



RIDE Rhode Island
Department
of Education

**Attendance and Academic Achievement Guidance
for
Local Education Agencies (LEAs)**

September 2025

September 2025

Dear Colleagues:

As we continue to accelerate student learning in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) has consistently provided Local Education Agencies (LEAs) with data-driven supports that LEAs may use to better support and get students back on track in attendance and academic performance. These supports should always be aligned with an LEA's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework for improving outcomes for all students.



RIDE is committed to ensuring all students have access to diverse course offerings with high-quality curriculum and instruction as essential components of a rigorous education that prepares every student for success in college and their career.

However, despite collective efforts to accelerate student learning, too many students are falling behind early in their academic journeys— both because of academic challenges, and because they are not in school often enough to engage deeply and learn.

Failing to ensure these students have the grade-appropriate, foundational, skills ultimately widens opportunity gaps and undermines a variety of long-term outcomes for these students.

For example, Rhode Island assessment data identifies that student assessment results and chronic absenteeism are clearly intertwined, with on average a more than 20-percentage point achievement gap between students who are chronically absent and their peers who are not. These gaps also persist for graduation rates, with a nearly 40 percentage point gap among graduation rates for students who are chronically absent throughout all their high school years and their peers who were not chronically absent. The good news is that these gaps in knowledge and academic attainment are recoverable, with consistent school attendance, instruction, and support.

Some of our students simply may need more: more support, more time, more practice, more attention, more adults who care. Needing more is not a bad thing, and luckily, it is something that we, as responsible adults, can and should provide.

In partnership,

Angélica Infante-Green
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

RIDE’s Mission

1. To lead and support districts, schools, and communities through a unified, strategic direction for education in the state.
2. To use policy, advocacy, and governance structures to create an environment that advances opportunities for all students.
3. To maintain collaboration and efficiency in the department that enables innovation, agility, and continuous learning.

Table of Contents

Letter from the Commissioner.....	2
Executive Summary.....	4
Policy Values and Criteria.....	5
Defining “Significantly Off-Track” Students.....	5
Communicating “Promotion in Doubt” Status and Supports.....	6
Making Retention Decisions Based on Attendance and Academic Performance.....	7
RIDE’s Retention Data Collection.....	9
Special Considerations for Youth in Care.....	9
Additional Considerations.....	10
Appendix A: Notification of Promotion-In-Doubt Template.....	12
Appendix B: Notification of Prior Year Pattern Template.....	13
Appendix C: Resources for MTSS and Academic or Attendance Supports.....	14
Appendix D: Table Demonstrating Cumulative Impact of Missing Two Days Per Month.....	16
Appendix E: Five Immediate Steps Families Can Take to Maximize Learning Time.....	17
Appendix F: Glossary of Terms / Acronyms.....	17
Authorship Note.....	17

Attendance and Academic Achievement Guidance for Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

Executive Summary

RIDE is issuing this *Attendance and Academic Achievement Guidance* to LEAs to support them in the establishment of, or support revision to, grade retention policies for students who are significantly off-track in both student attendance and academic performance.

This *Guidance* was developed in coordination with researchers at both the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Brown University. It ensures that student support is prioritized, first and foremost; that families are engaged and clearly communicated with early and often; and that retention decisions are a last result only after all other MTSS-aligned interventions have been exhausted. A support team, composed of educators and parents, family, or guardians, must determine that retaining a student is in the long-term best interest of the student.

Research indicates that elementary students who do not read at grade level in third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school. Further, research and evidence supports the implementation of retention policies in elementary years when combined with the appropriate supports.

Students who are consistently chronically absent through elementary and middle schools, and who have never achieved grade-level standards, will enroll in high school unprepared to complete high school level coursework.

In line with a strategy of intervening early strategy, focused on enhancing support systems around at-risk students, LEAs should prioritize focusing their retention decisions primarily on elementary grades, given that elementary years are the foundation for students' long-term academic success.

RIDE's *Attendance and Academic Achievement Guidance* is meant to support LEAs in navigating the complexity and the seriousness of retention decisions.

Policy Values

- Focus on younger students and earlier grades in order to intervene early.
- Emphasize early and consistent family communication with clear, easy-to-understand messaging.
- Ensure multi-tiered systems of supports are utilized and documented for all students.

Policy Criteria

1. Defining “Significantly Off-Track” Students

LEA retention policies should clearly include both the attendance and academic criteria used to identify a student is “Significantly Off-Track” throughout the school year.

