

STUDENT ATTENDANCE

General Requirements

The New Hanover County Board of Education (Board) believes that regular and punctual attendance at school is imperative for educational success. Students are expected to be in school each day unless ill or unable to attend due to an unavoidable reason. The Board further believes that there is no substitute for the uninterrupted personal contact between teachers and students in the classroom environment where learning experiences are carefully planned and taught by teachers.

The primary responsibility for school attendance rests with students and parents. Schools, however, have the responsibility for properly recording absenteeism and tardiness, notifying parents when needed, and discouraging excessive absences in accordance with state law. North Carolina General Statute (NCGS) 115C-307 (f).

The Board seeks the full cooperation from parents in promoting good attendance and punctuality, in particular and strongly encourages the following:

- When possible medical and dental appointments should be scheduled after school hours; and
- Family vacations should be taken during school vacation and recess periods.

Parent/guardians should inform the student's teacher and/or designated personnel of the reason for each absence. The process shall be outlined in each school's student handbook.

No student will be excused from regular schoolwork to take private lessons in music, art, dance, or any other area without prior approval of the Superintendent's office.

The objectives of the New Hanover County Schools' attendance policy are to:

- Encourage maximum class attendance;
- Encourage students to apply their time and attention toward obtaining the maximum benefits for their education;
- Place the primary responsibility for school attendance upon students and parents;
- Provide teachers, counselors, and administrators more time to accomplish their primary responsibilities as educators;
- Eliminate excessive absenteeism;
- Provide alternative consequences for excessive absences; and
- Reward good and perfect attendance.

Lawful, Excused Absences

Pursuant to state law NCGS 115C-378 and the rules and regulations of the N. C. Department of Public Instruction, School Attendance and Student Accounting Manual, the following shall constitute a lawful excused absence, provided satisfactory evidence is given to the appropriate school official:

- **Illness or injury:** An illness or injury which prevents the student from being physically able to attend school.
- **Quarantine:** When isolation of the student is ordered by the local health officers or the State Board of Health.
- **Death in the immediate family of the student:** Defined to include, but not necessarily limited to, grandparents, parents, brothers, and sisters.
- **Medical or dental appointments:** When the absence results from a medical or dental appointment of a student.
- **Court or administrative proceedings:** Attendance at the proceedings of a court or an administrative tribunal if the student is party to the action or under subpoena as a witness.
- **Religious observances:** When the tenets of a religion to which a students and/or parents/guardians adhere require or suggest the observance of a religious event unless the religious observance or the cumulative effect of the religious observance is of such duration as to interfere with the education of the student. More than two (2) religious observances require the approval of the Superintendent or designee.
- **Educational opportunity:** When the absence clearly is to take advantage of a valid education opportunity, such as travel or experience that supports career and college ready skills. All requests for excused educational opportunities should be submitted, in writing, in advance of the opportunity. The request should include the learning objective of the opportunity, and how the objective links to coursework or educational development of the student. Such experiences may include: Cultural exposure or experiences with clear alignment to course content standards for elementary and middle school levels; and college tours, cultural exposure or experiences with clear alignment to course content standards. Approval for such an absence must be granted prior to the absence by the principal.
 - The Board considers juniors and/or seniors present for two (2) post-secondary college visits. For any additional college visits, juniors and/or seniors will be considered excused and absent and should be marked as such.
- **Absences related to deployment activities:** A student whose parent/ legal guardian is an active duty member of the uniformed services and has been called to duty for, is on leave from, or immediately returned from deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting for the purpose of visiting said parent/ legal guardian. (NCGS 115C-407.5, current School Attendance and Student Accounting Manual Article V (E).

- **Child Care:** Absences due to the illness or medical appointment during school hours of a child of whom the student is the custodial parent are to be coded excused (lawful). (NCGS 115C-375.5)

Unlawful Absences

For students who are entitled to attend public school and who have enrolled in a public school, *unlawful* absence is defined as:

- A student's willful absence from school with or without the knowledge of the parent/guardian; or
- A student's absence from school for any reason other than those listed in the current School Attendance and Student Accounting Manual Chapter 2, Section IV.D., under "Lawful Absences."
- When students are not permitted to attend school because they lack proper immunization. (see NCGS 130A-155)

Make Up Days for At-Risk Students

Identified **At-Risk** students who miss days or classes may be allowed to make them up during non-school hours. Time must be made up on an hour-for-hour/day-for-day basis with participation limited to those students who fit an LEA's criteria for identification as an **At-Risk** student (see Policy 7150).

Notification of Excessive Absences for Elementary, Middle and High School

Attendance must be taken each day of the school year. In order to be considered in attendance, a student (except for hospital/homebound or staggered kindergarten) must be present in the school for the school day or at a place other than the school with the approval of the appropriate school official for the purpose of attending an authorized school activity. Such activities may include field trips, athletic contests, student conventions, musical festivals, college visits, educational opportunities or any similar approved activity.

