Common Data Project Executive Summary

Improving the Quality and Comparability of State Educational Data across New England

NEW ENGLAND
SECONDARY SCHOOL
CONSORTIUM

Executive Summary

The New England Secondary School Consortium (NESSC) Common Data Project Annual Report provides transparent, comparable data about high school and college outcomes from across the New England states. We began tracking high school graduation and dropout rates in 2009. Since then, we have added extended high school graduation rates, as well as college enrollment, persistence, and completion measures.

The six New England states have shared comparable data through the NESSC Common Data Project that demonstrate evidence of progress in secondary school outcomes. This report presents data trends across the region, as well as by state. The report also includes data disaggregated by student characteristics across six indicators, which allow us to examine educational equity in New England secondary school outcomes by economic disadvantage (ED), English learner status (EL), disability status, gender, and race/ethnicity.

Over the last 13 years, the region has seen some noteworthy gains. For example, high school graduation rates across New England have been continuously trending up, even if the years since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Additionally, four-year graduation rates for multiple student groups have reached the NESSC target of 90%. Another positive trend is a narrowing of the graduation rate gaps between groups of students within historically disadvantaged demographics. For example, the gap between economically disadvantaged students and their non-economically disadvantaged peers, as well as students with disabilities and students without disabilities, and English Learner students and non-English Learner students, have all narrowed in recent years.

Furthermore, as this report reflects the first full school year of learning since the COVID-19 pandemic began in Spring 2020, these data also shed light on how recovery and student attainment measures are disproportionately impacting students.
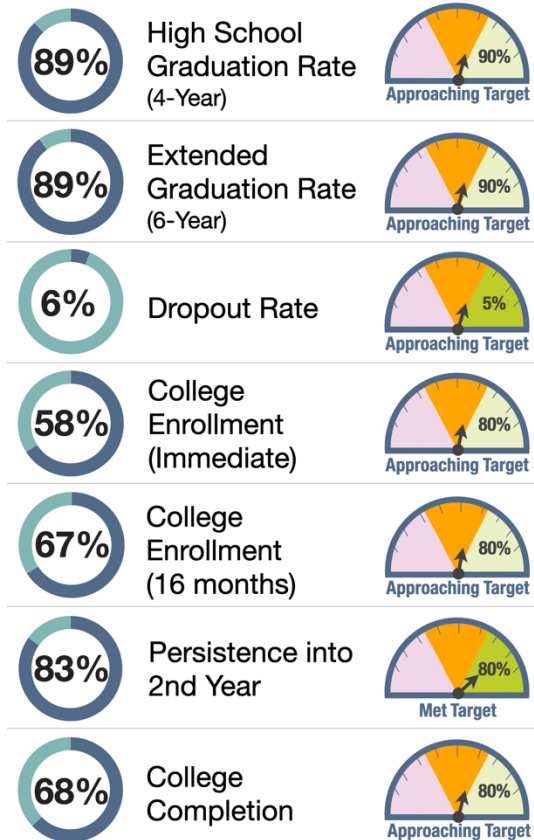
However, the data also reveal persistent attainment gaps among other measures captured by this report that disproportionately impact historically disadvantaged students.

Significant and still widening gaps are seen when comparing data for high school dropout, college enrollment and for college persistence. We showcase attainment gaps for the region, as well as trends across states, in greater detail in the accompanying dashboard.

Regionally, student achievement approaches, but has not yet met, targets for all high school and college outcomes. The sole measure for which the NESSC has achieved the agreed upon target of 80% is college persistence. Regionally, the college persistence rate, which experienced a sharp drop the first year of COVID-19, has continued over the last two years to increase back to pre-pandemic rates. High school graduation (4-year) has stayed steady in the past year at the regional level and has maintained a slight increase since the first year impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. College enrollment and college completion rates continue to be well below the NESSC targets of 80%. Furthermore, although college completion has continued to remain steady since the onset of the pandemic, immediate college enrollment continues to be lower than it has been since before 2010 and is more than 20 percentage points below target.

