

Students

Attendance, Excused Absences and Truancy

Connecticut state law requires parents to cause their children to attend school regularly during the hours and terms the public school is in session. The responsibility for regular attendance rests with the students' parents, guardians or with the students themselves when they become of legal age.

In order for students to develop to their full potential, the Board of Education deems it essential that students attend school on a regular basis. The learning experiences that occur in the classroom are considered to be meaningful and essential components of the learning process. Time lost from class tends to be irretrievable in terms of opportunity for instructional interaction.

A student is considered to be "in attendance" if present at his/her assigned school, or an activity sponsored by the school (e.g., field trip), for at least half of the regular school day. A student who is serving an out-of-school suspension or expulsion should always be considered absent.

Excused Absence

The Board believes a student should not be absent from school without the parents' knowledge and consent, therefore verification of an absence should be in writing by parent or guardian.

For absences one through nine, an absence shall be considered "excused" when a child does not attend school and appropriate documentation is provided by the student's parent/guardian approving the absence, due to:

- A. Illness or injury,
- B. Death in the immediate family,
- C. Religious obligation,
- D. Court appearance,
- E. School sponsored activity,
- F. Lack of transportation that is normally provided by a district other than the one the students attends, (This reason does not require documentation.)
- G. An emergency, or
- H. Other exceptional circumstances and extraordinary educational opportunities pre-approved by a District administrator and in accordance with SDE guidelines. Written excuse for such absences should be submitted to school officials by the child's parent or guardian. All other absences with or without written explanation shall be considered unexcused.

For the tenth absence and all others thereafter, the same reasons cited above shall constitute "unexcused" absence, even if the parent excuses the absence. Documentation is required for the tenth absence and all others thereafter, including documentation by a medical professional is required for illness, regardless of the length of the absence in order for the absence to be considered excused.

Such documentation includes a signed note from the student's parent/guardian, a signed note from a school official that spoke in person with the parent/guardian regarding the absence, or a note confirming the absence by the school nurse or by a licensed medical professional, as appropriate. Documentation should explain the nature of and the reason for the absence as well as the length of absence. Separate documentation must be submitted for each incidence of absenteeism.

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Unexcused Absence

Board policy with respect to unexcused absences stresses prevention and inquiry leading to remediation of absences. The schools will make all reasonable efforts to keep parents and students informed as to attendance problems and will make all reasonable efforts to help students improve their attendance when such improvement is warranted. Only when all local resources are exhausted is referral to legal authorities recommended.

A student's absence from school shall be considered "unexcused" unless the absence meets the definitions, listed above, for an "excused" absence, including the documentation requirements; or if the absence is the result of school or District disciplinary action.

Release of Student During School Day

The Board recognizes the need for students to be in school for the full instructional day. It is encouraged that early dismissal should be requested only in emergency or unusual situations.

Request for release of a student during the school day originating outside the schools must be handled by the administration or designee to ensure maximum provisions for the safety and welfare of the student.

Students who become ill during the school day may be excused by the school nurse, and transportation home will be arranged by school personnel.

Truancy

The Board of Education must provide each child with a continuing education which will prepare the student to assume adult roles and responsibilities. Therefore, regular attendance and punctuality are expected from all children enrolled in our schools. By statute, responsibility for assuring that students attend school rests with the parent(s) or other person having control of the child. Every effort must be made to keep absences and tardiness to a minimum. To assist parent(s) and others in meeting this responsibility, the Board of Education has developed the following procedures regarding students ages five (5) to eighteen (18) inclusive.

1. Annually notify parents or other person having control of each child enrolled, ages five (5) to eighteen (18), inclusive in writing of the obligations of the parent pursuant to student attendance (C.G.S. 10-184).
2. Obtain from each parent or other persons having control of an enrolled child a telephone number or other means of contacting such parent or other person during the school day.

