## Attendance, Truancy, and Chronic Absenteeism

### I. Attendance and Truancy

#### A. Definitions for Section I

1. **Absence** is any day during which a student is not considered "in attendance" at the school, or on a school-sponsored activity (e.g. field trip), for at least one-half of the school day.
2. **Disciplinary absence** is any absence as a result of school or Bethany Public School District (District) disciplinary action. Any student serving an out-of-school suspension or expulsion should be considered absent. Such absence is not considered excused or unexcused for attendance and truancy purposes.
3. **Educational evaluation** for purposes of this regulation is an assessment of a student's educational development, which, based upon the student's presenting characteristics, would assess, as appropriate, the following areas: health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities.
4. **Excused absence** is considered a student excused from school if the school has received written documentation describing the reason for the absence within ten (10) school days of the student's return to school, or if the student has been excluded from school in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes § 10-210 regarding communicable diseases, and the following criteria are met:
    a. Any absence before the student's tenth ($10^{th}$) absence, is considered excused when the student's parent/guardian approves such absence and submits appropriate written documentation in accordance with this regulation.
    b. For the student's tenth (10th) absence and all absences thereafter, a student's absences from school are, with appropriate documentation in accordance with this regulation, considered excused only for the following reasons:
        i. student illness (verified by an appropriately licensed medical professional);
        ii. religious holidays;
        iii. mandated court appearances (documentation required);
        iv. funeral or death in the family, or another emergency beyond the control of the student's family;
        v. extraordinary educational opportunities pre-approved by District administration and in accordance with Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) guidance and this regulation; or
        vi. lack of transportation that is normally provided by a district other than the one the student attends.

c. A student, over the age of five (5), whose parent or legal guardian is an active duty member of the armed forces who has been called for duty, is on leave from or has immediately returned from deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting, shall be granted ten (10) days of excused absences in any school year, and, in the discretion of the administration, additional excused absences to visit such student's parent or legal guardian with respect to the parent's leave or deployment. In the case of such excused absences, the student, and parent or legal guardian are responsible for obtaining assignments from the student's teacher prior to any period of excused absence, and for ensuring that such assignments are completed by the student prior to the student's return to school.

Excused absence excludes a student's engagement in 1) virtual classes, 2) virtual meetings, 3) activities on time-logged electronic systems, and 4) the completion and submission of assignments, if such engagement accounts for not less than one-half of the school day during remote learning.

d. Absence resulting from a student enrolled in grades K-6, taking two (2) non-consecutive mental health wellness days during the school year.

5. **In Attendance** is any day during which a student is present at school, or from an activity sponsored by the school, for at least half of the regular school day.
6. **Student** is a student enrolled at the Bethany Community School.
7. **Truant** is any student five (5) years of age or older, inclusive, who has four (4) unexcused absences from school in any one month or ten (10) unexcused absences from school in any school year.
8. **Unexcused absence** is any absence from a regularly scheduled school day for at least one-half of the school day, which is not excused or considered a disciplinary absence.

   Unexcused absence excludes a student's engagement in 1) virtual classes, 2) virtual meetings, 3) activities on time-logged electronic systems, and 4) the completion and submission of assignments, if such engagement accounts for not less than one-half of the school day during remote learning.

   The determination of whether an absence is excused will be made by the school administration or designee. Parents or other persons having control of the child may appeal that decision to the Superintendent or designee, whose decision shall be final.
9. **Mental health wellness day** is a school day during which a student in K-6 attends to such student's emotional and psychological well-being in lieu of attending school. Such days must be nonconsecutive.
10. **Remote learning** means instruction by means of one or more Internet-based software platforms as part of a remote learning model as may be authorized by the Bethany Board of Education (Board) in accordance with applicable law.

**B. Mental Health Wellness Days**

Any student enrolled in grades kindergarten to six, inclusive, shall be permitted to take two (2) mental health wellness days during the school year, during which day such student shall not be required to attend school. No student shall take mental health wellness days during consecutive school days. Mental health wellness days shall be excused when permission by the student's parent/guardian is documented by the school, regardless of the number of absences a student has accrued in the school year. Mental health wellness days will not be included in reporting or referrals to truancy. Mental health wellness days will count as an "absence" for determining chronic absenteeism, as defined in Section II of this regulation.

