

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 the important academic and social-emotional skills and approaches to learning that are part of the K-3 experience and critical for ongoing school success.^{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

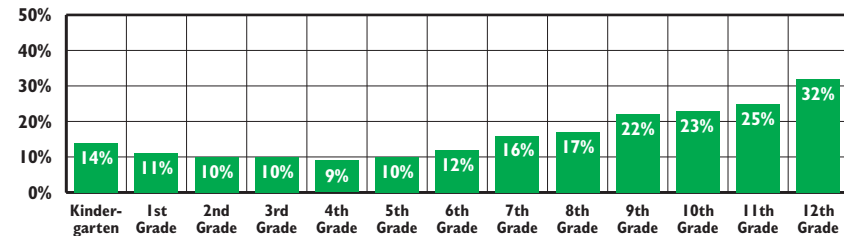
More than 3.8 million elementary school students nationwide or 11% of all elementary school students are chronically absent.⁵ In the early grades, children from poor families are much more likely to be chronically absent than higher-income children. In the U.S., one in five (21%) poor kindergartners 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 Chronic absenteeism can affect the reading and math outcomes of all students in a class, not just those who are absent, because teachers may have to backtrack or slow the learning pace to review lessons for students who have missed school.⁸

Young children are chronically absent from school for a variety of reasons. Asthma is one of the leading causes of school absenteeism, accounting for one-third of all absences, but other physical and behavioral health issues, including poor dental health, vision problems, diabetes, obesity, anxiety, and/or depression can also result in chronic absence.^{9,10}

While illness is a leading factor in chronic early absence, 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 or absenteeism, disruptive classrooms, and/or bullying. 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 other factors that can lead to chronic absence.^{11,12,13}

Chronic Absence Rates in Rhode Island by Grade, 2015-2016 School Year



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

- ◆ **Chronic absence rates are high in kindergarten and then decline before increasing again in middle and high school.** During the 2015-2016 school year, 14% of Rhode Island kindergarten students, 11% of first graders, 10% of second graders, and 10% of third graders were chronically absent (i.e., absent 18 days or more), down from 18% of kindergarten students, 14% of first graders, 12% of second graders, and 11% of third graders during the 2014-2015 school year.^{14,15}
- ◆ **During the 2015-2016 school year, 11% of all Rhode Island children in grades K-3 were chronically absent, and an additional 14% missed 12 to 17 days of school.**¹⁶
- ◆ **Averages for school-wide attendance can mask significant numbers of chronically absent individual students.**¹⁷ During the 2015-2016 school year, the average daily attendance rate for K-3 students in Rhode Island's four core cities was 94%, but 19% of students were chronically absent.¹⁸
- ◆ **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.**^{19,20}
- ◆ **States can prioritize reducing chronic absence by 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.**²¹

Table 51.

Chronic Early Absence Rates, Grades K-3, Rhode Island, 2015-2016 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	15	867	96%	51%	36%	10%	3%
Bristol Warren	66	1,001	95%	42%	33%	16%	8%
Burrillville	18	631	95%	36%	43%	14%	6%
Central Falls	123	892	94%	36%	27%	17%	20%
Chariho	41	829	96%	51%	36%	10%	3%
Coventry	92	1,272	95%	41%	36%	16%	8%
Cranston	186	2,945	95%	42%	35%	12%	11%
Cumberland	66	1,314	97%	57%	31%	9%	3%
East Greenwich	27	625	98%	80%	17%	2%	<1%
East Providence	116	1,656	95%	42%	33%	14%	12%
Exeter-West Greenwich	*	408	96%	42%	39%	14%	5%
Foster	12	170	96%	48%	36%	11%	5%
Glocester	13	349	96%	45%	42%	10%	3%
Jamestown	*	205	95%	31%	39%	22%	8%
Johnston	67	963	95%	40%	37%	14%	9%
Lincoln	35	816	96%	48%	35%	11%	6%
Little Compton	*	86	97%	57%	30%	10%	2%
Middletown	62	702	96%	43%	36%	14%	7%
Narragansett	20	323	96%	47%	40%	10%	3%
New Shoreham	*	27	93%	30%	15%	37%	19%
Newport	70	717	95%	36%	32%	18%	14%
North Kingstown	49	982	96%	48%	34%	12%	5%
North Providence	83	1,041	95%	41%	34%	10%	10%
North Smithfield	30	484	96%	51%	38%	8%	3%
Pawtucket	402	3,162	95%	44%	31%	15%	10%
Portsmouth	38	658	96%	50%	36%	11%	4%
Providence	1,231	7,735	93%	31%	29%	18%	21%
Scituate	17	336	93%	32%	33%	16%	19%
Smithfield	16	678	96%	50%	37%	10%	4%
South Kingstown	43	840	96%	46%	40%	10%	4%
Tiverton	50	539	97%	69%	20%	7%	3%
Warwick	169	2,596	95%	44%	34%	12%	9%
West Warwick	109	1,161	95%	39%	33%	15%	12%
Westerly	67	856	96%	45%	34%	16%	5%
Woonsocket	382	2,036	93%	28%	30%	19%	24%
<i>Charter Schools</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>2,460</i>	<i>96%</i>	<i>55%</i>	<i>28%</i>	<i>11%</i>	<i>6%</i>
<i>Rhode Island School for the Deaf</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>99%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>0%</i>
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>2,138</i>	<i>13,825</i>	<i>94%</i>	<i>34%</i>	<i>29%</i>	<i>17%</i>	<i>19%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>1,603</i>	<i>26,077</i>	<i>96%</i>	<i>46%</i>	<i>34%</i>	<i>12%</i>	<i>7%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>3,792</i>	<i>42,371</i>	<i>95%</i>	<i>42%</i>	<i>32%</i>	<i>14%</i>	<i>11%</i>

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 3,792 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, RISE Prep Mayoral Academy, 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.

^{2,3,12,19} 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, 2017, from <http://ridatahub.org>

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