

Chronic Absence, Middle School and High School

DEFINITION

Chronic absence, middle school and high school is the percentage of children in middle and high school who were enrolled for at least 90 days and missed 18 days or more of school, including excused and unexcused absences (10% or more of the school year for a 180-day school year).

SIGNIFICANCE

Students who are frequently absent from school miss critical academic and social learning opportunities and are at risk of disengagement from school, academic failure, and dropping out.¹ Studies in large cities have shown strong relationships between chronic absence in middle and high school and the likelihood of dropping out.² Chronic absence in sixth grade is one of three early warning signs that a student is likely to drop out of high school, and by ninth grade, a student's attendance is a better predictor of dropout risk than eighth-grade achievement test scores.³

Students miss school for a variety of reasons, including physical and mental health problems, substance abuse, lack of access to health care, unstable housing, child welfare or juvenile justice involvement, work or family responsibilities, and lack of affordable or reliable transportation. Students may also stay away from school to avoid bullying, harassment, disciplinary actions due to tardiness, or

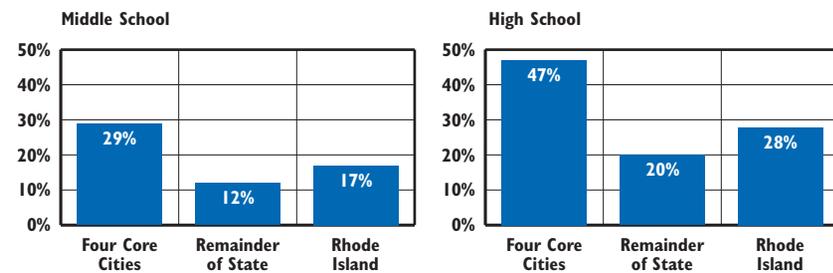
embarrassment associated with lack of clean or appropriate clothing or literacy or other academic problems.^{4,5,6}

A national survey of students found that the most common reasons students report being chronically absent are health-related reasons, transportation barriers, personal stress, preferring activities outside of school, and perceiving that school has little value (i.e., is boring, their parents do not care if they miss school, or a belief that school will not help them reach future goals).⁷

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) defines truancy as ten or more unexcused absences in a school year.⁸ During the 2016-2017 school year in Rhode Island, 24% of middle school students and 35% of high school students were considered truant by RIDE.⁹ Truant students in Rhode Island may be referred to the Family Court's Truancy Calendar, a community and school-based intervention program.¹⁰

More than one-third (34%) of Rhode Island's low-income middle and high school students were chronically absent in 2016-2017, compared with 13% of higher-income students. Middle and high school students receiving special education services (31%) were more likely than their peers not receiving these services (22%) to be chronically absent. Almost three-quarters (73%) of absences by middle and high school students were unexcused absences.¹¹

Chronic Absence Rate by District Type, Middle and High School, 2016-2017 School Year



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2016-2017 school year.

◆ The chronic absence rate among middle (29%) and high (47%) school students in the four core cities is more than twice as high as the rates among middle (12%) and high (20%) school students in the remainder of the state.¹²

◆ One of the most effective strategies for increasing student achievement, high school graduation rates, and college access and completion, and for closing achievement gaps between higher income and lower income students, would be to increase the number of low-income students who attend school regularly.¹³

Reducing Chronic Absence

◆ Schools, districts, and community agencies can improve student attendance by developing systems that provide frequent reports on student absenteeism and reasons for the absenteeism, problem solving to address reasons for absenteeism, building and sustaining relationships with students and their families, developing a community response that involves adults who interact with students outside of school, recognizing and rewarding good attendance.^{14,15} Studies also show that high school attendance rates improve when school start times are later.¹⁶

◆ States can reduce chronic absence by increasing public awareness about the problem, developing attendance improvement plans, requiring school and district-level attendance teams, producing chronic absence reports showing data by grade and subgroup, incorporating chronic absence measures into early warning and accountability systems and school improvement efforts, and allocating resources to address barriers to attendance.^{17,18,19}

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Table 51.

Chronic Absence and Attendance Rates, Middle and High School, Rhode Island, 2016-2017 School Year

