

Book	Policy Manual
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Purpose

The Joint Operating Committee recognizes that attendance is an important factor in educational success, and supports a comprehensive approach to identify and address attendance issues.[\[1\]](#)

Authority

Attendance shall be required of all students during the days and hours that school is in session, except that authorized school staff may excuse a student for temporary absences upon receipt of satisfactory evidence of mental, physical, or other urgent reasons that may reasonably cause the student's absence.[\[2\]](#)[\[3\]](#)[\[4\]](#)[\[5\]](#)[\[6\]](#)[\[7\]](#)

The Joint Operating Committee shall establish and enforce attendance requirements, in accordance with applicable laws and regulations, Joint Operating Committee policy and administrative regulations.

Definitions

Compulsory school age shall mean the period of a child's life from the time the child's parents/guardians elect to have the child enter school, which shall be no later than eight (8) years of age, until the child reaches seventeen (17) years of age. The term does not include a child who holds a certificate of graduation from a regularly accredited, licensed, registered or approved high school.[\[8\]](#)[\[9\]](#)

Habitually truant shall mean six (6) or more school days of unexcused absences during the current school year by a child subject to compulsory school attendance.[\[9\]](#)

Truant shall mean having incurred three (3) or more school days of unexcused absences during the current school year by a child subject to compulsory school attendance.[\[9\]](#)

Person in parental relation shall mean a:[\[9\]](#)

1. Custodial biological or adoptive parent.
2. Noncustodial biological or adoptive parent.
3. Guardian of the person of a child.
4. Person with whom a child lives and who is acting in a parental role of a child.

This definition shall not include any county agency or person acting as an agent of the county agency in the jurisdiction of a dependent child as defined by law.[\[10\]](#)

School-based or community-based attendance improvement program shall mean a program designed to improve school attendance by seeking to identify and address the underlying reasons for a child's absences. The term may include an educational assignment in an alternative education program, provided the program does not include a program for disruptive youth established pursuant to Article XIX-C of the Pennsylvania Public School Code.[\[9\]](#)

Delegation of Responsibility

The Director or designee shall annually notify students, parents/guardians, staff, participating school districts, the local children and youth agency and local Magisterial District Judges about the school's attendance policy by publishing such policy in student handbooks, newsletters, school website and other efficient communication methods.[\[1\]](#)

The Director or designee, in coordination with the building administrator, shall be responsible for the implementation and enforcement of this policy.

The Director or designee shall develop administrative regulations for the attendance of students which:

1. Govern the maintenance of attendance records in accordance with law.[\[11\]](#)[\[12\]](#)
2. Detail the process for submission of requests and excuses for student absences.
3. Detail the process for written notices, School Attendance Improvement Conferences, School Attendance Improvement Plans, and referrals to a school-based or community-based attendance improvement program, the local children and youth agency, or the appropriate judge.
4. Ensure that students legally absent have an opportunity to make up work.

Guidelines

Compulsory School Attendance Requirements

School staff shall coordinate with a student's school district of residence to ensure students comply with the requirements for compulsory school attendance.[\[5\]](#)

A student shall be considered in attendance if present at any place where school is in session by authority of the Joint Operating Committee; the student is receiving approved tutorial instruction, or health or therapeutic services; the student is engaged in an approved and properly supervised independent study, work-study or career education program; or the student is receiving approved homebound instruction.[\[2\]](#)[\[5\]](#)[\[13\]](#)[\[14\]](#)[\[15\]](#)[\[16\]](#)

Excused/Lawful Absence

For purposes of this policy, the following conditions or situations constitute reasonable cause for absence from the school:

1. Illness, including if a student is dismissed by designated school staff during school hours for health-related reasons.[\[3\]](#)[\[6\]](#)
2. Obtaining professional health care or therapy service rendered by a licensed practitioner of the healing arts in any state, commonwealth or territory.[\[6\]](#)
3. Quarantine.
4. Family emergency.
5. Recovery from accident.

6. Required court attendance.
7. Death in family.
8. Participation in a project sponsored by a statewide or countywide 4-H, FFA or combined 4-H and FFA group, upon prior written request.[\[1\]\[6\]](#)
9. Observance of a religious holiday observed by a bona fide religious group, upon prior written parental request.[\[17\]](#)
10. Nonschool-sponsored educational tours or trips, if the following conditions are met:
[\[6\]\[18\]](#)
 - a. The parent/guardian submits a written request for excusal prior to the absence.
 - b. The student's participation has been approved by the Director and/or Superintendent of the student's district of residence, or their designee.
 - c. The adult directing and supervising the tour or trip is acceptable to the parents/guardians, the Director and/or Superintendent of the student's district of residence, or their designee.
11. College or postsecondary institution visit, with prior approval.
12. Other urgent reasons. Urgent reasons shall be strictly construed and do not permit irregular attendance.[\[3\]\[6\]](#)

The school may limit the number and duration of nonschool-sponsored educational tours or trips for which excused absences may be granted to a student during the school year.

