

## **STUDENT ABSENCES, TARDINESS AND EXCUSES**

### Background

The Public School Code requires all resident and migratory children of compulsory school age to attend an approved day school, except for students who are home-schooled (see Policy IH) or receiving home-bound instruction (see Policy IMBF). Mental, physical or other "urgent reasons" are considered proper excuses for non-attendance, but the law specifically states that the term "urgent reasons" shall be strictly construed and shall not permit irregular attendance. Students returning to school after periods of absence are required to submit parents' written explanations for such absences, and certification by a health care provider of medical reasons for absences may be required.

Authorized persons may arrest any child, who, without sufficient cause, fails to attend school. Penalties may be levied against parents, guardians and persons in parental relations who fail to send children in their charge to school. Any references in this Policy to "parents" include guardians and persons in parental relations to students. Any reference to "Principal" includes Unit Principal, Assistant Principal, or any designee of a Principal.

The Mt. Lebanon School Board believes that excusing students for activities which could be arranged outside school hours has the effect of depriving students of their educational opportunity. However, it also recognizes the importance, in certain circumstances, of outside instruction not offered in the District and the opportunity to pursue these interests through released time.

The Board further believes that the importance of regular attendance should be inculcated in students from their earliest school years.

### Objective

The objective of this policy is to assure that students attend school regularly, not only to comply with State law, but to benefit from instruction, to participate in class activities and to promote a climate that values school attendance and prepares students for the expectations of the workplace.

### Policy

Although some age-appropriate variations with regard to make up work, re-admission, tardiness, denial of class credit for excessive absences, and related matters are delineated in Administrative Procedures, it is the policy of the Board that the District adhere to the following guidelines.

1. Absences:

- a. Excused Absences: Permissible excused absences from District Schools are: (1) personal illness, (2) medical or dental appointments, (3) District approved tutorial programs not offered by the District, (4) quarantine, (5) death in the immediate family, (6) traditionally-recognized religious holidays, (7) religious instruction as defined below, (8) approved school activities and educational travel, (9) approved 4-H/FFA/FHA participation in authorized Pennsylvania agricultural fairs, (10) required court appearances or attendance, (11) other urgent reasons as approved by the District, and (12) suspension from school.

A maximum of ten (10) days of cumulative lawful absences verified by parental notification shall be permitted during a school year. Any absence beyond ten (10) cumulative days may require an excuse from a licensed medical practitioner.

- b. Unexcused Absences: The following constitute unexcused absences: (1) lack of a valid written excuse from the parent/guardian (and/or licensed health care provider, where deemed appropriate by the Principal), (2) absence because of parental neglect, (3) unapproved educational travel, (4) oversleeping, (5) working at home, and (6) other reasons not sanctioned under excused absences.
- c. Unlawful Absences: Any unexcused absence for pupils of compulsory school age is also unlawful. Except as may be provided otherwise by applicable law, compulsory school age is the time from when the pupil enters first grade (but no later than age 8) to age 17 or graduation from high school, whichever occurs first.
- d. Exceptions: In unusual circumstances a child may not be able to attend school for severe psychological or medical reasons. In such cases, parents must notify the Principal, provide supporting documentation from a licensed health care provider, and work with school officials to develop a plan to ensure that the child receives an appropriate education and that the parent does not violate state attendance laws. Temporary excuses based on medical, psychological or other urgent reasons may not exceed three (3) months: excusals anticipated to be over three (3) months shall be reviewed in consultation with the Pennsylvania Department of Education guidelines.
- e. Truant: Three (3) or more school days of unexcused absence during the current school year by a child subject to compulsory school attendance.
- f. Habitually Truant: Six (6) or more school days of unexcused absences during the current school year by a child subject to compulsory attendance.

2. Readmitting Absent Students – Upon returning from an absence, a parent/guardian's written excuse or other appropriate verification note (including but not limited to certification by a licensed health care provider of medical reasons for absence where deemed appropriate by the Principal) must be presented to the homeroom teacher within

three calendar days. If the excuse is not given to the homeroom teacher by the third calendar day after return, the absence will be considered unexcused. The excuse must include the following information:

- a. Full name of student
- b. Date of absence
- c. Reason for absence
- d. Signature of parent/guardian (and/or licensed health care provider, where applicable) [Note: An excuse can be emailed to the teacher/school provided it originates from the email address of the parent/guardian which is on file in the District.]

