

Series 4 | Week 1: High School to College Pathways for Students Across New England

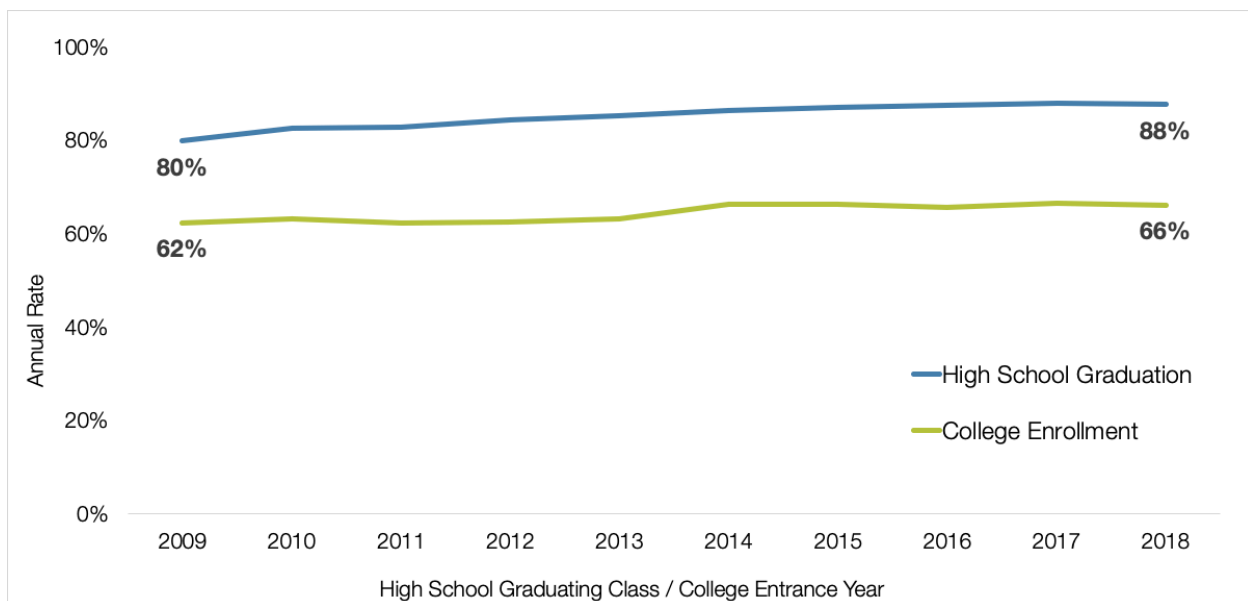
About the Data Dialogue Series

Thank you for participating in the New England Secondary School Consortium's (NESSC) Data Dialogue Series, an opportunity to explore, reflect on, and talk about our region's education data with your students, colleagues, and community.

This week, let's start by exploring trends in high school graduation and college enrollment, persistence, and completion rates across New England.