Generally, students should be defined as significantly off-track if they meet the following criteria at any point within the school year:

Attendance	Academic Performance
<p>On-track to miss at least ten percent of the school year.</p> <p>Typically, 18 days of a 180 day-school year is the threshold for students to be considered chronically absent.</p> <p>For example, a student who missed 3 out of the first 45 days of school would be considered “Off-Track”.</p> <p>For more information, see Appendix D.</p>	<p>Performed below grade-level expectations in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics based on prior year state assessments, starting with 4th grade students based on 3rd grade state assessment results;</p> <p><i>(i.e. performed at Level 1- Did not Meet Expectations on both RICAS ELA and Math)</i></p> <p>and:</p> <p>is off-track in ELA and Math in the current school year based off of locally defined academic performance criteria, such as LEA interim assessment data and/or grades.</p>

2. Communicating “Promotion in Doubt” Status and Supports

As part of an LEA’s retention policies, LEAs must communicate clearly, early, and often, starting with the end of first academic quarter and at least on a quarterly basis afterwards. Additionally, LEAs should automatically issue a “*Promotion in Doubt*” letter to the student’s parent/guardian, in their preferred home language, once any student has been identified as being “Significantly Off-Track.”

The school or LEA should notify and document communication to the parent/guardian through multiple modes, both written and verbal, (letter, email, phone call, etc.) within two (2) weeks of identifying the student as “Significantly Off-Track.”

Knowing that past attendance patterns predict future attendance patterns, these communications are critical to ensure that a clear, early signal is sent to families that more intensive support is needed for their child to get back on track in their academic journey.

To help every student succeed, schools should identify as early as possible when a student is at risk of not being promoted to the next grade. This can be based on patterns from the previous school year or, at the latest, by the end of the first academic quarter. Early identification allows schools to provide timely, targeted, and comprehensive support that gives students the best chance to improve and get back on track. Acting early is key to helping students succeed.

As part of engagement with families, LEAs should clearly communicate— with a translator or interpretation if necessary— the supports that will be provided to students to get them back on track.

These supports should be documented as part of an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) in alignment with the LEA’s pre-existing Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework.

- Given that retention determinations should be made in alignment within the MTSS framework, LEAs should use the opportunity of updating their retention policy to also consider strengthening their MTSS policies and respective interventions.
- Example interventions may include, but not be limited to, targeted academic assistance, access to out-of-school time programs, and attendance improvement plans.
- Please see Appendix C for more information about an MTSS framework and possible approaches LEAs may take to strengthen their academic and attendance-related interventions.

LEAs are expected to continue to communicate frequently with families about the status of their child’s attendance and academic performance throughout the year, especially as it pertains to the student’s readiness to matriculate to the next grade.

RIDE has provided a “*Promotion in Doubt*” letter template to support this frequent, clear, and candid, communication (see Appendix A and B).

3. Making Retention Decisions Based on Attendance and Academic Performance

Retaining a student should always be the last resort. The LEA's retention policy should include the following considerations when reviewing and making student retention decisions based upon attendance and academic performance:

Focus on Elementary and Middle Grades

Intervening early is key. LEAs should focus retention-based decisions on elementary and middle grades, with a particular focus on 4th grade students¹ prior to these students matriculating to 5th grade, and 7th grade students prior to these students matriculating to the 8th grade.

LEAs should ensure students are being set up for success at each grade, and especially at moments of critical academic transitions.

Align with a Multi-Tiered System of Supports Framework

An LEA's retention policy should outline promotion and retention procedures in alignment with the LEA's existing Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework for both student attendance and academic performance. Given the seriousness and complexity of retention decisions, retention determinations should be a last resort only once all other options and interventions in alignment with the MTSS framework have been exhausted.

An illustrative, but not exhaustive, list of MTSS supports that could be utilized might include, but not be limited to:

- In-person or online high dosage tutoring
- Research-based interventions
- Transportation assistance
- Housing assistance
- Connections with school or community-based social services
- School-based mental health services
- Out of school time providers
- [Learn365](#) programming at the municipality level
- Community partners
- Culturally relevant enrichment opportunities
- Providing a parent liaison to ensure parents are informed and involved
- Providing a family navigator to connect families with resources and provide support

¹ 4th grade students are identified as a focus, given 4th grade will be the first year that LEAs will be able to use prior year state assessment results (3rd grade) to initially identify whether or not a student is "Significantly Off-Track" inclusive of state assessment results.

Review is Data-Driven, Determination is Team-Based

Each LEA should assemble a team to conduct a team-based, data-driven review to inform retention decisions.

