

I. Policy Statement

The Board of Education is committed to ensuring that a quality education is provided for each student who is enrolled in the school system. The Board recognizes that students are required to be in school or to be attending a school-related activity each day school is in session and that there is a strong correlation among regular attendance, academic achievement, and the completion of school. The Board of Education further believes that regular attendance is vital to ensuring that students become productive members of society.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish the requirements for student attendance, guidelines for attendance monitoring and recording, and procedures for supporting chronically absent and habitually truant students.

III. Definitions

- A. Absence – The failure of a student to be physically present in school/class or at a school-related activity during the school day.
- B. Attendance – The act of being physically present at school or school-related activities during the school day.
- C. Attendance source documents – Documents on which the classroom teacher, homeroom teacher, substitute or other staff member records the student's attendance.
- D. Chronically absent – A year-to-date absence rate of 20% or more, including both lawful and unlawful absences.
- E. Exemplary attendance – A final attendance rate of 96% or more of the student year with no unlawful absences.
- F. Habitual truant – A student who met ALL of the following criteria during the school year:
 - 1. The student was age 5 through 20

2. The student was enrolled in the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) for 91 or more days
 3. The student was unlawfully absent for 20% or more of the days of enrollment.
- G. Lawful absence – An excused absence for any portion of the day under the following conditions (COMAR 13A.08.01.03):
1. Death in the immediate family
 2. Illness of the student
 3. Court summons
 4. Hazardous weather conditions
 5. Work approved or sponsored by the school
 6. Observance of a religious holiday
 7. State emergency
 8. Suspension
 9. Lack of authorized transportation
 10. Other emergency or set of circumstances which, in the judgment of the Superintendent or designee, constitutes a good and sufficient cause for absence from school.
- H. Parent – Any one of the following, recognized as the adult(s) legally responsible for the student:
1. Biological parent – A natural parent whose parental rights have not been terminated.
 2. Adoptive parent – A person who has legally adopted the student and whose parental rights have not been terminated.
 3. Custodian – A person or an agency appointed by the court as the legal custodian of the student and granted parental rights and privileges.
 4. Guardian – A person who has been placed by the court in charge of the affairs of the student and granted parental rights and privileges.
 5. Caregiver – An adult resident of Howard County who exercises care, custody or control over the student, but who is neither the biological parent nor legal guardian.
 6. Foster parent – An adult approved to care for a child who has been placed in their home by a State agency or a licensed child placement agency as provided by section 5-507 of the Family Law Article.
- I. School-related Activity – Any school system activity, whether held on or off school property, in which a student directly participates (e.g., school field trip, athletic event, or class/graduation activity), or in which the student does not directly participate but represents the school or student body simply by being there (e.g., spectator at a school event).

- J. Truant – A student who is absent for a day or any portion of a day for any reason other than those cited as lawful in COMAR 13.08.01.03 and/or failure to bring a note written by a parent to verify a lawful absence.
- K. Unlawful absence – An unexcused absence, including absence for any portion of the day, for any reason other than those cited as lawful are presumed as unlawful and may constitute truancy. Students unlawfully absent are considered truant. (COMAR 13A.08.01.04).

IV. Standards

- A. Annual Notification
Attendance guidelines will be communicated annually to all students, parents, and staff.
- B. Attendance Expectations
All students are expected to attend school regularly in accordance with state law and regulation and this policy and may be excused from class or school only for reasons as specified in state law and regulation and this policy.
- C. Denial of Credit
Any high school student with absences constituting five percent (5%) of a semester or a yearlong course will be considered for denial of credit.
- D. Discipline
Disciplinary consequences for unlawful/unexcused absences will be applied as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct.
- E. Entry/Withdrawal
For enrollment purposes, students will be entered and withdrawn using the procedures outlined in the Maryland Student Records System Manual.
- F. Exemplary Attendance
Schools will recognize students with exemplary attendance.
- G. Make-up Work
A student may make up work missed due to lawful absence and receive a recorded grade in accordance with Policies 8010, Grading and Reporting: Pre-kindergarten thru Grade 8, and 8020, Grading and Reporting: High School
- H. Monitoring of Attendance
Teachers will maintain daily/period attendance records for all students.
- I. Retention of Attendance Source Documents

Attendance source documents will be retained in accordance with guidelines outlined in the Maryland Student Records System Manual.

- J. **Support for Students**
Supports and interventions will be provided through school problem-solving teams for students who are chronically absent and/or habitually truant.

