



House Committee on Education
Chairman Joseph McNamara

Re: Support for H8190 – Attendance for Success Act

May 9, 2024

Dear Chairman McNamara and Members of the Committee,

The National Education Association Rhode Island (NEARI) supports Chairman McNamara's bill H8190. Chronic absenteeism is a widespread issue affecting rural, suburban, and urban school districts regardless of race, socio-economic status, or zip code.

This bill establishes a clear definition of "absent," which is crucial as current district definitions vary. Standardizing this definition will enable accurate comparisons between schools and districts while still encouraging students to attend school, even if they are late.

Each student who is chronically absent may have unique reasons for their absence. This bill mandates that districts delve into these reasons and address each student on an individual basis. **This necessitates the allocation of social workers and family/community engagement staff who can evaluate students, engage with families, and develop personalized plans.** Data from the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) shows that chronically absent students fall behind in Math and Language Arts proficiency on the RICAS assessment -- proving that **classroom instruction and interactions are vital to student learning and cannot be replaced.**

In addition to missing instruction, students also miss out on socialization with peers and trusted adults, which is critical to their development. Early identification and intervention are crucial in addressing chronic absenteeism.

While we support the bill, **we do have one concern regarding the implementation of a specific section (Page 9, lines 15-16) related to providing time for students to make up missed schoolwork. We look forward to collaborating with the sponsor, the committee, and RIDE to ensure that this provision is implemented as intended.**

Thank you for considering our perspective on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Mary Barden, Executive Director
National Education Association Rhode Island