

# College Access and Persistence in Maine

## Research Brief

**November 2011**

Updated version, January 2012

Sponsored by



This *Research Brief* shows trends in Maine over the past decade in high school completion and college enrollment, persistence, and completion. The Brief also compares the Maine and national averages on these measures. It then presents recent data on the earnings and employment payoff for those with a college education, and projected growth in employer demand for college-educated workers. Finally, it provides information on two key barriers to college: cost and academic preparation. The Brief concludes with key questions, suggested by the data, for Maine to address in order to promote economic vitality going forward.

The goal of this Brief is to provide an updated snapshot using available data on key measures of college access, the benefits of college, and barriers to college.

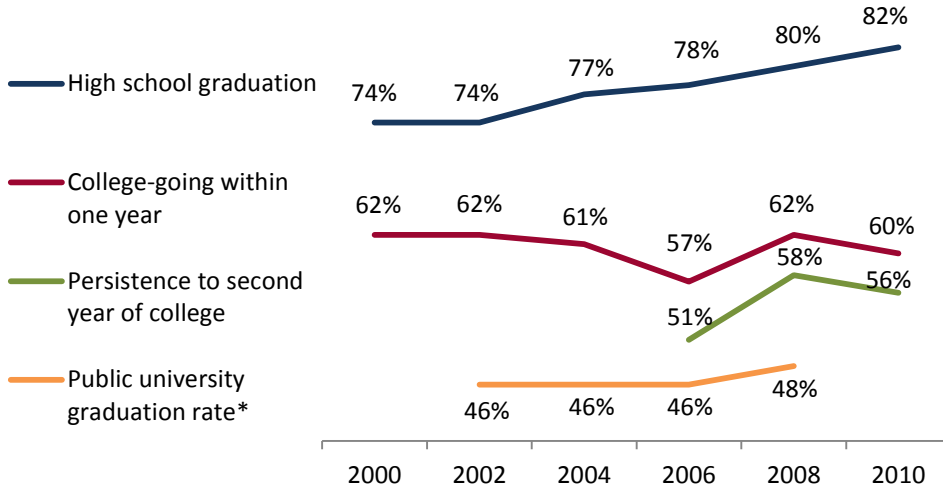
We use the term ‘college’ broadly, to encompass any certificate or degree earned above the high school level. College enrollment data include students in degree-granting two- and four-year colleges. Comprehensive data on certificate program enrollment and completion are not currently available.

The Mitchell Institute thanks Maine Community Foundation for the financial support for this work.

*Note: This updated version uses a different data source for the national college graduation rates shown in the second chart on page 1.*

# The Access to College “Funnel”

**Trends in Maine, 2000 to 2010**



In the past decade, high school graduation in Maine has improved steadily.

College-going rates dropped, and then partially rebounded.

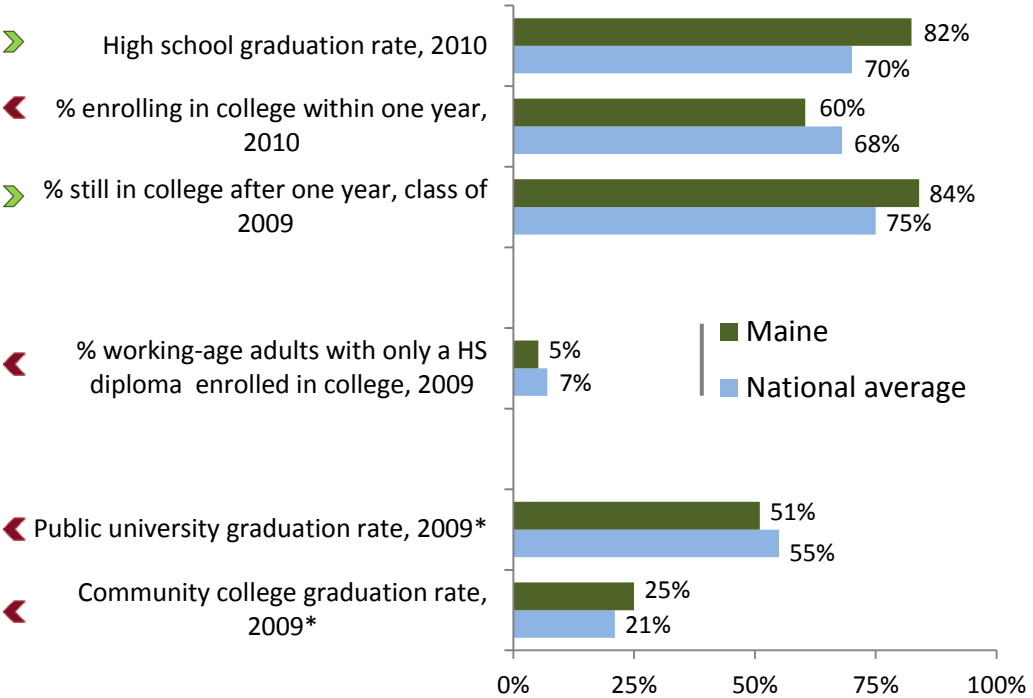
From the limited available data, college persistence and graduation appear to be making modest gains.