V. Compliance

- A. The Superintendent/designee is responsible for monitoring standards and procedures related to attendance as set forth in state law and policy.
- B. Principals are responsible for informing students, staff, and parents annually of the provisions of this policy.
- C. High school principals are responsible for making determinations regarding denial of credit.
- D. Principals are responsible for assigning and overseeing personnel to monitor the recording of daily/period attendance, the reporting of student absences (lawful and unlawful), and the entering and withdrawing of students for purposes of enrollment.
- E. Teachers are responsible for maintaining daily/period attendance and retaining attendance source documents in accordance with guidelines outlined in the Maryland Student Records Systems Manual.
- F. Teachers are responsible for providing make-up work for students who are lawfully absent.
- G. Students are responsible for being in school or attending a school-related activity each day school is in session.
- H. Students are responsible for making up work when they are absent.
- I. School-based problem solving teams are responsible for developing interventions and providing support to students who are chronically absent or habitually truant.

VI. Delegation of Authority

The Superintendent is authorized to develop appropriate procedures for the implementation of this policy.

VII. References

- A. Legal
 - The Annotated Code of Maryland, Education Article, Title 7, Attendance and Discipline of Students, Sections 301, 302, 303, 304
 - COMAR 13A.08.01.02, Age for School Attendance
 - COMAR 13A.08.01.03, Lawful Absence
 - COMAR 13A.08.01.04, Unlawful Absence

- B. Other Board Policies
 - Policy 3000 Religious Observances
 - Policy 8010 Grading and Reporting: Pre-kindergarten through Grade 8
 - Policy 8020 Grading and Reporting: High School
 - Policy 8100 Field Trips and Student Activity Trips
 - Policy 8110 Foreign Travel
 - Policy 9000 Enrollment, Residency, Student Assignment, and Admission to Pre-K and K
 - Policy 9020 Students' Rights and Responsibilities
 - Policy 9200 Discipline

- C. Other
 - Maryland Student Records System Manual
 - Student Code of Conduct

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I. Annual Notification

- A. The HCPSS will publish attendance information annually in the Calendar Handbook and post current attendance guidelines and procedures on the school system's website.
- B. The principal will inform all students, parents, and staff of the provisions of this policy annually and at other times as appropriate. This may be done in the following ways:
 - 1. Making announcements via the public address system at the beginning of the school year
 - 2. Publishing the information in school newsletters
 - 3. Publishing the information in staff/student handbooks
 - 4. Posting the information on a bulletin board and/or school's website
 - 5. Making the information available for new students through the registration process.

II. School Procedures

Recognizing administrators' and teachers' responsibility for developing and maintaining a system to record and report student absences (lawful and unlawful/excused and unexcused), the following procedures are required for all schools:

- A. Monitoring of Attendance:
 - 1. Teachers will maintain daily/period attendance records for all students and report tardiness and absence information as well as suspected truanancies to attendance reporting personnel. This information will be entered into the student information management system. The actual document used by the teacher to record attendance is the attendance source document. Attendance source documents may include, but are not limited to grade books, attendance rosters, attendance registers, class lists or electronic reports. The attendance source document is the documentation substantiating a student's attendance. The document must include school name, school year, teacher's name,

student's name, consecutive and chronological dates and a clear indicator of present, absent, and tardy with a legend for the indicators. These elements are required for the Maryland State Department of Education September Enrollment Audit.

2. Attendance personnel will use the following guidelines for determining full day absent, full day present and half day present:
 - a. **Students Scheduled for a Full Day**
A student is counted present for a full day if the student is in attendance four hours or more of the school day. A student is counted present for a half day if in attendance for at least two hours of the school day, but less than four hours.
 - b. **Students Scheduled for a Partial Day**
A student scheduled for less than a full day is to be counted present based on the amount of time the student is scheduled.
 - i. Students enrolled in less than a full day of classes must be present for their full defined day in order to be credited with a full day present.
 - ii. Students enrolled in only one class must be present for the full class in order to receive a full day present, otherwise they are marked absent.
 - iii. In all other cases, the student will be credited with a half day present if the student is present an hour or more of the school day.
3. Any student who participates during the school day in a school-sponsored activity which is approved by the Superintendent or the principal, or any persons duly authorized by the Superintendent/designee or principal/designee shall be considered in attendance at school. This means that when a student is involved in an approved school sponsored activity during the day, he or she is to be counted "present" and not coded as lawfully absent.
4. Students reporting late to school/class when the day/period begins are considered tardy. Leaving school/class before the day/period ends is considered early dismissal. School personnel will designate tardiness and early dismissal as lawful or unlawful and treat it under the same criteria as a lawful or an unlawful absence. Missing class for more than 20 minutes will be treated as an absence for that class.
5. School personnel will contact the parent when a student is absent for two or more consecutive days or when truancy is suspected.

