

School Attendance

DEFINITION

School attendance is the average daily attendance of public school students in each school district in Rhode Island for middle school (grades 6-8), and high school (grades 9-12).

SIGNIFICANCE

An important aspect of students' access to education is the amount of time actually spent in the classroom.¹ Truant students are at risk of disengagement from school, academic failure and dropping out.² Regardless of whether absences are unexcused or excused, students who miss school are more likely to fall behind academically and engage in risky behaviors.^{3,4}

Nationally, 3% of eighth graders and 5% of tenth graders in the U.S. reported that they skipped three or more days of school in a four-week period.⁵ Students' reasons for not attending school include repeated suspensions, disruptive learning environments, poor achievement, concerns for safety, difficulty with peer and adult relationships, conflicts between school and work, family responsibilities and negative perceptions of school.^{6,7}

Absenteeism is rarely a reflection of the student alone and is often an indication that the family needs help. Family and economic factors connected to student absenteeism include poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, foster care placements, student employment,

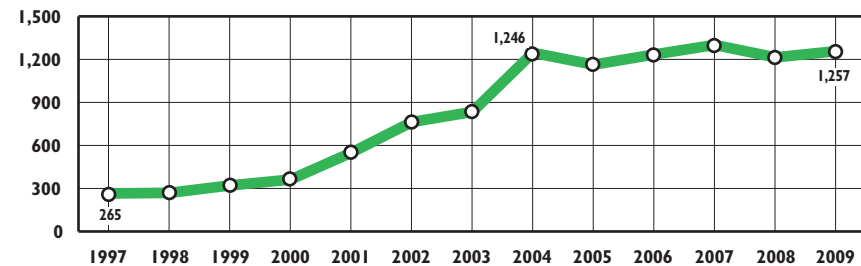
student disability and lack of affordable and reliable transportation.^{8,9,10}

School factors contributing to student absenteeism include school climate, school size, attitudes of school staff and discipline policies.^{11,12,13} Policies and practices to increase student attendance include providing free breakfast and lunch in schools with low attendance rates and high concentrations of low-income students, investing in out-of-school time programs, improving reliability of transportation to and from school, streamlining school enrollment for students in foster care and providing psychological services.^{14,15}

During the 2009-2010 school year in Rhode Island, nearly half (49%) of low-income middle and high school students missed 12 or more days of school, compared with a quarter (27%) of higher-income students. Forty-one percent (41%) of middle and high school students who are English Language Learners missed 12 or more days of school, compared with 36% of all middle and high school students.¹⁶

Attendance rates in the core cities are lower than in the remainder of the state. Improving the core cities' high school attendance rate from the current rate of 86% to 93% (the rate in the remainder of the state) would mean that on average 956 more students would be attending high school in the core cities each day of the school year.¹⁷

Students Charged With Truancy in Rhode Island Family Court and Truancy Court, 1997-2009



Source: Rhode Island Family Court, Intake Charges, 1997-2009.

- ◆ The U.S. Department of Education and the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) define truancy as 10 or more unexcused absences in a school year.^{18,19} In Rhode Island, truant students may be referred by school administrators to the Rhode Island Truancy Court. The goal of the Truancy Court is to work with families, schools and communities to address the individual causes of truancy through monitoring, counseling, tutoring and other support services for students.²⁰
- ◆ The number of Rhode Island students charged with truancy more than quadrupled between 1997 and 2009, from 265 students to 1,257 students.²¹
- ◆ In the 2009-2010 school year in Rhode Island, 21% of middle school students and more than a quarter (27%) of high school students were considered truant by RIDE. More than half (58%) of the absences by middle and high school students were unexcused absences.²²
- ◆ School connectedness plays an important role in student attendance.²³ An open, supportive, safe and engaging school environment and caring adults can address many of the causes of truancy.^{24,25}
- ◆ Effective truancy-reduction strategies include creating community and school partnerships to get students to school, using challenging and creative school curricula, developing discipline policies that keep students in school, providing art, music, physical education and other high-interest classes, creating safe school environments where students do not fear bullying and implementing credit recovery programs.^{26,27,28}

Table 48. Student Absence and School Attendance Rates, Rhode Island, 2009-2010 School Year

