

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 problems, 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

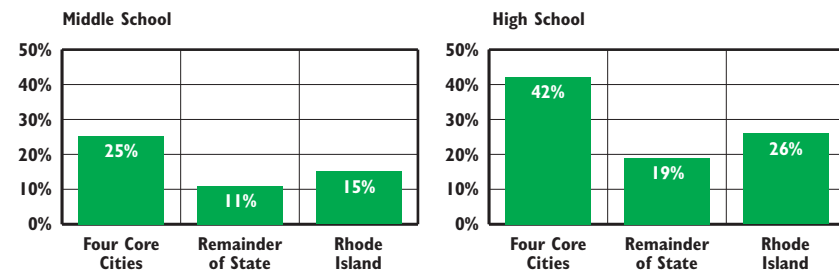
tardiness, or embarrassment associated with lack of clean or appropriate clothing or literacy or other academic problems.^{4,5,6}

A national survey of students found that the most common reasons students report skipping school are that they find school boring or are uninterested in their classes. Other common reasons are a desire to spend times with friends outside of school, school start times that are too early, the desire to avoid a test or homework, work or family responsibilities, bullying, and transportation issues.⁷

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) defines truancy as ten or more unexcused absences in a school year.⁸ During the 2015-2016 school year in Rhode Island, 22% of middle school students and 32% 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 2015-2016, compared with 12% of higher-income students. Middle and high school students receiving special education services (29%) were more likely than their peers not receiving these services (19%) to be chronically absent. Almost three-quarters (72%) of absences by middle and high school students were unexcused absences.¹¹

Chronic Absence Rate by District Type, Middle and High School, 2015-2016 School Year



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015-2016 school year.

◆ The chronic absence rate among middle (25%) and high (42%) 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.¹²

◆ One of the most effective strategies for increasing student achievement, high school graduation rates, and 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.¹³

Reducing Chronic Absence

◆ Schools, districts, and 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, expanding effective programs, and halting efforts that are not working.^{14,15}

◆ 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.^{16,17}

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Table 52.

Chronic Absence and Attendance Rates, Middle and High School, Rhode Island, 2015-2016 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	10	846	96%	10%	6%	24	1,048	97%	8%	4%
Bristol Warren	37	761	94%	18%	17%	92	929	91%	18%	27%
Burrillville	19	592	96%	9%	6%	34	766	95%	12%	11%
Central Falls	84	457	92%	16%	28%	190	661	86%	16%	40%
Chariho	25	754	96%	10%	6%	63	1,109	94%	12%	12%
Coventry	60	1,162	95%	13%	10%	102	1,553	94%	15%	17%
Cranston	100	2,565	94%	15%	17%	199	3,289	88%	15%	40%
Cumberland	41	1,166	96%	12%	5%	86	1,346	94%	14%	16%
East Greenwich	19	639	98%	1%	1%	15	742	99%	1%	<1%
East Providence	88	1,166	94%	16%	17%	132	1,509	91%	14%	30%
Exeter-West Greenwich	*	424	96%	10%	4%	40	518	96%	12%	8%
Foster-Glocester	16	470	91%	23%	27%	23	674	92%	21%	18%
Jamestown	*	163	96%	17%	5%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Johnston	46	783	94%	18%	14%	60	879	92%	16%	28%
Lincoln	31	762	95%	11%	11%	50	878	92%	14%	23%
Little Compton	*	104	96%	8%	9%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Middletown	30	553	95%	14%	11%	40	676	95%	14%	12%
Narragansett	13	297	96%	12%	8%	27	412	95%	12%	12%
New Shoreham	*	33	95%	18%	9%	*	35	94%	20%	14%
Newport	49	474	94%	18%	15%	96	604	90%	19%	31%
North Kingstown	33	967	96%	11%	6%	62	1,416	95%	10%	9%
North Providence	47	880	95%	16%	12%	101	1,004	92%	12%	24%
North Smithfield	21	463	96%	11%	6%	40	505	95%	13%	8%
Pawtucket	194	2,158	95%	14%	12%	248	2,004	90%	13%	32%
Portsmouth	33	594	96%	10%	9%	43	904	94%	13%	13%
Providence	915	5,457	91%	16%	28%	1,336	6,727	86%	15%	45%
Scituate	19	346	95%	13%	10%	12	464	93%	18%	22%
Smithfield	*	560	96%	11%	7%	37	747	95%	11%	11%
South Kingstown	31	785	96%	9%	5%	49	994	95%	10%	10%
Tiverton	18	431	98%	5%	2%	65	543	99%	2%	1%
Warwick	102	2,155	95%	15%	10%	213	2,797	92%	16%	21%
West Warwick	45	743	93%	15%	19%	120	1,004	92%	11%	21%
Westerly	18	677	96%	11%	10%	80	904	94%	19%	13%
Woonsocket	170	1,291	91%	15%	31%	209	1,485	86%	14%	42%
Charter Schools	25	1,160	97%	8%	5%	143	1,882	87%	14%	28%
State-Operated Schools	16	16	99%	0%	0%	282	1,690	92%	17%	24%
UCAP	11	119	87%	14%	49%	*	19	87%	26%	37%
Four Core Cities	1,363	9,363	92%	15%	25%	1,983	10,877	87%	15%	42%
Remainder of State	977	22,315	95%	13%	11%	1,913	28,254	93%	14%	19%
Rhode Island	2,392	32,973	94%	13%	15%	4,324	42,772	91%	14%	26%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015-2016 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 2,392 Rhode Island middle school students and 4,324 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 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, 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.

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 189.