The foregoing also applies to tardies.

3. Penalties for Unlawful Absence for Pupils of Compulsory School Age

- a. First Offense: When a child has accumulated three days (or their equivalent) of unlawful or unexcused absences as verified by the Principal or his/her designee, the parent is notified by mail by the Superintendent (or a Principal as the Superintendent's designee) with the First Offense Notice, advising the parent of the dates of unlawful or unexcused absences and including a description of the consequences that will follow if the child becomes habitually truant. The First Offense Notice shall be in the mode and language of communication preferred by the person in parental relation, may include an offer of a school attendance improvement conference and, when transmitted to a person who is not the biological or adoptive parent, shall be provided to the child's biological or adoptive parent if the parent's mailing address is on file with the school and the parent is not precluded from receiving the information by court order.
- b. Subsequent Offenses: If the child continues to incur unlawful or unexcused absences after the District has issued the First Offense Notice, the District shall then offer by advance written notice a school attendance improvement conference to the child and the person in parental relation, unless a conference was held previously following the First Offense Notice. The following shall apply:
  - i. No legal requirement is placed upon the child or person in parental relation to attend the conference. The conference shall occur even if the person in parental relation declines to participate or fails to attend the scheduled conference after advance written notice and attempts to communicate via telephone.
  - ii. The outcome of the conference shall be documented in a written school attendance improvement plan on a form substantially similar to one developed by the Department of Education.

- iii. Further legal action may not be taken by the school to address unexcused absences by the child until after the date for the scheduled school attendance improvement conference has passed.
- iv. The District shall not expel or impose out-of-school suspension, disciplinary reassignment or transfer for truant behavior.

c. Habitually Truant Consequences:

- i. When a student under fifteen (15) years of age is habitually truant, the District:
    - a. Shall refer the student to a school-based or community-based attendance improvement program or or the local children and youth agency.
    - b. May file a citation against the person in parental relation who resides in the same household as the student.
  - ii. When a student fifteen (15) years of age or older is habitually truant, the District:
    - a. Shall refer the student to a school-based or community-based attendance improvement program.
    - b. May file a citation against the student or the person in parental relation who resides in the same household as the student.
    - c. May refer the student to the local children and youth agency, if the student continues to incur additional unexcused absences after being referred to a school-based or community-based attendance improvement program, or if the student refuses to participate in such program.
  - iii. The procedures for filing a citation are set forth in Section 1333.2 of the School Code, as amended.
  - iv. Additional penalties for violating compulsory school attendance requirements are set forth in Section 1333.3 of the School Code, as amended, and include, without limitation: fines, assignments of community service, completion of programs designed to improve attendance, referral for services or possible disposition as a dependent child under 42 Pa.C.S. Ch. 63, suspension of drivers licenses or ineligibility to apply for driver licenses.
4. Tardiness – Student who are not inside their assigned homerooms or classrooms when the late bell rings are considered tardy. Tardiness is considered excused or unexcused for the same reasons as excused or unexcused absences and may result in disciplinary consequences.
5. Early Dismissals – Parents and students are strongly encouraged to make personal appointments before or after school hours since being dismissed early from school can cause a disruption to the educational process. A written request from the parent that includes the

reason for the request must be submitted in advance. The District may also require that students who receive approved early dismissals for medical or dental appointments bring an appointment notice from the doctor when the excuse is issued or when the student returns from the appointment. In exceptional circumstances, prior written notice may be waived, provided that in the case of an elementary or middle school student, the parent must personally appear at the school to request a child's release. In all circumstances, parents of high school students must also call the attendance office prior to the dismissal to request a release.

6. Pre-Approved Absences Including Educational Travel – The District recognizes that students may need to travel with parents for valid educational or family reasons. In such cases, pre-approval is required. Students requesting permission for such travel with parents must complete a Pre-Approved Absence Request Form at least five days in advance of the proposed trip, which when completed will explain their reason for the request and the duration of the trip. All trips must have some educational or family value for the student as predetermined by the Principal in order to be counted as an excused absence. A Pre-Approved Absence is to be no more than five school days in length and is to be taken with a parent(s) or person(s) in a parental relationship.