At the state level, only one state has met the regional target of 90% for high school graduation (4-year), and just two states have met the target of 5% for high school dropout.

NESSC Regional Averages (2022)

89%	High School Graduation Rate (4-Year)	90% Approaching Target
89%	Extended Graduation Rate (6-Year)	90% Approaching Target
6%	Dropout Rate	5% Approaching Target
58%	College Enrollment (Immediate)	80% Approaching Target
67%	College Enrollment (16 months)	80% Approaching Target
83%	Persistence into 2nd Year	80% Met Target
68%	College Completion	80% Approaching Target

Note: The NESSC sets targets for each of the student achievement outcomes and monitors progress toward these targets annually

Many student groups are approaching the NESSC targets for high school outcomes, but gaps continue to persist. Since 2009, notable gains have been made in improving high school graduation rates and reducing high school dropout rates. Despite these gains, some groups of students complete high school at rates far below the average.

Economically disadvantaged students, English Learners, students with disabilities, male students, and Black, Hispanic, Native American, and multiracial students across the region graduate high school at far lower rates as compared to their counterparts. The widest gap is experienced by English Learner students who graduate at an average rate 18.2 percentage

points lower than their non-English Learner peers.

When disaggregating data by student characteristics, high school outcomes vary substantially:

- English Learner students and students with disabilities both have four-year high school graduation rates below 75%, while many other groups are surpassing NESSC's 90% target.

- Non-economically disadvantaged students, non-English Learner students, students without disabilities, and students who are female, Asian or White, have met or exceeded the 90% high school graduation rate target. All of these groups of students have consistently met or surpassed the target for at least the past three years.

- The regional dropout rate for economically disadvantaged students, while in decline over the last decade, stands at 9% in 2022, while the dropout rate for non-economically disadvantaged students has hovered between 2-3% since 2014.

- Regionally, English Learner students, Hispanic students, and Native American students dropout of high school at significantly greater rates than their peers. The dropout rates for these students are 16.4%, 13.0%, and 10.5%, respectively, while the regional average for all students is just above the target at 5.5%.

Students with disabilities gain the most through the support of up to two extra years to graduate from high school; economically disadvantaged, male, Black, multiracial, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Native American students all achieve extended graduation (6-year) rates above 80%, yet still below the 90% target.

English Learner students experienced a sharp decline in the extended graduation (6-year) rate to 67.9% two years ago and have remained more than 20 percentage points below the regional target.

Many trends in both high school and post-secondary outcomes remained relatively steady this year, yet there are some that have still not recovered to pre-pandemic rates. Interestingly, each of the post-secondary measures reflects different trends since COVID-19. Regionally, college enrollment rates saw a decrease of over 5 percentage points in the first year of the pandemic, and the rate these past two years is lower, more than 22 percentage points from the 80% target. College persistence saw a similar, yet smaller, drop in the first year, but has fully recovered back to pre-pandemic rates and back to surpassing the target at 82.8%. Lastly, college completion rates regionally seemed to be minimally impacted by the pandemic, experiencing an **increase** the first year of 1.5 percentage points, and having nominal gains in the two years since. However, this continues to remain about 12 percentage points below target.

No student subgroups have met the NESSC targets for college enrollment or college completion

The subgroups of students meeting the target for college persistence include students without disabilities, Asian students, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students, Multiracial students, White students, male and female students, non-English Learner students, and non-economically disadvantaged students. College enrollment rates and college completion rates experience some of the greatest disparities observed in this report. For example:

- Hispanic students have significantly lower rates for both enrollment and completion than their peers, with the largest gap being seen in comparison to Asian students. For college enrollment, a gap of 37.4 percentage points exists between these two groups of students regionally, and a gap of 34.3 percentage points for completion.

