



Book	Policy Manual
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32. 24 P.S. 1510

32. 24 P.S. 1546
 33. 22 PA Code 11.32
 34. 22 PA Code 11.5
 35. 24 P.S. 1327.1
 36. 22 PA Code 11.31
 37. 22 PA Code 11.31a
 38. Pol. 137
 39. 24 P.S. 1333.1
 40. Pol. 113.3
 41. Pol. 114
 24 P.S. 1333.2
 24 P.S. 1333.3
 42 Pa. C.S.A. 6302
 22 PA Code 11.24
 22 PA Code 11.8
 Pol. 103

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Purpose

The Board requires that school-aged students enrolled in district schools attend school regularly, in accordance with state laws. The educational program offered by this district is predicated upon the presence of the student and requires continuity of instruction and classroom participation in order for students to achieve academic standards and consistent educational progress.[1][2][3][4][5][6][7]

Definitions

Absence - the nonattendance of a student on those days and partial days school is in session.

Adult - a person who is at least twenty-one (21) years of age or older.

Beginner - a child who enters a school district's lowest elementary school grade that is above kindergarten.[8]

Compulsory school age - compulsory school age begins from the time that a child is a Beginner or reaches age six (6), whichever comes first. Compulsory school age ends when the child reaches the age of eighteen (18). The term does not include a child who holds a certificate of graduation from a regularly accredited, licensed, registered, or approved high school.[2][5]

Excused absences - absences permitted under this policy.

Unexcused absences - an absence from school that is not due to a cause that is considered to be excused under this policy and/or for which an approved explanation has not been submitted within the time period and in the matter prescribed by this policy. An out-of-school suspension is not an unexcused absence.

Regular attendance - attending school each day during which school is in session. Students are to attend all sessions unless properly excused by school authorities.

Tardiness - the absence of a student at the time any morning or afternoon session begins provided the student is in attendance before the close of that session. Tardiness may be addressed under the school district's Student Framework for Citizenship.

Truancy - three (3) or more days of unexcused absence during the current school year by a student who is of compulsory school age.[2]

Habitually truant - six (6) or more school days of unexcused absences during the current school year by a child who is of compulsory school age.[2]

School Attendance Improvement Conference (SAIC) - a conference where the child's absences and reasons for absences are examined in an effort to improve attendance, with or without additional services. The following individuals shall be invited to the conference:[2]

1. The child.
2. The child's parent/guardian.
3. Other individuals identified by the parent/guardian who may be a resource.
4. Appropriate school personnel.
5. Recommended service providers.

School Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP) - the School Attendance Improvement Plan created at the SAIC in order to assist the student in improving their school attendance.

Authority

Attendance shall be required of all students enrolled in district schools during the days and hours that school is in session, except that the Superintendent or designee may excuse a student for temporary absences when receiving satisfactory evidence of mental, physical, or other urgent conditions that may reasonably cause the student's absence. Urgent reasons shall be strictly construed and do not permit irregular attendance.[3][7][9][10][11][12]

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

Delegation of Responsibility

The Superintendent or designee shall annually notify students, parent(s)/guardian(s) and staff about the district's attendance policy by publishing such policy in the student handbook, parent newsletters, district website and other efficient methods.[6][13]

The Superintendent or designee shall:

1. Develop administrative regulations in accordance with this policy and applicable law.
2. Ensure a school session that conforms with requirements of state law and regulations.[14][15][16][17][18][19]
3. Govern the maintenance of attendance records in accordance with law.[20][21]
4. Distribute annually to staff, students, and parent(s)/guardian(s) Board policies and school rules and regulations governing student attendance, absences and excusals.[6]
5. Impose on truant students appropriate incremental disciplinary measures for infractions of school rules, which shall not include expulsion, out-of-school suspension, disciplinary

reassignment, or transfer.[22]

6. Identify the habitual truant, investigate the causes of truant behavior, and consider modification of the student's educational program to meet particular needs and interests.
7. Ensure that students legally absent have an opportunity to make up work.
8. Issue written notice as provided under this policy and the relevant law. The Superintendent will ensure the district's compliance with the truancy enforcement policy and applicable laws regarding truancy.