The District urges parents to refrain from scheduling pre-approved absences during the first or last week of the school year or during specified days when standardized tests or semester or final exams are being administered. Approval may be denied during these periods.

Students absent ten or more days of the semester will be refused permission. Also, students who, in the opinion of the Principal, as advised by professional staff, are performing less than satisfactorily, will not be given permission to leave on a pre-approved absence. If the trip is taken without permission, the absence will be treated as an unexcused/unlawful absence.

No more than five days of pre-approved absence will be granted to any one student in a given school year. Additional days of pre-approved absence may be approved at the discretion of the Principal on a limited basis when the student is absent from school for educational purposes and has been absent less than ten school days during a semester.

7. Application to Students Beyond Compulsory School Age/Emancipated Minors –Provisions pertaining to the rights, duties and responsibilities of "parents" under this policy apply to parents or guardians of all District students, including those who are 18 years or older and are unemancipated. Legally emancipated students, of whatever age, possess the rights of parents under this Policy. For example, under Section 2 of this Policy, an excuse or other appropriate verification note prepared by the parent/guardian must be presented upon the student's return (unless the student is legally emancipated), regardless of whether the student is 18 years of age or older. If the student is legally emancipated, however, an excuse or note signed by the student is acceptable.

8. Homebound Instruction – Students receiving homebound instruction for other than disciplinary reasons are considered present. (See Policy IMBF-Homebound Instruction.)
9. Religious Instruction – Students may be released from school for a total of not more than 36 hours per year in order to attend classes for religious instruction. In advance of the student’s release, the parent or person acting in a parental role must identify and describe the instruction and the dates and hours for which the release time is requested. The parent must, following each such absence, furnish in writing to the Superintendent a statement attesting that the child did in fact attend the instruction and the dates and hours when such attendance took place. Release time for religious instruction is considered an excused absence.
10. School-Sanctioned Activities—Students may be released from school for approved participation in school-sponsored field trips, performances and co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. The student is responsible for making up the work, quizzes and/or tests during the released time. Students who, with approval, are participating in school sponsored activities are considered present. A Principal may deny requests to attend school sanctioned activities where the Principal, with the input of professional staff, determines that the student’s grades and/or attendance record indicate that the request to miss class for the activity should not be granted.
11. Make Up Work - Students who are absent from school including: Tardiness, Early dismissal, Pre-Approved absences, Excused/Unexcused absences, Religious Release Time, or attending a school-sanctioned activity are required to make up the work missed in each class. It is the student's responsibility to make up work and pursue the successful completion of all class work missed.
12. Excessive Absences –Students absent ten or more days (or their equivalent) (and/or missing ten or more classes (or their equivalent) in a given course), excused and/or unexcused, in a semester may be denied credit for a course or courses, and/or may be retained at their grade level for the next school year, where so determined after review of the matter pursuant to applicable Administrative Procedures. In addition to the legal proceedings for violation of compulsory attendance laws described above, disciplinary action for unexcused absences may also be taken where circumstances warrant, as determined by the District.
13. Withdrawals and Transfers – Students withdrawing from school must first obtain approval from the Principal. In conformance with the School Code, students must be 17 years of age or older to withdraw or 16, 15 or 14 years of age with a legal work permit and written parental permission, as more specifically described in Section 1330 of the School Code. For students transferring to another school, a formal request must be made by the new school district for records to be forwarded , and the Principal shall forward the records within five (5) business days from the date of the request.

Administration Responsibility

It shall be the responsibility of the Administration to:

1. Establish administrative procedures necessary to implement this policy including but not limited to attendance requirements as they relate to eligibility for course credit, grade advancement and graduation.
2. Require excuses from physicians or other health care providers where deemed appropriate.
3. Apply the policy as set forth.

Communication

This policy shall be communicated to:

1. All administrative personnel involved in implementing the policy.
2. All teachers.
3. Students and parents or guardians of students.

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