| SCHOOL DISTRICT | MIDDLE SCHOOL (GRADES 6-8) | | | | | HIGH SCHOOL (GRADES 9-12) | | | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| | # ENROLLED LESS THAN 90 DAYS | # ENROLLED 90 DAYS OR MORE | ATTENDANCE RATE | % ABSENT 12-17 DAYS | % ABSENT 18+ DAYS | # ENROLLED LESS THAN 90 DAYS | # ENROLLED 90 DAYS OR MORE | ATTENDANCE RATE | % ABSENT 12-17 DAYS | % ABSENT 18+ DAYS |
| Barrington | 10 | 802 | 96% | 10% | 8% | 23 | 1,126 | 96% | 12% | 6% |
| Bristol Warren | 49 | 757 | 93% | 20% | 19% | 136 | 902 | 92% | 16% | 19% |
| Burrillville | 24 | 558 | 95% | 11% | 9% | 28 | 780 | 95% | 13% | 10% |
| Central Falls | 68 | 519 | 93% | 15% | 24% | 140 | 689 | 97% | 14% | 37% |
| Chariho | 25 | 738 | 95% | 9% | 7% | 69 | 1,117 | 93% | 15% | 13% |
| Coventry | 30 | 1,100 | 95% | 13% | 10% | 74 | 1,485 | 93% | 16% | 18% |
| Cranston | 159 | 2,445 | 94% | 16% | 18% | 347 | 3,289 | 89% | 15% | 41% |
| Cumberland | 52 | 1,136 | 95% | 12% | 8% | 120 | 1,356 | 94% | 14% | 14% |
| East Greenwich | 17 | 679 | 96% | 12% | 5% | 27 | 724 | 97% | 5% | 3% |
| East Providence | 67 | 1,207 | 93% | 18% | 19% | 99 | 1,467 | 90% | 14% | 32% |
| Exeter-West Greenwich | * | 409 | 96% | 13% | 6% | 24 | 515 | 95% | 12% | 7% |
| Foster-Glocester | * | 487 | 92% | 25% | 29% | 17 | 675 | 92% | 19% | 21% |
| Jamestown | * | 162 | 96% | 15% | 5% | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| Johnston | 42 | 774 | 94% | 14% | 20% | 89 | 867 | 92% | 18% | 26% |
| Lincoln | 21 | 765 | 98% | 5% | 3% | 42 | 858 | 96% | 7% | 9% |
| Little Compton | * | 90 | 95% | 11% | 10% | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| Middletown | 24 | 493 | 95% | 14% | 7% | 42 | 640 | 95% | 15% | 13% |
| Narragansett | 11 | 328 | 95% | 12% | 8% | 22 | 424 | 95% | 11% | 12% |
| New Shoreham | 0 | 32 | 94% | 31% | 9% | * | 40 | 93% | 28% | 15% |
| Newport | 51 | 475 | 93% | 21% | 23% | 65 | 648 | 89% | 18% | 37% |
| North Kingstown | 28 | 959 | 96% | 13% | 8% | 63 | 1,417 | 95% | 11% | 9% |
| North Providence | 52 | 869 | 95% | 15% | 13% | 97 | 976 | 92% | 14% | 23% |
| North Smithfield | 21 | 426 | 95% | 14% | 8% | 39 | 491 | 95% | 11% | 12% |
| Pawtucket | 162 | 2,239 | 93% | 15% | 20% | 293 | 1,945 | 88% | 14% | 35% |
| Portsmouth | 21 | 567 | 95% | 17% | 10% | 42 | 915 | 94% | 15% | 14% |
| Providence | 816 | 5,414 | 91% | 18% | 31% | 1,474 | 6,883 | 84% | 16% | 51% |
| Scituate | * | 349 | 94% | 15% | 18% | 22 | 425 | 90% | 23% | 33% |
| Smithfield | 20 | 556 | 96% | 11% | 5% | 34 | 731 | 95% | 13% | 10% |
| South Kingstown | 17 | 787 | 96% | 9% | 4% | 43 | 946 | 95% | 10% | 9% |
| Tiverton | 14 | 428 | 95% | 14% | 14% | 45 | 545 | 94% | 14% | 12% |
| Warwick | 83 | 2,129 | 94% | 17% | 15% | 187 | 2,788 | 92% | 17% | 24% |
| West Warwick | 52 | 757 | 93% | 17% | 18% | 131 | 955 | 91% | 14% | 23% |
| Westerly | 27 | 662 | 95% | 12% | 13% | 51 | 866 | 93% | 20% | 17% |
| Woonsocket | 151 | 1,299 | 89% | 14% | 39% | 207 | 1,504 | 86% | 15% | 48% |
| Charter Schools | 52 | 1,211 | 96% | 13% | 8% | 264 | 2,084 | 90% | 15% | 28% |
| State-Operated Schools | 14 | 16 | 93% | 25% | 19% | 325 | 1,678 | 92% | 18% | 26% |
| UCAP | 16 | 124 | 86% | 19% | 42% | * | 15 | 77% | 27% | 53% |
| Four Core Cities | 1,197 | 9,471 | 91% | 17% | 29% | 2,114 | 11,021 | 86% | 15% | 47% |
| Remainder of State | 949 | 21,926 | 95% | 14% | 12% | 1,980 | 27,974 | 93% | 14% | 20% |
| Rhode Island | 2,228 | 32,748 | 94% | 15% | 17% | 4,686 | 42,772 | 91% | 15% | 28% |

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2016-2017 school year.

Attendance rates are calculated by dividing the state-calculated "average days of attendance" by the "average days of membership."

Chronic absence rates are based on attendance patterns for students who were enrolled in a district for at least 90 days. A total of 2,228 Rhode Island middle school students and 4,686 high school students were not included in this analysis because they were only enrolled for a short period. The Rhode Island Department of Education excludes these students so that chronic absence issues can be examined separately from student mobility issues. It is likely that more students were excluded from districts with higher student mobility rates.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

Little Compton students attend high school in Portsmouth, and Jamestown students can choose to attend high school in Narragansett or North Kingstown.

Charter middle schools include Beacon Charter School for the Arts, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy, The Compass School, Paul Cuffee Charter School, Highlander Charter School, The Learning Community, Segue Institute for Learning, and Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts. Charter high schools include Beacon Charter High School for the Arts, Blackstone Academy, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy, Paul Cuffee Charter School, The Greene School, Highlander Charter School, Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College Charter School, Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy, Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, and the Village Green Virtual Public Charter School.

State-operated schools include The Rhode Island Training School operated by DCYF, Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center, Rhode Island School for the Deaf, and William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School. UCAP is the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program.

*Fewer than 10 students are in this category. Actual numbers are not shown to protect student confidentiality. These numbers are still counted in district totals and in the four core cities, remainder of the state, and state total.

References are on page 188.