

STUDENT ATTENDANCE POLICY

Preamble

Under Florida's compulsory school attendance law, each parent of a child within the compulsory attendance age is responsible for such child's school attendance. All children who have attained the age of six years, on, or before February 1st of the school year are required to attend school regularly during the entire school term. A student who attains the age of 16 years is not subject to compulsory school attendance if the student files a formal declaration of intent to terminate school enrollment and must be signed by the student and parent or legal guardian. Compulsory school requirements shall apply until the student turns eighteen, graduates or until the parent or legal guardian signs the declaration of intent to terminate school enrollment.

"Attendance" means being present at school or away from school on a school day and engaged in an educational activity which constitutes a part of the school-approved instructional program for the student. The parent has the responsibility to report any non-attendance and explain the cause of any school absence of a child. The superintendent has the responsibility to enforce the compulsory school attendance laws and has an obligation to notify the parent when no valid reason is found for a child's non-enrollment over a period of time.

The sole purpose of this policy is to set forth procedures as such are required under Florida's compulsory school attendance laws and the enforcement thereof.

The superintendent shall develop and distribute procedures that meet the school district's obligation regarding attendance under this policy, state statute and state rules and regulations, including the enforcement of school attendance requirements. The procedures must provide that schools track excused and unexcused absences and contact the home in the case of an unexcused absence from school, or absence for which the reason is unknown, to prevent the development of patterns of non-attendance.

I. Excused Absence

- A. Illness or other legitimate causes will be excused with the permission of the parent/guardian and the school principal, up to 15 days within the school year. After 15 days of absence, excused or unexcused, a student must have a doctor's verification for subsequent absences due to illness. In addition, the school shall also have the discretion to require that subsequent absences or tardinesses be accompanied by a statement explaining the reason for such absences and tardinesses. The legitimacy of a cause for being absent shall be determined by the building principal or designee based on the following criteria: (a) whether the reason for absence is equivalent in importance to the student's need to be in attendance; (b) the needs of the student and the student's family; (c) the number of absences accumulated by the student; and (d) other justifiable rationale.
- B. Schools must be notified of excused absences by either personal communication or written explanation from the parent/guardian in accordance with procedures established by the school. If the parent/guardian fails to provide notification, the absence will be recorded as unexcused.

- C. For students with chronic illnesses that may require more than the allowed 15 days of absences, the parent must provide a letter from the student's doctor stating that the student suffers with a chronic illness that will likely require more than 15 days of absences each year. This letter must be provided to the school each year that the condition continues. The parent may then call in illnesses beyond the 15 days without providing additional medical documentation.
 - D. Medical and dental appointments should be made after school hours. When this is not possible, students may be excused to fill these appointments. An excuse from the doctor or parent/guardian is required.
 - E. Religious holidays or religious instruction: Students may be excused from school for observance of established religious holidays or for religious instruction in accordance with School Board Policy 207. Where a student is absent for the observance of an established holiday or for religious instruction and the school has been so notified in accordance with the terms of this policy, such absence shall not disqualify the student from qualifying for an attendance recognition given by the school.
 - F. Autism Spectrum Disorder Therapy: Absences for student appointments to receive autism spectrum disorder therapy shall be excused upon parent request. The parent must notify the school of each day of the absence(s). Therapy includes, but is not limited to, applied behavioral analysis, speech therapy, and occupational therapy. Therapy must be provided by a licensed health care practitioner or behavior analyst certified pursuant to section 393.17, Fla. Stat. If a student with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder is continually sick and repeatedly absent, he or she must be under the supervision of a licensed health care practitioner or a certified behavior analyst certified pursuant to section 393.17, Fla. Stat. for the absences to be excused.
- II. Unexcused Absence
- A. The fact that the student's parent/guardian knew of the absence does not, in and of itself, require that the absence be recorded as an excused absence by school personnel.
 - B. Absence without notification of school officials by the parent/guardian is considered an unexcused absence.
 - C. Out-of-school suspensions are considered unexcused absences.
- III. Tardies/Lates/Early Checkouts
- A. A student shall be considered tardy when he or she arrives to school after the beginning of the official school day or is not in the assigned class at the official beginning of a class period. A parent/guardian shall notify the school as to the reason of the tardiness or early checkout.

