	6,280	73%	4%	1%	15%	4%	3%
English Language Learners	665	66%	7%	1%	22%	1%	2%
Students With Disabilities	2,438	59%	7%	1%	22%	4%	7%
Students Without Disabilities	9,922	81%	3%	<1%	11%	3%	1%
Low-Income Students	5,641	66%	5%	1%	20%	5%	3%
Higher-Income Students	6,719	86%	2%	<1%	8%	3%	1%
White	8,528	80%	3%	<1%	11%	4%	2%
Asian	397	81%	3%	1%	11%	3%	1%
Black	1,161	68%	6%	1%	19%	3%	3%
Hispanic	2,183	67%	5%	1%	21%	3%	3%
Native American	91	63%	5%	2%	20%	3%	7%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2007 cohort. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

◆ The Rhode Island four-year graduation rate for students entering the ninth grade during the 2006-2007 school year and graduating in 2010 was 77%, and the dropout rate was 13%. An additional 4% of students graduated in five years in 2011, and 1% graduated in six years in 2012. Four percent of students completed their GED within six years, and 2% were still in school.[7]

◆ Poverty is strongly linked to the likelihood of dropping out. Low-income students (20%) are more than twice as likely to drop out as higher-income students (8%). Minority students also are more likely than White students to drop out. Females (81%) have a higher graduation rate than males (73%).[8]

RHODE ISLAND FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATE BY DISTRICT TYPE, 2007-2012

■ FOUR CORE CITIES   ■ REMAINDER OF THE STATE   ■ RHODE ISLAND
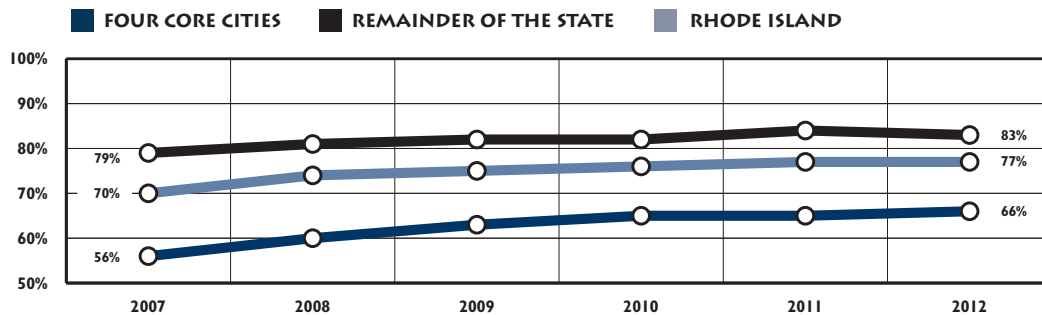
◆ In Rhode Island, the four-year graduation rate increased from 70% to 77% between 2007 and 2012. The four-year graduation rate for the four core cities continues to be much lower than the remainder of the state, but the four core city rate has increased from 56% in 2007 to 66% in 2012, a steeper increase than in remainder of the state districts, where the graduation rate increased from 79% in 2007 to 83% in 2012.[9]

◆ Two core city districts, Central Falls and Pawtucket, have experienced the largest increases in high school graduation rates in the state, with Central Falls' graduation rate increasing from 46% in 2007 to 68% in 2012 and Pawtucket's graduation rate increasing from 48% to 67%.[10]

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2004-2009 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 2012

