



New England Fast Facts

College Readiness in New England: A Snapshot

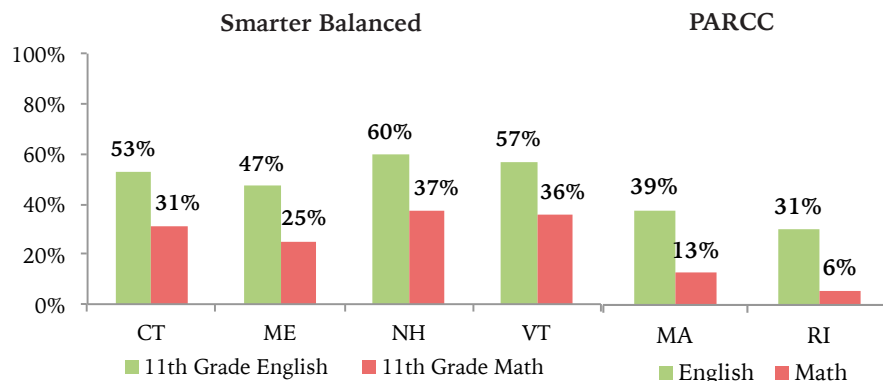
College readiness, due to little agreement on a definition and metrics, is difficult to measure. Yet, it's important because it influences postsecondary enrollment, the time it takes to obtain a degree, and overall college completion. Further, the number of jobs that require higher education continues to grow: the Georgetown Center for Education and the Workplace estimates that 65% of all jobs will require at least some postsecondary education by 2020. College readiness directly impacts the development of a productive workforce. This *Fast Facts in New England* examines the college readiness of the region's high school students using the most recent available measures and data.

Are students in New England acquiring the knowledge needed to pursue postsecondary education?

States measure how well students are grasping high school material with statewide assessments in English language arts and math. Some states have used the Smarter Balanced Assessment while others use the Partnership for Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). In addition to helping pinpoint opportunities for improvement in teaching and learning, these assessments also provide benchmarks for the level of knowledge and skills that measure readiness for college. Because states have a choice of assessment tools, measuring college readiness regionally can be difficult.

Overall, however, **approximately half of all students in the region have reached a benchmark for college readiness (are “college ready”) in English, while roughly one in three are college ready in math.**

Figure 1: Share of Students Meeting College Readiness Benchmarks on State Assessments, 2014-2015



Note: The highest level of PARCC math testing with the greatest participation in Rhode Island, during the 2014-2015 school year, was 10th grade geometry. The last year of PARCC English testing in Rhode Island occurred in the 10th grade. The data displayed for Massachusetts is of 11th grade English II and Algebra II.
Source: NEBHE analysis of data from Achieve and the state of Rhode Island

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- Four of the six New England states have assessed student achievement using the Smarter Balanced Performance test. Results from 2014-15 show the majority of 11th graders have reached the college ready English language benchmark while slightly more than a third have reached the benchmark in math (Figure 1).
- Massachusetts and Rhode Island have used Partnership for Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Massachusetts has 13% of 11th graders reaching proficiency in math and close to 40% attaining proficiency in English. In Rhode Island, fewer than one in three (31%) students can be described as “college ready” in English and one in twenty (5%) prepared for college in math.

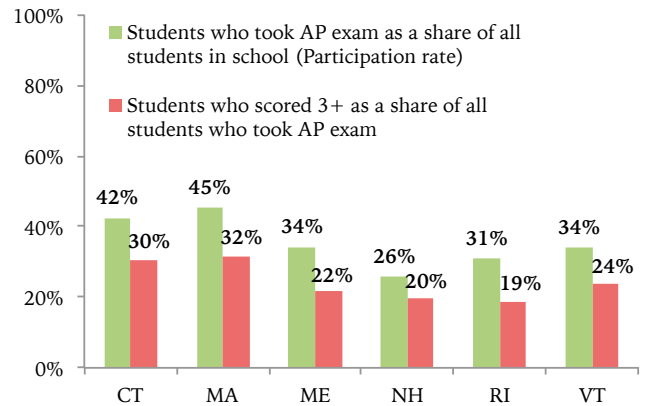
How many students are actively preparing for college in New England?

Advanced Placement (AP) classes are often the most challenging level of coursework that high school students can take. The American Council on Education (ACE) and the College Board recommend that colleges give credit or advanced placement to students scoring at least a 3 out of 5 for most AP classes. For this reason, the number of students who enroll in and score well in AP courses is a good proxy for measuring students' interest in and preparedness for college.

- The share of high school students in the region taking at least one AP exam ranges from 26% to 45% by state. Connecticut and Massachusetts have the highest participation rates in the region.
- Of the students who take AP exams, 19-30% are likely to score a 3 or above, and, depending on the selectivity of the college or university they attend, may earn college credit or advanced placement for their coursework (Figure 2).

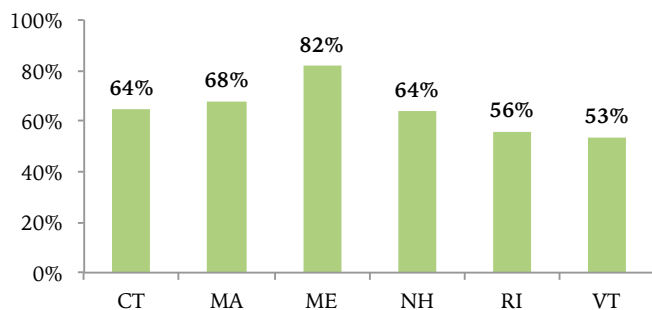
High school students who plan to attend college are advised to take a college entrance exam in order to demonstrate their knowledge and abilities to colleges and universities. The SAT is the most common college entrance exam used in New England, and as such, the rate of students taking the SAT (participation rate) often corresponds to the rate of students considering pursuing postsecondary education.

