

Student Absences and Excuses

The Public School Code requires all resident and migratory children of compulsory school age to attend an approved day school, except for students who are home-schooled or receiving home-bound instruction. Mental, physical or other "urgent reasons" are considered proper excuses for non-attendance but the law specifically states that the term "urgent reasons" shall be strictly construed and shall not permit irregular attendance. Students returning to school after periods of absence are required to submit parents' written explanations for such absences, and certification by a health care provider of medical reasons for absences may be required.

The school can be effective in educating a child only if the child is in school. Therefore, every effort should be exerted to have every child attend school regularly. Poor school attendance is usually symptomatic of a more serious problem. School personnel must work with parents to help the child resolve the underlying problem. In those cases where the underlying problem cannot be resolved, the school must still make every effort to have the child attend regularly. To this end, the Superintendent is charged with the responsibility of developing administrative regulations to carry out the objective of having every child attend school regularly. In addition, the superintendent shall direct each principal to develop procedures for attendance within the respective school.

Categories of absences include:

Excused Absences: Permissible excused absences from District Schools are: (1) personal illness, (2) doctor/dental appointments, (3) approved tutorial programs not offered by the district, (4) quarantine, (5) death in the immediate family, (6) traditionally-recognized religious holidays, (7) religious instruction as defined below, (8) approved educational travel, (9) approved 4-H/FFA/FHA participation in authorized Pennsylvania agricultural fairs, (10) court appearances and (11) other urgent reasons as approved by the District.

Unexcused Absences: The following constitute unexcused absences: (1) lack of a valid written excuse from the parent/guardian (and/or licensed health care provider, where deemed appropriate by the Principal), (2) absence because of parental neglect, (3) unapproved educational travel, (4) oversleeping, (5) working at home, and (6) other reasons not sanctioned under excused absences.

Unlawful Absences: Any unexcused absence for pupils of compulsory school age is also unlawful. Except as may be provided otherwise by applicable law, compulsory school age is the time from when the pupil enters first grade (but no later than age 8) to age 17 or graduation from high school, whichever occurs first. When a student is unlawfully absent, a notice will be sent to the parent/guardian.

Exceptions: In unusual circumstances a child may not be able to attend school for severe psychological or medical reasons. In such cases, parents must notify the Principal, provide supporting documentation from a licensed health care provider, and work with school officials to develop a plan to ensure that the child receives an appropriate education and that the parent does not violate state attendance laws. Temporary excuses based on medical, psychological or other urgent reasons may not exceed three (3) months: excusals anticipated to be over three (3) months shall be reviewed in consultation with the Pennsylvania Department of Education guidelines.

Each school shall publish and distribute a daily absentee list to the staff during the school day.

School contact with parents is to be made on the third day of consecutive absence of a student. In the case of students suspected of truancy, the contact is to be made the first day of absence.

Readmitting Absent Students - Excuses: Upon returning from an absence, a parent/guardian's written excuse or other appropriate verification note (including but not limited to certification by a licensed health care provider of medical reasons for absence where deemed appropriate by the Principal) must be presented to the homeroom teacher within three school days. If the excuse is not given to the homeroom teacher by the third day after return, the absence will be considered unexcused. The excuse must include the following information:

- a. Full name of student
- b. Date of absence
- c. Reason for absence
- d. Signature of parent/guardian (and/or licensed health care provider, where applicable)

The foregoing also applies to tardies.

Tardiness: Students who are not inside their assigned homerooms or classrooms when the late bell rings are considered tardy. Tardiness is considered excused or unexcused for the same reasons as excused or unexcused absences.

Early Dismissals: Parents and students are strongly encouraged to make personal appointments before or after school hours since being dismissed early from school can cause a disruption to the educational process. A written request from the parent that includes the reason for the request must be submitted in advance. The District may also require that students who receive approved early dismissals for medical or dental appointments bring an appointment notice from the doctor when the excuse is issued or when the student returns from the appointment. In exceptional circumstances, prior written notice may be waived, provided that in the case of an elementary or middle school student, the parent must personally appear at the school to request a child's release. In all circumstances, parents of high school students must also call the attendance office prior to the dismissal to request a release.

Class Cuts: Schools will develop a plan for immediate reporting and follow-up of students in school but not attending an assigned class. Accumulated class cuts can be converted to absences and used as a basis for legal action. A student who cuts class is subject to discipline by the teacher or principal and the parents shall be notified.