**C. Written Documentation Requirements for Absences**

1. Written documentation must be submitted for each incidence of absence within ten (10) school days of the student's return to school. Consecutive days of absence are considered one (1) incidence of absence.
2. The first nine (9) days of absence will be excused upon receipt of a signed note from the student's parent/guardian, a signed note from a school official that spoke in person with the parent/guardian regarding the absence, or a note confirming the absence by the school nurse or by a licensed medical professional, as appropriate.
    a. A student's engagement in remote classes, remote meetings, activities on time logged electronic systems, and completion and submission of assignments, if such engagement accounts for not less than one-half of the school day during remote learning is excluded from the definitions of "excused absence" and "unexcused absence."
    b. A student taking two (2) non-consecutive mental health wellness days during the school year shall not be required to present documentation or parent/guardian consent.
3. For the student's tenth (10th) absence, and all absences thereafter, documentation of the absence must be submitted in accordance with paragraphs 1 and 2 above, and must also include the reason for the absence and the following additional information:
    a. student illness:
        i. a signed note from a medical professional, who may be the school nurse, who has evaluated the student confirming the absence and giving an expected return date; or
        ii. a signed note from the school nurse who has spoken with the student's medical professional and confirmed the absence, including the date and location of the consultation.
    b. religious holidays: none.
    c. mandated court appearances:
        i. a police summons;
        i. a subpoena;
        ii. a notice to appear;
        iii. a signed note from a court official; or
        iv. any other official, written documentation of the legal requirement to appear in court.
    d. funeral or death in the family, or another emergency beyond the control of the student's family: a written document explaining the nature of the emergency.
    e. extraordinary educational opportunity pre-approved by the school administration and in accordance with CSDE guidance and this policy: written pre-approval from the administration, in accordance with this regulation.
    f. lack of transportation that is normally provided by a district other than the one the student attends: none.

4. The District reserves the right to randomly audit written documentation received, through telephone and other methods of communication, to determine its authenticity.
5. Any absence that is not documented in accordance with this regulation within ten (10) school days after the incidence of absence will be recorded as unexcused. If documentation is provided within ten (10) school days but is incomplete, the building principal may, at their own discretion, grant up to a five (5) school day extension for provision of the completed documentation.

**D. Extraordinary Educational Opportunities**

1. To qualify as an extraordinary educational opportunity, the opportunity must:
   a. be educational in nature and must have a learning objective related to the student's coursework or plan of study;
   b. be an opportunity not ordinarily available to the student;
   c. be grade and developmentally appropriate; and
   d. include content that is highly relevant to the student; while some opportunities will be relevant to all students, others will contain very specific content that would limit their relevance to a smaller group of students.
2. Family vacations do not qualify as extraordinary educational opportunities.
3. All requests for approval of extraordinary educational opportunities must:
   a. be submitted to the building principal in writing prior to the opportunity, but no later than ten (10) school days prior to the opportunity except in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the building administrator;
   b. contain the signatures of both the parent/guardian and the student;
   c. include an outline of the learning objective of the opportunity and include detail as to how the objective is linked to the student's coursework or plan of study; and
   d. include additional documentation, where available, about the opportunity.
4. The building principal shall provide a response in writing and include the following:
   a. either approval or denial of the request;
   b. brief reason for any denial;
   c. any requirements placed upon the student as a condition of approval;
   d. the specific days approved as excused absences for the opportunity;
   e. the understanding that the building administrator may withdraw its approval if the opportunity is canceled or the student fails to meet the agreed-upon requirements of the approval.
5. All decisions of the school administration relating to extraordinary educational opportunities shall be final.
6. Students who are granted excusal from school to participate in extraordinary educational opportunities are expected to share their experiences with other students and/or school staff when they return.
7. Approval for an extraordinary educational opportunity is determined on a case-by-case basis and the analysis of individualized factors. An opportunity approved for one (1) student may not be approved for another.

**E. Truancy Exceptions**

1. A student five (5) or six (6) years of age shall not be considered truant if the parent/guardian has appeared personally at the school office and exercised the option of not sending the child to school at five (5) or six (6) years of age.
2. If a parent/guardian of an expelled student chooses not to enroll the student in an alternative program, the student shall not be considered to be "truant."

**F. Determinations of Whether a Student is "In Attendance"**

1. A student serving an out-of-school suspension or expulsion shall be reported as absent unless the student receives an alternative educational program for at least one-half of the regular school day. In any event, the absence is considered a disciplinary absence, and will not be designated as excused or unexcused.
2. On early dismissal days and days shortened due to inclement weather, the regular school day for attendance purposes is considered to be the amount of instructional time offered to students on that day. For example, if the school is open for four hours (4) on a shortened day scheduled, a student must be present for a minimum of two (2) hours in order to be considered "in attendance."
3. Students placed on homebound instruction due to illness or injury in accordance with applicable regulations and requirements are counted as being "in attendance" for every day that they receive instruction from an appropriately certified teacher for an amount of time deemed adequate in accordance with applicable law.

