

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 the 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 conditions, 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

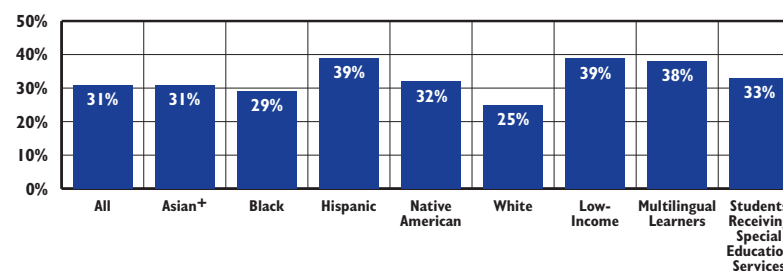
with lack of clean or appropriate clothing or literacy or other academic problems.^{4,5,6}

A national survey of students found that the most common reasons students report 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).⁷

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) defines truancy as ten or more unexcused absences in a school year. During the 2022-2023 school year in Rhode Island, 38% of middle school students and 44% of high school students were considered truant by RIDE.⁸ Truant students in Rhode Island may be referred to the Family Court's Truancy Calendar, a community and school-based intervention program.⁹

Chronic absenteeism increased during and right after the pandemic but has begun to decline. Forty-three percent of Rhode Island's low-income middle and high school students were chronically absent in 2022-2023, compared with 21% of higher-income students. Middle and high school students receiving special education services (33%) were more likely than their peers not receiving these services (30%) to be chronically absent. Seventy five percent of absences by middle and high school students were unexcused absences.¹⁰

K-12 Chronic Absence Rates in Rhode Island by Student Subgroup, 2022-2023 School Year



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2022-2023 school year. *Data for Asian students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups.

★ In Rhode Island during the 2022-2023 school year, Native American (32%), Hispanic (39%), and Black (29%) K-12 students had higher rates of chronic absence than Asian (23%) and white (25%) students. Rates were also higher for Multilingual Learners (38%), low-income students (43%), and students receiving special education services (33%) than for all students (31%).¹¹

★ Groups with the highest levels of chronic absence were also hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Partnering with students, families, and community partners can help schools re-engage chronically absent students and address lost learning opportunities.¹²

Teacher Chronic Absence

★ Teacher chronic absenteeism is the percentage of teachers who missed 10% or more of school days out of their days employed by a school, excluding days missed due to professional development, field trips, off-campus activities with students, pre-approved leaves, absences on non-school days and half days. Rhode Island was the first state to include teacher absenteeism as part of its school accountability system.¹³

★ Teacher absence is associated with lower student achievement and high financial costs for schools. Job-related stress, illness, and negative school culture contribute to teacher chronic absence.¹⁴

★ During the 2022-2023 school year in Rhode Island, 10% of teachers were chronically absent down from 13% the previous school year.¹⁵

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Table 52.

Chronic Absence and Attendance Rates, Middle and High School, Rhode Island, 2022-2023 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	13	798	96%	13%	8%	23	1,142	95%	17%	8%
Bristol Warren	18	655	91%	21%	25%	43	915	90%	17%	28%
Burrillville	20	491	92%	21%	22%	26	663	93%	17%	21%
Central Falls	74	580	93%	17%	19%	161	860	87%	12%	38%
Chariho	31	659	94%	16%	17%	110	1,084	93%	14%	18%
Coventry	29	980	93%	20%	20%	105	1,312	92%	18%	24%
Cranston	122	2,352	94%	18%	17%	262	3,498	92%	15%	27%
Cumberland	46	1,064	93%	15%	17%	70	1,471	92%	16%	25%
East Greenwich	*	634	94%	19%	16%	21	749	94%	16%	13%
East Providence	40	1,172	92%	19%	26%	80	1,739	87%	17%	38%
Exeter-West Greenwich	*	242	93%	18%	20%	33	461	94%	17%	15%
Foster-Glocester	*	432	92%	20%	27%	40	920	91%	23%	31%
Jamestown	*	135	95%	19%	9%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Johnston	26	773	92%	23%	28%	63	827	90%	18%	32%
Lincoln	19	792	92%	17%	25%	38	985	92%	20%	24%
Little Compton	*	73	95%	12%	8%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Middletown	30	473	93%	21%	21%	32	599	91%	19%	32%
Narragansett	*	232	94%	19%	18%	35	476	93%	19%	20%
New Shoreham	*	32	90%	36%	33%	*	36	90%	32%	43%
Newport	36	413	88%	18%	38%	87	642	86%	14%	45%
North Kingstown	30	807	93%	17%	20%	64	1,391	92%	17%	21%
North Providence	49	817	92%	19%	24%	54	1,137	90%	16%	34%
North Smithfield	10	381	94%	16%	17%	20	532	93%	16%	21%
Pawtucket	166	1,931	91%	20%	29%	261	2,169	85%	14%	44%
Portsmouth	12	463	94%	20%	14%	33	802	92%	20%	21%
Providence	489	4,602	86%	16%	46%	1,186	7,031	80%	12%	52%
Scituate	*	264	94%	21%	13%	11	373	93%	20%	18%
Smithfield	*	542	94%	20%	14%	17	790	93%	19%	20%
South Kingstown	18	598	92%	22%	22%	36	791	91%	20%	26%
Tiverton	13	386	92%	25%	22%	21	493	91%	26%	29%
Warwick	85	1,848	91%	21%	29%	204	2,412	89%	19%	37%
West Warwick	56	819	91%	20%	30%	120	1,039	89%	14%	32%
Westerly	15	539	93%	25%	17%	55	724	93%	22%	21%
Woonsocket	136	1,216	86%	18%	50%	215	1,685	83%	13%	48%
Charter Schools	81	2,087	93%	18%	22%	295	2,484	88%	17%	37%
State-Operated Schools	*	10	91%	18%	45%	98	1,732	91%	22%	29%
UCAP	31	123	81%	19%	55%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
YouthBuild	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	30	89	60%	7%	82%
Four Core Cities	865	8,329	88%	16%	44%	1,823	11,745	82%	13%	49%
Remainder of State	769	19,867	93%	18%	27%	1,727	28,353	97%	17%	26%
Rhode Island	1,747	30,416	91%	18%	27%	3,973	44,403	88%	16%	33%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2022-2023 school year.

**The definition of absence may differ between districts and from prior years due to the transition to hybrid and distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Use caution when comparing these data across districts. Data are not directly comparable to previous *Factbooks*.

Attendance rates are calculated by dividing the state-calculated "average daily attendance" by the "average daily 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 1,747 Rhode Island middle school students and 3,973 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 Achievement First Rhode Island, Beacon Charter School for the Arts, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy, The Compass School, Paul Cuffee Charter School, Highlander Charter School, Hope Academy, 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, Charette Charter School, 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.

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