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL	COHORT SIZE	4-YEAR GRADUATION RATE	DROPOUT RATE	% COMPLETED GED	% OF STUDENTS STILL IN SCHOOL
Barrington	301	94%	1%	1%	5%
Barrington High School	296	95%	1%	1%	4%
Bristol Warren	285	85%	5%	1%	9%
Mt. Hope High School	278	86%	5%	1%	8%
Burrillville	196	81%	12%	2%	5%
Burrillville High School	194	82%	11%	2%	5%
Central Falls	229	68%	15%	0%	17%
Central Falls Senior High School	224	70%	14%	0%	17%
Chariho	316	86%	6%	3%	5%
Chariho Regional High School	304	88%	4%	3%	5%
Coventry	468	87%	8%	<1%	5%
Coventry High School	467	87%	8%	0%	5%
Cranston	949	81%	11%	3%	6%
Cranston High School East	462	78%	12%	3%	6%
Cranston High School West	419	87%	5%	2%	6%
NEL/CPS Construction and Career Academy	64	61%	33%	2%	5%
Cumberland	398	81%	8%	4%	8%
Cumberland High School	393	82%	8%	3%	7%
East Greenwich	196	94%	3%	0%	4%
East Greenwich High School	195	94%	3%	0%	4%
East Providence	488	69%	16%	3%	12%
East Providence High School	464	71%	16%	3%	10%
Exeter-West Greenwich	148	90%	3%	2%	4%
Exeter-West Greenwich Regional High School	148	91%	3%	2%	4%
Foster-Glocester	217	86%	11%	1%	3%
Ponaganset High School	216	86%	10%	1%	3%
Johnston	222	82%	9%	5%	4%
Johnston Senior High School	221	82%	10%	5%	4%
Lincoln	254	83%	7%	3%	7%
Lincoln Senior High School	250	84%	7%	3%	6%
Middletown	168	81%	8%	4%	8%
Middletown High School	161	82%	8%	4%	6%
Narragansett	137	83%	5%	7%	5%
Narragansett High School	134	85%	4%	7%	4%
Newport	151	74%	19%	3%	5%
Rogers High School	147	73%	19%	3%	5%
North Kingstown	408	88%	8%	1%	3%
North Kingstown Senior High School	405	89%	7%	1%	2%
North Providence	263	87%	1%	4%	8%
North Providence High School	262	87%	1%	4%	7%
North Smithfield	138	78%	12%	7%	3%
North Smithfield High School	138	78%	12%	7%	3%
Pawtucket	617	67%	19%	3%	11%
Charles E. Shea High School	258	67%	21%	3%	9%
William E Tolman Senior High School	315	67%	18%	4%	11%
Jacqueline M. Walsh School for the Performing and Visual Arts	30	90%	3%	0%	7%

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL	COHORT SIZE	4-YEAR GRADUATION RATE	DROPOUT RATE	% COMPLETED GED	% OF STUDENTS STILL IN SCHOOL
Portsmouth	**276**	**91%**	**5%**	**3%**	**1%**
Portsmouth High School	269	92%	4%	3%	1%
Providence	**2,094**	**65%**	**21%**	**3%**	**11%**
Academy for Career Exploration (ACE)	55	84%	7%	0%	9%
Dr. Jorge Alvarez High School	156	62%	21%	4%	13%
Central High School	382	56%	22%	5%	18%
Classical High School	249	97%	1%	1%	1%
E-Cubed Academy	111	68%	20%	3%	9%
Hope High School	359	63%	23%	3%	11%
Juanita Sanchez Educational Complex	238	67%	20%	1%	11%
Mount Pleasant High School	360	56%	30%	4%	9%
Providence Career and Technical Academy	95	65%	27%	2%	5%
Times2 Academy	41	85%	0%	0%	15%
Scituate	**115**	**91%**	**3%**	**3%**	**3%**
Scituate High School	115	91%	3%	3%	3%
Smithfield	**206**	**94%**	**3%**	**<1%**	**3%**
Smithfield Senior High School	206	94%	3%	0%	3%
South Kingstown	**287**	**80%**	**6%**	**5%**	**9%**
South Kingstown High School	287	80%	6%	5%	9%
Tiverton	**163**	**83%**	**10%**	**1%**	**5%**
Tiverton High School	159	84%	11%	1%	4%
Warwick	**848**	**79%**	**9%**	**6%**	**6%**
Pilgrim High School	291	80%	10%	3%	7%
Toll Gate High School	270	86%	8%	1%	4%
Warwick Veterans Memorial HS	271	73%	8%	14%	4%
West Warwick	**280**	**70%**	**17%**	**4%**	**9%**
West Warwick Senior High School	272	70%	17%	4%	9%
Westerly	**248**	**87%**	**8%**	**2%**	**3%**
Westerly High School	246	88%	7%	2%	3%
Woonsocket	**456**	**65%**	**22%**	**4%**	**10%**
Woonsocket High School	445	66%	22%	4%	9%
Independent Charter Schools					
Beacon Charter High School for the Arts	42	90%	2%	0%	7%
Blackstone Academy	36	86%	3%	6%	6%
State-Operated Schools					
William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School	182	76%	9%	3%	11%
DCYF Schools	118	7%	49%	29%	15%
Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center	154	73%	7%	2%	18%
Four Core Cities	*3,396*	*66%*	*20%*	*3%*	*11%*
Remainder of State	*8,134*	*83%*	*8%*	*3%*	*6%*
Rhode Island	*12,076*	*77%*	*12%*	*3%*	*8%*

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009 cohort/Class of 2012 (those students who entered high school as ninth graders in the 2008-2009 school year and therefore would be part of the Class of 2012 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.

