

Students

ATTENDANCE / EXCUSES / DISMISSAL

Series C-19-COVID-19 Policies and Regulations

5113(a)/ C-19.8(a)

Attendance

Temporary amendments related to the COVID-19 Pandemic have been made to this policy and to the accompanying regulations. All temporary revisions appear in highlighted bold italics or strikethrough text.

Connecticut state law requires parents to cause their children, ages five through eighteen inclusive, to attend school regularly during the hours and terms the public school is in session. Parents or persons having control of a child five years of age have the option of not sending the child to school until ages six or seven. Mandatory attendance terminates upon graduation or withdrawal with written parent/guardian consent at age seventeen.

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. A student not meeting the definition of “in attendance” shall be considered absent.

Classroom learning experiences are the basis for public school education. Time lost from class is lost instructional opportunity. The Board of Education requires that accurate records be kept of the attendance of each child, and students should not be absent from school without parental knowledge and consent.

Definitions (related to chronic absenteeism)

Chronically absent child: An enrolled student whose total number of absences at any time during a school year is equal to or greater than ten percent of the total number of days that such student has been enrolled at such school during such school year.

Absence: An excused absence, unexcused absence or disciplinary absence, as those terms are defined by the State Board of Education.

District chronic absenteeism rate: The total number of chronically absent children in the previous school year divided by the total number of children under the jurisdiction of the Board of Education for such school year.

School chronic absenteeism rate: The total number of chronically absent children for a school in the previous school year divided by the total number of children enrolled in such school for such school year.

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5113(b)/ C-19.8(b)

Excused Absence

For absences one through nine, an absence shall be considered “excused” when a child does not attend school and appropriate documentation or notification 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 student attends; (This reason does not require documentation.)
- G. An emergency;
- H. Health Department directed quarantine or isolation;**
- I. Other exceptional circumstances and extraordinary educational opportunities preapproved 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 absences thereafter, a student’s absences from school are considered excused for all the reasons below unless otherwise stated:

- A. Student illness (must be verified by a licensed medical professional to be deemed excused, regardless of the length of the absence; **such a verification must include a signed note from a medical professional, who has evaluated the student confirming the absence and giving an expected return date and including any specific COVID-19 symptom(s) exhibited by the student so that the District can monitor trends that would suggest the spread of COVID-19;**
- B. Student’s observance of a religious holiday;
- C. Death in the student’s family or other emergency beyond the control of the student’s family;
- D. Mandated court appearances (documentation required);
- E. The lack of transportation that is normally provided by a district other than the one the student attends (no parental documentation required);
- F. Extraordinary educational opportunities pre-approved by District Administration and to be in accordance with Connecticut State Department of Education guidance; or
- G. Health Department directed quarantine or isolation.**

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Excused Absence (continued)

A student's absence from school shall be considered unexcused unless:

- A. The absence meets the definition of an excused absence and meets the documentation requirements; or
- B. The absence meets the definition of a disciplinary absence, which is the result of school or District disciplinary action and are excluded from these State Board of Education approved definitions.

When the school in which a child is enrolled receives no notification of the child's absence from a parent/guardian or other person having control of the child, a reasonable effort shall be made by school personnel to notify by telephone, email, or mail such parent/guardian or other person having control of the child. ***For any absence due a positive COVID-19 test or direct contact with someone with a positive COVID-19 test, the parent/guardian must call the dedicated District COVID-19 hotline.***

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/guardians 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.

If a student is unable to attend class in person due to health department directed quarantine or isolation, they are encouraged to participate from home but they will be marked absent from class. The absence will be excused if a parent/guardian notifies the school's absentee line; otherwise, the absence will be unexcused.

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Chronic Absenteeism

The Board of Education, in compliance with statute, requires the establishment of attendance review teams when chronic absenteeism rates in the District or at individual schools in the District meet the following circumstances:

1. A team for the District must be established when the District chronic absenteeism rate is 10 percent or higher.
2. A team for the school must be established when the school chronic absenteeism rate is 10 percent or higher.
3. A team for either the District or each school must be established when (a) more than one school in the District has a school chronic absenteeism rate of 10 percent or higher or (b) a District has a District chronic absenteeism rate of 10 percent or higher and one or more schools in the District have a school chronic absenteeism rate of 10 percent or higher.

