

Series 4 | Week 2: College Pathways for Economically Disadvantaged Students

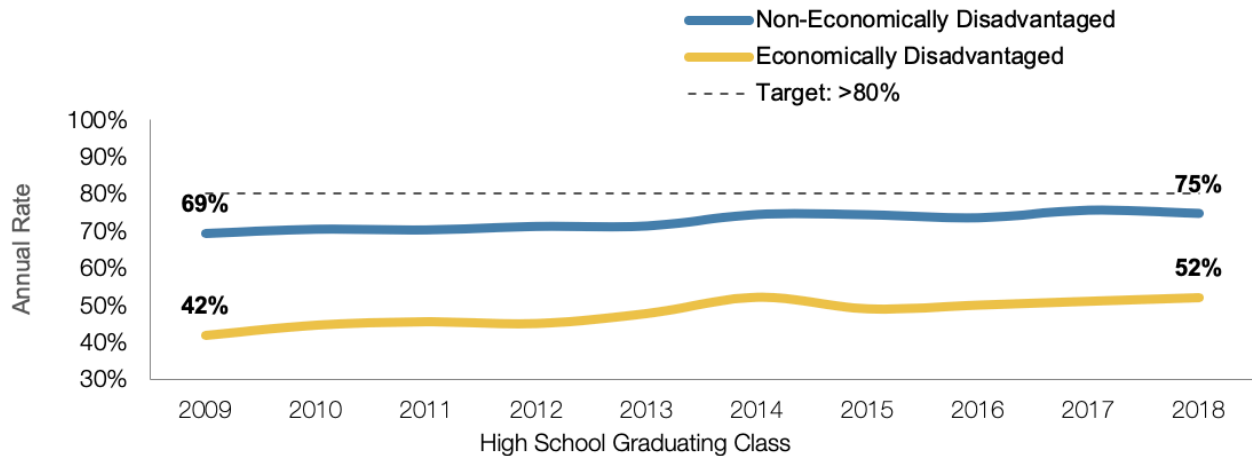
About the Data Dialogue Series

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.

Last week, we examined overall college enrollment, persistence, and completion rates across New England. This week, let's take a deeper dive to explore the educational opportunities and high school and college outcomes for economically disadvantaged students across the region.

Exploring the Data

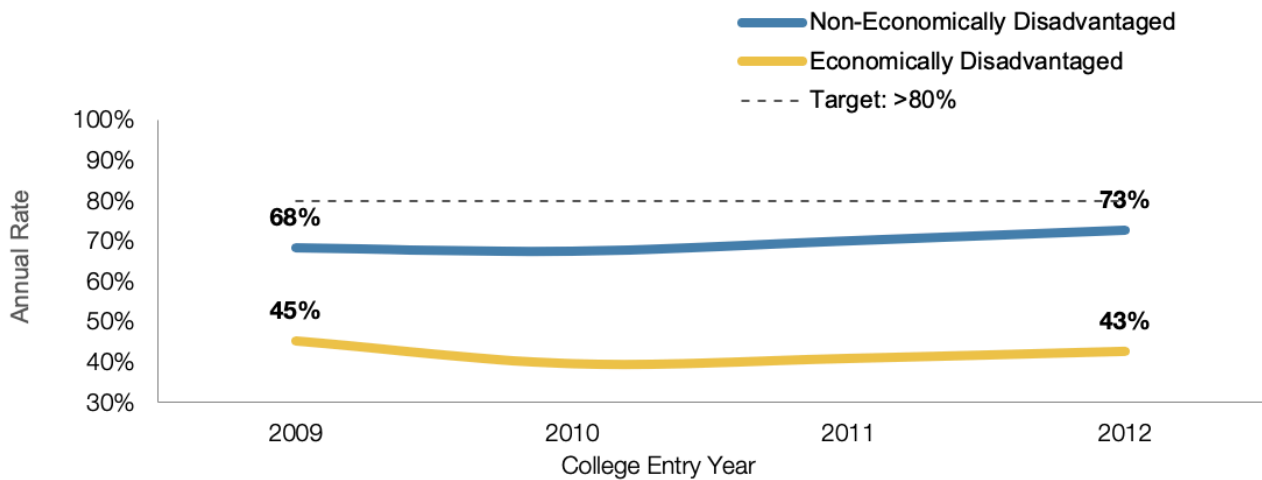
College Enrollment Rates Across New England: Economically Disadvantaged Students



The college enrollment rate for economically disadvantaged students in New England now stands at 52%, having increased by 10 percentage points since 2009. 75% of non-economically disadvantaged students enrolled in college in 2016, up 5 percentage points since 2009.

The gap in college enrollment between economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged students has decreased by 15%, from 27 to 23 percentage points.