Pre-Approved Absences Including Educational Travel: The District recognizes that students may need to travel with parents for valid educational or family reasons. In such cases, pre-approval is required. Students requesting permission for such travel with parents must complete a Pre-Approved Absence Request Form at least five days in advance of the proposed trip, which when completed will explain their reason for the request and the duration of the trip. All trips must have some educational or family value for the student as predetermined by the Principal in order to be

counted as an excused absence. A pre-approved absence is to be no more than five school days in length and is to be taken with a parent(s) or person(s) in a parental relationship.

Students are required to make up any class work or tests that are missed during the pre-approved absence.

The District urges parents to refrain from scheduling pre-approved absences during the first or last week of the school year or during specified days when standardized tests or semester or final exams are being administered. Approval may be denied during these periods.

Students absent ten or more days of the semester will be refused permission. Also, students who, in the opinion of the Principal, as advised by professional staff, are performing less than satisfactorily will not be given permission to leave on a pre-approved absence. If the trip is taken without permission, the absence will be treated as an unexcused/unlawful absence.

Religious Holidays/Religious Instruction: Provisions are to be made in each school to excuse pupils from school for observance of bona fide religious holidays. A pupil's absence from school for bona fide religious holidays shall be recorded as an excused absence. There shall be no penalty attached to such an absence. In addition, students may be released from school for a total of not more than 36 hours per year in order to attend classes for religious instruction. In advance of the student's release, the parent or person acting in a parental role must identify and describe the instruction and the dates and hours for which the release time is requested. The parent must, following each such absence, furnish in writing to the Superintendent a statement attesting that the child did in fact attend the instruction and the dates and hours when such attendance took place.

Release time for religious instruction is considered an excused absence. The student is responsible for making up the work, quizzes, and/or tests missed during the released time.

School-Sanctioned Activities: Students may be released from school for approved participation in school-sponsored field trips, performances and co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. The student is responsible for making up the work, quizzes and/or tests during the released time. Students who, with approval, are participating in school sponsored activities are considered present. A Principal may deny requests to attend school sanctioned activities where the Principal, with the input of professional staff, determines that the student's grades and/or attendance record indicate that the request to miss class for the activity should not be granted.

Make Up Work: Students who are absent from school or are attending a school-sanctioned activity are required to make up the work missed in each class. It is the student's responsibility to make up work and pursue the successful completion of all class work missed.

Excessive Absenteeism: Absences beyond five days in a nine week report period should be cause for having the counselor involved with the student.

Students who miss 10 consecutive school days will be dropped from the active membership roll unless the school has evidence that the absence is legal or is pursuing compulsory attendance prosecution.

A maximum of ten days of cumulative lawful absences verified by parental notification (excluding absences

that have been pre-approved by the principal) may be permitted during a school year. All absences beyond ten cumulative days shall require an excuse from a physician.

Penalties for Unlawful Absence for Pupils of Compulsory School Age

a. First Offense: When a student has accumulated three days (or their equivalent) of unlawful absence as verified by the Principal or his/her designee, the parent is notified by certified mail by the Superintendent (or a Principal as the Superintendent's designee) with the First Offense Notice. The First Offense Notice shall advise the parent (1) of the dates of unlawful absences, and (2) that if another unlawful absence occurs more than three days after the date of the First Notice, the District will refer the matter to the district justice who may find a parent, guardian, etc., or student, guilty of a summary offense for failure to comply with compulsory attendance laws.

- TEPs - After the third unlawful absence, a school/family conference will be held to discuss the cause of the child's truancy and develop a mutually agreed-upon Truancy Elimination Plan (TEP). At the end of the conference, all parties should sign a comprehensive TEP that is agreed to by the school representative, the child and the parents and/or family.

b. Subsequent Offenses: A subsequent offense is any additional unlawful student absence (1) occurring after agreement to a TEP, or (2) if there is no agreement on a TEP, more than three days have passed after the date of the first notice.

An official notice of unlawful absence will be sent home by certified mail. The purpose of this correspondence is to inform the child's parent that the TEP has been violated, or, if there is no TEP, to inform the parent that the compulsory attendance requirements have been violated and to advise that the District will file the case with the district justice pursuant to applicable law without further notice.

c. The District and/or the district justice may also refer the child to the appropriate agency for services or possible disposition as a dependent child, pursuant to applicable law.

d. Students convicted of violating compulsory attendance laws face suspension of their driver's license or ineligibility to apply for a driver's license.

State regulations require that parents be provided copies of the district's attendance policy yearly, including the consequences and penalties associated with violation of school attendance requirements. To ensure that parents are aware of these issues, forms that include acknowledgement and understanding of attendance policies are to be signed by the parent/guardian and returned to the school.