## Comparing Maine and the Nation

➤ Maine is above the national average      ◀ Maine is below the national average

High school graduation, first-year college persistence, and community college graduation rates in Maine exceed the national averages.

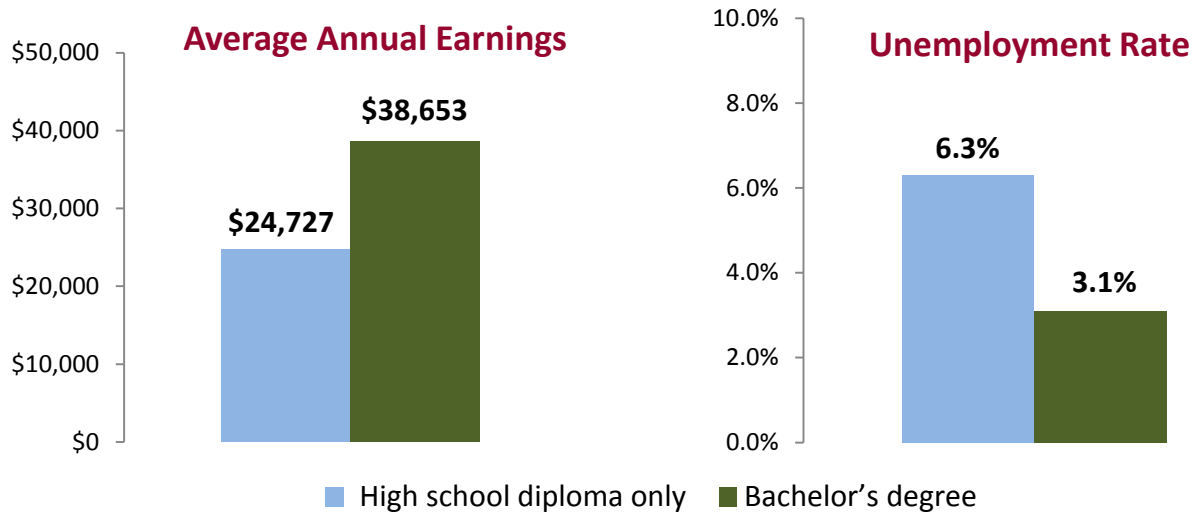
Maine trails the rest of the nation in college-going—both among recent high school graduates and adults—and four-year college graduation rates.



\* Graduation within 150% of normal program time (3 years for associate degrees and 6 years for baccalaureate degrees). Excludes students who transfer and graduate from another institution and part-time students.