YOUTH AT GREATEST RISK OF DROPPING OUT

High school graduation rates are one achievement measure that can help us to see how well our schools and communities are doing in educating the next generation. In Rhode Island, students in the following sub-populations are completing high school at lower rates than many of their peers.[11]

◆ Low-income students

◆ English Language Learners

◆ Male students

◆ Students with special needs or disabilities

◆ Minority students

Rhode Island data are not available, but national data also show that the following sub-populations are at increased risk for dropping out:

◆ Pregnant and parenting teens[12]

◆ Youth in the foster care system[13]

◆ Youth involved with the juvenile justice system[14]

◆ Homeless and runaway youth[15]

MONITOR WARNING SIGNS AND INTERVENE EARLY

In Rhode Island during the 2011-2012 school year, 1,867 students dropped out of high school between ninth and twelfth grade. An additional 204 students were recorded as dropping out in the seventh or eighth grade.[16]

Dropping out is almost always a long process rather than a sudden event. School-level factors such school attendance and grades are better predictors of student's decision to leave school than demographic characteristics such as gender, race, and poverty. These warning signs can begin as early as elementary school:

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

◆ Repeating one or more grades

◆ Poor grades and poor achievement on tests

◆ Not reading proficiently by the end of third grade

◆ Sixth grade attendance, behavior, and course performance

◆ Failing one or more subjects, particularly in ninth grade (especially English or mathematics)

◆ Chronic absenteeism

◆ Lack of connection and engagement in school

◆ Multiple suspensions or other behavior problems[17,18,19,20]

◆ School districts 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. This includes preventative interventions for at-risk populations as well as recovery programs for individual students who are off-track for graduation.[21,22]

◆ Poor performing or disruptive students may find it difficult to get the help they need to stay in school. Some students report that they encounter little resistance from those around them when they are frequently absent or make the decision to drop out of school.[23]

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.[24]

◆ In October 2012, 69% of Rhode Island fourth graders scored at or above proficiency for reading on the *New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP),* up from 60% in 2005.[25]

FOURTH-GRADE NECAP READING PROFICIENCY RATES, BY INCOME STATUS, RHODE ISLAND, 2005-2012
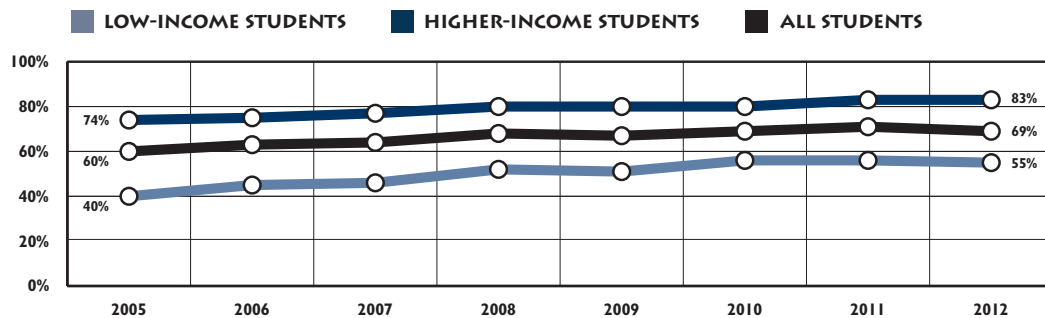
LOW-INCOME STUDENTS **HIGHER-INCOME STUDENTS** **ALL STUDENTS**

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP)*, October 2005–October 2012. Low-income status is determined by eligibility for the free or reduced-price lunch program.

◆ In Rhode Island, the percentage of higher-income fourth graders achieving at or above the proficient level on the *NECAP* has been consistently higher than that of low-income fourth graders. In 2012, 55% of low-income fourth graders scored at or above the proficient level, compared with 83% of higher-income fourth graders.[26]

◆ The national Campaign for Grade-Level Reading focuses on improving the reading proficiency of low-income children and includes 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.[27]

TRANSITION FROM MIDDLE SCHOOL TO HIGH SCHOOL

◆ The transition from middle school to high school is a critical phase in students' lives and academic careers. Students often move from smaller, more supportive middle schools to larger high schools where academic challenges and social demands are heightened. Unsuccessful high school transitions contribute to high dropout rates, low four-year graduation rates, and low achievement in high school.[28] Therefore, it is vital to identify strategies that work to ensure that all students make it through this important transition in their lives.

