

# College and Career Supports: Expanding Horizons Through Student Ambassadors and Post-secondary Planning

*“Since becoming a student ambassador, I have gained so much more knowledge and important skills that I can use after high school.”*

– STUDENT AMBASSADOR

## Proof Points

- Thanks to RIDE support, the ILP Student Ambassador Program has expanded to include up to 10 schools and approximately 50 students across the state annually.
- In 2024 alone, 46 student ambassadors from six Rhode Island high schools have been trained to serve as ambassadors.
- Student ambassadors have designed and launched a range of innovative projects in their school communities, ranging from leading workshops on college essay writing to delivering ILP lessons to hosting a podcast.

**I**t is not enough for students to have high aspirations. They also need tools, support and experiences to help turn their dreams into reality. Two Rethink-funded initiatives are doing just that.

### Ambassadors Empower Students to Chart The Future

Since 2005, all Rhode Island students in grades 6–12 have been required to develop a plan for their own educational journey. The Individual Learning Plan (ILP) is a student-directed tool that enables students to shape their own post-secondary objectives based on their values, strengths and interest level in college and career options. At least once per year, students monitor their progress and revise their post-secondary goals as they learn more about themselves and the options available.

In 2022, in an effort to catalyze the use of ILPs, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) leveraged the federal Rethink grant to create an innovative *ILP Student Ambassador Program* designed to expand awareness of post-secondary opportunities during the pandemic and to empower students to act as peer leaders in their high schools.

While RIDE created the concept, it was brought to life by two ambassador school counselors who shaped the **initial lessons**, recruited outside speakers and managed annual events. The program offers student ambassadors leadership training and equips them with strategies and tools to spread the word about the value of ILPs and encourage their peers to engage in charting their own journeys.

For instance, during two sessions at Johnson & Wales University in the spring of 2024, students engaged in a host of activities, including working in teams to learn about and practice peer interview techniques. Each student team returned to school and got to work planning, producing and broadcasting their own outreach campaigns, using a variety of tools, including online ILP platforms and social media channels.

# Student Futures in Focus

*“This program gave me and other students the opportunity to explore schools and careers we may not have known about.”*

– STUDENT PARTICIPANT

## Post-secondary Exploration and Planning

Before students can dream, they have to know what is possible. For many Rhode Island students, especially those who are the first generation in their family to apply to college, awareness of the full range of college and career options is often limited.

Thanks to the federal Rethink grant, school counselors in seven communities have planned a variety of college and career awareness and readiness events, trips and other activities for students. In 2024 alone, nearly 2,000 high school students have benefited, including:

- In Central Falls, students visited local colleges, including the University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College and the Community College of Rhode Island. For most of these students, this was the first time they had set foot on a college campus.
- In Westerly and East Greenwich, hundreds of students had a chance to meet face-to-face with admission counselors from dozens of colleges, technical schools and businesses.

**LEARN MORE:** Contact RIDE for more information about college and career readiness programs for school counselors by emailing Onna Holland ([onna.holland@ride.ri.gov](mailto:onna.holland@ride.ri.gov)).

- In Providence and Pawtucket, in partnership with Onward We Learn (a nonprofit specializing in supporting first-generation college students), RIDE launched successful Free Application for Student Federal Aid (FAFSA) completion campaigns to ensure more students in these two cities were poised for post-high school opportunities.



## Looking Ahead

Even after the Rethink grant sunsets, RIDE plans to support school counselors with a new framework and the assistance and resources they need to sustain their student ambassador programs locally. RIDE is also exploring alternative funding sources to help more communities host college and career readiness activities for first-generation college students.