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Truancy (continued)

3. Establish a system for monitoring student's individual absences/tardies.
4. Notify, by telephone and by mail the parent(s) or other such person(s) whenever a child fails to report to school on a regularly scheduled school day and no indication has been received by school personnel that the child's parent or other person is aware of the student's absence.

The required mailed notice shall include a warning that two unexcused absences from school in one month or five unexcused absences in a school year may result in a complaint filed with the Superior Court alleging the belief that the acts or omissions of the child are such that the child's family is a family with service needs.

5. Identify a student as "truant" when the student has four (4) unexcused absences in any one month or ten (10) unexcused absences in any school year.
6. Hold a meeting with appropriate staff and the parent or other person having control of the child identified as a "truant" within ten (10) days of such designation to review the reasons for the truant behavior and to evaluate the situation.
7. Referral will be made to the PPT to determine whether or not an educational evaluation is appropriate, prior to filing a written complaint with the Superior Court.
8. File a written complaint, by the Superintendent with the Superior Court alleging that the acts or omissions of any child identified as a "truant" are such that the student's family is a "family with service needs" if the parent or other person having control of the child identified as "truant" fails:
 - a. to attend the required meeting to evaluate why the child's truant or
 - b. to cooperate with the school in trying to solve the truancy problem.
 - c. Such filing shall occur not later than fifteen (15) calendar days after such failure to attend the required meeting or such failure to cooperate with the school in trying to solve the truancy problem.
9. Provide for the coordination of services and refer enrolled students who are truants or to community agencies providing child and family services.

A student who is identified as a "truant" may be subject to the following consequences:

- a. Promotion to the next grade may be contingent upon the student successfully completing a summer school program

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Truancy (continued)

- b. The student may be retained in the same grade in order to acquire the skills necessary for promotion to the next grade level

Persons who in good faith give or fail to give notice pursuant to subdivision (4) above, shall be immune from any liability, civil or criminal, which might otherwise be incurred or imposed and shall have immunity with respect to any judicial proceeding which results from such notice or failure to give notice.

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes

10-184 Duties of parents. (as amended by PA 98-243 and PA 00-157)

10-198a Policies and procedures concerning truants (as amended by PA 00-157 and PA 11-136)

10-199 through 10-202 Attendance, truancy in general. (Revised 1995 - PA 95-304)

10-221(b) Board of education to prescribe rules.

Campbell v New Milford, 193 Conn 93 (1984).

Action taken by State Board of Education on January 2, 2008, to define "attendance."

Action taken by the State Board of Education on June 27, 2012 to define "excused" and "unexcused" absences.

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The administration has established an attendance regulation which reflects that time lost from class is essentially irretrievable in terms of opportunity for instructional exchange; that excessive absences rob teachers and students of teaching time that could be better spent on programs and activities; and that a student has an obligation to give, as well as receive, in the context of the classroom setting.

Definitions

The following is a listing of definitions pursuant to this regulation.

1. **“Absence”** - is when a student in grades kindergarten through 12 is absent from an entire day or class or school with or without parental permission.

A student is considered to be “in attendance” if present at his/her assigned school, or an activity sponsored by the school (e.g., field trip), for at least half of the regular school day. A student who is serving an out-of-school suspension or expulsion should always be considered absent.

2. **“Excused Absence”** include absences from school, for absences one through nine, and appropriate documentation is provided by the student’s parent/guardian approving the absence, due to:
 - A. Illness or injury (with doctor’s verification after the tenth absence and all absences thereafter.)
 - B. Death in the family
 - C. Religious holidays
 - D. Court appearances
 - E. School sponsored activities
 - F. Lack of transportation that is normally provided by a district other than the one the students attends, (This reason does not require documentation.)
 - G. An emergency, or
 - H. Limited absence from school for special activities or extraordinary educational opportunities with parental consent, subject to the advance approval of the Principal or his/her designee, in accordance with SDE guidelines.