This team should be integrated into an existing school MTSS structure, attendance team structure, or school improvement team structure. Team members may include:

- Classroom teacher(s)
- School counselor or social worker
- School administrator
- Family engagement coordinator or liaison
- Staff supporting differently-abled students (if applicable)
- Multilingual learner specialist (if applicable)
- Attendance or MTSS team member

The review should include, at a minimum, a review of student attendance, local student performance data (such as interim assessments and student grades), and state assessment data, as available, to inform retention decisions that are aligned to LEA promotion criteria.

The team may also review potential additional evidence to consider good cause exemptions from retention, such as, but not limited to: a student's differently-abled or multilingual learner status, being identified as a youth in care, medical issues that have impacted student attendance/performance, or participation in other programs or interventions that will support a student getting back on-track if promoted to the next grade.

The review should also clearly include the team's consultation with parents, families, or guardians, prior to making any retention decision.

As identified above, retention determinations should be made only after exhausting all other potential supports and determining - inclusive of parent/guardian input - that retaining the student is in the best long-term interests of the student.

Intensive Supports for Retained Students

For any student that is retained, the LEA must create an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) for the student for the upcoming school year that ensures the student will receive the intensive attendance, academic, and student-focused supports necessary to get the student back on-track.

If there are extenuating circumstances that the school or LEA is aware of, those circumstances should be given all due and fair consideration in the planning and support process for the student.

4. RIDE’s Retention Data Collection

In developing this *Guidance*, RIDE explored multiple years of data through RIDE’s public retention data collection, which is required for Local Education Agencies (LEAs). The data allows RIDE to monitor and understand historical patterns, while also seeking to uncover trends.

RIDE continues to require LEAs to collect and submit data including reporting historical retentions longitudinally and through disaggregation by grade, school, LEA, race, gender, free-reduced lunch status, multilingual learner status, and differently-abled status.

This data allows RIDE to perform ongoing and annual reviews, as well as monitoring of retentions across the state prior to, and after, the release of this *Guidance*.

5. Special Considerations for Youth in Care

Retention decisions for students who are also children or youth in care will require heightened scrutiny and intentionality.

For the purposes of this *Guidance*, the phrase “youth in care” is intended to encompass any child or youth who are living in a temporary or permanent placement outside of their biological family home — inclusive of foster care, kinship care, other out-of-home placements, or those who have experienced state care and/or adoption.

Evidence suggests that regular school attendance is incredibly important for youth in care. Research also indicates that these students often face significant disruptions to their education, including placement changes, trauma, and inconsistent access to academic supports.

As such, attendance and academic achievement data may reflect systemic barriers the student is facing, occurring within the context of youth in care.

For these students, LEAs must collaborate with child welfare representatives, educational advocates, and caregivers in order to ensure that all supports have been explored - and that retention is in the student’s long-term best interest.

Retention should not be used as a default response to instability; however, due to the academic and social impact of instability, retention may, in fact, be in the student’s best interest.

6. Additional Considerations

Data Quality

Greater uniformity and improvement in data quality will improve the ability of teams to make data-informed decisions that are best for students.

LEAs should ensure that appropriate attendance and absence codes are utilized to record when students are present or absent.

Please refer to Section 4 regarding additional important data collections for monitoring and reporting.

Appeals

Families should review their school's specific procedures for handling appeals, as they may vary. LEA policies should include clear, step-by-step, procedures for parent/guardian to appeal any student retention decision, including information on initial steps a family can take.

1. **Start with the School Principal:** Discuss the concern directly with the principal to seek a resolution.
2. **Meet with the Superintendent:** If the issue isn't resolved, request a meeting with your LEA's superintendent.
3. **Present to the School Committee:** If needed, bring the matter to your local school committee at its next meeting.
4. **Appeal to the Commissioner:** If you are not satisfied with the school committee's decision, as part of a standard process, you may [file an appeal with the Commissioner's Office](#).

Given the time sensitive nature, and importance of, student retention decisions, RIDE is committed to expediting any properly submitted student retention appeals.

Advised Prohibitions

LEA should also be mindful of the following prohibitions when developing and/or updating retention policies:

- Do not allow social promotion based solely on age and grade level alone, except as provided by applicable federal and state law.
- No prekindergarten (PK) students should be retained.
- Kindergarten students should not be retained unless there is an attendance problem, or special circumstances discussed with school and LEA administration, in conjunction with parents/guardians.
- No student should experience retention more than once in their K-12 education, unless expressly agreed upon by their parents/guardians.

