

Hopewell Township Board of Education District Policy Manual

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Absences & Excuses

Policy 5113

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The Board of Education believes that the regular attendance of students in each class and in school in general is critical to its educational mission. The District shall endeavor to achieve the ninety percent (90%) attendance rate required by the New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC). Continuity of instruction is an essential element in student performance and allows students the greatest opportunity to succeed at meeting the state learning standards in the Core Curriculum Content Standards. The Superintendent or his/her designee will oversee the development of effective strategies that maximize student attendance at all scheduled periods of actual instruction or supervised study activities and strive to:

- Encourage good attendance;
- Discourage unexcused absences;
- Identify patterns of absence, tardiness and early departures from school; and
- Intervene to prevent and correct problems with attendance.

Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions shall apply:

“Attendance” is defined as a student’s presence in school and in the classroom to which he/she is assigned at the times scheduled for instruction or other school activities:

- A student will be considered to have attended if he/she has been present at least 4 hours during the school day;
- A student not present in school because of his/her participation in an approved school activity, such as a field trip, meeting, cooperative education assignment, or athletic competition will be considered to be in attendance.

“Excused absence” is defined as a student’s absence from school for a full day or a portion of a day for one or more of the following reasons:

- The student’s illness (a parent/guardian must provide a written note and/or email of illness for this excused absence);
- Absence for illness more than three (3) consecutive school days (a physician’s note is required);
- Requirements of a student’s individual health care plan;

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- A death or critical illness in the student's immediate family, or others with permission of principal (parent/guardian note required);
- Quarantine (physician's note required);
- Observance of the student's religion on a day approved for that purpose by the State Board of Education (parent/guardian note required);
- The student's suspension from school;
- Requirements of the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP);
- Alternate short or long term accommodations for students with disabilities;
- The student's required attendance in court (note from court required);
- Necessary and unavoidable medical or dental appointments that cannot be scheduled at a time other than the school day (A written note must be provided from the medical or dental professional's office confirming the student's attendance at the appointment);
- Such good cause as may be acceptable to the Principal and Chief School Administrator.

All parent/guardian notes required above must be provided within three (3) school days of the student's return to school.

Attendance need not always be within the school facilities. A student will be considered to be in attendance if he/she is present at any place where school is in session by authority of the Board. The Board shall consider each student assigned to a program of independent study, with parent/guardian permission, to be in regular attendance for that program, provided that he/she is under the guidance of a staff member so assigned, reports daily or weekly, as prescribed, to such staff member the place in which he/she is conducting his/her study, and regularly demonstrates progress toward the objectives of his/her course of study.

"Unexcused absence" is defined as a student's absence for all or part of a school day for any reason other than those listed in paragraph "Excused Absences" above. Absence is expressly not excused for any of the following purposes (this list is intended to be illustrative and is not inclusive):

- Family travel;
- Performance of household or babysitting duties;
- Shopping;

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- Cutting class;
- Faulty private transportation;
- Working; or
- Other daytime activities unrelated to the school program.

“Truancy” is defined as a student’s absence from all or a part of the school day without the knowledge of the student’s parent/guardian. A student between the ages of six and sixteen will also be considered truant if he or she:

- Has accumulated unexcused absences of 10 or more;
- Leaves school without permission when school is still in session;
- Leaves class because of illness and does not report to the school nurse as directed; or
- Is present in school but is absent from class without approval. Such truancy from class is a "class cut."

Attendance

In order for the Board of Education to fulfill its responsibility for providing a thorough and efficient education for each student, the complete cooperation of parents/guardians and students is required to maintain a high level of school attendance.

The frequent absence of students from classroom learning experiences disrupts the continuity of the instructional process and limits the ability of students to complete the prescribed curriculum requirements successfully. The following rules shall apply for student absences:

- In schools where attendance is taken by class period, a student shall be considered absent from class for tardiness in excess of one half of the total class period.
- A student shall be considered absent from school for participation in less than 4 instructional hours during the school day.

A student must be in attendance for 166 or more school days in order to be considered to have successfully completed the instructional program requirements of the grade/course to which he/she is assigned. Students who miss more than 14 days, regardless of the reason(s), will be considered excessively absent and subject to review pursuant to the Persistent Absence procedures below.

