

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

Family and economic factors connected to student absenteeism include poverty, 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. School factors contributing to chronic absence include school climate,

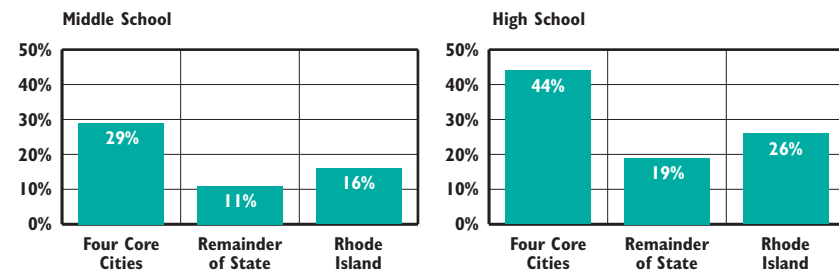
discipline policies, and concerns about bullying and unsafe situations.^{4,5,6}

Student-reported reasons for not attending school include repeated suspensions, disruptive learning environments, irrelevant or unchallenging courses, poor achievement, concerns for safety, difficulty with peer and adult relationships, conflicts between school and work, family responsibilities, and negative perceptions of school.^{7,8}

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) defines truancy as ten or more unexcused absences in a school year.⁹ During the 2014-2015 school year in Rhode Island, 22% of middle school students and 31% of high school students were considered truant by RIDE.¹⁰ Truant students in Rhode Island may be referred to the Family Court's Truancy Calendar, a community and school-based intervention program.¹¹

One-third (33%) of Rhode Island's low-income middle and high school students were chronically absent in 2014-2015, compared with 12% of higher-income students. Middle and high school students receiving special education services (30%) were more likely than their peers not receiving these services (21%) to be chronically absent. Almost three-quarters (71%) of absences by middle and high school students were unexcused absences.¹²

Chronic Absence Rate by District Type, Middle and High School, 2014-2015 School Year



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2014-2015 school year.

- ◆ The chronic absence rate among middle (29%) and high (44%) school students in the four core cities is more than twice as high as the rates among middle (11%) and high (19%) school students in the remainder of the state.¹³
- ◆ One of the most effective strategies for increasing student achievement, high school graduation rates, college access and completion, and for closing achievement gaps between higher income and lower income students, would be to increase the number of low-income students who attend school regularly.¹⁴

Reducing Chronic Absence

- ◆ Schools and districts together with community agencies can improve student attendance by developing systems that provide frequent reports on student absenteeism and reasons for the absenteeism, problem solving to address reasons for absenteeism, building and sustaining relationships with students and their families, developing a community response that involves adults who interact with students outside of school, recognizing and rewarding good attendance, and committing to learning what works and expanding effective programs and halting efforts that are not working.¹⁵
- ◆ States can reduce chronic absence by raising awareness about the problem; producing chronic absence reports with data available by district, grade, and subgroup; making chronic absence rates and strategies for improving them a key part of accountability systems and district and school improvement plans; and allocating resources to address barriers to attendance.¹⁶

Chronic Absence, Middle School and High School

Table 50.

**Chronic Absence and Attendance Rates, Middle and High School,
Rhode Island, 2014-2015 School Year**

SCHOOL DISTRICT	MIDDLE SCHOOL					HIGH SCHOOL				
	# 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	13	826	96%	10%	4%	32	1,062	96%	11%	5%
Bristol Warren	32	773	95%	17%	12%	74	937	92%	19%	20%
Burrillville	*	622	95%	16%	10%	*	716	94%	16%	14%
Central Falls	50	437	91%	20%	33%	182	728	85%	14%	48%
Chariho	42	756	96%	9%	4%	113	1,145	94%	14%	14%
Coventry	21	1,152	96%	14%	6%	91	1,540	94%	12%	14%
Cranston	116	2,560	93%	17%	19%	241	3,175	88%	15%	40%
Cumberland	35	1,128	96%	10%	6%	64	1,301	94%	14%	14%
East Greenwich	*	626	97%	10%	2%	26	726	98%	5%	2%
East Providence	49	1,165	93%	18%	19%	86	1,524	92%	16%	27%
Exeter-West Greenwich	*	421	96%	12%	7%	31	540	95%	14%	18%
Foster-Glocester	17	467	92%	23%	15%	17	644	93%	19%	17%
Jamestown	*	147	96%	13%	9%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Johnston	25	755	93%	21%	23%	55	874	92%	17%	24%
Lincoln	24	768	95%	13%	11%	46	916	92%	15%	23%
Little Compton	*	102	94%	24%	8%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Middletown	43	527	95%	14%	9%	57	669	95%	12%	11%
Narragansett	21	296	96%	13%	8%	20	425	94%	14%	16%
New Shoreham	*	37	95%	16%	14%	*	35	94%	23%	17%
Newport	34	445	94%	17%	13%	110	578	89%	18%	32%
North Kingstown	29	964	96%	13%	7%	80	1,429	95%	10%	10%
North Providence	55	837	96%	11%	10%	105	997	92%	18%	30%
North Smithfield	18	445	96%	13%	4%	48	535	95%	15%	10%
Pawtucket	171	2,028	94%	15%	18%	280	2,072	90%	14%	34%
Portsmouth	19	596	96%	14%	9%	47	935	95%	13%	11%
Providence	893	5,400	91%	17%	30%	1,354	6,446	86%	16%	45%
Scituate	12	352	95%	13%	12%	20	467	94%	16%	12%
Smithfield	13	585	96%	10%	5%	26	718	95%	12%	10%
South Kingstown	14	775	96%	10%	5%	68	1,035	94%	11%	11%
Tiverton	19	433	95%	10%	10%	34	558	93%	19%	19%
Warwick	98	2,188	95%	16%	12%	216	2,818	92%	16%	24%
West Warwick	55	765	94%	13%	15%	117	968	92%	12%	22%
Westerly	22	655	95%	16%	9%	60	931	94%	17%	15%
Woonsocket	208	1,328	89%	18%	38%	218	1,545	85%	14%	51%
<i>Charter Schools</i>	33	1,085	96%	15%	7%	144	1,624	89%	14%	28%
<i>State-Operated Schools</i>	28	11	94%	18%	0%	325	1,717	91%	21%	32%
<i>UCAP</i>	11	125	89%	17%	38%	*	11	86%	36%	36%
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	1,322	9,193	91%	17%	29%	2,034	10,791	86%	15%	44%
<i>Remainder of State</i>	859	22,168	95%	14%	11%	1,888	28,203	93%	14%	19%
<i>Rhode Island</i>	2,253	32,582	94%	15%	16%	4,393	42,346	91%	15%	26%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2014-2015 school year.

Attendance rates are calculated by dividing the state-calculated "average days of attendance" by the "average days of 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 2,253 Rhode Island middle school students and 4,393 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 attend high school in North Kingstown.

Charter middle schools include 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, Highlander Charter School, Paul Cuffee Charter School, The Greene School, Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College, Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy, Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, and The Village Green Virtual Public Charter School.

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.

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

References are on page 185.