

ATTENDANCE, ABSENCES, & TRUANCY

The educational program provided by the school is predicated on students being in attendance daily to participate in uninterrupted learning experiences. There is a high relationship between regular school attendance and school achievement. The entire process of education requires regular continuity of instruction and participation in learning experiences in order to reach the goal of maximum educational benefits for each student.

Ohio believes that all of its children should, at minimum, obtain a high school diploma. It is a benefit to the state as a whole to have educated citizens; and it is a benefit to each individual young person to complete a high school education. In Ohio, children between the ages of six and eighteen are of compulsory school age and are required to attend school daily, unless they have graduated from high school, completed or passed the GED requirements, or have been legally dismissed or excused from school. Students who reach the age of eighteen, while beyond the compulsory age, are nonetheless expected to complete high school graduation requirements.

Students enrolled in school are expected to attend school regularly during the days and hours that the school is in session. School attendance is taken daily, and during each instructional period. Attendance is recorded in electronic school and state records. These systems permit efficient analysis of attendance. School attendance is monitored regularly by school staff and by the school board. Attendance need not always be within the school building. School planned, approved and supervised learning experiences may take place at many locations including off-campus locations. Students who participate in these experiences are considered present for instruction during that time.

From time to time various incentives are developed to feature the importance of school attendance. Families are engaged in supporting regular school attendance. School attendance is used to allow certain off-campus lunch privileges. Exemplary attendance is noted with school recognition. Ohio has allowed some high school graduation expectations to be enhanced based on exemplary attendance.

ABSENCES

Frequent absences from school learning experiences disrupt the continuity of the instructional process. Students who are late or absent from school are losing valuable instructional interactions between teachers and peers that cannot be made up entirely, even by giving extra beyond the school day activities. Students who miss school frequently do not have full access to teacher support, are not available for focused tutoring interventions, are not fully engaged in the activities of the school that are part of the comprehensive learning program including career development experiences, find it more difficult to achieve maximum results in their learning, may fall behind in completing course work necessary to meet graduation requirements, and will likely be under-prepared to achieve on state required end of course achievement tests.

Shortened School Day

Students who are late to school or who leave during the course of a school day are missing some amount of instructional opportunities. Students are required to sign in or sign out in the school office. School and state records are adjusted accordingly. Permission for a student to leave school when school is in session requires approval by the principal or designee. Requests are not approved without a parent's permission. If the request originates from a person other than the parent, the school official in authority contacts the parent to obtain permission.

Attendance is taken each period. Parents are contacted as soon as the school is aware that a student has left the school without permission.

Students Who Are Employed

Employment can be an opportunity for students to learn responsibility and provides real-life experiences that can be useful to future career goals. In an effort to provide an effective 'work-school' balance, students should not be scheduled to work during school hours. The school will contact the employer to discuss creating work schedules that do not interfere with school hours. If it is necessary for a student to work during school hours, parents are requested to contact the school to provide a work schedule for the student. Student time will be adjusted to less than a full time student to reflect the impact of the work schedule on the school schedule. This may result in extended time being needed to complete graduation requirements. Students are NOT permitted to leave school for work purposes unless parental approval has been obtained.

Absence Reporting Procedures

Parents or other responsible adult shall provide the school with their current home and/or work phone numbers, home address, and emergency phone numbers. Any changes to this information should be shared with the school in a timely manner so that the school is able to maintain communication with parents.

1. A parent must contact the school whenever a student is absent from school unless previous notification has been given in accordance with school procedures for excused absences. The parent is expected to call the school to inform the school that their child, or children, will be absent from school. This phone call should take place within the first hour that school is in session. As an assist to families the school maintains a voice mail system to record absence information before school opens.
2. If the school has not received a phone call from the parent of an absent student, school personnel will call the parent to inform them of the student's absence. In those cases when phone communication cannot be made, school personnel will initiate a written communication on the day of the absence to the home informing them of the student's absence.
3. If it is determined that an absent student is in fact a missing student, the principal will immediately give notice of the missing child to the Ohio Attorney General's missing children clearinghouse. The principal will assist parents by coordinating with the clearinghouse.

4. School staff make phone calls home beginning when any student has two consecutive absences and continuing these calls through all successive absences. These calls are an initial contact noting the absence, and expressing our concern for the student.

Verification of Absences

It is important for the school to know that parents are fully aware of their child's continuing participation in school. Every student who misses, or intends to miss, any school time is expected to present a written statement signed by the child's responsible adult that verifies that the student will be or has been absent due to specific reasons related to permissible excused absences. Notes should include the child's name, the date of the absences, reasons for the absence, and signature and phone number of the responsible adult. These absences are noted as 'Excused' in the school attendance system.

School absences that are not confirmed with a parent note, or cannot be confirmed with a medical note, or by a follow-up school contact with the parent will be reported as an 'Unexcused Absence.'

Students returning to school should make arrangements with their teachers to complete missing assignments, or tests.

Excused Absences

An excuse for absence from school may be approved on the basis of any one or more of the following conditions:

1. Medical or dental appointments
2. Court appearances
3. College visitation days
4. Job interviews
5. Personal illness
6. Illness in the family
7. Quarantine of the home
8. Death of a relative
9. Observance of a religious holiday
10. Emergency or set of circumstances that in the judgment of the Principal constitutes a good and sufficient cause for absence from school.

