

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 60 days and missed 12 days or more of school, including excused and unexcused absences (10% of 120 days before schools moved to distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

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.⁸ During the 2019-2020 school year in Rhode Island, 27% of middle school students and 36% of high school students were considered truant by RIDE.⁹ Truant students in Rhode Island may be referred to the Family Court's Truancy Calendar, a community and school-based intervention program.¹⁰

Almost one-third (31%) of Rhode Island's low-income middle and high school students were chronically absent in 2019-2020, compared with 15% of higher-income students. Middle and high school students receiving special education services (29%) were more likely than their peers not receiving these services (20%) to be chronically absent. Seventy percent of absences by middle and high school students were unexcused absences.¹¹



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.¹²**

◆ **Teacher absence is a leading school-based indicator of student achievement. Teacher chronic absence is associated with lower student achievement and high financial costs for schools. Factors that contribute to chronic teacher absence include job-related stress, illness, and negative school culture. Strategies to reduce teacher absenteeism include increasing teacher autonomy and positive school culture, providing professional development opportunities outside instructional time with students, developing policies that balance paid short-term leave privileges with income insurance for unpaid leave, and creating incentives to reduce absences.¹³**

◆ **As of March 15, 2020, in Rhode Island, 556 (5.8%) of teachers were chronically absent. Teacher chronic absence rates were higher for teachers assigned to Black (7.1%) and Hispanic (6.1%) students, than for teachers assigned to Asian (5.7%) and white (5.5%) students.¹⁴**



Reducing Student Chronic Absence

◆ **Schools, districts, and community partners can improve student attendance by developing systems that provide frequent reports on student absenteeism, problem solving to address reasons for absenteeism, building and sustaining relationships with students and their families, developing a community response that involves mentoring outside of school, and recognizing and rewarding good attendance.^{15,16} States can also incorporate chronic absence measures into early warning and accountability systems and school improvement efforts, and can allocate resources to address barriers to attendance.^{17,18}**

◆ **Continuing to collect and analyze chronic absence data during the COVID-19 pandemic and partnering with students, families, and community partners to develop outreach strategies can help schools re-engage chronically absent students and address lost learning opportunities.¹⁹**

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Table 52.

Chronic Absence and Attendance Rates, Middle and High School, Rhode Island, 2019-2020 School Year**

SCHOOL DISTRICT	MIDDLE SCHOOL (GRADES 6-8)				HIGH SCHOOL (GRADES 9-12)			
	# ENROLLED LESS THAN 60 DAYS	# ENROLLED 60 DAYS OR MORE	ATTENDANCE RATE	% ABSENT 12+ DAYS	# ENROLLED LESS THAN 60 DAYS	# ENROLLED 60 DAYS OR MORE	ATTENDANCE RATE	% ABSENT 12+ DAYS
Barrington	*	855	96%	7%	27	1,136	96%	7%
Bristol Warren	34	777	94%	16%	33	959	93%	24%
Burrillville	14	541	95%	14%	25	721	94%	15%
Central Falls	49	608	94%	19%	115	845	90%	29%
Chariho	22	735	95%	9%	38	1,136	94%	15%
Coventry	48	1,058	94%	15%	89	1,472	93%	18%
Cranston	101	2,493	95%	12%	244	3,439	93%	22%
Cumberland	45	1,072	95%	11%	95	1,462	94%	16%
East Greenwich	15	625	96%	9%	12	790	96%	6%
East Providence	33	1,210	95%	15%	66	1,527	91%	31%
Exeter-West Greenwich	*	368	96%	9%	12	513	95%	11%
Foster-Glocester	14	498	96%	9%	24	851	94%	19%
Jamestown	*	167	96%	8%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Johnston	39	810	93%	23%	63	845	92%	26%
Lincoln	21	775	95%	12%	27	953	89%	36%
Little Compton	*	81	94%	17%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Middletown	33	509	93%	19%	47	634	89%	40%
Narragansett	*	293	95%	11%	25	453	95%	13%
New Shoreham	*	26	93%	19%	*	47	90%	36%
Newport	25	461	94%	20%	73	675	89%	38%
North Kingstown	26	884	95%	12%	46	1,508	95%	13%
North Providence	38	879	95%	13%	49	1,162	94%	20%
North Smithfield	*	422	95%	10%	22	517	95%	12%
Pawtucket	177	2,320	94%	20%	218	2,138	89%	36%
Portsmouth	14	551	95%	11%	30	929	94%	16%
Providence	725	5,568	92%	26%	852	7,366	87%	40%
Scituate	*	293	94%	17%	16	392	92%	24%
Smithfield	18	599	95%	9%	22	747	95%	12%
South Kingstown	19	682	95%	10%	18	935	94%	15%
Tiverton	15	416	95%	13%	25	522	93%	19%
Warwick	72	1,979	94%	19%	158	2,587	92%	27%
West Warwick	56	860	93%	22%	115	991	92%	25%
Westerly	18	619	95%	10%	30	802	94%	17%
Woonsocket	138	1,438	91%	36%	181	1,675	86%	47%
Charter Schools	45	1,641	96%	11%	215	2,506	91%	27%
State-Operated Schools	0	20	93%	20%	79	1,702	93%	21%
UCAP	12	133	87%	53%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Four Core Cities	1,089	9,934	92%	26%	1,366	12,024	87%	40%
Remainder of State	769	21,538	95%	14%	1,432	28,710	93%	21%
Rhode Island	1,915	33,266	94%	17%	3,092	44,942	91%	26%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2019-2020 school year.

**Partial year data due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Data are only included through March 15, 2020 before all schools transitioned to distance learning. Chronic absence is measured as missing 12 days or more of school, which is 10% or more of the average number (120) of total school days through March 15, 2020 (the number of total school days varied by district). 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 60 days. A total of 1,915 Rhode Island middle school students and 3,092 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, 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.

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