

# Planning Information Center

# Census Data Bulletin

RHODE ISLAND  
STATEWIDE  
PLANNING  
PROGRAM



Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program  
One Capitol Hill, Third Floor, Providence, RI 02908

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## School Enrollment and Educational Attainment

Education plays an important role in the communities that planners serve. Grade schools and their students have distinct transportation needs, while college students often present housing challenges for planners. The state's educational institutions, from public school systems to universities, have special land use concerns that must respond to changes in school enrollment—both growth and decline. For planners working on economic development, the educational attainment of adults in the region, state, and cities and towns represents workforce strengths and weaknesses.

The recent release of the 2011 1-year American Community Survey dataset provides some insight into the dynamics of school enrollment and educational attainment in the state. While Rhode Island leads New England in the share of residents who are college or graduate students, it lags behind most others in the share of residents 25 and older who hold high school degrees and college degrees. This snapshot suggests that the state faces a “brain drain” challenge.

### Schoolchildren and College Students

The American Community Survey estimates that in 2011, there were 277,923 residents of Rhode Island enrolled as students.\* This figure includes an estimated 106,140 children in kindergarten through eighth grade and 55,145 high school students, of whom 88.1% attend public schools. The student population of

## BY THE NUMBERS

**277,923** students in Rhode Island

**74.3%** attend public schools

**1 in 10** R.I. residents are college students

**84.8%** of adults 25 and older have a high school diploma or equivalency

**31.1%** have a college degree

*Source: 2011 1-Year American Community Survey*

Rhode Island also include an estimated 99,750 people enrolled in college or graduate school, or 9.5% of the state's total population according to 2011 Census estimates. This is the highest share of all New England states. Even in Massachusetts, with its wealth of institutions of higher learning, 9.0% of residents are college or graduate students.

### High and Low Education Levels

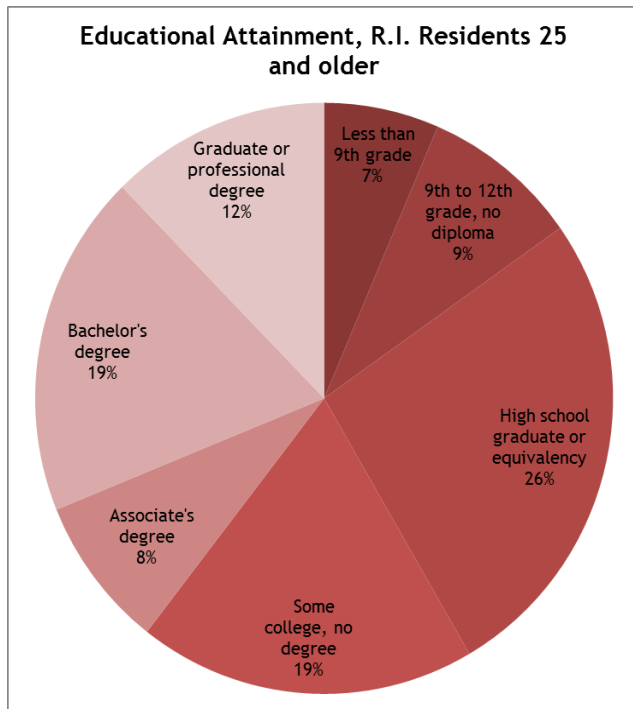
The educational attainment of Rhode Island residents is concentrated at both high and low levels of education. Compared with the United States, adults in Rhode Island are more likely to have an education that fell short of a high school diploma or equivalent (15.2% of adults 25 and older in the state, versus 14.1% of adults nationwide). On the other hand, 31.1% of Ocean State adults have a bachelor's or graduate degree, versus 28.5% of the nation's adults. These differences are small but statistically significant.

Younger age cohorts tend to have greater

## ABOUT THE DATA

Data in this Bulletin are drawn from the American Community Survey (ACS) 2011 one-year estimates and 2011 U.S. Census population estimates. Each ACS estimate has an associated margin of error, which corresponds with a 90 percent confidence level; that is, there is a 90 percent chance that the true count is within the margin of error of the estimate. While there is no universal standard, a general rule of thumb is that reliable estimates have a margin of error no larger than one quarter of the estimate itself. All the ACS estimates in this bulletin fall under this threshold.

\*The Census definition of “student” includes those enrolled full-time or part-time in regular schools.



Source: 2011 1-Year ACS (U.S. Census)

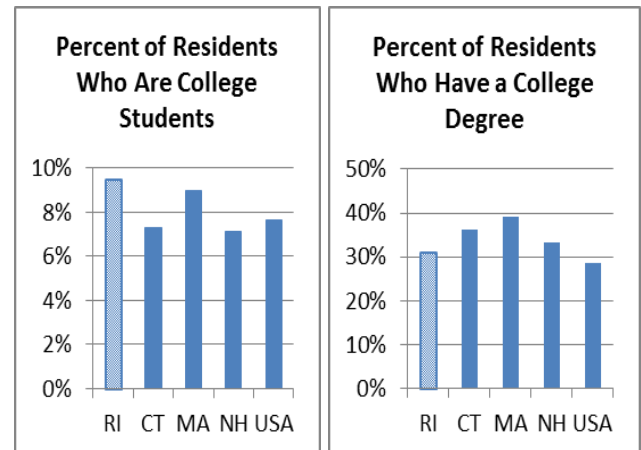
educational attainment in the state, but only by a slim margin among the working age population. For example, the share of adults 25-34, 35-44, and 45-64 who earned high school diplomas are 88.9%, 88.5%, and 87.2% respectively, while the share of residents 65 and older who earned a high school diploma jumps down to 73.3%.

### Compared with the Region

Despite having the greatest share of college students in New England, Rhode Island still falls behind other states in the region on educational attainment indicators. In every other New England state, a greater share of adults has earned at least a high school diploma than in Rhode Island, and in every New England state except for Maine, a greater share of adults holds a bachelor's degree.

### Educational Attainment and Income

One reason to be concerned about these lower rates is a correlation between poverty and educational attainment suggested by the ACS data. The poverty rate for those without a high school diploma is 24.5% (31.4% for women), while the poverty rate for those with a high school diploma is 13.9% and for residents with a bachelor's degree or more it is 3.5%.



Source: 2011 1-Year ACS (U.S. Census)

Residents with greater educational attainment also have clear income benefits as measured by median earnings. For those with only a high school diploma, median earnings are \$29,787, while median earnings for those with a college degree are \$50,327. Disparities in earnings by gender also vary depending on educational attainment. Median earnings for women without a high school diploma are 44% lower than for men, a difference of nearly \$12,000 annually. For women with a bachelor's degree, median earnings are 32% lower, a difference of \$19,722.

## TO LEARN MORE...

To explore the 2011 ACS data on school enrollment and educational attainment, visit the U.S. Census website, [American FactFinder](http://www.census.gov). To look at school enrollment or educational attainment data for your city or town, you may need to look at three-year ACS data, which is available for areas with 20,000 people or more, or five-year ACS data, which covers all geographies. All of these datasets have been released for 2011 ACS.

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education provides a wealth of data on enrollment, students, and schools at <http://www.ride.ri.gov/DataWorks/>.

For further information about Planning Information Center resources, contact Amanda Martin at Rhode Island Statewide Planning: [amanda.martin@doa.ri.gov](mailto:amanda.martin@doa.ri.gov) or (401) 222-4720.