TRUANCY

Students with excessive absences score lower than their peers on achievement tests, are less engaged in the classroom, fall behind their peers in completing graduation credits, and are at a higher risk of dropping out of school as they get older. National research from Attendance Works found that between 20 and 29 percent of students missed at least 15 days of school for any reason including suspensions and excused absences. The problem is most severe in high schools, and high poverty schools are more likely to struggle with chronic absenteeism, the report found. When school absences continue over time they rise to the level of truancy. In Ohio a 'habitual truant' is a student of school age who, without a legitimate excuse, is absent for five (5) or more

consecutive days (30 hours); or seven (7) or more consecutive or non-consecutive days (43 hours) in one month; or 12 consecutive or non-consecutive days (75 hours) in a school year. Chronic Absenteeism is being absent from school for 10% or more of the school year. This is 16 days, or 100 hours. Chronic Absenteeism is a data category that is reported on the Ohio Local Report Card as a school accountability measure.

City of Columbus Truancy Ordinance

Students between 6 and 18 years old who are on the public streets, or in a public place, between 9:00 am and 3:30 pm on a day when school is in session, can be picked up by police officers and returned to their school, or taken to the Truancy Intervention Center. Parents are required to pick up the student from that facility. Habitual offenders can cause the student to be charged with a 4th degree misdemeanor and summoned to Juvenile Court. Further offenses will result in the parent being summoned to the Court of Domestic Relations. The exceptions to this pick-up procedure are: students who have written permission from school authorities excusing him/her from school at that particular time (FHS issues a 'walking pass' for open lunch or other times as needed), have a work permit and are traveling to or from their job, are with a parent/ guardian, or are on an emergency errand (this will be verified).

Root Causes of Absences

There are many reasons for student absences. A very few students are willfully absent. The majority of student absences relate to out-of-school factors that are outside of the school's control. These can include any or all of the following: a pattern of school absences before enrollment at FHS, homelessness, socioeconomic issues, safety concerns in the neighborhood, traumatic family situations, lack of reliable transportation, taking care of siblings, lack of adequate clothing, lack of clean clothes, need for health care, chronic medical concerns. The school is interested in identifying those reasons, and linking families to necessary resources, services, and supports they need in order to improve student attendance.

The school does not expel or suspend students for excessive absences. However, as an Ohio community school, we are required to withdraw any student who is consecutively absent for 72 hours, which for FHS is 12 days. (Am.Sub.S.B. 216) This is a state funding issue. It is not a punishment for attendance issues.

Procedures

Schools can take actions within the school environment to encourage school attendance. These include, but are not limited to: assuring that instruction is engaging and that content represents important learning; maintaining a welcoming school culture; developing in students a sense of trust and belonging; supporting the Parent Advisory Group as they provide peer-to-peer communication around school engagement; providing families with resources emphasizing how important their role is to school achievement; connecting families to community resources and supports; providing information at enrollment about the importance of consistent attendance at school and asking families to alert the school to any issues, whenever they arise, that may keep a student from regular school attendance.

A series of deliberate and systematic meetings will be held with students, school faculty, and parents at various days/ hours of absence. The meetings will be modeled after Restorative

Practices 'Circle' protocol and should include the student. Other participants could include the student's advisor, other teachers, principal, social worker/ counselor, parent, or others deemed useful to the conversation. The goal in these meetings is to work with families to address the issues that keep students out of school, and to create more opportunities for students, especially the most vulnerable, to succeed. Attendance issues are an observable opportunity to discover why students are not in school, discern what would change those conditions, and to take actions to ameliorate those conditions. These are opportunities to teach students the importance of school attendance, and for them to be part of problem solving around their own life choices. Specific student centered plans will be developed, with the purpose of reducing or eliminating further school absences. Action steps will be noted. Letters will document the discussions, the plans identified during these meetings, and will be provided to the student and parents.

These meetings will be held for consecutive absences, and for cumulative absences. Participation by phone may be necessary. Meetings will be held with or without the student and/or the parent.

Circle Meeting #1

After 18 hours of absence. Meeting may be held with just the student. We would expect to see a change within the following five days. A letter is sent to student and parent documenting the meeting and including Board Policy JED.

Circle Meeting #2

After 50 hours of absence. Meeting may include the parent. A letter is sent to student and parent documenting the meeting. Those with 50 hours of consecutive absences will receive a letter informing them of the mandated 72 hour withdraw from school requirement, and that they are four days away from that deadline.

Circle Meeting #3

After 70 hours of absence. The meeting should strive to include the parent if possible. A letter will be generated describing what we have done to bring absences to the student's attention, and will include any plans/ supports proffered. The letter is sent to student and parent.

Circle Meeting #4

After 72 consecutive hours of absence (12 days). Per the 72 hour rule that applies to community schools, we will send a letter informing the student and parent that they are being withdrawn from school. If a request for their records is not received from another educational agency within a reasonable period of time, generally two weeks, we may notify Children's Services of their non-school attending status.

After 100 hours of accumulated intermittent absences a meeting will be held with the student and parent. The goal is to identify supports student or family may need in order to improve attendance. A letter is generated describing what we have done to bring absences to the student's attention, and will include any plans/ supports we have proffered. A letter is sent to the student and parent documenting the meeting.

Additional Meetings

Continued meetings to work with families over time as needed. Meetings will review plans, follow up on progress, and seek support for families as needed. Consideration is also given to actual course progress students are making, and any on-line learning time they may be working on or have completed. A letter is sent to the student and parents documenting plans and progress.

Potential Withdraw Meeting

After 300 hours of accumulated intermittent absences the school may take action to withdraw the student. However, in these instances' consideration is given to actual course progress students are making, and any on-line learning time they may be working on or have completed. A letter is sent to the student and parents documenting the action taken. If a student is withdrawn, and a request for their records is not received from another educational agency within a reasonable period of time, generally two weeks, we may notify Children's Services of their non-school attending status.

Legal Ref: ORC 3313.609; 3313.20; 3313.96; 3313.672; 3314.03; 3321.01 et seq;
3321.191; 3331.02

OAC: 3301-35-02; 3301-35-03; 3301-51-13.

Approved: April 28, 2020