6. The school must receive a note from the parent or physician explaining the absence/tardiness of a student within two school days of the student's return or the absence/tardiness will be unlawful/unexcused. Emancipated students as defined in Policy 9000 (Enrollment, Residency, Student Assignment, and Admission to Pre-K and K) may be allowed to write their own notes to verify a lawful absence. When a doctor's certification for chronic illness has been required and not provided within two school days of the student's return, the absence/tardiness will be recorded as unlawful/unexcused until a doctor's certificate is provided.
 7. All schools' report cards will report numbers of days present and absent from school. High school report cards will also report numbers of absences from each period.
 8. If unlawful/unexcused absences continue to persist after the school has contacted the parent and taken some disciplinary action, a referral should be made to the problem solving team (Instructional Intervention Team/Student Support Team).
- B. Retention of Attendance Source Documents:
Attendance source documents, tardy logs, and early dismissal logs will be maintained in all schools and be kept in a secured location. Attendance source documents, tardy logs, early dismissal logs, and parent notes must be retained for three years beyond the school year in which they were created in accordance with Maryland State Department of Education Student Records System Manual.
- C. Entry and Withdrawal for Purposes of Enrollment:
School staff responsible for maintaining enrollment and attendance information will record entry and withdrawal codes on the Student Record 1 card (Attendance Card) according to standards described in the Maryland Student Records System Manual. In addition, entry and withdrawal codes must be entered into the student information management system when a student enters or leaves the school.

III. Lawful/Excused Absence

Students presently enrolled in public schools are considered lawfully absent from school, including absence for any portion of the day, and may receive make-up work under the following conditions:

- A. Bereavement
 1. Immediate family – The number of days absent for a death in the “immediate family” is not to exceed five per instance. “Immediate family” is defined as

parents, (step) brother, (step) sister, grandparents, or anyone who has lived regularly in the household of the student.

2. Other – One day of absence will be allowed for the death of an aunt, uncle, cousin, classmate, or HCPSS staff member.

B. Illness of the student

1. A doctor’s certification may be required for chronic illness, which is defined as a physical or mental health disease (condition) of long duration, showing little change or of slow progression, which may be minor or severe in nature. This includes, but is not limited to, medical appointments.
2. Students receiving Home and Hospital Teaching will be maintained on the regular school rolls and counted as present except when students are not available for home and hospital teaching, in which case they are marked absent.

C. Court summons – When a student must report to court by the issuance of a summons, the time absent will be considered a lawful/excused absence.

D. Hazardous weather conditions – This will be interpreted to mean only those conditions of the weather, as determined by the Superintendent, which would endanger the health or safety of the student when in transit to and from school. Students will be credited for at least a half day attendance if they are present any part of the school day that schools close for weather-related or other emergencies.

E. Work – Such work must be approved or sponsored by the school, the local school system, or the State Department of Education, and accepted by the Superintendent or the principal/designee.

F. Observance of a religious holiday – Students may be excused when their attendance at school conflicts with participation in traditional and customary religious holidays.

G. State emergency – The Governor/designee makes these determinations.

H. Suspension – Suspension is the denial of a student's right to attend regular classes or school for a specified period of time for cause as outlined in Policy 9200, Discipline.

Note: Suspension is a lawful/excused absence and the days of suspension status cannot be used when determining “habitual truancy.”

- I. Lack of authorized transportation – A student may be excused when school system authorized transportation is not available for reasons beyond the student’s control. This does not include students denied authorized transportation for disciplinary reasons.
- J. Other emergency or set of circumstances, which, in the judgment of the Superintendent/designee, constitutes a good and sufficient cause for absence from school. The principal, in consultation with administrative directors, as appropriate, will determine whether absences are excused under this provision.

- 1. Absences of an Emergency Nature

Such absences will be reviewed by the principal in consultation with the administrative directors to determine whether the absences will be lawful/excused or unlawful/unexcused.