The membership of attendance review teams may consist of school administrators, guidance counselors, school social workers, teachers, chronically absent children, parents or guardians of chronically absent children, and representatives from community-based programs who address issues related to student attendance by providing programs and services to truants.

Each attendance review team shall be responsible for reviewing the cases of truants and chronically absent children, discussing school interventions and community referrals for such truants and chronically absent children and making any additional recommendations for such truants and chronically absent children and their parents or guardians. Each established attendance review team shall meet at least monthly.

The District shall utilize the chronic absenteeism prevention and intervention plan developed by the State Department of Education when it becomes available.

The District shall annually include in information for the strategic school profile report for each school and the District that is submitted to the Commissioner of Education, data pertaining to truancy and chronically absent children.

The Principal or his/her designee of any elementary or middle school located in a town/city designated as an alliance district may refer to the children's truancy clinic established by the Probate Court serving the town/city, a parent/guardian with a child defined as a truant or who is at risk of becoming a truant.

Release of Student During School Day/Dismissal

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

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Release of Student During School Day/Dismissal (continued)

handled by the administration 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. School personnel will notify parent/guardian to arrange transportation.

No student may be permitted to leave school at any time other than at regular dismissal without the approval of the student's parent/guardian. If a court official with legal permission to take custody of a child, or if a police officer arrests a student, the parent/guardian should be notified of these situations by the administration.

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)/guardian(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)/guardian(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. Notify parents/guardians or other person having control of each child enrolled, ages five (5) to eighteen (18) inclusive, in writing, of the obligations of the parents/guardians pursuant to student attendance (C.G.S. 10-184).
2. Obtain from each parent/guardian or other persons having control of an enrolled child a telephone number or other means of contacting such parent/guardian or other person during the school day.
3. Establish a system for monitoring student's individual absences/tardies.
4. Notify, by telephone, email, or mail the parent(s)/guardian(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/guardian or other person is aware of the student's absence.
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/guardian 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:

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Truancy (continued)

- 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.
9. Provide for the coordination of services and refer enrolled students who are truants 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.
- B. The student may be retained in the same grade in order to acquire the skills necessary for promotion to the next grade level.

High School Attendance

The purpose of this policy is to encourage school and/or class attendance in order to have students maximize their educational opportunities. Regular, uninterrupted attendance at school and/or class is essential to successful learning.

Students enrolled in a Fairfield high school who exceed the permitted number of unexcused absences from school or class may lose credit for that class or classes, as specified in the Student/Parent Handbook of each high school.

Attendance Records

The professional staff of each school shall keep an attendance record of students in their charge.

Regularity of Attendance

Regular, uninterrupted attendance at school and/or class is essential to successful learning. In accordance with Connecticut General Statutes, the Board may appoint one (1) or more persons, who shall be authorized to prosecute for violations of the laws relating to attendance of children and their employment. All warrants issued upon such prosecutions shall be returnable before any court having jurisdiction.

Evolving State Department of Education Guidance

The Board will review any and all guidance issued by the State Department of Education regarding attendance requirements, including during periods of blended learning, and regarding attendance requirements of students who choose not to participate.

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes
10-184 Duties of parents. (as amended by PA 98-243 and PA 00-157)
10-185 Penalty
10-198a Policies and procedures concerning truants (as amended by PA 00-157, PA 11-136 and PA 14-198)
10-199 through 10-202 Attendance, truancy in general. (Revised 1995 - PA 95-304)
10-220(c) Duties of boards of education (as amended by PA 15-225)

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes (continued)
10-221(b) Board of education to prescribe rules.
Campbell v. New Milford, 193 Conn93 (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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Temporary Revision Adopted 9/8/20

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Temporary Revision Adopted 8/24/2021