Merchantville Board of Education 130 South Centre Street Merchantville, NJ 08109	File Code : 5113 Adopted : 09/28/1993 Revised : 05/26/2020 Reviewed : 06/03/2024

Absences and Excuses

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 Common Core State Standards for mathematics and language arts and literacy and the Core Curriculum Content Standards. The chief school administrator shall oversee the development of effective strategies that maximize student attendance at all scheduled periods of actual instruction or supervised study activities and strive to:

A. Encourage good attendance;

B. Discourage unexcused absences;

C. Identify patterns of absence, tardiness and early departures from school; and

D. Intervene to prevent and correct problems with attendance.

Attendance

A day in session for purposes of attendance shall be a day on which the school is open and students are under the guidance and direction of a teacher or teachers engaged in the teaching process. Days on which school is closed for such reasons as holidays, teachers' institutes and inclement weather shall not be considered as days in session.

A school day shall consist of not less than four hours of actual instruction. One continuous session of two and one-half hours may be considered a full day in kindergarten.

A day of attendance shall be one in which a student is present for the full day under the guidance and direction of a teacher while school is in session. Where there are two sessions in a day due to overcrowding, either session of four hours or more, exclusive of lunch or recess, shall be the equivalent of a full day's attendance.

A student shall be recorded as absent in the school register when not in attendance at a session, except

the following reasons:

A. Religious observance as defined by law (N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(h));

B. A college visit (up to 3 days per school year, only for students in grades 11 and 12);

C. "Take Our Children to Work Day" (pursuant to the memo issued by the Commissioner to all districts on April 25, 2017) or other rule issued by the Commissioner;

D. Participation in observance of Veterans Day (N.J.S.A. 18A:36-13.2) or district board of election membership activities (N.J.S.A. 18A: 36-33); or

E. The closure of a busing district that prevents a student from having transportation to the receiving school.

The mere presence of a student at roll call shall not be regarded as sufficient attendance for compliance with law (N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3). In a school which is in session during both the forenoon and the afternoon, a student shall be present at least one hour during both the forenoon and the afternoon in order to be recorded as present for the full day. In a school which is in session during either the forenoon or the afternoon, a student shall be present at least two hours in the session in order to be recorded as present for the full day.

A student not present in school because of his or 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 and Unexcused Absence

A. An absence shall be considered an "excused absence" for the purpose of determining promotion, retention, truancy, grades, course credit, eligibility to make up missed assignments and tests for full credit, and violations of the school code of conduct for attendance, for the following reasons (school district must select options):

1. The student's illness with a doctor's note;
2. Requirements of a student's individual health care plan;
3. A death or critical illness in the student's immediate family, or of others with permission of principal;
4. Quarantine;
5. Observance of the student's religion on a day approved for that purpose by the State Board of Education;
6. The student's suspension from school;
7. Requirements of the student's individualized education program (IEP);
8. Alternate short or long term accommodations for students with disabilities;
9. The student's required attendance in court;
10. Interviews with an admissions officer of an educational institution;
11. Necessary and unavoidable medical or dental appointments that cannot be scheduled at a time other than the school day;
12. Such good cause as may be acceptable to the principal.

Attendance need not always be within the school facilities. A pupil 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 pupil 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.

B. An "unexcused absence" is a student's absence for all or part of a school day for any reason other than those listed as excused absences in "A" above. An unexcused absence may be counted toward retention, truancy, loss of course credit, ineligibility to make up missed assignments and tests for full

credit, and violations of the school code of conduct for attendance. Absence is expressly not excused for any of the following reasons (this list is intended to be illustrative and is not inclusive):

1. Family travel;
2. Performance of household or babysitting duties;
3. Other daytime activities unrelated to the school program;
4. Leaving school without permission when school is still in session;
5. Leaving class because of illness and not reporting to the school nurse as directed; or
6. Being present in school but absent from class without approval. Such absence from class is a "class cut."

Tardiness

The orderly conduct of class activity depends upon the prompt and precise beginning of the program. Tardiness hinders the proper conduct of school activity. Students are expected to arrive to school and class on time. A student who is tardy to any class will be subject to disciplinary action as outlined in board policy 5131 Conduct and Discipline and the student code of conduct. Consequences for accumulated occurrences of tardiness may include detention, loss of credit and an unexcused school day absence.

Attendance and Instruction

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.