◆ Strategies to help students successfully transition from middle school to high school include creating opportunities for staff across school levels to collaborate, preparing students to participate in the high school campus and culture before enrollment, and ensuring that all students feel connected to school.[29]

◆ One study in Philadelphia found that a majority of the City's dropouts could be identified in eighth grade using just three indicators -- failing math in eighth grade, failing English in eighth grade, and attending school less than 80% of the time. Identifying students who are struggling prior to high school and preparing timely and individualized supports would help students transition and reduce the likelihood of students dropping out.[30]

CHRONIC ABSENCE, A RISK FACTOR FOR DROPPING OUT

CHRONIC ABSENCE, RHODE ISLAND, 2011-2012 SCHOOL YEAR
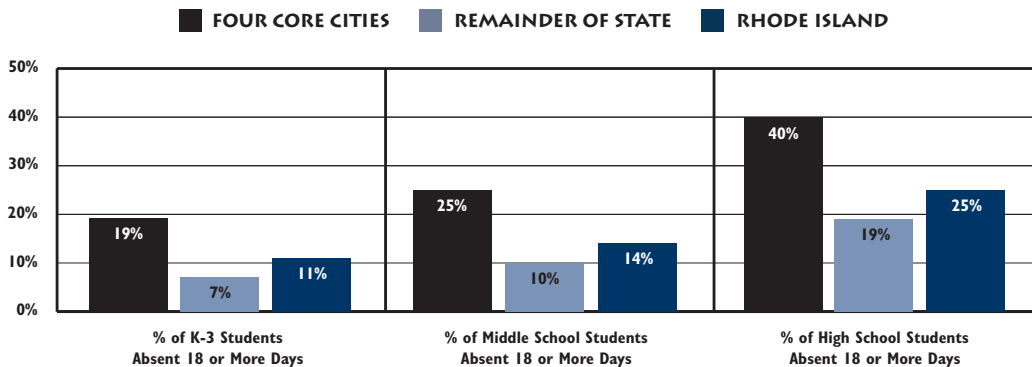
■ FOUR CORE CITIES ■ REMAINDER OF STATE ■ RHODE ISLAND

% of K-3 Students Absent 18 or More Days: Four Core Cities 19%, Remainder of State 7%, Rhode Island 11%

% of Middle School Students Absent 18 or More Days: Four Core Cities 25%, Remainder of State 10%, Rhode Island 14%

% of High School Students Absent 18 or More Days: Four Core Cities 40%, Remainder of State 19%, Rhode Island 25%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011-2012 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, including excused and unexcused absences.[31]

◆ In Rhode Island, during the 2011-2012 school year, 11% of students in grades kindergarten through third grade, 14% of middle school students and 25% of high school students were chronically absent, missing 18 or more days of school. The chronic absence rate at all school levels was more than twice as high in the four core cities as in the remainder of the state.[32]

◆ Students who are frequently absent from school miss critical academic and social learning opportunities and are at risk of disengagement from school, academic failure, and dropping out.[33] Studies in Baltimore, Chicago, Philadelphia, and other cities have shown strong relationships between chronic absence in middle and high school and the likelihood of dropping out.[34]

◆ One of the most effective strategies for increasing student achievement, high school graduation rates, and college access and completion and for closing achievement gaps between higher and lower income students would be to increase the number of low-income students who attend school regularly.[35]

◆ Schools and districts, together with community agencies, can reduce chronic absence by developing systems that provide 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, developing a community response that involves adults who interact with students outside of school, recognizing and rewarding good attendance, and committing to learning what works and expanding effective programs and halting efforts that are not working.[36]

COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE IN RHODE ISLAND

◆ The research on the effects of raising the compulsory school attendance age is mixed. Some studies have shown that states that have raised their compulsory school attendance age have experienced higher graduation rates, while others have not. Raising the compulsory school attendance age is not a silver bullet, but should be part of a comprehensive set of policies and targeted interventions designed to reduce the dropout rate.[37,38]