A waiver of these attendance requirements may be granted for good cause by the Chief School Administrator upon recommendation of a review committee, appointed by him/her, and consisting of representative staff, including student service personnel and classroom teachers.

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In recommending the granting of a waiver of this attendance requirement, the review committee shall consider the nature and causes of all absences rather than only those in excess of 14 days. As required, written documentation stating the date, the reason for the absence, and a parent/guardian signature shall be the responsibility of the parent/guardian. For excused absences requiring documentation pursuant to the definition of excused absences above contained in this Policy, any absence without such written or email documentation that is received in the time frame noted above will be considered unexcused.

Parents/guardians are responsible for calling out their child prior to the start of the school day to ensure student safety and accountability; however, a phone call does not take the place of written documentation being submitted to the office upon a student's return to school.

Unexcused Absences

When a student fails to report to class or school the district will:

- Make a reasonable attempt to notify the student's parents/guardians of each unexcused absence the day of the unexcused absence;
- Attempt to contact the parents/guardians by telephone, email and/or cellular phone to determine the cause of the unexcused absence.

If contact through these means is unsuccessful the district may follow-up with another attempt to contact the parents/guardians or send a letter reporting the unexcused absence and requesting the parent/guardian to contact the school.

If at any time, it is suspected that there is a potential of abuse, neglect and/or a student is potentially missing the district shall implement all procedures required by law including reporting protocols, notification of parents/guardians and cooperation with law enforcement and other authorities and agencies, as appropriate.

Five to Nine Unexcused Cumulative Absences

If the pattern of unexcused absences continues and five (5) to nine (9) unexcused absences are accumulated the district shall:

- Make a reasonable attempt to notify the student's parents/guardians of each unexcused absence the day of the unexcused absence;
- Attempt to contact the parents/guardians by telephone, email and/or cellular phone to determine the cause of the unexcused absence;

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- Conduct a follow-up investigation by contacting the student's parents/guardians in writing to determine the cause of each unexcused absence;

The Principal or his or her designee shall schedule a meeting with the parents/guardians and the student. The purpose of this meeting shall be to evaluate the appropriateness of the action plan to assist the student to return to school and maintain regular attendance. The plan shall be reviewed and revised in coordination with the parent/guardian and may include the participation of the classroom teacher, school nurse, guidance counselor, Principal or other appropriate staff. The plan shall establish outcomes based upon the student's needs and specify the interventions for achieving the outcomes and supporting the student's return to school and regular attendance. That plan may include any or all of the following:

- Referral or consultation with the Intervention and Referral Services team;
- Testing, assessments or evaluations of the student's academic, behavioral and health needs;
- The consideration of an alternate educational placement;
- Referral to a community-based social and health provider agency or other community resource;
- Referral to the court program designated by the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts;
- The implementation of all required procedures for potential abuse, neglect or missing child including cooperation with law enforcement and other authorities and agencies, as appropriate.

Ten or More Cumulative Unexcused Absences

If the pattern of unexcused absences continues to ten (10) cumulative unexcused absences, the district will issue a letter from the Principal which will be sent via certified and regular mail stipulating:

- The parents/guardians must have a mandatory meeting with the Principal within five (5) school days;
- The student is required to resume regular attendance.
- The student will be in danger of failing to complete courses and/or a specific grade level.
- There will be a mandatory referral to the court program required by the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts for students under the compulsory school age (below 16 years of age) (NJSA 18A:38-25 through 31); and failure to comply with the provisions

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of the law may cause the parent/guardian to be deemed a disorderly person and the parent/guardian may be subject to a fine (NJSA 18A:38-25 through 31).

- Notification for a student who is 16 years or older (above the school compulsory age) that failure to meet with the Principal (within 5 days as stipulated in this section) and failure to resume attendance will be dropped from the school register. Once a student is withdrawn from the school register they may be permitted to re-enter only after a meeting with the Principal or his/her designee.

The student must also be referred to the Intervention and Referral Services Team and the counselor, in conjunction with the parent/guardian, will evaluate the appropriateness of the action plan developed as a result of 5 cumulative unexcused absences. The counselor and parent/guardian will continue to consult with the involved agencies to support the student's return to school and regular attendance.