SCHOOL DISTRICT	MIDDLE SCHOOL				HIGH SCHOOL			
	TOTAL # OF STUDENTS	% OF STUDENTS ABSENT 12-17 DAYS	% OF STUDENTS ABSENT 18+ DAYS	ATTENDANCE RATE	TOTAL # OF STUDENTS	% OF STUDENTS ABSENT 12-17 DAYS	% OF STUDENTS ABSENT 18+ DAYS	ATTENDANCE RATE
Barrington	783	8%	6%	96%	1,143	0%	<1%	96%
Bristol Warren	820	17%	17%	94%	1,115	15%	25%	91%
Burrillville	529	10%	8%	95%	794	10%	9%	93%
Central Falls	591	14%	18%	94%	796	15%	40%	88%
Chariho	823	16%	8%	95%	1,198	15%	17%	92%
Coventry	1,239	14%	8%	95%	1,769	10%	10%	95%
Cranston	2,461	17%	18%	94%	3,522	16%	23%	92%
Cumberland	1,164	13%	9%	96%	1,519	8%	17%	94%
East Greenwich	605	12%	5%	96%	759	1%	2%	95%
East Providence	1,302	16%	29%	93%	1,889	9%	9%	90%
Exeter-West Greenwich	477	15%	6%	96%	620	13%	12%	94%
Foster-Glocester	546	18%	12%	95%	794	19%	17%	94%
Jamestown*	153	16%	8%	94%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Johnston	815	17%	20%	93%	914	15%	28%	91%
Lincoln	895	15%	10%	95%	1,026	16%	20%	93%
Little Compton*	103	16%	10%	95%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Middletown	592	13%	6%	96%	719	14%	15%	94%
Narragansett	346	14%	11%	95%	479	12%	15%	95%
New Shoreham	38	9%	0%	91%	26	3%	7%	91%
Newport	482	19%	25%	92%	627	19%	42%	87%
North Kingstown	1,028	11%	8%	96%	1,654	13%	17%	94%
North Providence	776	9%	7%	94%	1,065	20%	27%	92%
North Smithfield	441	12%	6%	96%	563	14%	10%	94%
Pawtucket	2,113	15%	20%	93%	2,370	15%	37%	88%
Portsmouth	651	14%	10%	95%	1,021	11%	11%	95%
Providence	5,093	17%	29%	91%	7,370	15%	45%	85%
Scituate	433	15%	11%	95%	537	13%	9%	96%
Smithfield	637	11%	5%	96%	807	12%	9%	94%
South Kingstown	869	12%	7%	95%	1,110	9%	16%	93%
Tiverton	452	22%	12%	94%	648	22%	18%	93%
Warwick	2,537	16%	17%	94%	3,389	16%	25%	92%
West Warwick	781	19%	25%	92%	1,071	16%	30%	89%
Westerly	738	19%	13%	95%	983	22%	18%	94%
Woonsocket	1,436	19%	30%	92%	1,756	18%	45%	86%
<i>Charter Schools</i>	<i>391</i>	<i>18%</i>	<i>8%</i>	<i>96%</i>	<i>388</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>90%</i>
<i>State-Operated Schools</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>11%</i>	<i>6%</i>	<i>94%</i>	<i>1,545</i>	<i>14%</i>	<i>16%</i>	<i>93%</i>
<i>UCAP</i>	<i>134</i>	<i>18%</i>	<i>21%</i>	<i>92%</i>	<i>NA</i>	<i>NA</i>	<i>NA</i>	<i>NA</i>
<i>Core Cities</i>	<i>10,497</i>	<i>17%</i>	<i>27%</i>	<i>92%</i>	<i>13,989</i>	<i>16%</i>	<i>42%</i>	<i>86%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>22,252</i>	<i>15%</i>	<i>12%</i>	<i>95%</i>	<i>30,061</i>	<i>13%</i>	<i>17%</i>	<i>93%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>33,299</i>	<i>15%</i>	<i>17%</i>	<i>94%</i>	<i>45,973</i>	<i>14%</i>	<i>25%</i>	<i>91%</i>

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009-2010 school year.

Attendance rates are calculated by dividing “the average daily attendance” by the “average daily membership.”

Note that these numbers may not include some children who miss more than 18 days of school but who are officially un-enrolled 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.

*Little Compton students attend high school in Portsmouth and Jamestown students attend high school in North Kingstown.

Core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

Charter schools include Beacon Charter School, Blackstone Academy Charter School, The Compass School, Highlander Charter School, The Learning Community Charter School, Paul Cuffee Charter School and the Segue Institute for Learning. 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.

NA indicates that the school district does not have students at that grade level or that the number of students was too small to report.

References

^{1,3,8} Sundius, J. & Farneth, M. (2008). *Missing school: The epidemic of school absence*. Baltimore, MD: Open Society Institute-Baltimore.

^{2,27} Klima, T., Miller, M. & Nunlist, C. (2009). *Truancy and dropout programs: Interventions by Washington's school districts and community collaborations* (Document No. 09-06-2202). Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

(continued on page 173)