



Rhode Island Manufacturers Association
The Economic Engine for Rhode Island

May 9, 2024

The Honorable Joseph M. McNamara
Chairperson, House Committee on Education
Room 101, Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Testimony on House Bill 8190 – Relating to Education – Attendance for Success Act

Dear Chairperson McNamara,

I am writing on behalf of the Rhode Island Manufacturers Association in support of House Bill 8190 – Relating to Education – Attendance for Success Act. This legislation would require local education agencies (LEAs) and schools to maintain and make public attendance policies. It would also require LEAs to develop and make public attendance improvement plans that include data on student absenteeism, resources and supports to address absenteeism, and recommendations for improvement at the district and school level. Schools with chronic absenteeism rates of five percent or greater would also be required to develop attendance improvement plans. This legislation would also require schools to provide interventions for chronically and excessively absent students and would establish new reporting requirements for LEAs to the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE).

House Bill 8190 would serve as an important tool in addressing Rhode Island's crisis in chronic student absenteeism. According to the latest research compiled by the RI Public Expenditure Council, since the pandemic, absenteeism has ballooned both nationwide and here in Rhode Island. In fact, the state of Rhode Island has consistently been listed as one of the top ten states for chronic absenteeism. This issue is of critical importance to the success of Rhode Island's K-12 education system and beyond. Research has shown that students with high levels of absenteeism tend to have lower math and reading scores, lower graduation rates, and are less likely to pursue postsecondary education. The effects of absenteeism also have been shown to follow individuals into adulthood and have been linked to higher rates of poverty and involvement in the criminal justice system. High levels of absenteeism within a single school also have been linked to lower levels of learning and worse outcomes for all students.

While this issue continues to impact educational systems across the state, not enough is being done to bolster accountability and implement proven mechanisms to create lasting change. However, some RI districts have demonstrated best practices for improving attendance. For example, Central Falls reduced its chronic absenteeism rate by nearly 20 percentage points in just two years by establishing a data-driven approach, implementing an aggressive outreach plan,

led by family and community teams, and including a home visiting program that connects families as necessary with the services they need.

Using some of these same methods with demonstrated success, the proposed legislation is critical to curbing the chronic absenteeism crisis. Central Falls has seen significant improvement in student attendance by prioritizing the issue, using data effectively, and implementing a clear plan. However, without clear guidance and direction from the state, few districts have shown similar rates of improvement. House Bill 8190 would hold LEAs accountable for mapping out their approaches to improve attendance and would better enable the state to coordinate and facilitate local-level programs that follow evidence-driven strategies for mitigating chronic absenteeism. This is of critical importance given that teachers and local administrators interact most frequently with students and families about school issues and are consequently best positioned to positively affect student attendance.

RIMA additionally supports this legislation as a founding member of the Rhode Island Businesses for Better Education (RIBBE)—an alliance of businesses and business organizations committed to taking action that improves Rhode Island’s public K-12 system. RIBBE’s top priority is ensuring that every student is provided a high-quality education to meet the demands of Rhode Island’s future competitive economy, and the group has identified addressing chronic absenteeism as a legislative priority. RIBBE’s 2024 Legislative Priorities can be found [here](#). I am also a member of the Career Tech and Education board, Governor’s Workforce Board and Trustee for Davies Vocational. RIMA needs talented educated students to fill the pipeline of many upcoming retirees.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to support House Bill 8190.

Respectfully,

David M. Chenevert
Executive Director of Rhode Island Manufacturers Association