

# Knocking at the College Door

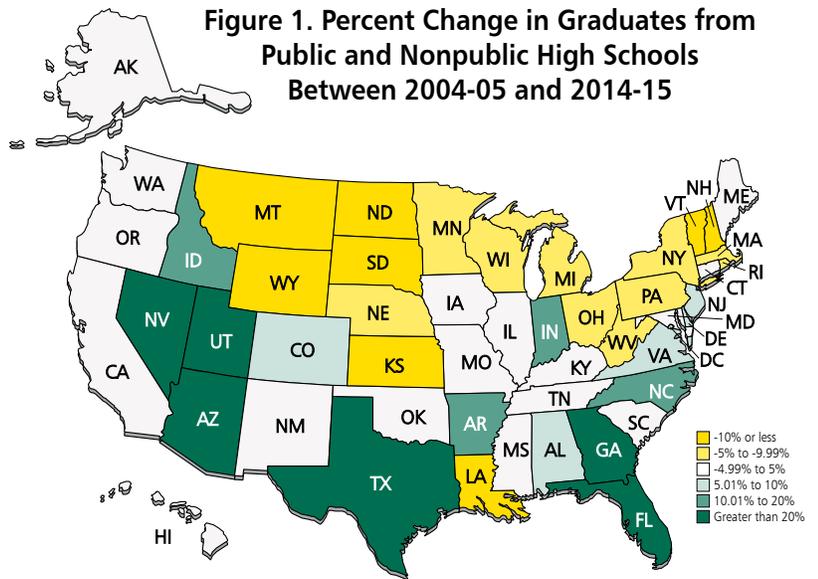
## Projections of High School Graduates by State and Race/Ethnicity, 1992-2022

# RHODE ISLAND

At over 3.3 million, the nation's graduating class of 2007-08 is projected to be history's largest. In fact, 2007-08 will mark the last year in an era of continuous growth in the nation's production of high school graduates, a period that reaches back to 1994. Over that time, the number of graduates swelled by 35.7 percent. In 2008-09, however, our country will begin a protracted period during which its production of high school graduates is expected to stagnate, assuming existing patterns persist. The number of graduates nationally will dip slightly over the next several years before growth resumes at a slower pace around 2015. Ultimately, projections indicate that between 2004-05 (the last year of available actual data) and 2021-22, the number of high school graduates will grow by approximately 265,000, or 8.6 percent.

The national data obscure significant variations in this picture at the regional and state levels, however. Regionally, in the decade leading up to 2004-05, the number of high school graduates grew the fastest in the West at 34 percent, with the South growing by 23.5 percent, the Northeast by 20.7 percent, and the Midwest by 14.2 percent. But the regions face very different futures in the years to come. The South will see the most growth in its production of high school graduates, at about 9 percent by 2014-15; and the West's numbers will climb by 7.1 percent. But the number of graduates produced in the Northeast and the Midwest will decline – by 6.1 and 3 percent, respectively.

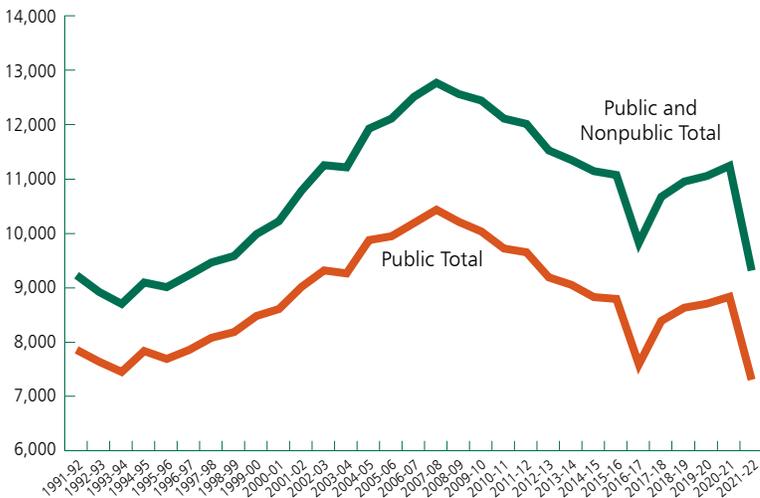
As with the national view, the regional picture masks considerable variation at the state level (Figure 1). Rhode Island produced over 2,800 more graduates in 2004-05 than it did a decade earlier, an increase of 31.2 percent. Projections indicate that the state's number of graduates will grow though



2007-08 before beginning a sustained and substantial decline, assuming existing patterns of high school completion and migration continue. The state projects to produce about 840 more high school graduates in 2007-08 than it did in 2004-05, an increase equal to about 7 percent.

Rhode Island was among the states with rapid growth in its production of high school graduates between 1993-94 and 2004-05, the most recent year of actual data from public schools (Figure 2). In 2004-05, 9,881 students graduated from public high schools in the state, 2,055 more graduates than were produced in 1994-95, representing growth of 26.3 percent. Nonpublic schools in the state added an estimated 2,050 in 2004-05, which was about 780 more than graduated in 1994-95. Of the state's total number of high school graduates each year, nonpublic schools produced an estimated 17 percent, on average. But projections indicate that nonpublic schools'

