

Chronic Early Absence

DEFINITION

Chronic early absence is the percentage of children in kindergarten through third grade (K-3) 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 absent from school miss opportunities to learn and develop positive relationships within the school community. During the early elementary school years, children develop important skills and approaches to learning that are critical for ongoing school success. Through their experiences in K-3 classrooms, children build academic, social-emotional and study skills.^{1,2} Children who are chronically absent in kindergarten show lower levels of achievement in math, reading, and general knowledge in first grade. Chronic absence in kindergarten appears to be especially detrimental for poor and Hispanic children.³ In Rhode Island, children who are chronically absent in kindergarten have lower levels of achievement as far out as the seventh grade and are more than twice as likely to be retained.⁴

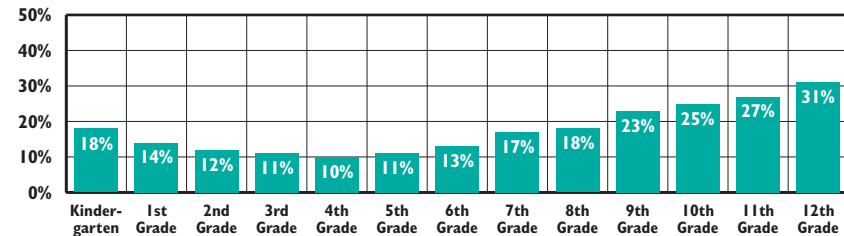
Chronic early absence affects one out of ten children in the U.S. during their first two years of school.⁵ Children from poor families are much more likely to

have high rates of chronic absenteeism in the early grades than higher-income children. In the U.S., one in five (21%) poor kindergartners were chronically absent, compared to less than one in 10 (8%) of their higher-income peers.⁶ Children who are homeless or formerly homeless experience poor educational outcomes related to student absenteeism and mobility.⁷ Unaddressed health and behavioral health issues, including asthma, can result in increased absenteeism.⁸

Chronic early absence is most often a result of a combination of school, family, and community factors.⁹ While illness is a leading factor in chronic early absence, poverty, teenage parenting, single parenting, low maternal education levels, unemployment, poor maternal health, public assistance enrollment, and household food insecurity all can affect school attendance. Rates of chronic absence rise significantly when three or more of these risk factors are present.^{10,11}

Chronic absenteeism also can result from poor quality education, ambivalence about or alienation from school, and chaotic school environments, including high rates of teacher turnover, disruptive classrooms and/or bullying.¹² Unreliable or insufficient transportation, violence at and around school, multiple foster care placements, lack of clean or affordable clothes, and lack of safe and affordable housing are factors that can lead to chronic absence.¹³

Chronic Absence Rates in Rhode Island by Grade, 2014-2015 School Year



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

- ◆ **Chronic absence rates are high in kindergarten and then decline before increasing again in middle and high school.** During the 2014-2015 school year, 18% of Rhode Island kindergarten students, 14% of first graders, 12% of second graders, and 11% of third graders were chronically absent (i.e., absent 18 days or more).¹⁴
- ◆ **During the 2014-2015 school year, 14% of Rhode Island children in grades K-3 were chronically absent, and an additional 16% missed 12 to 17 days of school.**¹⁵ Chronic absenteeism can affect the reading and math outcomes of all students in a class because teachers may backtrack or slow the learning pace to review lessons for students who have missed school.¹⁶
- ◆ **Averages for school-wide attendance can mask significant numbers of chronically absent individual students.**¹⁷ During the 2014-2015 school year, the average daily attendance rate for K-3 students in Rhode Island's four core cities was 93%, but 23% of students were chronically absent.¹⁸
- ◆ **Most schools monitor average daily attendance or unexcused absences, but few actively track chronic absenteeism.** Rhode Island is one of the few states that makes school-level data on chronic absence available on a state website.¹⁹
- ◆ **Schools, districts, and the state can nurture a culture of attendance by raising awareness among school and community personnel about the problem of chronic absence, using positive messaging to encourage parents to send their children to school on time and every day in the early grades, providing frequent reports on student absenteeism and identifying and intervening with students with troubling absenteeism patterns.**^{20,21}

Table 49.

