



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF COMMERCE

Submitted via email

May 8, 2024

The Honorable Representative Joseph M. McNamara
Chair, House Education Committee
State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H. 8190 – Relating to Education – Attendance for Success Act

Dear Chair McNamara and Members of the Committee,

I write on behalf of the Executive Office of Commerce (“Commerce”) to provide comment on House Bill 8190. Commerce joins the Department of Education in supporting this legislation as elementary and secondary education attendance is paramount in fostering an educated workforce in a competitive and evolving global economy.

By passing this common-sense legislation, proper safeguards can be established by local education agencies to identify and proactively remediate school attendance issues—even before they evolve into cases of chronic absenteeism.

Attached, please find the text from my January 14, 2024, opinion piece that was published in the Providence Journal pertaining to the importance of regular school attendance.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth M. Tanner".

Elizabeth M. Tanner, Esq.
Secretary of Commerce

CC. Honorable Members of the House Education Committee
Honorable Representative Mia A. Ackerman
Honorable Representative Susan R. Donovan
Lisa Cataldi, Committee Clerk
Nicole McCarty, Chief Legal Counsel

Enclosure

**Subject: The Role of School Attendance in Shaping Rhode Island's Future Workforce
As published in the Providence Journal on January 14, 2024**

Rhode Island Business Community,

I am writing to you as Rhode Island's Secretary of Commerce to highlight a matter that has far-reaching implications for our future workforce and our economy: the critical role of school attendance.

The correlation between school attendance and academic performance cannot be overstated. It is well-established that regular school attendance is a key predictor of academic success. Students who consistently attend school are more engaged, likely to have higher grades, perform better on standardized tests such as the SAT, and ultimately, have a wider range of educational and career-path opportunities.

Furthermore, the habit of regular attendance instilled in students transcends the classroom. It fosters a sense of responsibility, discipline, and commitment. These are qualities that are highly valued in the workforce. Employees who are punctual, dependable, and committed to their work are invaluable assets to any organization. The discipline of regular school attendance translates into a strong workforce, which is essential for the growth and success of our businesses and our economy.

However, despite the clear importance of regular attendance, chronic absenteeism, defined in Rhode Island as missing 10% of the school year, or 2 days a month, on average, is a major concern across the US, and in our state. Rates of chronic absenteeism soared in Rhode Island from 19% pre-pandemic to 34% in the 2021-2022 academic year and have yet to return to pre-pandemic levels.

To help address this challenge, Governor McKee and the Rhode Island Department of Education have taken decisive steps to improve school attendance rates and, consequently, student learning outcomes. Initiatives like Learn365RI, which partners municipalities, local education agencies and community-based organizations aim to expand high-quality learning experiences beyond the traditional 180 school days. Similarly, the #Back2schoolRI and #AttendanceMattersRI campaigns are focused on raising awareness and offering solutions to this issue. However, the success of these efforts largely depends on the active involvement of the entire community, including the business sector.

In light of this, I encourage you to support initiatives that promote school attendance in your communities. Whether it be through partnering with local schools on events that make school more engaging for students; establishing mentorship programs where students can understand the real-world applications of their education; creating internships where students can link academic success to future career opportunities; instituting flexible work schedules for student employees that accommodate their school commitments; offering scholarships or grants to students with good attendance; or implementing family-friendly policies to support your employees' ability to support their children's educational needs, your involvement can make a significant difference.

By supporting education, you are investing in our future leaders, innovators, and workforce. As leaders in the business community, you can help reinforce the message that education must be a priority. You can help ensure that our future workforce is not only skilled and educated but also understands the value of commitment and responsibility; values you seek when hiring new talent.

Education is the foundation upon which we build our future. Your support in any endeavor that help students show up and perform in school is not just an investment in individual students, it is an investment in the future of your businesses and our state.

Thank you for your attention to this issue and for your ongoing commitment to the betterment of our community and the growth of our economy.