**Figure 2. Rhode Island High School Graduates 1991-92 to 2004-05 (Actual), 2005-06 to 2021-22 (Projected)**



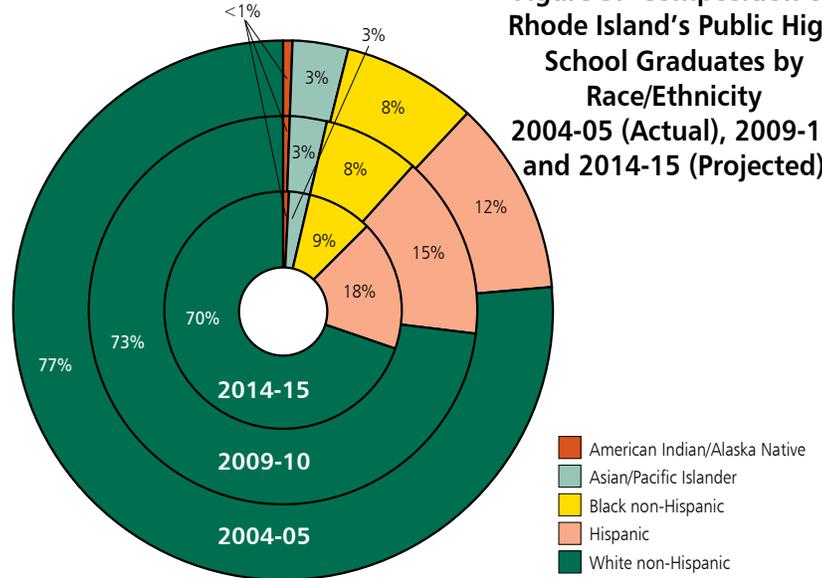
production of graduates will continue to increase in the years ahead.

Along with much of the rest of the nation, Rhode Island is poised to enter a new period characterized by much more stagnant growth or declines in the production of high school graduates. After reaching a peak in 2007-08 at over 10,400, the state will see a sharp decline in the number of public high school graduates each year through 2016-17, assuming a continuation of existing patterns of enrollment, progression, and completion. During that timeframe, the number of high school graduates is forecast to drop by over 2,800 (27 percent). Subsequently, projections indicate that production will recover.

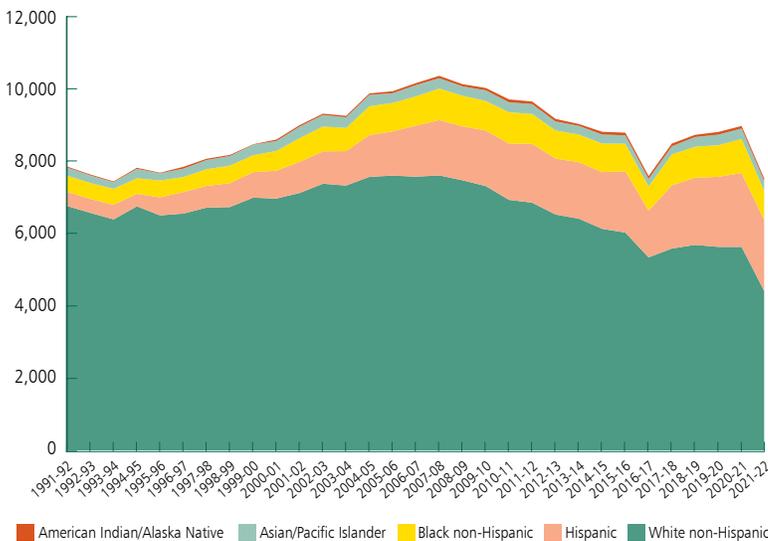
The racial/ethnic composition of Rhode Island's public high school graduating classes will continue to diversify over the coming decade and beyond (Figure 3). In 1994-95, White non-Hispanics accounted for 86.4 percent of the graduates from the state's public high schools. A decade later, that proportion had dropped slightly to 76.7 percent. By 2014-15, the proportion of White non-Hispanics will have fallen to around 69.6 percent.

These changes are roughly comparable to the experience of states all over the country. Although the magnitude may differ substantially, the nation as a whole is undergoing sweeping changes in the racial/ethnic composition of its population. In Rhode Island, as in other states, the big changes are the result of a shrinking number of White non-Hispanics in the educational pipeline, coupled with rapid growth in the number of Hispanic high school students and graduates. While immigration has contributed to the growth of the Hispanic population, signs of the continuing demographic shift are evident in data showing a dramatic increase in the number of Hispanic births, which is due in part to a higher fertility rate among Hispanic women.

**Figure 3. Composition of Rhode Island's Public High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity 2004-05 (Actual), 2009-10 and 2014-15 (Projected)**



**Figure 4. Rhode Island High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity, 1991-92 to 2004-05 (Actual), 2005-06 to 2021-22 (Projected)**



Hispanic graduates from public schools in the state numbered 1,153 in 2004-05. But within a decade Hispanic graduates are projected to increase by around 35.6 percent to about 1,564 (Figure 4). American Indians/Alaska Natives, who accounted for just 42 graduates in 2004-05, are projected to see a substantial increase of about 77 percent over the same timeframe, although their number will remain modest by comparison. All other racial/ethnic groups are projected to have fewer graduates by 2014-15 than they did in 2004-05. The biggest decline will be among White non-Hispanic graduates, who numbered 7,576 in 2004-05 but will fall by over 1,400 (nearly 19 percent). After initially increasing, by 2014-15, Black non-Hispanics are forecast to have about the same number of graduates, dropping by only six from their 2004-05 level of 794. Asians/Pacific Islanders will also see their number of graduates fall, by about 60 (20 percent) from 316.

For more information, contact: Dolores Mize, Vice President, Public Policy and Research, 303.541.0221, dmize@wiche.edu; or Brian Prescott, Senior Research Analyst, Public Policy and Research, 303.541.0255, bprescott@wiche.edu. To view the full publication or to place an order for a bound copy, visit our website at [www.wiche.edu/policy](http://www.wiche.edu/policy).