Figure 2: AP Exam Takers, 2015



Note: This includes all students in all grades who took AP exams in 2015. Source: NEBHE analysis of data from the College Board

Figure 3: SAT Participation Rate, 2014

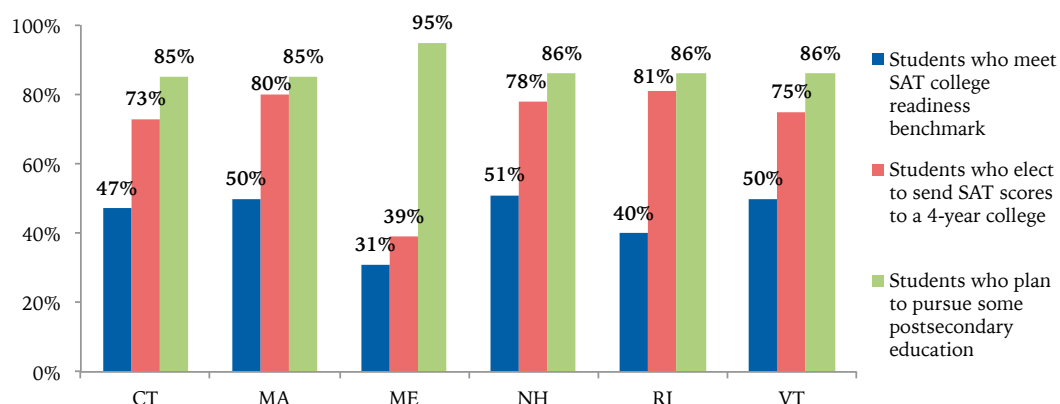


Note: The SAT participation rate is the number of high school seniors who took the SATs at any point during high school divided by the total number of high school seniors. 2014 is the most recent year for which the total number of 12th graders per state is available.

Source: NEBHE analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the College Board

- Across all New England states, the vast majority of students took the SAT in 2014. Maine high schools had the highest participation rate, with 82% of all students taking the SAT at least once before leaving high school, while Vermont students were the least likely to take the SAT, with a 53% participation rate (Figure 3).
- Massachusetts, Vermont and New Hampshire had the highest average SAT scores of the New England states: each above 1,550 (of a possible 2,400), which is the SAT's college readiness benchmark score. The College Board, which administers the SAT, estimates that the share of students prepared for college ranges from 31-51% by New England state (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Characteristics of SAT Test Takers, 2015



Note: This includes all students who took the SAT in 2015, regardless of grade. Source: NEBHE analysis of the College Board's 2015 state Program Results reports.

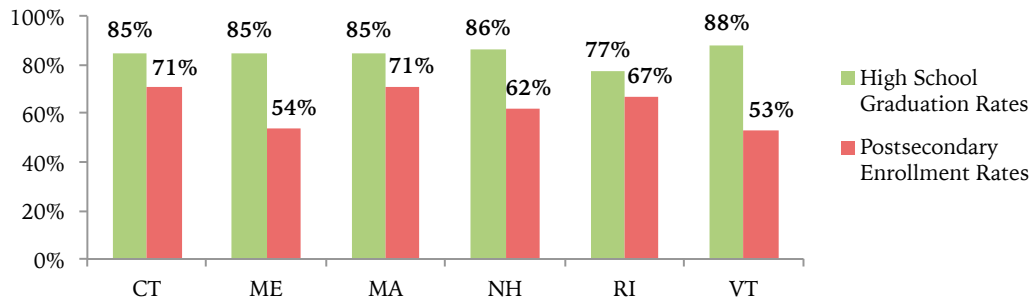
- Additionally, the SAT surveys high school students on their plans for higher education. Across states, a large majority of students (85-95%) plan to pursue a postsecondary certificate or degree. In most states, slightly fewer students (73-81%) actually elect to have their scores sent to a four-year college (the SAT is not required for enrollment in community college)—except in Maine, where only 39% of students choose to do so.

How many students in New England graduate from high school and enroll in college?

The final achievement for a vast majority of students before heading into higher education, the workplace or the military is a high school diploma.

- Public high school graduation rates are consistently high across the New England states, ranging from 77% in Rhode Island to 88% in Vermont (Figure 5).
- New England states report that a majority of public high school graduates will pursue postsecondary education of some kind. Vermont reports the lowest postsecondary enrollment rate of 53%, while Massachusetts and Connecticut report that 71% of graduates enroll in postsecondary education.

Figure 5: Public High School Students' Graduation and Postsecondary Enrollment Rates, 2012



Note: 2012 represents the most recent year for which there are estimates of postsecondary enrollment by state residency of student.

Source: NEBHE analysis data from the U.S. Department of Education

While there are many measures of college readiness, common to all are gaps between low-income students and students of color, and their wealthier and white peers. As the demographic makeup of New England continues to change—and the imperative to prepare underserved students for success after high school grows more critical—the persistence of these disparities presents a challenge to the region, and warrants a more extensive analysis.

For questions or comments, please contact Gretchen Syverud at gsyverud@nebhe.org or 617-533-9522.

About the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE)

Established in 1955 by six visionary New England governors, NEBHE is a regional compact that works across New England to: help leaders assess, develop and implement education practices and policies of regional significance; promote regional cooperation that encourages efficient sharing of education resources; and strengthen the relationship between higher education and the regional economy.

Learn more at www.nebhe.org.



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