Executive Summary

Attendance Matters RI appears to have helped drive an impressive turnaround in student attendance in Rhode Island, markedly reducing the statewide chronic absenteeism rate from its post-pandemic peak and producing one of the sharpest declines nationwide. Yet, absenteeism remains a serious concern; over one in five students was chronically absent in 2024–25. Chronic absenteeism was moreover much higher in some district, state, and charter schools (LEAs), with rates exceeding 40%. Variations in student populations partially explain this difference, but RIPEC's regression analysis, controlling for demographic variation, suggests local policies also play a significant role. This reveals a persistent challenge: while Attendance Matters RI offers effective tools, the state lacks the authority to ensure local implementation of best practices. In consequence, progress remains uneven.

Key Findings

- Since it was launched in November 2023, the **Attendance Matters RI** campaign has used data-driven initiatives, a robust public messaging campaign, and professional training and guidance for educators to improve chronic absenteeism, defined as missing at least 10% of school days.
- The proportion of students who were chronically absent was **22.1% in 2024-25,** a marked improvement from **2021-22 (34.1%)** but still greater than pre-pandemic **2018-19 (19.1%).**
- In 2024-25, **6.7% of students missed at least 20%** of school days.
- Rhode Island posted the **5th largest decline** in chronic absenteeism among reporting states, falling **from the 8th highest** rate in 2021-22 **to 16th** in 2023-24. Rhode Island's rate was **slightly lower than the preliminary U.S. state average** in 2024-25 (22.1% vs. 22.7%).
- The proposed **Attendance for Success Act**, which would have required LEAs to follow best practices, failed to advance in 2024 in the General Assembly and was not reintroduced in 2025.
- Chronic absenteeism **rates ranged from under 5% to over 40% across districts** in 2024-25. Non-district LEAs, including charter and state schools, also had a wide range in chronic absenteeism levels.
- RIPEC's **linear regression model** compared each LEA's actual chronic absenteeism rate with a predicted level based on its student demographics for 2024-25.
- **Several districts significantly overperformed or underperformed predicted levels**. The most extreme cases for districts were Central Falls—its rate (25.7%) was 10.1 percentage points lower than predicted—and Woonsocket—its rate (41.6%) was 10.7 percentage points higher than predicted. Compared to districts, **a greater share of charter and state schools outperformed predicted levels**.
- **Central Falls** and **Providence** outperformed predicted levels and **reduced chronic absenteeism rates by more than 20 percentage points** from their peak. Both districts implemented initiatives that (1) prioritize attendance in schools and the community, (2) establish clear lines of authority, (3) effectively use data, and (4) establish frequent and partnership-oriented communication with families.

Recommendations

Advance Attendance Matters RI

Require LEAs to implement proven strategies

Add an accountability tier for students missing 20% of school or more

Adopt a statewide definition of attendance