Ten Consecutive Absences

If the pattern of unexcused absences continues to ten (10) consecutive unexcused absences, the district shall issue a letter from the principal which will be sent via certified and regular mail stipulating:

- The parents/guardians must have a mandatory meeting with the Principal within five (5) school days.
- The student is required to return back to school immediately.
- There will be a mandatory referral to the court program required by the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts for students under the compulsory school age (below 16 years of age) (NJSA 18A:38-25 through 31); and failure to comply with the provisions of the law may cause the parent/guardian to be deemed a disorderly person and the parent may be subject to a fine (NJSA18A:38-25 through 31).
- Notification for a student who is 16 years or older (above the school compulsory age) that failure to meet with the Principal (within 5 days as stipulated in this section) and failure to resume attendance will be dropped from the school register. Once a student is withdrawn from the school register they may be permitted to re-enter only after a meeting with the Principal or his/her designee.

The student must also be referred to the Intervention and Referral Services Team and the counselor will continue to consult with the parent/guardian and the involved agencies to support the student's return to school and regular attendance.

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Discipline

All discipline regarding the attendance of students shall be consistent with the code of student conduct and the student handbook. Consequences for absences may include:

- Students will be denied participation in co-curricular activities if their attendance fails to meet the standards set forth herein;
- Students will be denied participation in athletic competition if their attendance fails to meet the standards set forth herein;
- Loss of partial or total course credit; and Detention or suspension.

No student excused absence shall be disciplined and/or deprived of any award or of eligibility for or opportunity to compete for any award because of the absence.

Students, parents and guardians shall be notified of disciplinary actions for attendance, including loss of credit.

Truancy

For cumulative unexcused absences of 10 or more, the student between the ages of six and 16 is truant, pursuant to law. The district will:

- Make a mandatory referral to the court program required by the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts;
- Make a reasonable attempt to notify the student's parents/guardians of the mandatory referral;
- Continue to consult with the parent/guardian and the involved agencies to support the student's return to school and regular attendance;
- Cooperate with law enforcement and other authorities and agencies, as appropriate; and
- Follow all procedures required by NJSA 18A:38-28 through 31, Article 3B, Compelling Attendance at School and other applicable state and federal statutes.

Regular Release of Students Before the End of the Normal School Day

There are varying situations which may justify release of certain students from school before the normal time for closing. Such situations are justifiable only if the release does not jeopardize the student's educational program and the reasons for such release can be shown to have positive benefits for the student.

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Late Arrival and Early Dismissal

The Board of Education recognizes that from time to time compelling circumstances will require that a student be late to school or dismissed before the end of the school day. If a student is present less than four (4) hours s/he will be considered absent. Depending upon the basis for the late arrival or early dismissal, such an absence may be deemed excused.

As agent responsible for the education of the children of this district, the school must be notified in advance of such absences by written request of the student's parent/guardian, which shall state the reason for the tardiness or early dismissal. Justifiable reasons may include:

- Medical or dental appointments which cannot be scheduled outside of school hours;
- Requirements of a student's individual health care plan;
- Requirements of the student's Individual Education Program (IEP);
- Alternate short or long term accommodations for students with disabilities;
- Medical disability;
- Motor vehicle driver's test;
- Interviews for college entrance or employment;
- Family emergency;
- Court appearance; or
- Such good cause as may be acceptable to the administration.

No student in grades kindergarten through 5th shall be permitted to leave school before the close of the school day unless he/she is met in the school office by his/her parent/guardian or a person authorized by the parent/guardian to act in his/her behalf.

Tardiness not covered by the causes listed, shall be cumulative, and may affect course credit.

Legal Custody

A record shall be kept indicating the legal custodian of each student. Such custodian shall be responsible for informing the Board of Education of any change in the student's custodian. If one parent/guardian has been awarded custody of the student in a divorce settlement, the other parent/guardian shall present to the Principal a letter authorizing him/her to accompany the child from school before the child may be released to him/her. The Principal may take such steps as seem necessary to ensure that the child is released only to proper custody

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Potentially Missing Children

- If daily attendance records indicate a student is absent, and the parent/guardian has not called, a designated person shall attempt to contact them;
- If no telephone contact can be made, the attendance officer shall investigate;
- If the attendance officer cannot locate the child, he/she shall inform the Principal, who shall inform the appropriate local authorities; and
- If a child who was present in the morning is absent after lunch, the same procedure shall be followed.