"Chronic absenteeism" is defined in New Jersey's *ESSA* State Plan as the percentage of a school's students who are not present for 10 percent (18 days) or more of the days that they were in membership at a school.

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:

A. A student shall be considered absent from class for tardiness in excess of one half of the total class period.

B. A student shall be considered absent from school for participation in less than 4 instructional hours during the school day.

A pupil must be in attendance for 165 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.

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

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 the days. Documentation of the nature and causes of these absences shall be the responsibility of the pupil and parent/guardian. The absence of documented parent/guardian notes, doctor's notes, and other records that verify that an absence was excused according to board policy, shall be considered unexcused. Unexcused absences shall count toward truancy and may be subject to loss of grade or course credit toward promotion or graduation and disciplinary actions according to the code of student conduct. Notes from parents/guardians shall be considered but the district may require additional documentation such as doctor's notes or other official records to verify the note.

Parents/guardians are responsible for notifying the school early in the day when a child will be absent

and for informing the school in writing of the reason for the absence.

Procedures for Unexcused Absences

When a student fails to report to class or school accumulating up to four unexcused absences, the district shall:

A. Make a reasonable attempt to notify the student's parents/guardians of each unexcused absence prior to the start of the following school day;

B. Make a reasonable attempt to determine the cause of the unexcused absence, including through contact with the student's parents;

C. Identify in consultation with the student's parents needed action designed to address patterns of unexcused absences, if any, and to have the child return to school and maintain regular attendance;

D. Follow all procedures according to law and board policy 5142 Safety and 5141.4 Child Abuse and Neglect if a potential missing or abused child situation is detected;

E. Cooperate with law enforcement and other authorities and agencies, as appropriate.

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.

Procedures for Persistent Absences

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

A. Make a reasonable attempt to notify the student's parents/guardians of each unexcused absence prior to the start of the following school day;

B. Make a reasonable attempt to determine the cause of the unexcused absence, including through contact with the student's parents to address patterns of unexcused absences previously;

C. Evaluate the appropriateness of action taken as identify in consultation with the student's parents;

D. Develop an action plan to establish outcomes based upon the student's patterns of unexcused absences and to specify the interventions for supporting the student's return to school and regular attendance, which may include any or all of the following:

1. Refer or consult with the building's intervention and referral services team;

2. Conduct testing, assessments or evaluations of the student's academic, behavioral and health needs;

3. Consider an alternate educational placement;

4. Make a referral to or coordinate with a community-based social and health provider agency or other community resource;

5. Refer to the court or a court program as follows:

a. When the unexcused absences are determined to be violations of the compulsory education law and board policy;

b. When there is evidence of a juvenile-family crisis the student may be referred to Superior Court, Chancery Division, Family Part. "Juvenile-family crisis" pursuant to N.J.S.A. 2A:4A-22(g) means behavior, conduct or a condition of a juvenile, parent or guardian or other family member which presents or results in a threat to wellbeing and safety of the juvenile, serious conflict regarding the juvenile's conduct, unauthorized absence from home, pattern of unauthorized absence from school, or human trafficking;

6. 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;

7. Engage the student's family.

Discipline

All discipline regarding the attendance of students shall be consistent with the board policy 5131 Conduct and Discipline and the code of student conduct. Consequences for absences may include:

A. Students may be denied participation in co-curricular activities if their attendance fails to meet the standards set forth herein;

B. Students may be denied participation in athletic competition if their attendance fails to meet the standards set forth herein;

C. Loss of partial or total course credit;

D. Detention or suspension.

No student who is absent from school for observance of a religious holiday or other 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 and may appeal this determination through the procedure as set forth in board policy 5145.6 Student Grievance Procedure.