- 2. Absences for Non-emergency Circumstances

- a. A written request for such absences to be lawful/excused should be submitted in advance to the principal/designee.
- b. Such absences may not occur during exam or state-mandated testing periods unless authorized by the principal/designee.
- c. For absences of up to 3 days per year, the principal may determine whether the absences will be lawful/excused or unlawful/unexcused. Such absences may include, but are not limited to, the following events directly involving the student:
 - i. Visits to post-secondary institutions
 - ii. Participation in college orientation programs
 - iii. Scheduled interviews with prospective employers
 - iv. Special family events, including vacations/trips.
- d. For absences in excess three days under this provision, the principal in consultation with the administrative directors will determine if the absences will be lawful/excused or unlawful/unexcused. When the request is for 15 consecutive days or more, the written request should be submitted at least 2 weeks prior to the absences, or as soon as possible. See also section IV.B of these procedures.
- e. Requests for absences for religious obligations which are not addressed under III.F of these procedures should be handled in accordance with Policy 3000, Religious Observances.

- K. Health related exclusion - Students are temporarily excluded from school for the following health related reasons:
 - 1. Failure of parents or guardians to abide by the health regulations regarding immunization schedules or failure to provide evidence of appropriate immunizations after 20 calendar days: COMAR 10.06.04.03; or
 - 2. Conditions that present a clear and direct health risk to others: COMAR 10.06.01.06.

IV. Unlawful/Unexcused Absence: An absence for any reason other than those cited as lawful are presumed as unlawful and may constitute truancy (COMAR 13A.08.01.04).

- A. Teachers may assist students with make-up work when a student has an unlawful absence, however, students will not receive credit for such assignments.
- B. Students with unlawful absences of 15 consecutive school days or more will be withdrawn from school and may be allowed to re-enroll, provided they meet enrollment requirements, upon their return. For students receiving special education services, withdrawal can only be considered through the IEP team process and with the approval of the Department of Special Education. Teachers will not be required to provide make-up work during this time of absence. For these absences to be considered as lawful, parents will need to exercise the option outlined in Section III.J.2.d of these procedures.

V. High School Denial of Credit

- A. Teachers will submit to the principal the attendance record and a recommendation for granting or denying credit for each student for whom denial of credit is considered.
- B. Students and their parents will be notified by the principal/designee that the students are in danger of losing credit and provided opportunities to present information explaining the degree of absenteeism.
- C. The principal will determine whether credit is awarded or denied.
- D. Any student who loses credit under this provision may appeal the determination to the Superintendent's designee.

VI. Support and Intervention Procedures for Chronically Absent Students

- A. The expectation for regular attendance is the same for all students enrolled in the HCPSS whether they are under or over the compulsory attendance age.

- B. Under The Annotated Code of Maryland, criminal charges may be filed in relation to unlawful absence from school.
1. Any person who induces or attempts to induce a child to absent himself unlawfully from school or employs or harbors any child who is absent unlawfully from school while school is in session is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to a fine not to exceed \$500 or imprisonment not to exceed 30 days, or both. (Section 7-301 (e) 1)
 2. Any person who has control over a child who is 5 years old or older and under 16 who fails to see that the child attends school or receives instruction under this section is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to a fine not to exceed \$50 per day of unlawful absence or imprisonment not to exceed 10 days, or both. (Section 7-301 (e) 2)
- C. These support and intervention procedures should be in place for students who have chronic absences (lawful and/or unlawful).
1. Prior to a referral to the problem-solving team (Instruction Intervention Team/Student Support Team), a designated staff person should document attempts to notify the parent of the chronic absences.
 2. If the absences continue, the student should be referred to the school's problem-solving team (Instruction Intervention Team/Student Support Team).
 3. Members of the team will develop, implement and regularly monitor an attendance improvement plan that may include the following:
 - a. Meeting with the student
 - b. Meeting with the student's teachers and administrative staff
 - c. Meeting with the student's parent(s)
 - d. Assigning the student to a counseling group
 - e. Referring the student to an alternative placement
 - f. Scheduling a hearing with the Pupil Personnel Worker
 - g. Referring the student and parent to Project Attend, a program designed to improve the attendance of habitually truant and chronically absent students in the Howard County School System
 - h. Making a referral to an outside agency for support
 - i. Making a referral to the State's Attorney's office for possible court action (for students under the compulsory attendance age)
 - j. Completing the Maryland State Department of Education Statewide Educational Interview Form (for students over the compulsory attendance age).

VII. Attendance Motivation Strategies

- A. Conduct school-wide orientation assemblies at the beginning of the school year to review the attendance policy and promote the idea that regular attendance is a student responsibility and an essential life skill.
- B. Develop school-wide incentive programs to improve attendance.
- C. Develop and utilize positive rewards for students with exemplary and improved attendance during any one grading period and/or for the school year.
- D. Include quarterly reminders on the importance of regular attendance in school newsletters and on school websites.

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