- Non-English Learner students were more than twice as likely to enroll in college than their English Learner student peers.

- Students with disabilities, English Learner students, and students with economic disadvantage all have college completion rates around 45%, while their counterpart peers complete college at a rate of 68% or higher.

Although the NESSC college persistence rate for all students has recovered to 82.8%, matching the rate of the year before the onset of COVID-19 and surpassing the target, disparities within continue to grow. The gap in college persistence rates for students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and English Learner students, and their respective counterparts, grew in the past year. Gaps for students with disabilities and for economically disadvantaged students both widened by nearly 2 percentage points, while the gap for English Learner students grew by more than 5 percentage points this year.

The smallest gaps in regional college persistence rates within student subgroups this year are found for the following (with the difference in rate provided in parentheses):

- Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and Multiracial students (0.1 percentage point)

- Hispanic and Black students (1.3)

- Multiracial and Native American students (2.6)

- Male and female students (3.1)

- White and Multiracial students (3.2)

Many other comparisons are possible with additional exploration of the data. We hope these data inform efforts to close achievement gaps and promote greater educational equity and opportunity for all students. To ensure this dashboard is as valuable as possible, we encourage all users to provide feedback: www.surveymonkey.com/r/CDPReportFeedback.

Introduction

Data offer a tool to better understand the full impact of the pandemic on student learning and outcomes. The availability of data over time, in particular, provides insight, not only about variation in opportunities and outcomes for different students prior to the pandemic, but also helps us understand the degree to which COVID-related learning disruptions disproportionately impact certain student groups.

All students deserve to have access to a high-quality education that readies them for college, careers, and life; they also deserve to be prepared to pursue and succeed in a career of their choosing while earning a living wage. Research finds that individuals with high school diplomas have greater financial stability and socio-emotional well-being as adults, have better health outcomes, and are less likely to be incarcerated as compared to those with less education.[1]

More than ever, many career paths require a high school diploma, with an increasing number of jobs also requiring at least some postsecondary credentials. As automation and globalization have led to major structural changes in the global economy, economic opportunity has shifted toward more educated workers with higher skill levels, particularly those with postsecondary education and industry-recognized credentials.[2]

In recent years, schools across the nation have made a concerted effort to reduce high school dropout rates and increase students' access to postsecondary education opportunities. High school graduation rates nationwide have made a steady, but slowing, increase over the past decade.[3] Despite this progress, substantial achievement gaps remain, particularly for Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students, who continue to graduate high school at far lower rates as compared to their White and more affluent peers. Fewer English Learners and students with disabilities, too, graduate as compared to their counterparts. The inequities persist at the postsecondary level, as these historically underrepresented student groups are less likely to enroll, persist, and complete a postsecondary credential.[4]

[1] Cutler, David M., and Adriana Lleras-Muney. "Education and Health: Evaluating Theories and Evidence." Working Paper No.12352, Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research, July 2006, https://www.nber.org/papers/w12352; Lochner, Lance. "Education Policy and Crime." Working Paper No. 15894, Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research, April 2006, https://www.nber.org/papers/w15894; Sum, Andrew, Ishwar Khatiwada, Joseph McLaughlin, and Shelia Palma. "The Consequences of Dropping Out of High School: Joblessness and Jailing for High School Dropouts and the High Cost for Taxpayers." Report, Boston: Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, October 2009, https://www.issuelab.org/resource/the-consequences-of-dropping-out-of-high-school-joblessness-and-jailing-for-high-school-dropouts-and-the-high-cost-for-taxpayers.html; Edelman, Peter B. and Harry J. Holzer. "Connecting the Disconnected: Improving Education and Employment Outcomes Among Disadvantaged Youth." Policy Paper No. 56, Bonn: IZA, April 2013, http://ftp.iza.org/pp56.pdf; Kearney, Melissa S. and Phillip B. Levine. "Income Inequality, Social Mobility, and the Decision to Drop Out of High School." Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, (Spring 2016): 333-396, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/kearneytextspring16bpea.pdf.