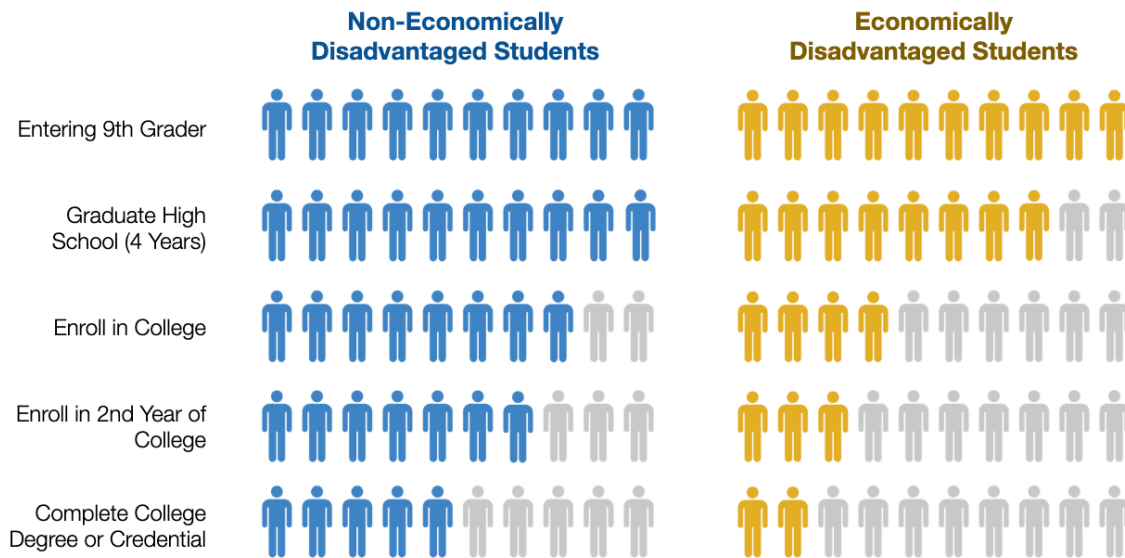
College Completion Rates Across New England: Economically Disadvantaged Students



In the college-entering class of 2012, 65% of students across New England states completed a college degree by 2018 (including two- and four-year degrees). When we disaggregate outcomes by subgroup, however, college completion among economically disadvantaged students—43% of students who entered college in 2012—trails that of their non-economically disadvantaged peers by about 30 percentage points.

The figure above notes the percentages of students who enroll in college who receive a two- or four-year degree within six years. It does not consider students who failed to graduate from high school or chose not to enroll in college. When we look over time starting with a cohort in ninth grade, gaps in college outcome rates for economically disadvantaged students are even more stark.

High School to College Pathways for Economically Disadvantaged 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.

For example, the previous graphic depicts a hypothetical class of ninth-graders. The data indicate that for every ten non-economically disadvantaged students in that class, ten will graduate high school and eight will enroll in college. By contrast, for every ten economically disadvantaged students in that class, only eight will graduate high school and only four will enroll in college. This trend continues with persistence in college and degree completion; seven non-economically disadvantaged students will persist into a second year and five will complete a college credential whereas only three economically disadvantaged students will persist and two will complete a college credential (including two- and four-year degrees).

What This Means & Why It Matters

39% of the class of 2018 (61,395 total students) across New England qualify as economically disadvantaged, defined by (1) student eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals (in five New England states) or (2) student participation in either the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), cash assistance, foster care, or Medicaid (Massachusetts only).

Given the size of the population, the 23 percentage point gap in college enrollment and 30 percentage point gap in college completion for economically disadvantaged students represents a substantial inequity in New England's schools. While an increasing proportion of students are enrolling in college, many students are not.

On the one hand, the gap in college enrollment between economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged students has narrowed slightly over the last decade from 27 to 23 percentage points. This may be indicative of efforts across the region to increase access to college for economically disadvantaged students, a group historically underrepresented in higher education.

Unfortunately, while more economically disadvantaged students are enrolling in college, few are completing a degree or credential, particularly as compared to their non-economically disadvantaged peers. Closing this substantial gap will require innovative thinking, but doing so is essential in order to achieve our collective goal of educational equity and opportunity for all students.

Let's use the discussion questions below to consider how we can effect change in our schools and communities that will continue to narrow this gap.

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 these trends). What questions do these visuals raise about your own community and school? (These questions might be different depending on your role, experience, proximity to/relationship with students in this subgroup, etc.)
2. What additional data might you need in order to better understand who these students are and the educational opportunities and supports they have at your school?

3. What steps will you take to explore the reasons for the disparities among student trajectories among economically disadvantaged students?

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.**