

# 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.<sup>1</sup> Studies in large cities have shown strong relationships between chronic absence in middle and high school and the likelihood of dropping out.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

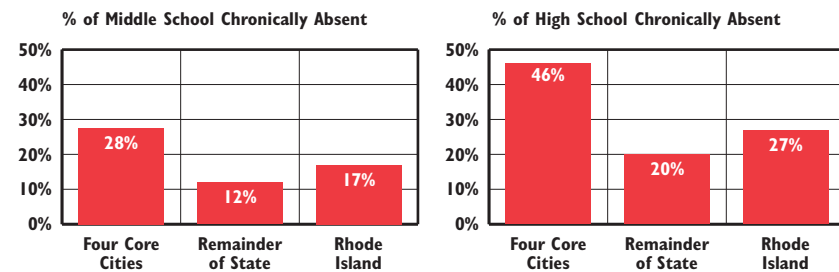
embarrassment associated with lack of clean or appropriate clothing or literacy or other academic problems.<sup>4,5,6</sup>

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).<sup>7</sup>

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) defines truancy as ten or more unexcused absences in a school year.<sup>8</sup> During the 2017-2018 school year in Rhode Island, 25% of middle school students and 35% of high school students were considered truant by RIDE.<sup>9</sup> Truant students in Rhode Island may be referred to the Family Court's Truancy Calendar, a community and school-based intervention program.<sup>10</sup>

One-third (33%) of Rhode Island's low-income middle and high school students were chronically absent in 2017-2018, compared with 14% of higher-income students. Middle and high school students receiving special education services (31%) were more likely than their peers not receiving these services (21%) to be chronically absent. Almost three-quarters (72%) of absences by middle and high school students were unexcused absences.<sup>11</sup>

## Chronic Absence Rate by District Type, Middle and High School, 2017-2018 School Year



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2017-2018 school year.

- ◆ The chronic absence rate among middle (28%) and high (46%) school students in the four core cities is more than twice as high as the rates among middle (12%) and high (20%) school students in the remainder of the state.<sup>12</sup>
- ◆ 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.<sup>13</sup>

## 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.<sup>14,15</sup> Studies also show that high school attendance rates improve when school start times are later.<sup>16</sup>
- ◆ States can reduce chronic absence by increasing public awareness about the problem, sharing best practices, requiring school and district-level attendance teams, incorporating chronic absence measures into early warning and accountability systems and school improvement efforts, and allocating resources to address barriers to attendance.<sup>17,18,19,20</sup>

# Chronic Absence, Middle School and High School

Table 52.

Chronic Absence and Attendance Rates, Middle and High School, Rhode Island, 2017-2018 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	12	789	96%	12%	7%	20	1,164	96%	8%	5%
Bristol Warren	41	759	94%	15%	19%	80	941	92%	16%	25%
Burrillville	17	540	95%	13%	9%	35	780	94%	14%	13%
Central Falls	61	553	93%	18%	21%	178	662	89%	15%	32%
Chariho	29	727	96%	11%	6%	64	1,099	93%	16%	14%
Coventry	44	1,120	95%	15%	11%	73	1,490	94%	13%	17%
Cranston	133	2,479	94%	16%	15%	334	3,286	90%	17%	33%
Cumberland	53	1,107	95%	13%	8%	102	1,412	94%	16%	14%
East Greenwich	17	635	97%	7%	3%	19	756	98%	5%	1%
East Providence	57	1,218	93%	17%	20%	110	1,528	91%	16%	29%
Exeter-West Greenwich	15	387	95%	13%	9%	20	525	96%	9%	8%
Foster-Glocester	12	510	96%	9%	7%	19	746	93%	14%	20%
Jamestown	*	160	96%	19%	6%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Johnston	23	799	93%	19%	21%	61	932	92%	17%	26%
Lincoln	40	785	95%	14%	11%	49	868	90%	20%	31%
Little Compton	0	89	96%	15%	7%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Middletown	28	534	95%	16%	9%	55	607	94%	10%	14%
Narragansett	11	341	95%	18%	7%	21	442	94%	14%	17%
New Shoreham	0	24	93%	33%	13%	*	49	94%	24%	16%
Newport	30	446	93%	19%	21%	94	660	88%	18%	38%
North Kingstown	24	926	96%	12%	8%	69	1,421	94%	9%	12%
North Providence	40	898	95%	15%	13%	64	1,068	94%	14%	19%
North Smithfield	16	408	95%	18%	7%	34	505	95%	11%	11%
Pawtucket	201	2,242	93%	17%	20%	239	1,956	89%	15%	35%
Portsmouth	19	553	95%	17%	8%	34	894	94%	13%	13%
Providence	823	5,487	91%	20%	30%	1,401	7,262	85%	16%	50%
Scituate	*	332	94%	17%	14%	21	412	94%	19%	12%
Smithfield	16	587	96%	10%	6%	16	711	95%	14%	11%
South Kingstown	15	775	96%	11%	8%	36	937	94%	11%	12%
Tiverton	18	437	94%	16%	12%	16	534	90%	19%	29%
Warwick	92	2,094	94%	16%	15%	177	2,709	91%	15%	29%
West Warwick	59	764	92%	16%	19%	184	1,021	91%	13%	25%
Westerly	30	661	95%	16%	13%	63	834	93%	20%	21%
Woonsocket	159	1,321	91%	19%	33%	214	1,577	85%	14%	47%
Charter Schools	51	1,354	95%	13%	11%	226	2,310	91%	14%	24%
State-Operated Schools	*	13	94%	8%	38%	290	1,675	93%	20%	20%
UCAP	19	123	87%	17%	49%	*	13	84%	15%	62%
Four Core Cities	1,244	9,603	92%	19%	28%	2,032	11,457	86%	16%	46%
Remainder of State	899	21,884	95%	15%	12%	1,874	28,334	93%	14%	20%
Rhode Island	2,219	32,977	94%	16%	17%	4,423	43,789	91%	15%	27%

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2017-2018 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 2,219 Rhode Island middle school students and 4,423 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 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 William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School, Rhode Island Training School operated by DCYF, Metropolitan Regional Career & Technical Center, and Rhode Island School for the Deaf. UCAP is the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program.

NA indicates that the school district does not serve students at that grade level. \*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)