

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 conditions, 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

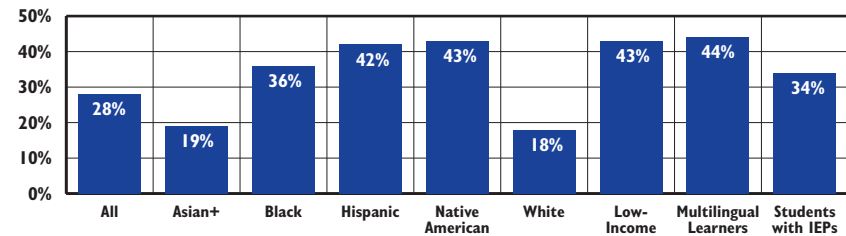
tardiness, or embarrassment associated with lack of clean or appropriate clothing or literacy or other academic problems.^{4,5,6}

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. During the 2020-2021 school year in Rhode Island, 39% of middle school students and 47% of high school students were considered truant by RIDE.⁸ Truant students in Rhode Island may be referred to the Family Court's Truancy Calendar, a community and school-based intervention program.⁹

Forty-seven percent of Rhode Island's low-income middle and high school students were chronically absent in 2020-2021, compared with 21% of higher-income students. Middle and high school students receiving special education services (38%) were more likely than their peers not receiving these services (31%) to be chronically absent. Ninety-two percent of absences by middle and high school students were unexcused absences.¹⁰

K-12 Chronic Absence Rates in Rhode Island by Student Subgroup, 2020-2021 School Year*



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2020-2021 school year. *The definition of absence may differ from prior years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. +Data for Asian students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups.

◆ In Rhode Island during the 2020-2021 school year, Native American (43%), Hispanic (42%), and Black (36%) K-12 students had higher rates of chronic absence than Asian (19%) and white (18%) students. Rates were also higher for Multilingual Learners (44%), low-income students (43%), and students with IEPs (34%) than for all students (28%).¹¹

◆ Groups with the highest levels of chronic absence were also hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Partnering with students, families, and community partners can help schools re-engage chronically absent students and address lost learning opportunities.¹²

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.¹³

◆ Teacher absence is associated with lower student achievement and high financial costs for schools. Job-related stress, illness, and negative school culture contribute to teacher chronic absence.¹⁴

◆ During the 2020-2021 school year in Rhode Island, 5.9% of teachers were chronically absent, similar to the 2018-2019 rate, before the COVID-19 pandemic (5.5%).^{15,16}

Chronic Absence, Middle School and High School

Table 52.

Chronic Absence and Attendance Rates, Middle and High School, Rhode Island, 2020-2021 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	*	843	99%	2%	1%	12	1,109	99%	1%	1%
Bristol Warren	10	716	90%	11%	26%	19	991	87%	12%	40%
Burrillville	24	496	90%	14%	30%	22	694	89%	13%	35%
Central Falls	44	635	91%	4%	31%	215	793	83%	9%	44%
Chariho	26	707	94%	9%	14%	60	1,144	94%	5%	14%
Coventry	46	1,018	93%	13%	23%	83	1,441	94%	13%	16%
Cranston	82	2,467	95%	7%	12%	191	3,434	95%	5%	13%
Cumberland	31	1,092	94%	9%	15%	49	1,463	93%	8%	20%
East Greenwich	11	639	97%	4%	7%	11	821	97%	4%	7%
East Providence	30	1,150	94%	9%	14%	51	1,581	83%	14%	46%
Exeter-West Greenwich	*	339	96%	7%	9%	12	519	95%	6%	11%
Foster-Glocester	12	444	97%	5%	6%	19	929	96%	10%	11%
Jamestown	*	157	97%	3%	4%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Johnston	28	775	94%	8%	15%	36	812	83%	13%	50%
Lincoln	20	779	87%	16%	41%	40	965	87%	13%	39%
Little Compton	*	80	95%	4%	13%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Middletown	30	473	89%	16%	39%	44	623	76%	4%	79%
Narragansett	12	251	96%	6%	8%	21	495	95%	14%	12%
New Shoreham	*	32	93%	19%	31%	*	43	92%	23%	21%
Newport	24	432	88%	11%	33%	46	651	89%	10%	31%
North Kingstown	27	855	91%	17%	28%	60	1,493	91%	13%	23%
North Providence	36	851	93%	10%	22%	49	1,141	90%	10%	30%
North Smithfield	16	437	97%	5%	8%	16	514	96%	5%	11%
Pawtucket	127	2,251	90%	13%	32%	149	2,250	82%	10%	46%
Portsmouth	18	506	96%	9%	10%	28	866	93%	7%	16%
Providence	348	5,309	82%	11%	56%	2,569	6,705	74%	9%	68%
Scituate	13	288	95%	8%	11%	13	394	92%	13%	23%
Smithfield	*	577	95%	10%	13%	*	747	95%	12%	11%
South Kingstown	23	642	95%	7%	13%	13	945	89%	9%	30%
Tiverton	25	392	95%	10%	13%	11	489	94%	9%	14%
Warwick	63	1,929	87%	12%	40%	115	2,463	81%	9%	53%
West Warwick	56	859	89%	13%	36%	99	1,012	95%	13%	13%
Westerly	16	605	96%	6%	12%	23	785	97%	4%	8%
Woonsocket	112	1,363	83%	7%	46%	112	1,663	91%	9%	31%
Charter Schools	33	1,895	88%	10%	32%	121	2,612	87%	10%	34%
State-Operated Schools	*	21	91%	33%	14%	175	1,743	91%	13%	34%
UCAP	26	121	66%	6%	87%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Four Core Cities	631	9,558	84%	10%	48%	3,045	11,411	79%	9%	56%
Remainder of State	703	20,831	93%	9%	20%	1,152	28,568	91%	9%	25%
Rhode Island	1,401	32,426	90%	10%	29%	4,493	44,334	87%	9%	34%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2020-2021 school year.

**The definition of absence may differ between districts and from prior years due to the transition to hybrid and distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Use caution when comparing these data across districts. Data are not directly comparable to previous *Factbooks*.

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 1,401 Rhode Island middle school students and 4,493 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, Hope Academy, 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.

(continued with references on page 190)