

# School Attendance

## DEFINITION

*School attendance* is the average daily attendance of public school students in each school district in Rhode Island for elementary school (grades 1-5), middle school (grades 6-8), and high school (grades 9-12). Public school students in pre-school, kindergarten, and ungraded classrooms are not included.

## SIGNIFICANCE

An important aspect of students' access to education is the amount of time actually spent in the classroom. When students are absent from school they forgo opportunities to learn.<sup>1</sup> Lower attendance rates are linked to lower reading scores and are an important factor in variation in states' mathematics scores.<sup>2,3</sup> Absenteeism is detrimental to student's achievement. Students who miss school fall behind their peers in the classroom.<sup>4</sup> Students who think of dropping out have already begun skipping school occasionally.<sup>5</sup> Truancy among teens is a powerful predictor of juvenile delinquency and may be connected with substance abuse and other illegal activities.<sup>6,7</sup>

Problems with student attendance create a climate of instability in schools. In schools where truancy rates are low, there is less disruption and violence, teachers are more committed to students and are more likely to interact and engage with the entire class. Students are

less likely to miss school when they are engaged and have a sense of belonging due to established relationships with both their teachers and classmates.<sup>8</sup>

Student absenteeism places individual children at risk for school failure. Truancy is rarely a reflection of the child alone and is often the first indication that the family needs help.<sup>9</sup> Teens who live in more affluent families and those who live with both parents have higher education aspirations and expectations, are more engaged in school, do better academically and are more likely to continue their schooling than their peers in less well-off families and those in single-parent families.<sup>10</sup>

Nationally, the tendency to miss school either by skipping or for other reasons increased notably by grade level. Over the past two decades, twelfth graders have reported a declining interest in school.<sup>11</sup>

Students are very aware of whether their teachers have high or low expectations for them and often their achievement levels are strongly linked to those expectations. The relationships between students and their teachers are critical in shaping the school climate of the school. All students, regardless of age, will do better when relationships are respectful, behavior is not disruptive and teachers are invested in the student's success.<sup>12</sup>

## Suspensions Due to Attendance Infractions, Rhode Island, 2001-2002 School Year

	Number	Percent of All Suspensions
Cutting/Skipping Classes	6,281	14%
Cut/Skipped Detention	5,264	12%
Left School Grounds	2,610	6%
Tardy	1,362	3%
Truancy	880	2%
<b>Total Attendance Infractions</b>	<b>16,397</b>	<b>37%</b>

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2001-2002 school year.

- ◆ During the 2001-2002 school year, more than a third (37%) of the 44,127 incidents in which a Rhode Island public school student received a suspension or alternative program placement were due to attendance infractions. This is more than any other single category of infractions.
- ◆ U.S. Students who have considered dropping out of school have skipped class or school for the following reasons: school was boring, they did not complete an assignment or they did not feel ready to take a test.<sup>13</sup>
- ◆ In Rhode Island during the 2001-2002 school year, high school attendance rates were 86% in the core cities and 92% in the remainder of state. With 13,844 high school students in the core cities, improving the core cities' attendance rate from 86% to 92% would mean that 907 more students would be attending high school in the core cities each day of the school year.<sup>14</sup>
- ◆ Effective truancy reduction strategies include clear, consistently enforced school policies; school reorganization to support students' engagement in learning and attachment to school; effective communication between the school and the parent; family counseling programs; and collaboration between the school and community partners.<sup>15</sup>

Table 33.

School Attendance Rates, Rhode Island, 2001-2002

SCHOOL DISTRICT	ELEMENTARY SCHOOL		MIDDLE SCHOOL		HIGH SCHOOL	
	NUMBER ENROLLED	ATTENDANCE RATE	NUMBER ENROLLED	ATTENDANCE RATE	NUMBER ENROLLED	ATTENDANCE RATE
Barrington	1,549	96%	752	96%	985	95%
Bristol-Warren	1,693	95%	944	94%	1,173	89%
Burrillville	1,175	95%	667	94%	907	95%
Central Falls	1,860	94%	930	91%	848	86%
Chariho	1,582	95%	1,105	95%	1,200	93%
Coventry	3,014	96%	921	95%	1,850	91%
Cranston	5,182	96%	2,721	94%	3,252	90%
Cumberland	2,554	96%	1,318	96%	1,501	92%
East Greenwich	1,368	97%	400	96%	672	95%
East Providence	2,919	95%	1,604	93%	2,043	87%
Exeter-W. Greenwich	1,141	96%	386	96%	625	93%
Foster	402	96%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Foster-Glocester	NA	NA	745	94%	887	93%
Glocester	802	96%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Jamestown	330	96%	258	96%	NA	NA
Johnston	1,645	95%	885	99%	851	87%
Lincoln	2,051	97%	578	95%	1,077	93%
Little Compton	216	95%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Middletown	1,187	96%	834	95%	835	92%
Narragansett	622	93%	583	95%	537	94%
New Shoreham	66	92%	34	91%	30	91%
Newport	1,446	93%	655	91%	836	87%
North Kingstown	2,109	96%	1,056	95%	1,336	93%
North Providence	1,631	95%	794	95%	1,051	93%
North Smithfield	1,052	96%	273	95%	536	94%
Pawtucket	5,419	95%	2,134	94%	2,280	89%
Portsmouth	1,128	96%	924	96%	836	95%
Providence	13,970	92%	6,285	88%	6,904	83%
Scituate	813	96%	446	96%	513	94%
Smithfield	1,217	96%	675	95%	841	93%
South Kingstown	1,925	96%	1,088	95%	1,331	93%
Tiverton	776	96%	778	94%	668	92%
Warwick	6,411	96%	2,015	94%	3,796	92%
West Warwick	1,819	95%	886	93%	1,090	91%
Westerly	1,715	96%	893	95%	1,083	94%
Woonsocket	3,354	94%	1,520	93%	1,886	86%
<b>Core Cities</b>	<b>27,868</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>12,410</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>13,844</b>	<b>86%</b>
<b>Remainder of State</b>	<b>48,275</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>23,677</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>30,416</b>	<b>92%</b>
<b>Rhode Island</b>	<b>76,143</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>36,087</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>44,260</b>	<b>90%</b>

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2001-2002 school year.

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

The denominator is the total number of students enrolled in the school district.

### References for Indicator

<sup>1</sup> *Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth (2001)*. Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>2</sup> *The Condition of Education (1996)*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

<sup>3</sup> *A Report from the Kids Mobility Project (March 1998)*. Minneapolis: The Kids Mobility Project.

<sup>4,15</sup> *Student Truancy, ERIC Digest, Number 125 (1999)*. Eugene OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management

<sup>5,13</sup> *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher. Student Life: School, Home and Community (2002)*. New York, NY: MetLife, Inc.

<sup>6</sup> *Manual to Combat Truancy: The Problem of Truancy in America's Communities (July 1996)*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>7,9</sup> *Truancy, Literacy and the Courts. A User's Manual for Setting Up a Truancy Intervention Program (2001)*. Washington, DC: The American Bar Association.

<sup>8</sup> *Urban Policies and Programs to Reduce Truancy (1997)*. Clearinghouse on Urban Education, ERIC DIGEST.

<sup>10</sup> *Educating America's Youth: What Makes a Difference (2002)*. Washington, DC: Child Trends.

<sup>11</sup> *The Condition of Education (2002)*. Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.

<sup>12</sup> *Learning Support Indicators: Technical Assistance Bulletin (2002)*. Providence, RI: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

<sup>14</sup> Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2001-2002 school year.