- B. Early checkouts occur when a parent/guardian removes a student from class prior to the official end of the day.
 - C. Tardies and/or early checkouts will be excused with the permission of the parent/guardian and the school principal. The legitimacy of a cause for being tardy or checked out early shall be determined by the building principal or designee based on the following criteria: (a) whether the reason for absence is equivalent in importance to the student's need to be in attendance; (b) the needs of the student and the student's family; (c) the number of absences accumulated by the student; and (d) other justifiable rationale.
 - D. Schools shall have the discretion to establish attendance guidelines providing that an excessive number of tardies may impact a student's conduct or effort grade.
 - E. In cases of truancy and habitual truancy that are referred to the Problem Solving Team, tardies/early checkouts will be recognized and calculated in the truancy instances. For truancy purposes in the Problem Solving Team (PST) documentation that may be used for court action, five unexcused tardies and/or five unexcused checkouts will equal one unexcused absence.
- IV. Procedures for Addressing Absences
- A. Upon each unexcused absence, or absence for which the reason is unknown, the school principal or their designee should contact the parent to determine the reason for the absence.
 - B. If a student has had at least five unexcused absences within a calendar month or 10 unexcused absences within a 90-calendar day period, excluding out-of-school suspensions, school personnel should evaluate the attendance to determine if a pattern of non-attendance is developing. Unless there is clear evidence that the absences are not a pattern of non-attendance, the principal or designee shall refer the case to the school's Problem Solving Team. Teachers can consult with school social workers about attendance concerns at any point throughout the problem solving process. The Problem Solving Team chair, school representative, and school social worker will review the attendance reports to determine which students/cases are serious enough to forward to PST. Data determines whether the problem should be addressed through the PST or through a PST meeting designated for attendance concerns only. If the Problem Solving Team determines that a pattern of non-attendance is developing, whether the absences are excused or not, a meeting with the parent must be scheduled to identify potential remedies. If the initial meeting does not resolve the problem, the Problem Solving Team shall implement the following: (a) frequent attempts at communication between the teacher and the family; (b) evaluation for alternative education programs; or an (c) attendance contract.
 - C. A referral may be made to the school social worker if interventions implemented by the Problem Solving Team are not successful in resolving the truancy problem.

- D. When a student has accumulated 15 unexcused absences, excluding out-of-school suspensions, within a 90 calendar day period they have met the state's legal definition of habitual truancy. After appropriate interventions by the Problem Solving Team have been implemented, a referral may be forwarded to the agencies identified in F.S. 1003.27, if the truancy issue is not resolved.
- E. When a student reaches the age of 16, in order not to be subject to compulsory school attendance, the student must file a formal declaration with the school district acknowledging his or her intent to terminate enrollment in the school district. The declaration must acknowledge that terminating school enrollment is likely to reduce the student's earning potential and must be signed by both the student and the parent/legal guardian. The guidance counselor or other school personnel must conduct an exit interview with the student to determine the reasons for their decision to terminate school enrollment and actions that could be taken to keep the student in school. The student must be informed of opportunities to continue their education in a different environment, including adult education and GED test preparation. Additionally, the student must complete a survey intended to provide data on the student's reason for terminating enrollment and the actions taken by the schools to keep students enrolled in school.
- F. If the family notifies the school of their plans to leave for an extended amount of time, schools should encourage them to enroll their child in the school district where they are temporarily residing. If they agree, the student should be withdrawn with the appropriate code.

If it is learned that a family has left, but the parent/guardian has neglected to notify the school, the school should follow-up as with any attendance situation when a student is not attending. Attempt phone contact, send a letter, and if no response is received within a reasonable amount of time, follow-up with the school social work referral in attempts to obtain information on the status of the student.

If a student is not attending school even after proper procedures have been exhausted, schools should contact School Social Services for consultation. A student may not be withdrawn by the school until all avenues have been exhausted. Due to the fact that the district does not conduct the adult high school education program and therefore does not have access to confidential student information for students who are enrolled in that program, such students shall be coded as having been withdrawn from the district to enroll in the adult high school educational program. Such coding shall only be changed upon notice from the student or the student's parents.