Guidelines

Student absences are generally governed under the definition and authority of the Pennsylvania School Code of 1949. This section permits student absences to be considered excused in cases of illness, quarantines, recovery from an accident, required court attendance, death in the family, or any other urgent reason justifying a temporary absence. Absences covered under law must be directly related to the student's inability to attend school due to reasons cited above and not merely for the convenience of the family. The Superintendent shall have the discretion to approve absences for special events such as unique athletic events, academics, arts/theater, and extended college visits that exceed the cumulative absences allowed to students each year.[9]

Absences will generally be recognized as excused or unexcused. **Non-cumulative absence** refers to any excused absences that are excused, in writing, by a licensed physician. **Cumulative absences** refer to excused absences that are excused by the student's parent/guardian only. As explained more thoroughly below, students incurring ten (10) cumulative absences in one (1) school year must present an excuse from a licensed physician for each subsequent absence to be deemed excused.

Absences for an unlawful reason shall be unexcused. Absences for a lawful reason shall be treated as unexcused until the district receives a written excuse explaining the reason(s) for the absence, which must be submitted within three (3) school days of the absence. Failure to submit a written excuse to the principal or teacher within three (3) school days may result in the absence being permanently counted as unlawful. The absence must be for a legal reason as determined by the principal or teacher, according to law. When it is known that a parent/guardian cannot read or write, the principal or teacher may accept a verbal excuse. However, the verbal excuse shall be documented, in writing, as to the date of the absence, the reason, and the name of the parent/guardian contacted. This documented note is to be signed by the person from the school who contacted the parent/guardian.

The Superintendent or designee is responsible for notifying parents/guardians of the appropriate procedure for submitting written excusals for students' absences. If the dominant language in a student's home is not English and the parent(s)/guardian(s) are able to read and write in another language, s/he shall be required to submit a written explanation in that language.

Students who attend Bethlehem Area Vocational Technical School (BAVTS) must adhere to all attendance policies. Absences and tardiness that occur at BAVTS for district-enrolled students who attend career and technical school will be treated as absences and tardiness in the district for the purposes of this policy.

Excused Absences

The Board considers the following conditions or situations reasonable cause for absence from school:

1. Illness, including if a student is dismissed by designated district staff during school hours for health-related reasons.[9][12]
2. Family emergency.
3. Obtaining professional health care and/or therapy service rendered by a licensed physician.[9]

4. Quarantine.
5. Recovery from accident.
6. Observance of a religious holiday observed by a bona fide religious group, upon prior written parental request.[23]
7. Required court appearance.
8. Death in the family.
9. Participation in a project sponsored by a statewide or countywide 4-H, FFA or combined 4-H and FFA group upon written request prior to the event.[6][9]
10. Impassable roads.
11. Three (3) preapproved college and/or postsecondary institution visits per school year. The building principal shall have the authority to refuse approval for such visits where absences related to such visits are excessive or may have a negative impact on the student's academic performance.
12. Suspension(s) from school.
13. Preapproved family vacation while school is in session per Board policy.
14. Nonschool-sponsored educational tours or trips, if the following conditions are met:[9][24]
 - a. The parent/guardian submits a written request for excusal prior to the absence.
 - b. The student's participation has been approved by the principal or designee.
 - c. The adult directing and supervising the tour or trip is acceptable to the parents/guardians and the principal or designee.
15. Preapproved educational tours and trips.
16. The Board will recognize other justifiable absences for part of the school day. These shall include medical or dental appointments, court appearances, or family emergencies.

Attendance need not always be within school buildings. A student shall be considered in attendance if present at any place where school is in session by authority of the Board; 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; the student is receiving approved homebound instruction; or the student is receiving instruction through online learning and/or cyber education.[3][11][25][26][27][28][29]

Temporary Excusal

The Board shall excuse the following students from the requirements of attendance at district schools, upon request and with the required approval:

1. On certification by a physician or submission of other satisfactory evidence and on approval of the Department of Education children who are unable to attend school or apply themselves to study for mental, physical, or other reasons that preclude regular attendance (see Board Policy 204.1 - Temporary Medical Excusal).[9][10][30][31]
2. Students participating in a religious instruction program, if the following conditions are met: [23][32].

- 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. The organizers of the instruction must inform the Board of the child's attendance record.
 - d. The Board shall not provide transportation to religious instruction.
 - e. 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. Students enrolled in nonpublic or private schools in which the subjects and activities prescribed by law are taught.[3][33]
 4. Students enrolled in special schools conducted by the Colonial Intermediate Unit or the Department of Education.
 5. Students receiving private instruction from a properly qualified tutor.[3][25][29]
 6. Students attending college who are also enrolled part-time in district schools.[34]
 7. Students attending a home education program in accordance with law.[3][35][36][37][38]
 8. Students fifteen (15) or sixteen (16) years of age whose enrollment in private trade or business schools has been approved.[3]
 9. Students fifteen (15) years of age and fourteen (14) years of age who have completed sixth grade, who are engaged in farm work or private domestic service under duly issued permits. [10].
 10. Students sixteen (16) years of age who are regularly employed during the school session and holding a lawfully issued employment certification.[10][26]

The Board shall report to appropriate authorities infractions of the law regarding the attendance of students below the age of eighteen (18). The Board shall issue notice to those parent(s)/guardian(s) who fail to comply with the requirements of compulsory attendance that such infractions will be prosecuted according to law.