Appendix A: Notification of Promotion-In-Doubt Template

School Letterhead

Notification of Promotion-In-Doubt *Due to Attendance and Performance*

Date

Dear Parent or Guardian of **Student Name**,

We monitor students' work and attendance throughout the year to track their readiness for the next grade level. We believe **your child is not yet performing at the level necessary to be promoted** to the next grade. It is possible your child may remain in the same grade for the next school year unless they make significant progress in their attendance and academics.

Student Name is in danger of not meeting the requirements for promotion to the next grade.

There is **still time for your child to improve**. We encourage you to make an appointment with your child's teacher, school counselor, or school administrator to discuss ways we can come together to support their academic progress. Please schedule an appointment and learn more about our promotion policy here: [link](#)

School attendance is a powerful predictor of student outcomes. Research shows that chronic absenteeism, or missing just 2 days of school per month or 18 days in an academic year, is associated with a number of negative consequences for students, including lower achievement, disengagement from school, course failure, and an increased risk of dropping out. We know some absences are unavoidable, but any absence makes it more difficult for students to keep up with the daily learning needed to grow and succeed.

Thank you for your commitment to your child's education. Together, we can help your child learn the skills they need to be successful in their future.

Sincerely,

Principal Signature

Principal Name

Please cut on the dotted line, sign below, and return this slip to **contact name at school name**.

I have received a copy of the "Promotion-in-Doubt" notice. I understand my child may remain in the same grade level for next school year unless they make significant progress.

Child's Name

Grade

Parent or Guardian's Signature

Today's Date

Appendix B: Notification of Prior Year Pattern Template

School Letterhead

Notification of Prior Year Pattern *Past Patterns of Attendance and Performance*

Date

Dear Parent or Guardian of **[Student Name]**,

Welcome to a new academic year. As part of our commitment to supporting all students' success, we are writing to inform you of patterns in **[Student Name]'s** attendance and academic performance from the previous school year that may affect their progress this year. Our records indicate that your child experienced one or more of the following last year:

- **Chronic absenteeism** (missing 10% or more of the school year, or approximately 18 days)
- **Consistently low academic performance**, including difficulty meeting grade-level expectations

These patterns can be early indicators of ongoing academic challenges if not addressed. While this is not a formal promotion-in-doubt notice, we want to bring this to your attention now—at the start of the year—so that we can work together to ensure **[Student Name]** receives the support they need to stay on track.

School attendance is one of the strongest predictors of student success. Even just 2 absences a month can significantly affect a student's ability to keep up with instruction and progress academically. Similarly, consistent academic support and engagement from both school and home are key to helping students grow and meet grade-level expectations.

We encourage you to:

- Connect with your child's **teacher, school counselor, or administrator** to discuss your child's needs
- Explore available resources for academic and attendance support
- Monitor attendance and progress closely in partnership with the school

Thank you for your continued commitment to your child's success. With strong communication and partnership, we are confident that **[Student Name]** can have a successful year.

Sincerely,

[Principal Name]

Please cut on the dotted line, sign below, and return this slip to **contact name at school name**.

I have received a copy of the "Prior Year Pattern" notice. I understand my child may remain in the same grade level for next school year unless they make significant progress.

Child's Name

Grade

Parent or Guardian's Signature

Today's Date

Appendix C: Resources for MTSS and Academic or Attendance Supports

Note: Clicking on the hyperlinks will take you directly to additional support information and material.

Intervention/Support	Description/Resources
AttendanceMattersRI	The central hub for resources and attendance supports in Rhode Island.
AttendanceWorks	Leading national research on implementing practices to reduce chronic absenteeism.
BRIDGE-RI	Designed to increase school and district implementation of MTSS and evidence-based practices, including attendance interventions , with fidelity by providing resources and effective learning opportunities for educators.
MTSS Guidance	A framework to increase student achievement and social and emotional competencies through prevention and intervention in general education.
Historical Data Dashboards	Interactive, chronic absenteeism trend data from 2017-2024.
Attendance Leaderboard	Daily updated dashboard of all public schools in Rhode Island, ranked by their chronic absenteeism rates and reductions in chronic absenteeism from the prior year.
PLP Guidance	Supports designed for schools to develop Personal Literacy Plans for all K-5 students who are at risk of reading failure.
Even More Data Dashboards	A suite of 6 additional interactive and dynamic dashboards looking at chronic absenteeism in different ways, including geographic, achievement data, and trend data.
Student Data Portal	Districts, school administrators, and teachers can access student assessment data through the "Student Data Portal" (SDP) app within the RIDE Portal. Instructional video for using SDP