◆ In 2011, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed legislation that increases the compulsory school attendance age in Rhode Island from age 16 to age 18 and allows the waiver of the compulsory attendance requirement for students over age 16 who are involved with an alternative learning plan.[39,40]

IMPROVING DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES AND SCHOOL CLIMATE

◆ Research shows close connections between being suspended and dropping out. Being suspended even once in ninth grade is associated with a twofold increase in the likelihood of dropping out of high school.[41]

◆ Punitive disciplinary practices, including "zero tolerance" policies, are largely ineffective and even counterproductive. Despite substantial evidence of its ineffectiveness, out-of-school suspension is a widely used disciplinary technique, both nationally and in Rhode Island.[42,43]

DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS, RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 2011-2012

BY TYPE OF INFRACTION	#	%	BY TYPE OF INFRACTION	#	%
Attendance Offenses	15,439	37%	Assault of Student or Teacher	1,627	4%
Disorderly Conduct	6,713	16%	Alcohol/Drug/Tobacco Offenses	1,022	2%
Insubordination/Disrespect	6,553	16%	Communications/Electronic Devices	726	2%
Fighting	2,562	6%	Arson/Larceny/Vandalism	543	1%
Obscene/Abusive Language	2,142	5%	Weapon Possession	305	1%
Harassment/Intimidation/Threat	2,114	5%	Other Offenses*	1,725	4%
			Total	*41,471*	

*Examples of other offenses include unauthorized use of a computer or other technology, forgery, fire regulations violations, trespassing, etc. This category also includes disciplinary actions where the infraction is missing or not specified.

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011-2012 school year. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

◆ In Rhode Island, during the 2011-2012 school year, out-of-school suspensions accounted for 54% of all disciplinary actions, followed by in-school suspensions (34%), and alternate program placements (13%). The three most common infractions resulting in disciplinary actions were attendance offenses (37%), disorderly conduct (16%), and insubordination/disrespect (16%).[44]

◆ Low-income and minority students are overrepresented in school suspensions and receive disproportionately severe disciplinary actions compared with their higher-income and White peers. In Rhode Island, during the 2011-2012 school year, minority students made up 37% of the student population, but received 55% of all disciplinary actions. Less than one-third (29%) of students were enrolled in the four core city districts, but students in these districts received 54% of the disciplinary actions.[45]

◆ Schools could improve school climate and reduce the use of suspensions by focusing on teaching, modeling, and rewarding students' positive behavior. School districts could revise disciplinary policies to ensure the equitable, appropriate, and limited use of suspension and expulsion for only the most serious infractions.[46]

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 aim to re-engage out-of-school youth and provide them with support and alternative pathways to high school graduation. Promising approaches to dropout recovery include focusing on students' career goals, allowing individualized and flexible academic programs, using a case management model that addresses barriers to high school completion, and partnering with community organizations to address student needs.[47]

◆ Proven strategies to enable at-risk youth to earn a high school diploma or complete an alternative pathway to high school graduation outside the traditional classroom setting include high-quality, individualized, and flexible online instruction and dual enrollment programs that allow students to earn their high school degrees and college credit at the same time, at little or no cost.[48]

EXPANDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN RHODE ISLAND

◆ Expanded learning opportunities (ELOs) provide structured learning opportunities outside of the traditional classroom before or after school, during the school day, or over the summer. These programs can focus on the arts, civic engagement, or science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).[49] Expanded learning opportunities can increase student engagement, improve attendance, reduce dropout rates, provide stronger connections to adults and peers, and prepare students for college and careers.[50,51]

◆ Districts such as Central Falls, Providence, and Woonsocket have developed systems that allow students to receive high school credit for rigorous, hands-on, individualized learning opportunities that occur outside of the traditional classroom. All of these districts allow students to earn credit for project-based learning that students complete through collaborations their districts have formed with community partners, including community organizations, businesses, and universities.[52,53]

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

◆ High school graduation is the minimum requisite for college and most employment, and post-secondary education is fast becoming a necessity for a growing number of workers. By 2018, almost two-thirds (61%) of Rhode Island jobs will require some post-secondary education.[54]