- G. A student who attains the age of 18 years during the school year is not subject to compulsory school attendance beyond the date upon which he or she attains that age.
- H. When a student's accumulated unexcused tardies/unexcused checkouts, and/or unexcused absences (or a combination of both) reach 5 unexcused absences within a calendar month, the student's attendance history shall be reviewed to see if a pattern of non-attendance is occurring. The school can send the parent a 5-day

letter as documentation to communicate this information. A student with fewer accumulated unexcused tardies/checkouts may be considered for further intervention if patterns of non-attendance are developing.

V. Habitual Truancy

Habitual truancy is defined as 15 unexcused absences within a 90-calendar day period. When a student is habitually truant, the principal must ensure that the following actions required by procedures developed by the superintendent in accordance with statutory requirements have been followed, in order to determine the cause and attempt the remediation of the student's truancy. Parents who disagree with the remediation recommended shall have the right to meet with the Student Placement Committee to discuss the matter. If the parent is not satisfied with the action recommended by the Student Placement Committee, then the parent shall have the right to request a hearing before the school board.

VI. Parental Notification of Grades K-12 Student Absences

Parents/guardians are responsible for their child(ren)'s safe arrival either at school or onto the assigned bus. When a student is absent from school due to illness or other reasons, the parent/guardian is responsible for notifying the school, preferably the morning of the absence. If the school has not been notified about a student's absence, school staff will attempt to notify the parent by telephone.

VII. Grades 9-12

Schools providing services to students in grades 9-12 shall have the discretion, on a school-wide basis only, to implement a requirement that where a student is absent more than nine days in a semester and does not have an overall grade of "C" or higher in a course, including make-up work, such student shall not be awarded credit in that course until the student demonstrates proficiency (70% or higher). If the determination is made to exercise this discretion, the school shall establish the method for demonstrating proficiency, e.g., attaining a grade of 70 or higher on the end of semester exam.

VIII. Make-up Work

For an excused absence a reasonable time will be allowed for the student to complete make-up work requirements for credit as set forth in individual school policy. Make-up work for unexcused absences shall be governed by the terms established in each individual school's policy, which may include the assessment of a letter grade penalty. However, students who are suspended shall be provided with specific homework assignments to be completed.

IX. Educational Trips

School sponsored trips are part of the educational program and are not to be considered as unexcused absences. Written permission by the parent is required to participate.

X. Leaving School Grounds

No student may be permitted to leave school grounds prior to dismissal except by combined approval of parent(s) or legal guardian and the principal or designee. Exceptions to the requirement of approval by the parent/guardian shall be where a high school allows for an open lunch, and communicates that fact to the parents, or where the student is leaving campus to participate in an academic program with the approval of the parent/guardian. No student may leave the school grounds during the school hours without following duly authorized procedures.

XI. Driving Privileges

Students who, due to failure to comply with attendance requirements may lose their driving privileges, may seek a hardship waiver for a personal or family hardship to retain driving privileges for employment or medical care. The student may request a hardship waiver from the building principal. If the request is denied, the student may appeal the denial to the Student Placement Committee. If the appeal is denied, the student may then pursue the matter through a hearing before the school board.

XII. Military Dependents

Florida Statutes Section 1000.36, Article V(E), Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, states that a student whose parent or legal guardian is an active duty member of the uniformed services, as defined by the Compact, and has been called to duty for, or is on leave from, or immediately returned from deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting, shall be granted additional excused absences at the discretion of the school superintendent. The additional excused absences are to allow the student to visit with his or her parent or legal guardian for the reasons specified.

Section 1003.05, Florida Statutes, provides additional information regarding the smooth transition to school districts for military dependents and gives first preference to special academic programs, including magnet programs.

XIII. Virtual Instruction

The district full-time virtual instruction program is required by state law to report attendance for every student enrolled. The nature of a virtual course allows students the flexibility of working in their course at any time from any place; therefore, attendance is based on weekly monitoring of student progress and pacing in each course. Students enrolled in Virtual Off-Campus-Instruction are required to login to every course, every day of the school week. This means attendance must be taken for full-time virtual students and these students have the same guidelines related to truancy as students in brick-and-mortar schools.

Legal Authority:

Section 1001.41, Florida Statutes

Laws Implemented:

Sections 1001.42, 1002.20, 1003.02, 1003.04, 1003.21, 1003.231, 1003.23, 1003.24, 1003.26, Florida Statutes

History:

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