



Guide to Student Attendance

The Office of Youth Engagement supports schools and families in working to maintain good student attendance. Regular school attendance is critical to academic success. Absences impact the number of instructional hours that students receive and may result in poor test scores, failing grades, disengagement from the school environment, and—ultimately—students dropping out of school.

School Attendance Requirements

School attendance is required for all students who reach five years of age on or before September 30 of the current school year. *Students must attend school daily* until they meet high school graduation requirements or reach their 18th birthday. Students who reside in the District of Columbia must be enrolled in a public, independent, private, parochial, or home school each year during the period that schools are in session.

Valid Reasons for Absence:

- ◆ Death in the student's immediate family;
- ◆ Illness of the student (a doctor's note is required for a student absent more than five days);
- ◆ Observance of a religious holiday;
- ◆ Medical reasons such as a doctor's appointment (a doctor's note is required);
- ◆ Necessity for a student to attend a judicial proceeding as a plaintiff, defendant, witness or juror;
- ◆ Absences **approved in advance by the principal** upon the written request of a parent/guardian

When a student returns to school after an absence, a note must be sent with him/her to the teacher or attendance counselor which includes the date(s) of the absence and the reason. A doctor's note should be provided if required. At this time, the attendance counselor or designee will change the student's absence(s) from "unexcused" to "excused."

Invalid Reasons for Absence

When a school-aged student is absent from school without a valid reason, with or without parental approval, these absences are considered unexcused and the student is considered truant.

Examples of unexcused absences include:

- ◆ Babysitting
- ◆ Shopping
- ◆ Doing errands
- ◆ Oversleeping
- ◆ Cutting classes
- ◆ Job hunting

Truancy

Truancy is the unexcused absence from school by a minor (5-18 years of age) with or without approval, parental knowledge, or consent. (NOTE: All D.C. Public Schools, with the exception of School Without Walls, are closed campuses. This means that students are to remain on campus during school lunch periods.)



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Students who cut class or have unexcused absences will be subject to the following:

- ◆ Individual or group counseling to address attendance needs;
- ◆ Participate in the creation of and adhere to an Attendance Intervention Plan;
- ◆ If a secondary student cuts 26% to 59% of his/her scheduled classes, the student will receive a half-day absence.
- ◆ If a secondary student cuts 60% or more of his/her classes, the student will receive an unexcused absence for the full day.
- ◆ Each student must present a written verification from his/her parent/guardian regarding the cause of absence prior to (if pre-arranged) or upon return from absence.
- ◆ Secondary students with **5 or more unexcused absences** per advisory in a class may be subject to a grade reduction in that subject or class, absent a successful appeal.
- ◆ Parents of students with **5 unexcused absences** will be requested to participate in a conference regarding their child(ren)'s attendance.
- ◆ **Ten (10) or more unexcused absences** per advisory in any class will result in a referral to the school's attendance committee for the development of an attendance intervention plan.
- ◆ Elementary and middle school students with **10 or more unexcused absences** will be referred to the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) for suspected educational neglect.
- ◆ Secondary students with **10 or more unexcused absences** per advisory in a class may be subject to receiving a grade of "FA" (failure due to absences) in that subject or class, absent a successful appeal.
- ◆ **Fifteen (15) or more unexcused absences** will result in a referral to the Office of the Attorney General or Court Social Services.

The Compulsory School Attendance Law states that parents/guardians who fail to have their children attend school are subject to the following:

- ◆ Truancy charges may be filed against the student;
- ◆ Truancy charges may be filed against the parent;
- ◆ Neglect charges may be filed against the parent;
- ◆ Parents may be fined;
- ◆ Parents may be jailed;
- ◆ School-aged students may be picked up by law enforcement officers during school hours for suspected truancy;
- ◆ Students may be referred to Court Diversion and other community based interventions; and
- ◆ Parents and students may be assigned community service and placed under court supervision/probation.

All uniformed law enforcement officers in the District are responsible for truancy enforcement. If a truant is picked up by the police:

- ◆ He/she will be transported in a police vehicle to the student's school.
- ◆ Parents are notified of the student's truancy status.
- ◆ Parents and students attend a truancy conference at the local school.



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Consequences of Poor Student Attendance

Missing school may result in:

- ◆ Poor work habits
- ◆ Lower grades/loss of credit
- ◆ Frustration in learning
- ◆ Dropping out of school
- ◆ Lower self-esteem
- ◆ Lack of self-discipline
- ◆ Delinquency
- ◆ Reduced earning potential
- ◆ Possible unemployment
- ◆ Potential criminal activity

Student Expectations

- ◆ Arrive on time to school and to class each day;
- ◆ Attend all classes on time daily.

Parent Expectations

- ◆ Let your child know that you think school is important.
- ◆ Set a regular bedtime schedule and enforce it.
- ◆ Provide your child with plenty of time to get ready for school.
- ◆ Provide an alternate plan of transportation for getting your child to school on time.
- ◆ Plan medical, dental, and other appointments before and after school if possible. If appointments must be during the school day, plan them so that your child does not miss the same class every time.
- ◆ If your child must be out of school part of the day, allow him or her to miss only the time necessary for the appointment.
- ◆ Encourage students to be on time or early to school and class.
- ◆ Refuse to write an excuse for anything other than a valid absence.
- ◆ Make sure your child arrives at school on time daily. Classes begin promptly at 8:45 a.m. Students should arrive at least ten (10) minutes early.

Who to Contact for More Information

- ◆ School attendance counselors/designees
- ◆ Cluster attendance specialists
 - Cluster 1 & 2: Debra Reed (202-939-3617)
 - Cluster 3: Raymond Poles (202-939-3619)
 - Cluster 4: Drake Simpson (202-939-3527)
 - Cluster 5: Nina Harrison (202-939-3618)
 - Cluster 6: Mentoria Washington (202-939-3528)