◆ Many students arrive at college unprepared for the academic work. Nationally, nearly a quarter of all students entering four-year colleges require remediation. Students entering two-year colleges are even more likely to need remediation. Among U.S. students entering two-year colleges in Fall 2006, more than half (52%) enrolled in a remedial or developmental course because they were not academically prepared for college work. In Rhode Island, the rate is even higher with 70% of Rhode Island students entering the Community College of Rhode Island in Fall 2006 enrolled in a remedial or developmental course.[55]

◆ Being college-ready does not just mean having the academic skills and knowledge to succeed in college, though having these skills is important. It also means having the motivation and tenacity to overcome challenges and knowledge about how to navigate the college application and financial aid processes.[56]

◆ Rhode Island is working to make college and career readiness a priority for all students. In 2010, Rhode Island adopted the *Common Core Standards*, national standards designed to reflect what students need to know to be college and career-ready. Beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, Rhode Island will begin administering the *Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)* test which is designed to be aligned with the *Common Core Standards*.[57,58]

YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON PREPARING FOR COLLEGE

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT partnered with Young Voices to conduct focus groups with Providence youth to get their perspectives about the support that is available from the schools and the larger community to help them select and apply to college. **Key findings showed that students want:**

◆ To start the conversation about preparation for college early (i.e., by middle school).

◆ More advice about what courses would best prepare them for college and career.

◆ A clear timeline outlining steps they need to take to apply to college.

◆ Help selecting a college, including opportunities for college visits and tours.

◆ More information about college selection and application for their parents.

More complete information is available in Rhode Island KIDS COUNT's October 2012 special report, *Improving College Access and Success: Providence Youth Perspectives.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

◆ **Raise awareness** among students, parents, and the general public about the connection between educational attainment and positive economic, social, and health outcomes.

◆ **Increase access to high-quality early childhood programs**, pre-kindergarten, and full-day kindergarten to prevent the achievement gap early on.

◆ **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 interventions to get students back on the path to graduation.

◆ **Help students transition from middle school to high school** by preparing students to participate in the high school campus and culture before enrollment, ensuring that all students feel connected to school, and identifying students who are struggling before high school and providing timely and individualized supports.

◆ **Provide multiple pathways to graduation** for all students who need them, including acceleration programs for students lacking credits, online instruction, flexible hours, partnerships with adult education and other community providers, and alternative completion models.

◆ **Ensure that school leaders have high expectations** for all students and staff.

◆ **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 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.

◆ **Ensure that all students have effective teachers** and that all teachers receive professional development opportunities focused on effective instructional practice and differentiated teaching methods for a range of learning styles.

◆ **Offer students a rigorous and engaging curriculum** aligned with standards and tied to college access, career pathways, and vocational exploration opportunities, including opportunities to participate in arts, music, and sports programs and expanded learning opportunities that allow students to receive credit for rigorous, hands-on, individualized learning opportunities outside the classroom.

◆ **Reduce chronic absence at all school levels** by developing systems that provide frequent reports on student absenteeism and reasons for absenteeism, raising awareness about the importance of regular attendance, recognizing and rewarding good attendance, and developing partnerships among students, their families, schools, and community groups to address obstacles to attendance.

◆ **Improve the school climate** by focusing on teaching, modeling, and rewarding students' positive behavior and revising disciplinary policies to ensure the equitable, appropriate, and limited use of suspensions and expulsions.

◆ **Improve communication with parents**, especially when students are falling behind academically, frequently absent, or exhibiting troubling behaviors in school.

◆ **Develop and nurture partnerships** between schools and higher education institutions, community organizations, and businesses to offer wrap-around supports to students and promote educational success.

◆ **Share best practices** of schools and districts that are having success in raising their graduation rates with other schools and districts.

REFERENCES

[1] Child Trends. (September, 2013). *High school dropout rates: Indicators on children and youth.* Retrieved November 15, 2013, from www.childtrendsdatabank.org

[2] Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (September, 2009). *Education matters for health.* Retrieved March 1, 2012, from www.commissiononhealth.org

[3,9,10] Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2004 Cohort/Class of 2007 - 2009 Cohort/Class of 2012.

[4] Graduation rates are calculated using the cohort formula which shows the percentage of students from an entering ninth grade cohort who graduate with a standard diploma within four years.

[5] U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010-2012. Table S2301.

[6] U.S Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010-2012.Table B20004.

[7,8] Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2007 Cohort/Class of 2010.

[11] Rhode Island Department of Education and Secondary Education, 2009 Cohort/Class of 2012.