Exploring the Data

High School Graduation and College Enrollment Trends in New England

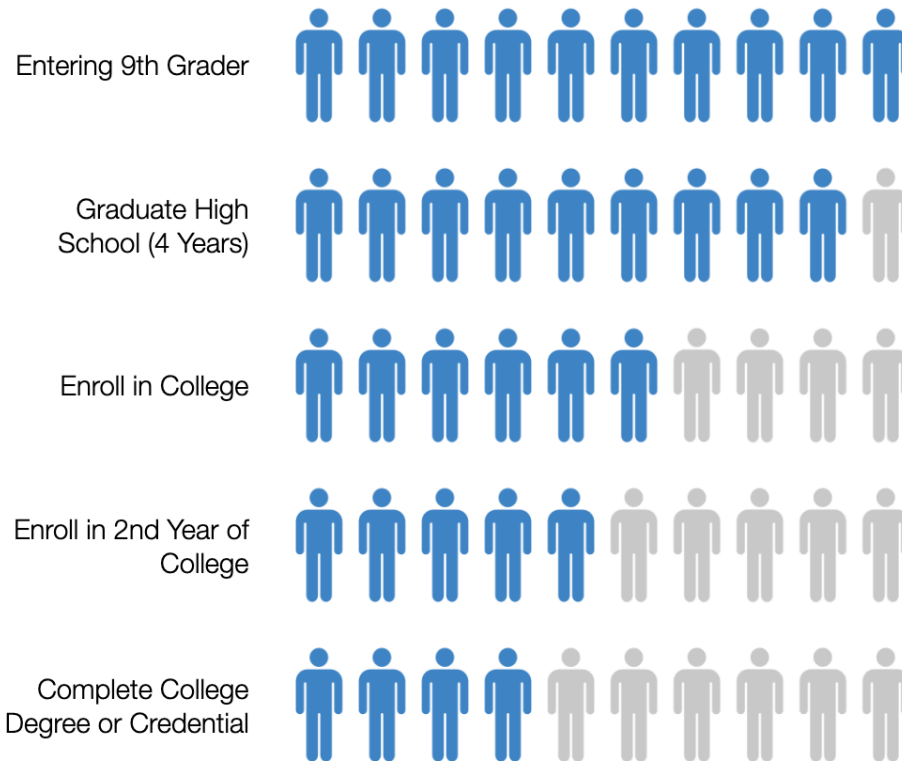


Across New England, high school graduation rates have steadily increased since 2009. The regional graduation rate decreased by less than half of one percentage point from 2017 to 2018. The 2018 graduation rate remains higher than rates all years prior to 2017. The growth in graduation rates was more dramatic in earlier years and slowed once the regional average surpassed 85% in 2013.

College enrollment rates, too, have increased during this time period. Between 2009 and 2014, college enrollment in the region rose by four percentage points from 62% to 66%; this rate has remained stable since 2014.

While these positive trends in high school graduation and college enrollment rates show promise, consider the longer-term implications for college persistence and completion. Imagine a hypothetical class of ninth-graders: the data suggests that for every ten students who enter 9th grade, nine will graduate high school and six will enroll in college. Among these students, just five will persist into a second year and only four students will earn a college credential (including two- and four-year degrees).*

High School to College Pathways for New England Students



**In order to make projections across indicators, we must combine rates from different student cohorts. For instance, the college-entering cohort of 2016 will include graduates from the class of 2015 as well as some students who completed high school in different ways (i.e., GED recipients or summer graduates) and excluding students who entered college later than fall 2016. In addition, because college completion rates are based on completion of a degree or credential within six years of college enrollment, these projections are calculated based on completion rates for the 2012 cohort.*

What This Means & Why It Matters

Earning a high school diploma is a gateway to a wide variety of career opportunities. More than ever, many career paths require a high school diploma as a basic necessity, with an increasing number of jobs also requiring postsecondary credentials. In fact, the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce projects that by 2020, most job openings will require education beyond high school; of those job openings, 35% will require at least a bachelor’s degree and 30% will require some college or an associate’s degree.

College-educated adults also are more likely to be employed full-time than their less-educated counterparts and less likely to be unemployed. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2018, unemployment was 2.2% among adults with a bachelor’s degree or higher as compared to 4% among adults with only a high school diploma.

On the one hand, the high school graduation and college enrollment rates across the region over the last decade offer promising evidence that we are making progress toward reducing high school dropout rates and increasing students' access to postsecondary education opportunities. The upward trajectory of these trendlines is particularly noteworthy because many New England states have also worked to implement more rigorous graduation requirements since 2009.

The current reality, however, is that while high school graduation and college enrollment rates have steadily increased, the likelihood of a student in New England actually completing a college degree or credential remains low. Given the increasing demand for a workforce with a college degree, there remains an urgency to working toward increasing overall college persistence and completion rates.

Let's use the discussion questions below to consider how we can effect change in our schools and communities.

Reflection & Dialogue Questions

While the visuals above are a rich starting point for personal reflection, we urge you to consider exploring the data through inclusive conversations with colleagues, students, parents, and other members of your school community.

1. These visuals show regional trends across New England, which were calculated by aggregating state-level data (meaning that your school's data contributed to this trend). What do these data make you wonder about the student outcomes for your school and community? What additional data do you need in order to understand how college enrollment, persistence, and completion plays out in your school? Where can you find that data?
2. What assumptions (e.g., about students, about your role, about your community, and/or about the purpose of school) might have been present in your analysis of the data? How might those assumptions influence your interpretation of the data? How can you seek out other perspectives on the data?
3. What steps could your school district take to become a place where all students are engaged and are able to successfully pursue and complete post-secondary options, including college?

To further explore trends in high school graduation and college enrollment, persistence, and completion rates across New England, check out our full 2019 NESSC Data Report: <https://www.newenglandssc.org/resources/common-data-project/>

**Would you like to share your reflection with the NESSC?
Don't hesitate to reach out at info@newenglandssc.org.**