

Chronic Early Absence

DEFINITION

Chronic early absence is the percentage of children in kindergarten through third grade (K-3) who have missed at least 10% of the school year (i.e., 18 days or more), including excused and unexcused absences.

SIGNIFICANCE

When students are absent from school they miss opportunities to learn and develop positive relationships within the school community. During the early elementary school years, children develop important skills and approaches to learning that are critical for ongoing school success. Through their experiences in K-3 classrooms, children build academic, social-emotional and study skills.¹² Children who are chronically absent in kindergarten show lower levels of achievement in math, reading and general knowledge in first grade.

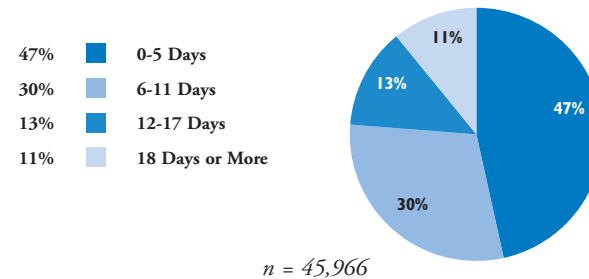
Among poor children, chronic absence in kindergarten can predict low educational achievement at the end of fifth grade. Nationally, chronically absent Hispanic kindergartners have lower reading achievement than their chronically absent peers of other ethnicities.^{3,4}

Nationally, chronic early absence affects one out of 10 children during their first two years of school.⁵ Younger children from poor families are much more likely to have high rates of chronic absenteeism than higher-income

children. In the U.S., one in five (21%) poor kindergartners was chronically absent, compared to less than one in ten (8%) of their higher-income peers.⁶ Children who are homeless or formerly homeless also experience poor educational outcomes related to school absenteeism and mobility.⁷ Lack of access to preventive health care and chronic health issues, such as asthma, can result in increased absenteeism.⁸

Chronic early absence is most often a result of a combination of school, family and community factors.⁹ Risk factors such as poverty, teenage parenting, single parenting, low maternal education levels, unemployment, poor maternal health, receipt of welfare, and household food insecurity can all affect school attendance. Rates of chronic absence rise significantly when three or more of these risk factors are present.^{10,11} Chronic absenteeism can also result from poor quality education, ambivalence about or alienation from school, and chaotic school environments, including high rates of teacher turnover, disruptive classrooms and/or bullying.¹² Community factors that may disrupt school routines and lead to chronic absence include unreliable or insufficient public transportation systems, violence or the fear of violence on the way to and from school, multiple foster care placements, and lack of access to safe and affordable housing.¹³

School Attendance in Rhode Island by Number of School Days Missed, Kindergarten Through Third Grade, 2008-2009 School Year



Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2008-2009 school year.

- ◆ During the 2008-2009 school year, 11% of Rhode Island children in grades K-3 were chronically absent (i.e. absent 18 days or more). In Rhode Island's core cities, 16% of children in grades K-3 were chronically absent.¹⁴
- ◆ Almost one in four (23%) Rhode Island children in grades K-3 missed 12 or more days of school during the 2008-2009 school year.¹⁵
- ◆ Schools may inadvertently overlook the prevalence of chronic early absence because high rates for school attendance can easily mask significant numbers of chronically absent students.¹⁶ In Rhode Island during the 2008-2009 school year, elementary schools in the core cities had an average daily attendance rate of 93%, but 16% of students in grades K-3 were chronically absent.¹⁷
- ◆ While most elementary schools monitor average daily attendance or unexcused absences, few actively monitor the combination of excused and unexcused absence for individual students.¹⁸ Schools can promote attendance by helping parents understand that coming to school, especially in the early grades, is critical to children's academic success.¹⁹
- ◆ Chronic absenteeism rates can be reduced through school-family-community partnerships that use an ongoing and intentional approach for monitoring attendance and contacting parents as soon as troubling patterns of attendance appear.²⁰ Schools and communities can address the problem of chronic absence through existing initiatives on parent involvement, school readiness, after-school programming, school-based health services, and drop-out prevention.²¹

Table 47.