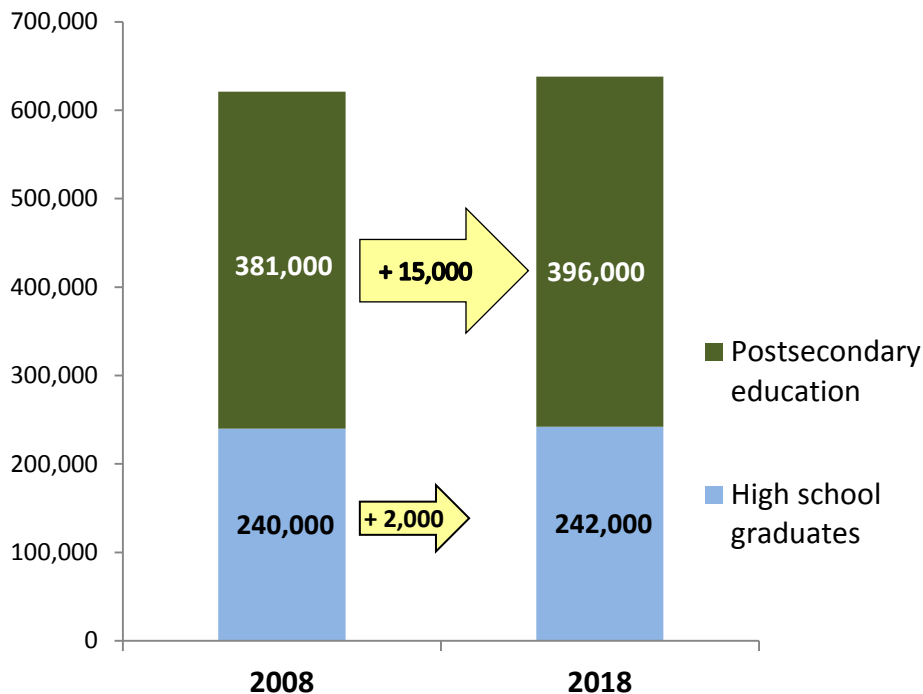
# College Pays

**Earnings and Unemployment in Maine, 2009**



The earnings of Maine workers with a bachelor's degree are more than 50% higher than for those with only a high school diploma, and their unemployment rate is less than half.

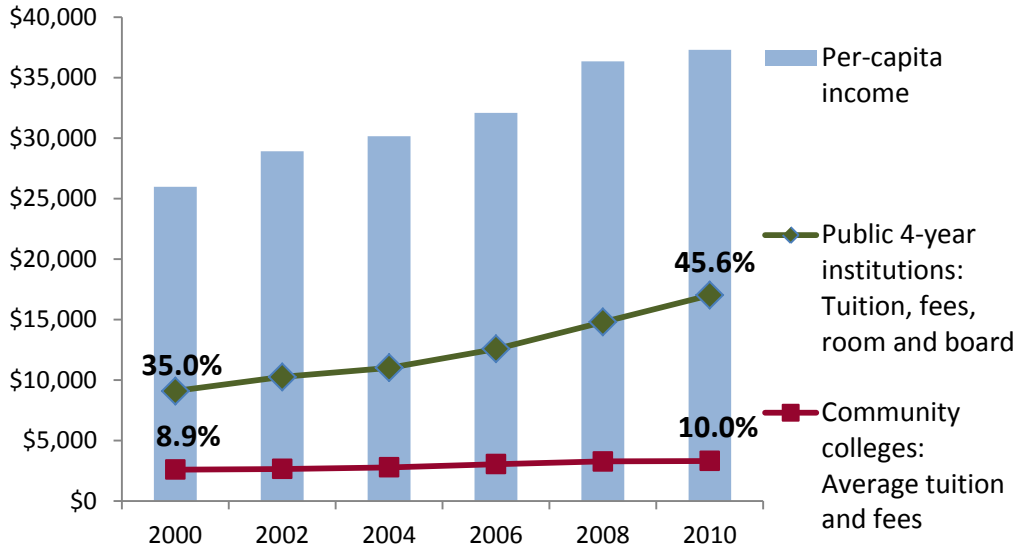
**Employer Demand for College-Educated Workers is Growing:  
Total Jobs in the Maine Economy by Education Level, 2008 and 2018**



The growth in demand for college-educated workers in Maine by 2018 is projected to be about seven times greater than for high school graduates.