[2] Carnevale, Anthony P., Jeff Strohl, Neil Ridley, and Artem Gulish. "Three Educational Pathways to Good Jobs: High School, Middle Skills, and Bachelor's Degree," Report: Washington DC: Center on Education and the Workforce, Georgetown University, 2018; Carnevale, Anthony P., Neil Ridley, Ban Cheah, Jeff Strohl, and Kathryn Peltier Campbell. "Upskilling and Downsizing in American Manufacturing," Report: Washington DC: Center on Education and the Workforce, Georgetown University, 2019.

[3] Atwell, Matthew N., Balfanz, Robert, Bridgeland, John and Ingram, Erin. "Building a Nation: Progress and Challenge in Raising High School Graduation Rates. Report, Civic, Everyone Graduates Center at the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University, 2019, https://www.americaspromise.org/2019-building-grad-nation-report.

[4] National Student Clearinghouse. "Snapshot Report: First-year Persistence and Retention." National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, June 27, 2018, https://nscresearchcenter.org/snapshotreport33-first-year-persistence-and-retention/.

The disheartening reality for New England schools, similar to the rest of the nation, is that certain student groups are experiencing very different education outcomes – and ultimately have access to fewer opportunities – than their peers.

About the NESSC Common Data Project Annual Report

The New England Secondary School Consortium (NESSC) Common Data Project Annual Report provides transparent, comparable data about high school and college outcomes from the six New England states. We began tracking high school graduation and dropout rates in 2009. Since then, we added extended high school graduation rates, as well as college enrollment, persistence, and completion measures. Further, these indicators are now presented disaggregated across key student groups.

The NESSC sets targets for each of the student achievement outcomes and monitors progress toward these targets annually. The targets include: at least 90% high school graduation rate for all student groups from a given cohort; a high school dropout rate at or below five percent; at least 80% college enrollment rate for high school graduates; and for students who enrolled in college, 80% persistence and completion rates.

To promote more accurate and reliable data comparability across member states, the NESSC Common Data Project develops and implements standardized procedures designed to minimize variance that may result from divergent data systems or computational errors. The Common Data Project also employs additional quality control mechanisms that further improve the reliability and comparability of state-reported data.

The data are organized around six data indicators of student achievement: high school graduation (4-year), extended high school graduation (6-year), dropout rates, college enrollment, persistence into second year of college, and postsecondary degree completion rates. When available, the report includes historical data since 2009 by state and aggregate rates across New England. Each indicator also includes disaggregated data by student characteristics and by state, which allows us to examine educational equity across New England secondary and postsecondary school outcomes by economic disadvantage (ED), English learner status (EL), disability status, gender, and race/ethnicity. More information on these subgroups can be found in the "Definitions" tab on the dashboard.

Member states have shared comparable data through the NESSC Common Data Project that demonstrate evidence of progress in secondary school outcomes. In recent years, notable gains have been made in improving high school graduation rates and reducing high school dropout rates. But some groups of students complete high school at rates far below the average. College enrollment and completion rates remain well below NESSC targets, and are alarmingly low for some groups of students.

The data presented in the accompanying dashboard have implications for educators at all levels, employers, policymakers, and residents throughout New England and beyond. With the population in our region aging and our workforce needing to evolve quickly, it is critical that all our young people succeed in secondary and postsecondary education. These data show where we are improving, and where there is still more work to do.

This report aims to support the NESSC mission to close achievement gaps, increase educational equity, and ensure opportunity for all students while also shedding light on persistent inequities and areas for growth across the region. We hope this report will serve as a helpful resource and might inspire reflection, conversation, and ultimately action to improve educational outcomes for all students.

For more information on the methodology of the report, including descriptions of indicators, we encourage you to review the accompanying Procedural Guidebook.