For the tenth absence and all others thereafter, the same reasons cited above shall constitute “unexcused” absence, even if the parent excuses the absence. Documentation is required for the tenth absence and all others thereafter, including documentation by a medical professional is required for illness, regardless of the length of the absence in order for the absence to be considered excused.

Such documentation includes a signed note from the student’s parent/guardian, a signed note from a school official that spoke in person with the parent/guardian regarding the absence, or a note confirming the absence by the school nurse or by a licensed medical professional, as appropriate. Documentation should explain the nature of and the reason for the absence as well as the length of the absence. Separate documentation must be submitted for each incidence of absenteeism.

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Definitions (continued)

The administration will determine whether absences are excused or unexcused. The school does not consider all absences from class or school which have been explained by parents to be excused. However, for purposes of the reporting of truancy to the SDE, the state approved definitions of “excused” and “unexcused” absences will be used. The District is not precluded from using separate definitions on such absences for its internal uses.

Students who have been absent from school must turn in a note from a parent or have a parent call to explain the student’s absence if it is to be considered excused, otherwise it will be treated as an unexcused.

3. **“Unexcused Absence”** is an absence from any entire regularly scheduled school day for which the absence is not excused as defined above. A student’s absence shall be considered unexcused unless the absence meets the definition of an excused absence, listed above, including the fulfillment of the documentation requirements, or if an absence is the result of school or District disciplinary action.
4. **“Class Cut”** is when a student misses a class and has no legitimate reason for doing so or is tardy to or dismissed from school and does not have a legitimate excuse.
5. **“Tardiness”** is when students arrive at school later than the beginning of school. Tardiness may be explained by a parent. Students tardy to school are responsible for work done in classes missed as well as assignments made or due.
6. **“Truant”** is any student ages five (5) through eighteen (18) inclusive, who has four (4) unexcused absences from school in any one month or ten (10) unexcused absences from school in any school year.
7. **“Habitual Truant”** is any student who has twenty (20) unexcused absences within a school year.

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Attendance Procedures (K-8)

1. If a student is absent from school, the parent or other person having control of the student, will contact the school by 9:00am.
2. If no contact is received, the school will make a reasonable effort to notify the parent or such person by telephone. A written record of these attempts shall be kept in the Attendance Log.

The required mailed notice shall include a warning that two unexcused absences from school in one month or five unexcused absences in a school year may result in a complaint filed with the Superior Court alleging the belief that the acts or omissions of the child are such that the child's family is a family with service needs.

3. The Building Principal will determine if the absence is unexcused. When the student has four (4) unexcused absences in a month or ten (10) unexcused absences in any school year, a referral will be made to the appropriate staff. The appropriate staff will arrange a meeting with the parent or other person having control of the student to review and evaluate the reason for the student being a truant. This meeting shall be held not later than ten (10) days after the child is identified as a truant. If the parent or other such person declines to attend the meeting, that fact shall be documented and the meeting will be held. The appropriate staff will develop a plan to help improve the student's attendance.
4. If the parent or other person having control of a child identified as "truant" fails to attend the required meeting or fails to cooperate with the school in trying to solve the truancy problem, the Building Principal or designee shall notify the Superintendent. The Superintendent shall, within 15 calendar days, file a written complaint with the Superior Court under the Family with Service Needs law.
5. If the student has ten (10) unexcused absences, a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting shall be held. The PPT will review the student's academic achievement and previous evaluations to determine if additional testing for special education is necessary.
6. After twenty (20) unexcused absences, the student will be identified as an habitual truant.
7. The appropriate staff shall coordinate services and refer truants and habitual truants to community agencies providing child and family services.

At the beginning of each new school year, any student who has had ten or more unexcused absences will be identified as an "at risk student" and will be monitored by the appropriate staff. A letter will be sent to parents and the appropriate staff will meet with the student to discuss the importance of regular attendance.

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10-221(b) Board of education to prescribe rules.

46-149 Family with Service Needs.

Campbell v New Milford, 193 Conn 93 (1984).

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