# Barriers to College

**Maine College Costs: A Growing Share of Personal Income**

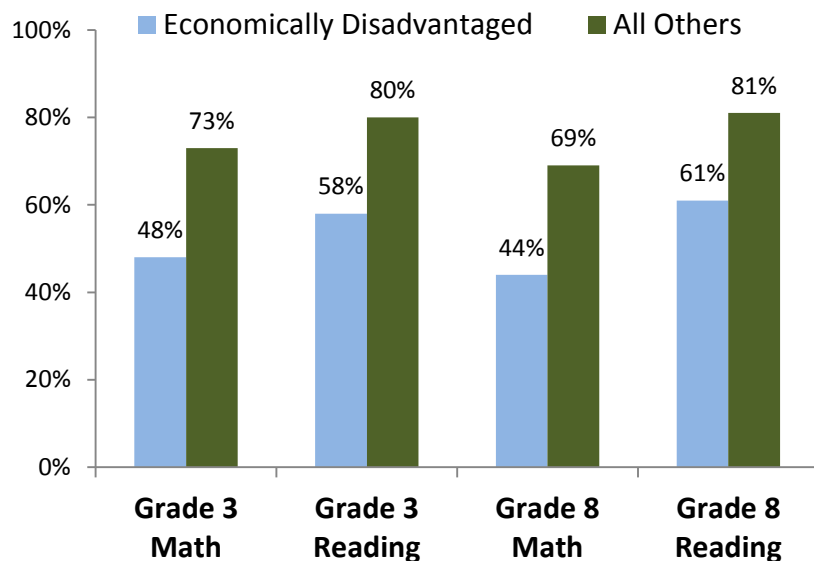


Over the past decade, the average cost of one year at public four-year college in Maine has grown from 35% to 46% of annual per-capita income.

Note: In an attempt to show the costs faced by typical Maine college students, public university figures include average housing and meal plan costs; community college figures do not.

- ➔ The factors that most affect access to college are student **socioeconomic background** and **academic preparation**. These two characteristics are strongly correlated.
- ➔ This year, **44%** of Maine K-12 students have family incomes low enough to qualify for free or reduced-price school meals—below \$41,348 for a family of four.

**Proportion of Maine Students Testing Proficient or Above on State Academic Standards, 2010**



There is a 25 percentage point gap in math proficiency between Maine students who qualify for subsidized school meals and their higher-income peers. Math proficiency is a strong predictor of college readiness.

# Improving Access to College and Degree Completion: Key Questions for Maine

For Maine to produce and attract enough people with college education to meet employer demand and promote a healthy economy, the data on barriers to college presented here suggest three policy questions:

- **How can we overcome the ‘income gap’ in academic achievement among students in our PreK-12 educational pipeline?**
- **How can we ensure that college is affordable for low- and moderate-income students?**
- **How can we support college persistence and success so that more Maine students complete college degrees?**

The Mitchell Institute will use these questions as a guide over the coming year as we continue our research on removing barriers to college in Maine. In 2002, we completed a study that examined Maine’s relatively low college-going rate in light of a comparatively strong high school graduation rate. Our 2007 report *From High School to College: Removing Barriers for Maine Students* focused on the gap between intentions to enroll in college and actual matriculation among recent high school graduates. In 2012, we will revisit these issues and also explore barriers to college persistence and completion. By systematically interviewing Maine students and educators, examining data on college enrollment patterns, and collecting information on promising practices and policies from Maine and beyond, we hope to begin answering these key questions.

## Data Sources

Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, June 2010. *The Rising Price of Inequality: How Inadequate Grant Aid Limits College Access and Persistence*: National data on access to college and unmet financial need. <http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/acsfa/edlite-publications.html>

Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. <http://cew.georgetown.edu>  
*The College Payoff: Education, Occupations, Lifetime Earnings* (2011).  
*Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018* (2010): employer demand projections.

Maine Compact for Higher Education, October 2011. *Indicators of Progress. Maine's Higher Education Attainment Goal: Exceeding the New England Average of Adults with Degrees by 2020*: Maine college-going, persistence and graduation rates; earnings and unemployment rates by education level; adult college enrollment rates. [www.collegeforme.com](http://www.collegeforme.com)

Maine Department of Education Data Center:

NECAP test results. [www.maine.gov/education/necap/results.html](http://www.maine.gov/education/necap/results.html)

Maine high school graduation rates. [www.maine.gov/education/gradrates/gradrates.html](http://www.maine.gov/education/gradrates/gradrates.html)

School meal eligibility. [www.maine.gov/education/sfs/data\\_tab.html](http://www.maine.gov/education/sfs/data_tab.html)

National Center for Higher Education Management Systems Information Center: national high school graduation, college-going and persistence rates. [www.higheredinfo.org](http://www.higheredinfo.org)

U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts, Annual State Personal Income: per-capita income. [www.bea.gov](http://www.bea.gov)

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*: college costs, national college graduation rates. <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest>

MITCHELL  
 INSTITUTE

SENATOR GEORGE J. MITCHELL  
SCHOLARSHIP RESEARCH INSTITUTE

22 Monument Square, Suite 200

Portland Maine 04101

207-773-7700

[www.mitchellinstitute.org](http://www.mitchellinstitute.org)