**G. Procedures for Students in Grades K-6**

1. Notification
   a. Annually at the beginning of the school year and upon the enrollment of any child during the school year, the administration shall notify the parent or other person having control of the student enrolled in grades K to 6 in writing of the obligations pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes § 10-184 to ensure that such a student attends school regularly or to show that the child is elsewhere receiving equivalent instruction in the studies taught in the District.
   b. Annually at the beginning of the school year and upon the enrollment of any child during the school year, the administration shall obtain from the parent/guardian of the student in grades K-6 a telephone number or other means of contacting such parent/guardian during the school day.
2. Monitoring

   The District shall implement a system of monitoring individual unexcused absences of students in grades K-6. Whenever such a student fails to report to school on a regularly scheduled school day, school personnel under the direction of the school administration shall make a reasonable effort to notify the parent/guardian of such student by telephone and by mail of the student's absence, unless school personnel have received an indication that the parent/guardian is aware of the student's absence. Reasonable efforts shall include two (2) attempts to reach the parent/guardian at the telephone number provided by the parent/guardian. Such attempts shall be recorded on a form provided by the Superintendent. Any person who, in good faith, gives or fails to give such notice shall be immune from liability, civil or criminal, which might otherwise be incurred or imposed and shall have the same immunity with respect to any judicial proceeding which results from such notice or failure to give notice.

**H. Procedures Applicable to Students Ages Five (5) and Over**

1. Intervention

   a. When a student is truant, the school administration shall schedule a meeting with the parent/guardian and appropriate school personnel to review and evaluate the reasons for the student's truancy. This meeting shall be held no later than ten (10) days after the student becomes truant. The school administration shall document the meeting, and if the parent/guardian declines to attend the meeting, or is otherwise is non-responsive, that fact shall also be documented and the meeting shall proceed with school personnel in attendance.

   b. When a student is truant, the building principal or designee shall coordinate services with and referrals of students to community agencies providing child and family services, as appropriate. The school administration or designee shall document efforts to contact and include families and to provide early intervention in truancy matters.

   c. When a student is truant, the Superintendent or designee shall provide notice to the student's parent/guardian of the information concerning the existence and availability of the 2-1-1 Infoline program, and other pediatric mental and behavioral health screening services and tools described in Connecticut General Statutes Section 17a-22r.

   d. Beginning July 1, 2023, when a student is truant, an appropriate school mental health specialist, as determined by the District, shall conduct an evaluation of the student to determine if additional behavioral health interventions are necessary for the well-being of the child. "School mental health specialist" means any person employed by the District to provide mental health services to students, including but not limited to a school social worker, school psychologist, trauma specialist, behavior technician, board certified behavior analyst, school counselor, licensed professional counselor or licensed marriage and family therapist.

   e. If the Commissioner of Education determines that the school under the jurisdiction of the Board has a disproportionately high rate of truancy, the District shall implement a truancy intervention model identified by the CSDE pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes § 10-198e.

   f. In addition to the procedures specified in subsections a) through c) above, a regular education student who is experiencing attendance problems should be referred to the school's Child Study Team (Team) to consider the need for additional interventions and/or assistance. The Team will also consider whether the student should be referred to a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting to review the student's need and eligibility for special education. A special education student who is experiencing attendance problems should be referred to a PPT meeting for program review.

   g. Where the documented implementation of the procedures specified in Subsections (a) through (d) above does not result in improved outcomes despite collaboration with the parent/guardian, the school administration or designee may, with written parent/guardian consent, refer a student who is truant to a Youth Service Bureau.

**I. Attendance Records**

All attendance records developed by the Board shall include the individual student's state-assigned student identifier (SASID).

## II. Chronic Absenteeism

### A. Definitions for Section II

1. **Chronically absent child** is a child who is enrolled in the school under the jurisdiction of the Board and whose total number of absences at any time during a school year is equal to or greater than ten percent (10%) of the total number of days that such student has been enrolled at the school during such school year.
2. **Absence** is an excused absence, unexcused absence, or disciplinary absence, as those terms are defined by the State Board of Education pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes § 10-198b and this regulation.
3. **District Chronic Absenteeism Rate** is the total number of chronically absent students under the jurisdiction of the Board in the previous school year divided by the total number of students under the jurisdiction of the Board for such school year.
4. **School Chronic Absenteeism Rate** is the total number of chronically absent students for the school in the previous school year divided by the total number of students enrolled in the school for such school year.