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 shall:

A. Make a determination regarding the need for a court referral for the truancy;

B. Make a reasonable attempt to notify the student's parents of the mandatory referral;

C. Continue to consult with the parent and the involved agencies to support the student's return to school and regular attendance;

D. Cooperate with law enforcement and other authorities and agencies, as appropriate;

E. Follow all procedures required by N.J.S.A. 18A:38-28 through 31, Article 3B, Compelling Attendance at School and other applicable state and federal statutes as follows:

1. An attendance officer who finds a truant child, shall take the child and deliver him/her to the parent/guardian or other person having charge and control of the child, or to the teacher of the school which such child is lawfully required to attend;

2. The attendance officer shall examine into all violations and shall warn the child, the parent/guardian or other person having charge and control of the child of the consequences of the violation if persisted in;

3. The attendance officer shall notify the parent/guardian or other person having charge and control of the child in writing, to cause the child to attend school within five days from the date on which notice is served, and regularly thereafter;

4. The attendance officer shall have full police power to enforce the provisions of this article and may arrest without warrant any vagrant child or habitual truant or any child who is habitually incorrigible or who is vicious or immoral in conduct or illegally absent from school;

5. The sheriff and his officers and all police officers and constables shall assist the attendance officer in the performance of their duties;

6. A parent, guardian or other person having charge and control of a child between the ages of 6 and 16 years, who shall fail to comply with any of the provisions of this article relating to his duties,

shall be deemed to be a disorderly person and shall be subject to a fine of not more than $ 25.00 for a first offense and not more than $ 100.00 for each subsequent offense, in the discretion of the court. In any such proceeding, the summons issuing therein, or in special circumstances a warrant, shall be directed to the alleged disorderly person and the child.

Unexcused Absences for Students in Special Education

For students with disabilities, the length of the school day and the academic year of programs must be at least as long as that established for nondisabled students (N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.1(c)). The attendance guidelines, discipline and remedial measures set forth in this policy shall apply to classified students where appropriate and in accordance with the student's:

A. Individualized education program (IEP);

B. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

C. Procedural protections set forth in N.J.A.C. 6A:14;

D. Alternate short or long term accommodations for students with disabilities as required by law;

E. Requirements of a student's individualized health care plan and individualized emergency healthcare plan.

The IEP team may make a decision, based on the individual needs of the student, that the student is unable to attend school and should receive special education and related services in a different setting or manner, such as through home instruction, all or part of the time. The decision of the IEP team shall be included in the student's IEP. In such a case, the student should be marked as "present" in the Student Information System (SIS) when he or she is educated in the educational placement(s) set forth in his or her IEP.

District Sending and Receiving Relationships

The receiving school shall report attendance problems to the sending district responsible for the student. Following five or more cumulative unexcused absences school officials from the sending district shall proceed in accordance with the sending district's board attendance policy and procedure.

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

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

Late Arrival and Early Dismissal

The board recognizes that from time to time compelling circumstances will require that a pupil be late to school or dismissed before the end of the school day.

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

A. Medical or dental appointments which cannot be scheduled outside of school hours;

B. Requirements of a student's individualized health care plan and individualized emergency healthcare plan;

C. Requirements of the student's individualized education program (IEP);

D. Alternate short or long term accommodations for students with disabilities;

E. Medical disability;

F. Motor vehicle driver's test;

G. Interview for college entrance or employment;

H. Family emergency;

I. Court appearance;

J. Such good cause as may be acceptable to the administration.

No pupil in grades kindergarten through eight shall be permitted to leave the 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 pupil. Such custodian shall be responsible for informing the board of any change in the pupil's custodian. The principal may take such steps as seem necessary to ensure that the child is released only to the proper legal custodian.

Potentially Missing Children

A. If daily attendance records indicate a child is absent, and the parent/guardian has not called, a designated person shall attempt to contact the parent/guardian;

B. If no telephone contact can be made, the attendance officer shall investigate;

C. If the attendance officer cannot locate the child, he/she shall inform the principal, who shall inform the appropriate local authorities;

D. 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 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 shall 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 pupil records (see policy 5125 Pupil Records). After the chief school administrator 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

The chief school administrator shall develop procedures for the attendance of pupils including:

A. The expectations and consequences regarding students' timely arrival of students to school and classes;

B. The expectations and consequences regarding attendance at school and classes;

C. A definition of unexcused absence that counts toward truancy that is consistent with the definition

of a school day;

D. School staff responses for unexcused absences for:

1. Cumulative absences up to four;
2. Cumulative absences of between five and nine;
3. Cumulative unexcused absences of 10 or more; and
4. Referral to court.

Dissemination and Implementation

The chief school administrator shall 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 shall 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 shall review the attendance policy on a regular basis.

Date:

Legal References: Use legal reference sheet.

Cross References: List your appropriate policies. See legal reference sheet for possibilities.

Key Words

Pupil Attendance, Attendance, Absences and Excuses, Student Attendance