Chronic Early Absence Rates, Grades K-3, Rhode Island, 2014-2015 School Year

SCHOOL DISTRICT	K-3 STUDENTS ENROLLED LESS THAN 90 DAYS	K-3 STUDENTS ENROLLED 90 DAYS OR MORE	K-3 ATTENDANCE RATE	% OF K-3 STUDENTS ABSENT 0-5 DAYS	% OF K-3 STUDENTS ABSENT 6-11 DAYS	% OF K-3 STUDENTS ABSENT 12-17 DAYS	% OF K-3 STUDENTS ABSENT 18+ DAYS
Barrington	20	877	96%	46%	40%	11%	3%
Bristol Warren	57	1,072	95%	38%	38%	14%	10%
Burrillville	14	640	95%	40%	37%	16%	8%
Central Falls	165	918	93%	33%	29%	20%	18%
Chariho	35	896	96%	48%	36%	11%	4%
Coventry	54	1,306	96%	45%	37%	12%	6%
Cranston	226	2,973	94%	33%	37%	17%	13%
Cumberland	73	1,302	96%	51%	37%	8%	4%
East Greenwich	20	634	96%	46%	41%	10%	4%
East Providence	116	1,674	95%	42%	32%	16%	11%
Exeter-West Greenwich	27	393	96%	40%	41%	15%	5%
Foster	*	171	96%	52%	33%	11%	4%
Glocester	13	341	98%	80%	15%	4%	1%
Jamestown	15	208	95%	41%	36%	15%	8%
Johnston	55	988	93%	26%	32%	22%	20%
Lincoln	45	819	96%	46%	33%	12%	8%
Little Compton	*	90	95%	36%	44%	14%	6%
Middletown	52	715	95%	38%	38%	16%	8%
Narragansett	12	352	96%	45%	37%	13%	6%
New Shoreham	*	24	92%	17%	21%	46%	17%
Newport	57	705	95%	35%	35%	19%	11%
North Kingstown	65	1,007	96%	45%	36%	13%	7%
North Providence	81	1,060	95%	41%	32%	15%	12%
North Smithfield	33	479	96%	46%	39%	11%	4%
Pawtucket	431	3,218	95%	39%	32%	16%	13%
Portsmouth	46	624	96%	45%	39%	11%	5%
Providence	1,347	7,913	92%	28%	27%	18%	26%
Scituate	21	333	94%	35%	34%	13%	18%
Smithfield	24	663	96%	50%	39%	9%	2%
South Kingstown	46	873	96%	45%	40%	11%	4%
Tiverton	36	519	96%	41%	35%	18%	6%
Warwick	186	2,573	95%	37%	35%	17%	11%
West Warwick	128	1,140	94%	36%	34%	19%	11%
Westerly	53	875	95%	41%	34%	15%	9%
Woonsocket	341	2,136	91%	23%	25%	20%	32%
<i>Charter Schools</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>2,033</i>	<i>96%</i>	<i>52%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>12%</i>	<i>6%</i>
<i>Rhode Island School for the Deaf</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>92%</i>	<i>31%</i>	<i>31%</i>	<i>8%</i>	<i>31%</i>
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>2,284</i>	<i>14,185</i>	<i>93%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>28%</i>	<i>18%</i>	<i>23%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>1,619</i>	<i>26,326</i>	<i>95%</i>	<i>41%</i>	<i>36%</i>	<i>14%</i>	<i>9%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>3,947</i>	<i>42,557</i>	<i>94%</i>	<i>38%</i>	<i>33%</i>	<i>16%</i>	<i>14%</i>

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 3,947 Rhode Island students in grades K-3 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 separate 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.

Charter schools include Achievement First Rhode Island, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy, The Compass School, Paul Cuffee Charter School, Highlander Charter School, Hope Academy, International Charter School, Kingston Hill Academy, The Learning Community, and South Side Elementary 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.

References

¹ Romero, M. & Lee, Y. (2008). *The influence of maternal and family risk on chronic absenteeism in early schooling*. New York, NY: Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health, National Center for Children in Poverty.

^{2,3,5,9,11,12,20} Chang, H. N. & Romero, M. (2008). *Present, engaged, and accounted for: The critical importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades*. New York, NY: Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health, National Center for Children in Poverty.

⁴ RI DataHUB. (n.d.). *Chronic absenteeism among kindergarten students*. Retrieved February 10, 2016, from <http://ridatahub.org>

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