

# 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.<sup>1</sup> Studies in large cities have shown strong relationships between chronic absence in middle and high school and the likelihood of dropping out.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4,5,6</sup>

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).<sup>7</sup>

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) defines truancy as ten or more unexcused absences in a school year.<sup>8</sup> During the 2018-2019 school year in Rhode Island, 26% of middle school students and 34% of high school students were considered truant by RIDE.<sup>9</sup> Truant students in Rhode Island may be referred to the Family Court's Truancy Calendar, a community and school-based intervention program.<sup>10</sup>

One-third (33%) of Rhode Island's low-income middle and high school students were chronically absent in 2018-2019, compared with 13% of higher-income students. Middle and high school students receiving special education services (29%) were more likely than their peers not receiving these services (21%) to be chronically absent. Almost three-quarters (73%) of absences by middle and high school students were unexcused absences.<sup>11</sup>



## Teacher Chronic Absence

- ◆ **Teacher chronic absenteeism is the percentage of teachers who missed 10% or more of school days out of their days employed by a school, excluding days missed due to professional development, field trips, off-campus activities with students, pre-approved leaves, absences on non-school days and half days. Rhode Island is the first state to include teacher absenteeism as part of its school accountability system.<sup>12</sup>**
- ◆ **Teacher absence is a leading school-based indicator of student achievement. Teacher chronic absence is associated with lower student achievement and high financial costs for schools. Factors that contribute to chronic teacher absence include job-related stress, illness and negative school culture. Strategies to reduce teacher absenteeism include increasing teacher autonomy and positive school culture, providing professional development opportunities outside instructional time with students, developing policies that balance paid short-term leave privileges with income insurance for unpaid leave, and creating incentives to reduce absences.<sup>13</sup>**
- ◆ **During the 2018-2019 school year, 581 (5.5%) of teachers were chronically absent.<sup>14</sup>**



## Reducing Student 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.<sup>15,16</sup> Studies also show that high school attendance rates improve when school start times are later.<sup>17</sup>**
- ◆ **States can reduce chronic absence by increasing public awareness about the problem, sharing best practices, requiring school and district-level attendance teams, incorporating chronic absence measures into early warning and accountability systems and school improvement efforts, and allocating resources to address barriers to attendance.<sup>18,19,20</sup>**

# Chronic Absence, Middle School and High School

Table 52.

## Chronic Absence and Attendance Rates, Middle and High School, Rhode Island, 2018-2019 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	*	844	96%	11%	7%	20	1,117	96%	8%	7%
Bristol Warren	29	794	93%	17%	22%	62	985	91%	13%	25%
Burrillville	20	538	94%	15%	13%	44	771	94%	15%	13%
Central Falls	73	592	94%	18%	18%	179	734	89%	15%	33%
Chariho	20	703	96%	12%	6%	44	1,150	94%	15%	15%
Coventry	48	1,123	95%	17%	12%	79	1,492	94%	14%	14%
Cranston	121	2,515	95%	15%	12%	345	3,462	93%	15%	21%
Cumberland	83	1,109	96%	12%	6%	113	1,504	94%	15%	14%
East Greenwich	14	646	96%	12%	4%	15	769	96%	9%	7%
East Providence	46	1,230	94%	21%	15%	90	1,511	90%	14%	34%
Exeter-West Greenwich	*	370	96%	13%	9%	14	504	96%	9%	7%
Foster-Glocester	11	498	96%	13%	6%	30	790	92%	16%	23%
Jamestown	*	175	96%	11%	5%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Johnston	31	804	93%	19%	19%	69	907	92%	17%	25%
Lincoln	29	757	95%	14%	12%	31	925	89%	18%	38%
Little Compton	*	82	95%	13%	11%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Middletown	38	517	95%	17%	10%	56	637	94%	17%	13%
Narragansett	11	308	95%	18%	7%	28	451	95%	14%	10%
New Shoreham	*	22	93%	27%	23%	*	51	92%	31%	27%
Newport	47	452	93%	26%	13%	104	662	88%	16%	42%
North Kingstown	40	924	95%	15%	9%	61	1,468	95%	11%	10%
North Providence	36	892	95%	15%	15%	91	1,137	93%	15%	23%
North Smithfield	*	402	95%	16%	7%	16	519	95%	13%	8%
Pawtucket	260	2,347	93%	16%	21%	264	2,003	89%	15%	34%
Portsmouth	18	568	95%	16%	11%	42	937	95%	15%	11%
Providence	868	5,496	90%	18%	35%	1,324	7,395	85%	15%	48%
Scituate	*	324	95%	14%	11%	18	376	94%	17%	10%
Smithfield	16	628	96%	15%	5%	17	737	95%	13%	10%
South Kingstown	14	724	96%	12%	8%	29	940	94%	11%	14%
Tiverton	16	420	95%	18%	10%	50	530	93%	20%	16%
Warwick	84	1,987	94%	18%	16%	183	2,701	91%	18%	27%
West Warwick	87	833	92%	19%	21%	172	1,009	92%	14%	21%
Westerly	28	646	95%	18%	11%	68	869	94%	17%	16%
Woonsocket	203	1,404	91%	18%	35%	170	1,668	85%	16%	49%
Charter Schools	53	1,502	96%	12%	9%	254	2,455	91%	16%	26%
State-Operated Schools	*	13	96%	15%	0%	221	1,729	93%	20%	20%
UCAP	10	129	83%	15%	64%	*	11	89%	18%	45%
Four Core Cities	1,404	9,839	91%	18%	31%	1,937	11,800	86%	15%	45%
Remainder of State	923	21,835	95%	16%	12%	1,896	28,918	93%	15%	19%
Rhode Island	2,394	33,318	94%	16%	17%	4,310	44,913	91%	15%	26%

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2018-2019 school year.

Attendance rates are calculated by dividing the state-calculated "average daily attendance" by the "average daily 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 2,394 Rhode Island middle school students and 4,310 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 Achievement First Rhode Island, 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, Charette Charter School, 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 William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School, Rhode Island Training School operated by DCYF, Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center, and Rhode Island School for the Deaf. UCAP is the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program.

NA indicates that the school district does not serve students at that grade level. \*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)