### B. Establishment of Attendance Review Teams

If the Board has a District chronic absenteeism rate of ten percent (10%) or higher, it shall establish an Attendance Review Team for the District.

If a school under the jurisdiction of the Board has a school chronic absenteeism rate of fifteen percent (15%) or higher, it shall establish an Attendance Review Team for the school.

### C. Composition and Role of Attendance Review Teams

Any attendance review team established under these regulations may include school administrators, school psychologists, teachers, representatives from community-based programs who address issues related to student attendance by providing programs and services to truants, as defined under I.A.7. and chronically absent students and their parents or guardians.

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

### D. State Chronic Absenteeism Prevention and Intervention Plan

The Board and its attendance review teams, if any, will consider any chronic absenteeism prevention and intervention plan developed by the CSDE.

## III. Reports to the State Regarding Truancy Data

Annually, the Board shall include information regarding the number of truants and chronically absent students in the strategic school profile report for the school under its jurisdiction and for the District as a whole submitted to the Commissioner of Education. Measures of truancy include the type of data that is required to be collected by the CSDE regarding attendance and unexcused absences in order for the CSDE to comply with federal reporting requirements and the actions taken by the Board to reduce truancy in the District.

## IV. Evolving State Department of Education and State Board of Education Guidance

The District will comply with any and all guidance issued by the State Department of Education and/or State Board of Education regarding attendance requirements, including during periods of remote learning.

Legal References:

Connecticut General Statutes § 10-184

Connecticut General Statutes § 10-185

Connecticut General Statutes § 10-186

Connecticut General Statutes § 10-198a

Connecticut General Statutes § 10-198b, as amended

Connecticut General Statutes § 10-198c

Connecticut General Statutes § 10-198d, as amended

Connecticut General Statutes § 10-198e

Connecticut General Statutes § 10-198f

Connecticut General Statutes § 10-220

Public Act 22-47

Guidelines for Reporting Student Attendance in the Public School Information System (Connecticut State Department of Education, January 2008)

Connecticut State Board of Education Memorandum, *Definitions of Excused and Unexcused Absences* (June 27, 2012)

Connecticut State Department of Education, *Guidelines for Implementation of the Definitions of Excused and Unexcused Absences and Best Practices for Absence Prevention and Intervention* (April 2013)

Connecticut State Department of Education, *Reducing Chronic Absence in Connecticut's Schools: A Prevention and Intervention Guide for Schools and District* (April 2017)

Connecticut State Department of Education Memorandum, *Youth Service Bureau Referral for Truancy and Defiance of School Rules* (February 22, 2018)

Connecticut State Department of Education Memorandum, *Youth Service Bureau Referral Guide* (February 2018)

Connecticut State Department of Education Memorandum, *Mental Health Wellness Days* (January 24, 2022)

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# Parent/Guardian Notification Regarding Student Attendance

Regular and punctual student attendance is essential to the educational process. Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-184 provides that "[e]ach parent or other person having control of a child five (5) years of age and over shall cause such child to attend a public day school regularly during the hours and terms the public school in the district wherein such child resides is in session or the parent or person having control of such child is able to show that the child is elsewhere receiving equivalent instruction in the studies taught in the public schools. Such parent or person shall personally appear at the school office and sign a withdrawal form. Such withdrawal form shall include an attestation from a guidance counselor or school administrator of the school that such school district has provided such parent or person with information on the educational options available in the school system and community. The parent or person having control of a child five (5) years of age shall have the option of not sending the child to school until the child is six (6) years of age and the parent or person having control of a child six (6) years of age shall have the option of not sending the child to school until the child is seven (7) years of age. The parent or person shall exercise such option by personally appearing at the school office and signing an option form. The district shall provide the parent or person with information on the educational opportunities available in the school system."

In order to assist parents and other persons in meeting this responsibility, the Bethany Board of Education (Board) monitors unexcused student absences and makes reasonable efforts to notify parents and other persons by contacting them when a student fails to report to school. State law provides that any person who, in good faith, gives or fails to give such notice shall be immune from any liability, civil or criminal, which might otherwise be incurred or imposed and shall have the same immunity with respect to any judicial proceeding which results from such notice or failure to give such notice. The Board, therefore, must obtain a telephone number or other means of contacting parents or other persons during the school day.

At the beginning of each school year, a student's parent/guardian will be required to complete a Student Contact Information Form for **every** student enrolled in the Bethany Community School.

It is the responsibility of a student's parent/guardian to immediately notify the Bethany Public School District of any changes to the information contained on the Student Contact Information Form during the school year.