The principal and staff shall take appropriate action to prevent excessive absences and/or provide counseling for students with a history of excessive absences. Parents must be notified of their student's excessive absences, and the teacher and/or counselor shall then work with the student and the family to analyze the causes and to determine the steps to eliminate the problem.

NCGS 115C-378 provides that "every parent/guardian or other person in the state having charge or control of a student **between the ages of 7 and 16 years** shall cause such student to attend school continually for a period equal to the time which the public school to which the student is assigned shall be in session." The law also purports that students under the age of seven who are already enrolled in public school must abide by the compulsory attendance law unless the

parent withdraws the student from school. The school will notify parents of excessive absences under the following conditions:

1. After the **third** unlawful absence,
 - a. The principal or designee will determine whether or not the absence is lawful or unlawful. School personnel shall notify the parent/guardian within a 24-hour period and may request an immediate conference.
 - b. If unable to contact the parent/guardian, the principal shall refer the matter to a school social worker or designee for immediate investigation.
2. After not more than **six** (6) unlawful absences, the principal or designee shall notify the parent/guardian of the student's excessive number of unlawful absences from school.
 - a. Notification of the parent/guardian shall be mailed and shall state that the parent may be prosecuted under the General Compulsory Attendance Law if these absences cannot be justified under established policies (see NCGS 115C-378).
 - b. A copy of the notice will be directed to the social worker or appropriate central office school personnel who will work with the student and family to remedy the problem (see NCGS 115C-378). If warranted, the social worker or principal may take legal action.
3. After ten (10) accumulated unlawful absences in a school year, the principal must review any report or investigation prepared under NCGS 115C-381 and must confer with the student and the parent/guardian, if possible, to determine whether the parent/guardian, has received notification and made a good faith effort to comply with the law. If the principal determines that a parent/guardian has not made a good faith effort to comply with the law, the principal shall notify the district attorney and the director of social services of the county where the student resides.

Elementary, Middle and High School Requirements

Research shows that there is a strong correlation between time on task and student achievement. Academic success demands regular and punctual school attendance. While the primary responsibility for school attendance rests with students and parents, schools have a continuing responsibility to make schools safe and inviting. The following requirements address these issues:

- Individual School Improvement Plans shall include strategies to promote regular school attendance and provide appropriate attendance incentives.
- Continued non-compliance shall result in the notification of the Department of Social Services, juvenile court, or the district attorney that the parent/guardian is not cooperating with the school system in addressing the attendance problem.
- Each school will annually address school attendance.

- Elementary and middle schools will require students arriving late or requesting early dismissal to be accompanied by a parent/guardian directly to the designated check-in check-out location in the school.

Additional High School Requirements

While school attendance is very important at all levels, it is of utmost concern in Grades 9-12. Classroom projects, discussions, activities, and experiments require daily participation. Students absent from school will miss these experiences as well as the interactions which occur between the teacher and other students. Teachers utilize this daily classroom participation to more accurately assess the student. Even with students over the age of 16 the school will continue to encourage continuous attendance.

Teachers are expected to personally account for attendance in their classes. Attendance shall be taken for each class period. Teachers are responsible for the documentation of student attendance. The attendance office will complete absence reports for each student, keep documentation of lawful/unlawful absences, and report this information to teachers, the school's social worker, the administration, and parents. If a student fails to bring a note, the absence may be deemed unlawful.

Students must be in attendance at least one (1) hour of class to receive attendance credit; however, habitual early checkouts (three (3) or more in the same class) will be addressed by the administration. Each high school shall establish protocol to address late arrivals and early departures.

Eleventh Absence: A student who misses more than ten (10) days in a semester will receive an incomplete for the course and shall not be awarded course credit except by determination of the attendance committee upon careful review of the student's records. In special circumstances, the principal may waive the committee review and approve the absences. Make-up work shall be assigned by the student's teacher as deemed appropriate. All make-up work shall be completed within a reasonable amount of time as determined by the student's teacher.

1. When total absences (lawful and unlawful) exceed ten (10) days per semester, further documentation may be required (doctor's statement, court documentation, etc.).
2. The principal, graduation coach, and school counselors shall develop a plan to provide the student with an opportunity to earn credits in courses.
3. A parent/guardian or student may appeal the grade before an attendance committee. The committee will present their decision to the principal who will make the final decision per NCGS §115C-288.

Once a student has reached the 10-day threshold, the student may lose the privilege of participating in extra-curricular experiences including, but not limited to, school dances, the prom, academic activities and athletics.

Every effort will be made by the administration and staffs of the high schools to work with the students individually and in groups in an effort to improve attendance.

LEGAL REFS: NCGS 115C-378 through 115C-383

CROSS REFS: Policy 7150 Programs for Disadvantaged At-Risk Students

Adopted: 06/05/84

Revised: 08/06/85, 04/14/87, 06/12/90, 07/06/93, 08/01/95, 09/01/98, 12/03/07, 06/05/12,
01/06/15