Intervention/Support	Description/Resources
Curriculum Frameworks	<p>RIDE is committed to ensuring all students have access to high-quality curriculum and instruction as essential components of a rigorous education that prepares every student for success in college and/or their career.</p> <p>As part of this effort, RIDE has developed curriculum frameworks for ELA/literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies drawing on the expertise of an interdisciplinary team of educators.</p>
High-Quality Curriculum Materials	<p>Rhode Island is committed to ensuring all students have access to consistent and high-quality curriculum materials (HQCM).</p> <p> Curriculum Visualization Tool Comprehensive Literacy Guidance Structured Literacy Math Screening Guidance </p>
Multilingual Learners	<p>RIDE uses multilingual learners (MLLs) to refer to the same population in federal policy as English learners (ELs). This term reflects the agency’s asset-based approach in serving students who come to Rhode Island schools with broad linguistic repertoires.</p> <p>All multilingual learners (MLLs) come to our classrooms with tremendous cultural, linguistic, and intellectual resources, along with the right to high-quality education.</p> <p>Our educational systems are responsible for supporting MLLs in cultivating these strengths through integrated content and language instruction, enrichment opportunities, and a whole-child approach to teaching and learning.</p>
Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, & Dyscalculia Resources	<p>RIDE is highlighting supports and resources regarding dyslexia and related disorders to help educators and families work together to better support students who struggle with reading, writing, and math.</p>
Special Education	<p>Facilitated IEP/504 Meetings are now being offered by the Rhode Island Department of Education. For more information or to request a facilitator at an IEP or 504 meeting, see the Facilitated IEP/504 Meeting page.</p>
Professional Learning	<p>High-quality professional learning is an integral part of a comprehensive talent management system that develops, supports, grows, and retains educators throughout their careers.</p>

MTSS Guidance

A [Multi-Tiered System of Supports](#) (MTSS) provides a framework to increase student achievement and social and emotional competencies through prevention and intervention in general education.

PLP Guidance

The Rhode Island (RI) General Assembly is committed to improving students' reading achievement as evidenced within [RI General Law 16-7.1-2\(c\)](#), requiring schools to develop [Personal Literacy Plans](#) (PLP) for all K-5 students who are at risk of reading failure.

While the law uses the term “program,” it is important to note that the word “program” used here refers to a structure of supports utilized to improve a student’s reading level, not a commercial reading program.

Appendix D: Table Demonstrating Cumulative Impact of Missing Two Days Per Month

Month	Days Absent This Month	Total Days Absent So Far	Potential Possible Impact
September	2 days	2 days	Missed critical routines & academic foundation
October	2 days	4 days	Starting to fall behind in key subjects
November	2 days	6 days	Missed review time before tests or breaks
December	2 days	8 days	Gaps in learning increase before holiday break
January	2 days	10 days	Missed catch-up time at start of new term
February	2 days	12 days	Falling behind in projects and test prep
March	2 days	14 days	Risk of not mastering grade-level standards
April	2 days	16 days	Struggling with spring assessments
May	2 days	18 days	Now considered chronically absent
June	2 days	20 days	Missed final instruction, end-of-year review; may be retained

Appendix E: Five Immediate Steps Families Can Take to Maximize Learning Time

1. **Attend school consistently:** If your children are healthy, they should be in school.
2. **Review the calendar:** Plan your vacation to align with the school calendar so your children do not fall behind their peers.
3. **Get academic help:** Investigate after-school learning, tutoring, or online programs to help students in subjects where they struggle.
4. **Connect with your school’s attendance team:** These experts may be able to help you problem-solve and address barriers to better school attendance.
5. **Get referrals:** If your child or your family are having serious health or behavioral issues, work with your school to get connected to professional help.

Appendix F: Glossary of Terms / Acronyms

504 Plan	Ensures equal access to education for disabled students
Chronically Absent	On-track to miss 10% of school days in one school year
HQCM	High-Quality Curriculum Material
IEP	Individualized Education Program
ILP	Individualized Learning Plan
LEA	Local Education Agency (for example: School Districts)
MTSS	Multi-Tiered System of Supports
PLP	Personal Literacy Plans
Youth in Care	Youth who are living outside of their family home

Authorship Note: This *Attendance and Academic Achievement Guidance* was prepared by the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, led by Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green, with the support of the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education.

RIDE engaged with Rhode Island students, families, educators, administrators, and community leaders while preparing this *Guidance*.

This *Guidance* is a living document which may be updated and revised to reflect changes, developments, or new information.