Temporary Excusals -

The following students may be temporarily excused from the requirements of attendance at the school:

1. Students receiving tutorial instruction in a field not offered in the school's curricula from a properly qualified tutor approved by the Director, when the excusal does not interfere with the student's regular program of studies.[\[5\]\[13\]](#)
2. Students participating in a religious instruction program, if the following conditions are met:[\[17\]\[19\]](#)
 - a. The parent/guardian submits a written request for excusal. The request shall identify and describe the instruction, and the dates and hours of instruction.
 - b. The student shall not miss more than thirty-six (36) hours per school year in order to attend classes for religious instruction.
 - c. Following each absence, the parent/guardian shall submit a statement attesting that the student attended the instruction, and the dates and hours of attendance.

3. School age children unable to attend school upon recommendation of the school physician and a psychiatrist or school psychologist, or both, and with approval of the Secretary of Education.[\[16\]](#)

Parental Notice of Absence -

Absences shall be treated as unlawful until the school receives a written excuse explaining the absence, to be submitted within three (3) days of the absence.

A maximum of ten (10) days of cumulative lawful absences verified by parental notification shall be permitted during a school year. All absences beyond ten (10) cumulative days shall require an excuse from a licensed practitioner of the healing arts.

Unexcused/Unlawful Absence

For purposes of this policy, absences which do not meet the criteria indicated above shall be considered an unexcused/unlawful absence.

An out-of-school suspension may not be considered an unexcused absence.[\[9\]](#)

Parental Notification -

School staff shall provide notice to the person in parental relation upon each incident of unexcused absence.

Enforcement of Compulsory Attendance Requirements

Student is Truant -

When a student has been absent for three (3) days during the current school year without a lawful excuse, school staff shall provide notice to the person in parental relation who resides in the same household as the student within ten (10) school-days of the student's third unexcused absence.[\[20\]](#)

The notice shall:[\[20\]](#)

1. Be in the mode and language of communication preferred by the person in parental relation;
2. Include a description of the consequences if the student becomes habitually truant; and
3. When transmitted to a person who is not the biological or adoptive parent, also be provided to the child's biological or adoptive parent, if the parent's mailing address is on file with the school and the parent is not precluded from receiving the information by court order.

The notice may include the offer of a School Attendance Improvement Conference.[\[20\]](#)

If the student incurs additional unexcused absences after issuance of the notice and a School Attendance Improvement Conference was not previously held, school staff shall offer a School Attendance Improvement Conference.[\[20\]](#)

School Attendance Improvement Conference -

School staff shall notify the person in parental relation in writing and by telephone of the date and time of the School Attendance Improvement Conference.[\[20\]](#)

The purpose of the School Attendance Improvement Conference is to examine the student's absences and reasons for the absences in an effort to improve attendance with or without additional services.[\[9\]](#)

The following individuals shall be invited to the School Attendance Improvement Conference:[\[9\]](#)

1. The student.
2. The student's person in parental relation.
3. Other individuals identified by the person in parental relation who may be a resource.
4. Appropriate school personnel.
5. Recommended service providers.

Neither the student nor the person in parental relation shall be required to participate, and the School Attendance Improvement Conference shall occur even if the person in parental relation declines to participate or fails to attend the scheduled conference.[\[20\]](#)

The outcome of the School Attendance Improvement Conference shall be documented in a written School Attendance Improvement Plan. The Plan shall be retained in the student's file. A copy of the Plan shall be provided to the person in parental relation, the student and appropriate school staff.[\[20\]](#)

The school may not take further legal action to address unexcused absences until after the date of the scheduled School Attendance Improvement Conference has passed.[\[20\]](#)

Student is Habitually Truant -

When a student under fifteen (15) years of age is habitually truant, school staff:[\[21\]](#)

1. Shall refer the student to:
 - a. A school-based or community-based attendance improvement program; or
 - b. The local children and youth agency.
2. May file a citation in the office of the appropriate judge against the person in parental relation who resides in the same household as the student.[\[21\]](#)

When a student fifteen (15) years of age or older is habitually truant, school staff shall:[\[21\]](#)

1. Refer the student to a school-based or community-based attendance improvement program; or
2. File a citation in the office of the appropriate judge against the student or the person in parental relation who resides in the same household as the student.

School staff may refer a student who is fifteen (15) years of age or older to the local children and youth agency, if the student continues to incur additional unexcused absences after being referred to a school-based or community-based attendance improvement program, or if the student refuses to participate in such program.[\[21\]](#)

Regardless of age, when school staff refer a habitually truant student to the local children and youth agency or file a citation with the appropriate judge, school staff shall provide verification that the school held a School Attendance Improvement Conference.[\[21\]](#)

Filing a Citation -

A citation shall be filed in the office of the appropriate judge whose jurisdiction includes the school in which the student is or should be enrolled.[\[22\]](#)

Additional citations for subsequent violations of the compulsory school attendance requirements may only be filed against a student or person in parental relation in accordance with the specific provisions of the law.[\[22\]](#)

Special Needs and Accommodations

If a truant or habitually truant student may qualify as a student with a disability, and require special education services or accommodations, the Director shall be notified and shall take action to address the student's needs in accordance with applicable law, regulations and Joint Operating Committee policy.[\[23\]](#)[\[24\]](#)[\[25\]](#)[\[26\]](#)

For students with disabilities who are truant or habitually truant, the appropriate team shall be notified and shall address the student's needs in accordance with applicable law, regulations and Joint Operating Committee policy.[\[23\]](#)[\[24\]](#)[\[26\]](#)

Discipline

The school shall not expel or impose out-of-school suspension, disciplinary reassignment or transfer for truant behavior.[\[20\]](#)