

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

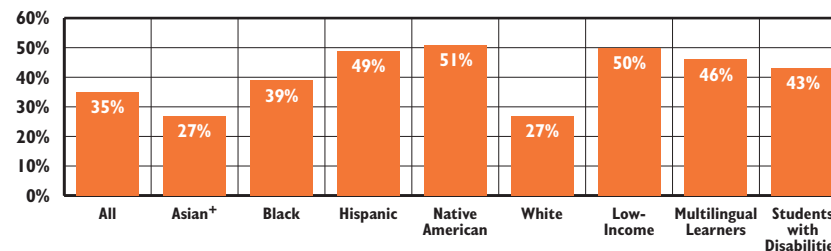
A national survey of students found that the most common reasons students report being chronically absent are health-related reasons, transportation barriers, personal stress, preferring activities outside of school, and perceiving that school has little value (i.e., is boring, their parents do not care 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. During the 2021-2022 school year in Rhode Island, 48% of middle school students and 43% of high school students were considered truant by RIDE.<sup>8</sup> Truant students in Rhode Island may be referred to the Family Court's Truancy Calendar, a community and school-based intervention program.<sup>9</sup>

Forty-nine percent of Rhode Island's low-income middle and high school students were chronically absent in 2021-2022, compared with 24% of higher-income students. Middle and high school students receiving special education services (43%) were more likely than their peers not receiving these services (35%) to be chronically absent. Seventy six percent of absences by middle and high school students were unexcused absences.<sup>10</sup>



**K-12 Chronic Absence Rates in Rhode Island by Student Subgroup, 2021-2022 School Year\***



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2021-2022 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 2021-2022 school year, Native American (51%), Hispanic (49%), and Black (39%) K-12 students had higher rates of chronic absence than Asian (27%) and white (27%) students. Rates were also higher for Multilingual Learners (46%), low-income students (50%), and students with disabilities (43%) than for all students (35%).<sup>11</sup>

◆ 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.<sup>12</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 was the first state to include teacher absenteeism as part of its school accountability system.<sup>13</sup>

◆ 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.<sup>14</sup>

◆ During the 2021-2022 school year in Rhode Island, 13.3% of teachers were chronically absent.<sup>15</sup>

# Chronic Absence, Middle School and High School

Table 51.

**Chronic Absence and Attendance Rates, Middle and High School, Rhode Island, 2021-2022 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	21	803	95%	17%	9%	19	1,124	95%	16%	10%
Bristol Warren	32	688	90%	22%	35%	39	942	89%	15%	32%
Burrillville	24	504	92%	25%	23%	35	672	92%	20%	22%
Central Falls	75	760	88%	19%	47%	136	863	82%	14%	56%
Chariho	27	923	91%	27%	29%	141	1,109	90%	21%	29%
Coventry	44	980	93%	16%	21%	146	1,405	90%	19%	27%
Cranston	147	2,351	93%	18%	19%	348	3,462	92%	14%	24%
Cumberland	49	1,051	95%	13%	13%	125	1,480	91%	18%	27%
East Greenwich	*	612	94%	15%	16%	17	788	94%	18%	16%
East Providence	42	1,152	92%	18%	28%	63	1,629	86%	16%	42%
Exeter-West Greenwich	*	240	92%	23%	28%	18	469	92%	17%	26%
Foster-Glocester	16	444	95%	15%	13%	28	942	92%	18%	23%
Jamestown	11	192	96%	10%	5%	NA	NA	NA	0%	0%
Johnston	32	789	91%	19%	31%	49	769	89%	21%	42%
Lincoln	25	803	93%	15%	20%	33	995	92%	12%	24%
Little Compton	*	70	94%	13%	16%	NA	NA	NA	0%	0%
Middletown	28	461	82%	12%	50%	44	643	88%	23%	40%
Narragansett	*	317	94%	19%	13%	10	512	92%	23%	27%
New Shoreham	*	30	89%	33%	40%	*	34	91%	29%	35%
Newport	60	558	89%	20%	40%	81	663	87%	15%	45%
North Kingstown	32	827	94%	11%	16%	81	1,459	93%	13%	17%
North Providence	40	810	92%	18%	31%	79	1,122	90%	18%	33%
North Smithfield	14	517	94%	20%	15%	33	531	93%	17%	18%
Pawtucket	218	1,966	90%	17%	34%	345	2,229	84%	14%	46%
Portsmouth	29	643	95%	17%	8%	34	826	92%	16%	21%
Providence	610	5,191	85%	16%	54%	919	6,973	76%	11%	64%
Scituate	10	256	94%	20%	12%	14	388	93%	21%	18%
Smithfield	17	543	93%	22%	20%	25	785	93%	18%	22%
South Kingstown	27	791	93%	19%	18%	42	863	92%	19%	22%
Tiverton	14	515	92%	19%	26%	29	514	91%	21%	27%
Warwick	100	1,887	88%	21%	45%	244	2,458	85%	17%	50%
West Warwick	95	1,077	88%	20%	46%	177	1,026	87%	17%	41%
Westerly	37	733	93%	21%	20%	33	759	94%	17%	17%
Woonsocket	150	1,283	85%	16%	55%	197	1,686	80%	14%	59%
Charter Schools	94	2,670	89%	20%	35%	238	2,702	89%	11%	65%
State-Operated Schools	20	11	93%	20%	35%	179	1,754	89%	18%	43%
UCAP	33	124	73%	10%	83%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Four Core Cities	1,053	9,200	86%	17%	49%	2,702	238	79%	12%	59%
Remainder of State	990	21,576	96%	18%	25%	885	39,886	91%	18%	25%
Rhode Island	2,190	33,581	90%	18%	33%	4,004	44,580	87%	16%	38%

**Source of Data for Table/Methodology**

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2021-2022 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 2,190 Rhode Island middle school students and 4,004 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.

\*Fewer than 10 students are in this category. Actual numbers are not shown to protect student confidentiality. These students are still counted in district totals and in the four core cities, remainder of the state, and state totals.

*(continued with references on page 190)*