[12] Perper, K, Peterson, K. & Manlove, J. (2010). *Diploma attainment among teen mothers.* Washington, DC: Child Trends.

[13] Center for the Study of Social Policy. (July, 2013). *Raising the bar: Child welfare's shift toward well-being.* Retrieved November 15, 2013, from childwelfaresparc.org

[14] *The costs of confinement: Why good juvenile justice policies make good fiscal sense.* (2009). Washington, DC: Justice Policy Institute.

[15] Toro, P. A., Dworsky, A. & Fowler, P. J. (2007). *Homeless youth in the United States: Recent research findings and intervention approaches.* 2007 National Symposium on Homelessness Research, March 1-2, 2007.

[16] Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011-2012 school year. Some of these 7th and 8th grade students may have transferred to another school and been mistakenly counted as a dropout if the district did not report the transfer.

[17] American Psychological Association. (n.d.). *Facing the school dropout dilemma.* Retrieved November 14, 2013, from www.apa.org

[18,22] Balfanz, R., Bridgeland, J. M., Bruce, M. & Fox, J. H. (2013). *Building a grad nation: Progress and challenge in ending the high school dropout epidemic.* Baltimore, MD: Civic Enterprises, Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University, America's Promise Alliance.

[19,21,30] Kennelly, L. & Monrad, M. (2007). *Approaches to dropout prevention: Heeding early warning signs with appropriate interventions.* Retrieved September 29, 2009, from www.betterhighschools.org

[20,24] Hernandez, D. J. (2012). *Double jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation.* Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

[23] Bridgeland, J., DiJulio Jr., J. & Morison, K. B. (2006). *The silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts.* Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises, LLC, in partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

[25,26] Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP), October 2005 - October 2012.

[27] The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. (n.d.). *Third grade reading success matters.* Retrieved November 15, 2013, from www.gradelevelreading.net

[28] 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

[29] Parrish, T., Poland, L., Arellanes, M., Ernandes, J., & Viloria, J. (2011). *Making the move: Transition strategies at California high schools with high graduation rates.* Sacramento, CA: California Comprehensive Center at WestEd.

[31,34,35,36] Balfanz, R. & Byrnes, V. (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.

[32,43,44,45] Rhode Island Department of Education, 2011-2012 school year.

[33] Sundius, J. & Farneth, M. (2008). *Missing school: The epidemic of school absence.* Baltimore, MD: Open Society Institute.

[37] *A review of compulsory attendance.* (2013). Annapolis, MD; Maryland State Department of Education.

[38] Whitehurst, G. J. & Whitfied, S. (2012). *Compulsory school attendance: What research says and what it means for state policy.* Washington, DC: Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings.

[39] *Implementation requirements: Compulsory attendance policy, RIGL 16-19-1.* Retrieved November 15, 2013, from www.ride.ri.gov

[40] Rhode Island General Law 16-19-1. Enacted by the General Asssembly as H-5061 in 2011.

[41] 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, The Civil Rights Project.

[42,46] 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.

[47] Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy. (November 2012). *Forgotten youth: Re-engaging students through dropout recovery.* Retrieved November 15, 2013, from www.renniecenter.org

[48] 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.

[49,50] Harris, E., Deschenes, S. & Wallace, A. (2011). *Helping older youth succeed through expanded learning opportunities.* Washington, DC: National Conference of State Legislatures.

[51] Little, P. M. (2009). *Supporting student outcomes through expanded learning opportunities.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

[52] *Learn anytime, anywhere: Rethinking how students earn credit beyond school hours.* New York, NY: The After-School Corporation (TASC).

[53] Chafee, L. D. (n.d.). *Expanded learning opportunities are key to student learning.* Retrieved November 15, 2013, from www.expandedlearning.org

[54] Carnevale, A. P., Smith, N. & Strohl, J. (2010). *Help wanted: Projections for jobs and education requirements through 2018.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce.

[55] *Remediation: Higher education's bridge to nowhere.* (2012). Washington, DC: Complete College America.

[56] McAlister, S. & Mevs, P. (2012). *College readiness: A guide to the field.* Providence, RI: Brown University, Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

[57] Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. (n.d.). *About PARCC.* Retrieved June 6, 2013, from www.parcconline.org

[58] Achieve. (n.d.). *Rhode Island's college and career-ready commitment.* Retrieved November 15, 2013, from www.achieve.org/Rhode-Island