Chronic Early Absence Rates, Grades K-3, Rhode Island, 2008-2009 School Year

SCHOOL DISTRICT	STUDENTS ENROLLED	ELEMENTARY (K-5) ATTENDANCE RATE	TOTAL # OF K-3 STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT	% CHRONIC ABSENCES IN GRADES K-3
Barrington	993	96%	40	4%
Bristol Warren	1,047	95%	83	8%
Burrillville	850	95%	72	8%
Central Falls	1,178	93%	205	17%
Chariho	1,017	96%	73	7%
Coventry	1,582	96%	31	2%
Cranston	3,285	95%	292	9%
Cumberland	1,454	96%	73	5%
East Greenwich	643	96%	27	4%
East Providence	1,823	95%	177	10%
Exeter-West Greenwich	527	96%	34	6%
Foster	168	95%	43	26%
Glocester	416	96%	10	2%
Jamestown	186	96%	12	6%
Johnston	961	95%	96	10%
Lincoln	866	96%	48	6%
Little Compton	126	95%	0	0%
Middletown	839	96%	39	5%
Narragansett	387	92%	28	7%
New Shoreham	47	93%	0	0%
Newport	754	94%	121	16%
North Kingstown	1,173	96%	72	6%
North Providence	896	95%	79	9%
North Smithfield	518	96%	38	7%
Pawtucket	3,233	95%	433	13%
Portsmouth	774	96%	38	5%
Providence	8,816	93%	1,865	21%
Scituate	468	96%	48	10%
Smithfield	686	97%	33	5%
South Kingstown	1,053	96%	68	6%
Tiverton	624	96%	38	6%
Warwick	3,129	96%	231	7%
West Warwick	1,343	95%	104	8%
Westerly	913	96%	30	3%
Woonsocket	2,204	93%	NA*	NA*
<i>Charter Schools</i>	976	96%	34	3%
<i>Rhode Island School for the Deaf</i>	11	93%	0	0%
<i>Core Cities</i>	17,528	93%	2,728	16%*
<i>Remainder of State</i>	27,451	96%	1,853	7%
<i>Rhode Island</i>	45,966	95%	4,615	11%*

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2008-2009 school year. Note that these numbers may not include some children in grades K-3 who miss 18 days of school or more (chronic early absence) but who are officially disenrolled in one district and have not yet enrolled in another district. This sometimes happens when children are homeless, live in unstable living situations, are transitioning from an out-of-home placement (juvenile justice, foster care, residential or hospital placement), or miss school due to extended travel out of state or out of the country.

* Data for Woonsocket were not available. Therefore, only five of the six core cities are included in the core cities calculation: Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and West Warwick. Woonsocket was also excluded from the Rhode Island calculation.

Charter schools include The Compass School, CVS Highlander Charter School, Kingston Hill Academy, International Charter School, The Learning Community, and Paul Cuffee Charter School.

References

- ¹ Romero, M. & Lee, Y. (2008). *The influence of maternal and family risk on chronic absenteeism in early schooling*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty.
- ^{2,3,5,9,11,12,18,19,20} Chang, H. N. & Romero, M. (2008). *Present engaged, and accounted for: The critical importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty.
- ⁴ Romero, M. & Lee, Y. (2007). *A national portrait of chronic absenteeism in the early grades*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty.
- ⁶ Romero, M. & Lee, Y. (2008). *Risk factors for chronic absenteeism: Facts for policymakers*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty.
- ⁷ Aratani, Y. (2009). *Homeless children and youth: Causes and consequences*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty.
- ⁸ Basch, C. E. (2010). *Healthier students are better learners: A missing link in school reforms to close the achievement gap*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

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