Marking Missing Child's School Record

Whenever the Chief School Administrator or his/her designee receives notice from the Missing Persons Unit that a child has been reported missing, he/she shall mark the child's records in such a way that whenever a copy of or information regarding the record is requested, district personnel will be aware that the record is that of a missing child. If a copy of a marked school record is requested, the Chief School Administrator or his/her designee will supply the record to the requestor without alerting him/her to the fact that the record has been marked, according to provisions in code and statute on accessing student records. After the Chief School Administrator or his/her designee has complied with the request for copies of records or information, he/she shall immediately report the inquiry or any knowledge as to the whereabouts of the missing child to the Missing Persons Unit.

Regulations / Procedures

The Chief School Administrator or his/her designee will develop procedures for the attendance of students which:

- Ensure a school session which is in conformity with requirements of the rules of the state Board of Education;
- Identify potentially missing and/or abused students;
- Govern the keeping of attendance records in accordance with rules of the state board, including students serving in or out of school suspensions, or excluded for health and cleanliness reasons;
- Impose on truant students such disciplinary measures as may be appropriate for infractions of school regulations, but no such penalty may have an irredeemable negative effect on the student's record of achievement beyond that which naturally follows his/her absence from school activities;

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- Identify the habitual truant, investigate the causes of his/her behavior, and consider modification of his/her educational program to meet his/her particular needs and interests;
- Address tardiness and class cutting in terms of the intent of this policy;
- Ensure that students absent for any reason have an opportunity to make up work they missed;
- Recognize exemplary attendance.

Dissemination and Implementation of this Policy

The Chief School Administrator or his/her designee will take all necessary steps to publicize this policy and may include these rules in district handbooks and/or on the district website. Parents/guardians and students shall be notified annually of the attendance policy.

The Chief School Administrator or his/her designee will ensure that the rules for this policy are applied consistently and uniformly, and that all disciplinary sanctions are carried out with necessary due process.

The Board of Education shall review the attendance policy on a regular basis.

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Legal References

- NJSA** 18A:11-1 General mandatory powers and duties
18A:35-4.9 Pupil promotion and remediation; policies and procedures
18A:36-14, -15, -16 Religious holidays; absence of pupils on; effect ...
18A:36-19a Newly enrolled students; records and identification
18A:36-24 through -26 Missing children; legislative findings and declarations ...
18A:38-25 Attendance required of children between six and 16; exceptions
18A:38-26 Days when attendance required; exceptions
18A:38-27 Truancy and juvenile delinquency defined
18A:38-31 Violations of article by parents or guardians; penalties
18A:38-32 District and county vocational school attendance officers
18A:40-7 Exclusion of pupils who are ill
18A:40-8 Exclusion of pupils whose presence is detrimental to health and cleanliness
18A:40-9 Failure of parent to remove cause for exclusion; penalty
18A:40-10 Exclusion of teachers and pupils exposed to disease
18A:40-11 Exclusion of pupils having communicable tuberculosis
18A:40-12 Closing schools during epidemic
18A:54-20 Powers of board (county vocational schools)
52:17B-9.8a through -9.8c Marking of missing child's school record
- NJAC** 6A:8-5.1 Graduation requirements
6A:16-1 et seq. Programs to support student development.
6A:30-1.1 et seq. Evaluation of the Performance of School Districts
6A:32-8.1 et seq. Student Attendance and Accounting
6A:32-8.3 Student attendance
- Wetherell v. Board of Education of Township of Burlington, 1978 S.L.D. 794
Wheatley v. Board of Education of City of Burlington, 1974 S.L.D. 851
C.R., on behalf of J.R., v. Board of Education of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Regional School District, 1988 S.L.D. (June 22)

Possible Cross References

5020, 5111, 5114, 5115, 5124, 5141.2, 5141.4, 5142, 6146, 6147, 6147.1, 6154, 6171.4, 6173