Unexcused/Unlawful Absences

Unexcused/Unlawful absences include, but are not limited to:

1. Any day, for which a written excuse is not submitted within three (3) school days of a student's return from an absence, including notes from physicians.
2. Any written excuse not approved by the principal.
3. Any absence not excused by a physician's note after ten (10) cumulative absences verified by parental excuses within the same school year.

Procedure When Child is Truant

For all truant students who are enrolled in the school district, the Superintendent/designee shall take the following steps:

1. The Superintendent/designee shall notify the child's parent/guardian in writing within ten (10) days of the child's third unexcused absence that the child has been truant. The notice shall include a description of the consequences of being habitually truant and be in the mode and language of communication preferred by the parent/guardian. The notice may also include the

offer of a School Attendance Improvement Conference (SAIC).^[22]

2. Where the above notice is transmitted to a person who is not the biological or adoptive parent, the notice shall also be provided to the child's biological or adoptive parent if the parent's mailing address is on file with the school district and the parent is not, by court order, precluded from receiving information.
3. If, after the notice has been sent, the child continues to be truant, the Superintendent/designee shall offer the student and parent/guardian a SAIC. An SAIC shall be held regardless of the attendance of the child and/or parent/guardian.^[22]
4. Prior to holding the SAIC, the Superintendent/designee shall make reasonable efforts to contact the parent/guardian to determine whether the parent/guardian will accept or decline attendance at the SAIC. Reasonable efforts include sending written notice of the SAIC to the parent/guardian and making three (3) attempts to contact the parent/guardian by telephone.
5. The Superintendent or a designee must document the outcome of the SAIC in a written attendance improvement plan.^[22]

Procedure When Child is Habitually Truant

The procedure that the Superintendent/designee shall follow when a child who is enrolled in the school district is habitually truant depends on whether the child is fifteen (15) years of age or older. The Superintendent/designee shall adopt and uniformly apply procedures consistent with the following.

Under Fifteen (15) Years of Age -

The child shall be referred to: (1) a school-based or community-based attendance improvement program; or (2) the county children and youth services (CYS) agency for services or possible disposition as a dependent child under the Juvenile Act. Additionally, the Superintendent/designee may file a citation against the parent/guardian in a magisterial district court.^[39]

Age Fifteen (15) Years and Older -

The Superintendent/designee shall either: (1) refer the child to a school-based or community-based attendance improvement program; or (2) file a citation against the student or parent/guardian in a magisterial district court. If the child incurs additional absences after s/he is referred to an attendance improvement program or the child refuses to participate in an attendance improvement program, the school may refer the child to CYS for possible disposition as a dependent child.^[39]

All Truant/Habitually Truant Students -

No student shall be expelled or removed from a classroom with a certified teacher based on truancy/habitual truancy. In addition, no student shall be subject to a disciplinary reassignment or transfer for truant behavior.^[22]

For all habitually truant students, regardless of age, a SAIC must be held and a SAIP completed before a referral is made to the magisterial district court.

Unexcused absences for students aged eighteen (18) and older will be addressed under the district's Student Framework for Citizenship.

Nondiscrimination

The district does not discriminate against students with physical or mental disabilities. Parent(s)/Guardian(s) of students with disabilities that are or may affect the student's school attendance should contact the Director of Special Education to determine whether accommodations are necessary.^{[27][40][41]}

Educational/Vacation Tours and Trips, Grades K-12

The building principal may excuse a student from school attendance to participate in a non-school district-sponsored educational tour or trip, if the following conditions are met:[9][24]

1. The student's parent/guardian prior to the tour or trip submits to the building principal a written request for the excusal.
2. The student's participation on the tour or trip has been approved by the building principal.
3. The child's parent or legal guardian is directing and supervising the tour or trip.

Where the tour or trip is not supervised by the child's parent or legal guardian, the request must be sent to the Superintendent for approval. The adult directing and supervising the tour or trip must be acceptable to both the child's parent or legal guardian and the Superintendent/designee.

The district may limit the number and duration of tours or trips for which excused absences may be granted to a student during the school term.