



**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**  
ONE UNION STATION  
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903  
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

**Testimony Re: House Bill 8108 RELATING TO EDUCATION -- RHODE ISLAND HOPE SCHOLARSHIP PILOT PROGRAM ACT**

**House Finance Committee**

**May 8, 2024**

**Jessica Vega, Senior Policy Analyst**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice our support for House Bill 8108 and thank Representative McNamara for sponsoring and Representatives Azzinaro, Caldwell, Giraldo, Donovan, Potter, Handy, and Fenton-Fung for co-sponsoring. This bill would extend the sunset date of the Rhode Island Hope Scholarship pilot program from 2028 to 2030, in order to allow the program to provide eligible students with funding for tuition and mandatory fees for an additional two years.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is the lead convener of the Rhode Island Alliance for College and Career Readiness. The Alliance was established in 2017 to raise awareness about the connection between college and career readiness, individual students' success, and our state's economic prosperity. The Alliance also identifies and advocates for legislative and regulatory changes and budgetary investments needed to increase college and career readiness and access and to address racial, ethnic, and income disparities.

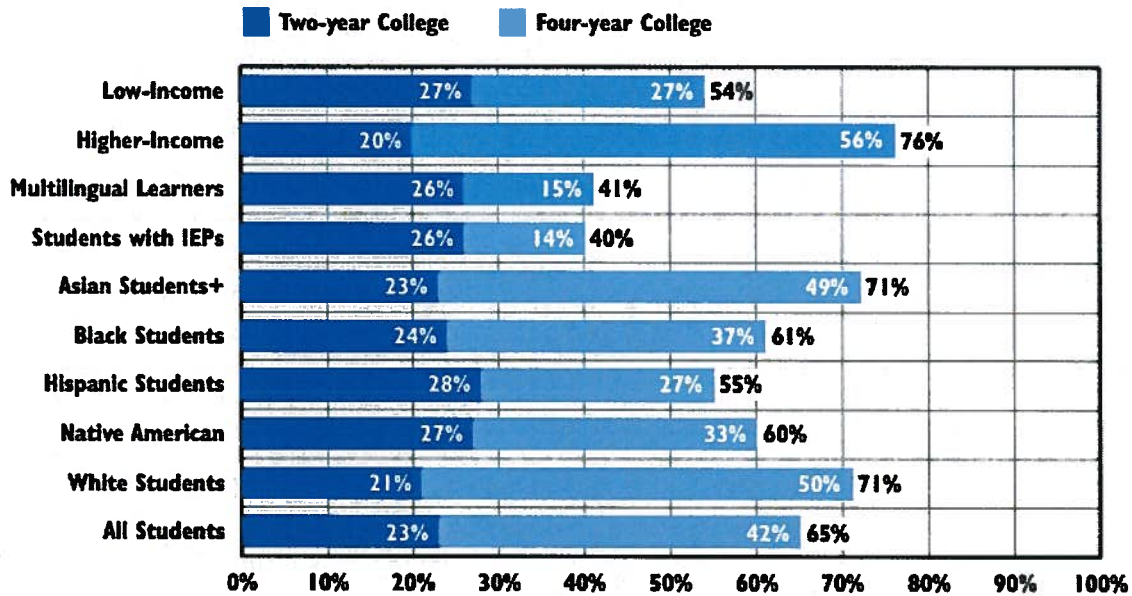
Between 2021 and 2031, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certificate are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring less education. Between 2018 and 2022 in Rhode Island, adults with high school diplomas were more than twice as likely to be unemployed as those with bachelor's degrees or higher, and the median annual income for adults with high school diplomas was \$41,968, compared to \$66,011 for adults with bachelor's degrees, making college attainment important for economic stability and mobility and generation changing for students from low-income families.

Many students, especially low-income students, face barriers to college enrollment and completion, such as insufficient academic preparation, difficulty navigating the application and financial aid processes, and the high cost of college. There continue to be large gaps in college access, particularly four-year college enrollment. For example, in 2023 27% of low-income students were enrolled in a four-year institution compared to 56% of high-income students. **Rhode Island students, especially our low-income students, need a four-year option.**

**College completion is just as important as college enrollment.** In Rhode Island, there are large gaps in college completion between low-income and higher-income students. Forty-three percent of low-income Rhode Island public school students who enrolled in a two- or four-year college in 2015 earned a college diploma within six years, compared to 75% of higher-income students. There were also large disparities in college completion by race and ethnicity, language status, and disability.

[rikids@rikidscount.org](mailto:rikids@rikidscount.org)  
[www.rikidscount.org](http://www.rikidscount.org)

## 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.

Extending the sunset date for the Rhode Island Hope Scholarship will likely increase the percentage of low-income students and Students of Color enrolling at Rhode Island College and make a four-year college experience more accessible to these students. Students who receive financial aid generally have lower dropout rates than non-aided students, but dropout rates vary depending on the amount and timing of student financial aid.

**Affordability is not the only barrier to increasing Rhode Island's college enrollment and completion rates, but it is essential.** Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown in investing in children from birth through college and investing in the education and training of our state's workforce and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.