Comprehensive Student Attendance

Statement of Overall Objectives

School attendance is both a right and a responsibility. The school district is an active partner with students and parents/guardians in the task of ensuring that all students meet or exceed the New York State Learning Standards. Because the school district recognizes that consistent school attendance, academic success and school completion have a positive correlation, the school district has developed and, if necessary, will revise this Comprehensive Student Attendance Policy ("Policy") to meet the following objectives:

a) to increase school completion for all students;
b) to raise student achievement and close gaps in student performance;
c) to identify attendance patterns in order to design attendance improvement efforts;
d) to know the whereabouts of every student for safety and other reasons;
e) to verify that individual students are complying with education laws relating to compulsory attendance;
f) to determine the district's average daily attendance for state aid purposes.

A. Description of Strategies to Meet Objectives

The school district will:

a) Create and maintain a positive school building culture by fostering a positive physical and psychological environment where the presence of strong adult role models encourages respectful and nurturing interactions between adults and students. This positive school culture is aimed at encouraging a high level of student bonding to the school, which in turn should lead to increased attendance.
b) Develop and maintain this Policy based upon the recommendations of a multifaceted district policy development team that may include representation from the Board of Education, administrators, teachers, students, parents/guardians and the community. The district will hold at least one public hearing prior to the revision of this Policy.
c) Maintain accurate recordkeeping via a Register of Attendance to record attendance, absence, tardiness or early departure of each student.
d) Utilize data analysis systems for tracking individual student attendance and individual and group trends in student attendance problems.
e) Develop early intervention strategies to improve school attendance for all students.

B. Definitions and Determinations

Whenever used within the Comprehensive Attendance Policy, the following terms shall mean:

1. Scheduled instruction: Every period that a pupil is scheduled to attend instructional or supervised study activities during the course of a school day during the school year.

2. Absent: For middle school/high school students the pupil misses 20 minutes or more of the pupil's scheduled instruction. The teachers' attendance register shall be the official record.

3. Tardy: The pupil arrives later than the starting time of the pupil's scheduled instruction.

4. Early departure: The pupil leaves prior to the end of the pupil's scheduled instruction.

5. Excused: Any absence, tardiness or early departure for which the pupil has a valid school approved excuse. Such excused non-appearance shall include: personal illness, illness or death in the family, religious observance, quarantine, required court appearances, attendance at health clinics or other medical visits, field trips, approved college visits, military obligations, absences approved in advance by the principal, school field trips or outings, suspensions, school sporting events and other reasons as may be approved by the Board of Education and/or Commissioner of Education.

6. Unexcused: Any absence, tardiness or early departure for which the pupil has no valid school approved excuse. Such unexcused non-appearance shall include shopping trips to the local mall, family vacation, oversleeping, skipping class, hunting, babysitting, haircuts, obtaining a learner's permit, road test, boy/girl scouting events and any other absence that is not excused.

Student Attendance Recordkeeping/Data Collection

The record of each student's presence, absence, tardiness and early departure shall be kept in a register of attendance in a manner consistent with Commissioner's Regulations. An absence, tardiness or early departure will be entered as "excused" or "unexcused" along with the district code for the reason.

Attendance shall be taken and recorded in accordance with the following:

a) For students in non-departmentalized kindergarten through grade 5 (i.e., self-contained classrooms and supervised group movement to other scheduled school activities such as physical education in the gym, assembly, etc.), such student's presence or absence shall be recorded after the taking of attendance once per school day.
b) For students in grades 6 through 12 each student's presence or absence shall be recorded after the taking of attendance in each period of scheduled instruction except that where students do not change classrooms for each period of scheduled instruction, attendance shall be taken in accordance with paragraph "a" above.
c) Any absence for a school day or portion thereof shall be recorded as excused or unexcused in accordance with the standards articulated in this Policy.
d) In the event that a student at any instructional level from grades K through 12 arrives late for or departs early from scheduled instruction, such tardiness or early departure shall be recorded as excused or unexcused in accordance with the standards articulated in this Policy. A record shall be kept of each scheduled day of instruction during which the school is closed for all or part of the day because of extraordinary circumstances including adverse weather conditions, impairment of heating facilities, insufficiency of water supply, shortage of fuel, destruction of or damage to a school building or such other cause as may be found satisfactory to the Commissioner of Education.

Attendance records shall also indicate the date when a student withdraws from enrollment or is dropped from enrollment in accordance with Education Law Section 3202(1-a).

At the conclusion of each class period or school day all attendance information shall be compiled and provided to the designated school personnel who are responsible for attendance. The nature of the absence, tardiness or early departure shall be coded on a student's record in accordance with the established district/building procedures.

Student Attendance/Course Credit

The district believes that classroom participation is related to and affects a student's performance and grasp of the subject matter and as such is properly reflected in a student's final grade. For purposes of this Policy classroom participation means that a student is in class and prepared to work.

Consequently, for each marking period a certain percentage of a student's final grade will be based on classroom participation as well as the student's performance on homework, tests, papers, projects, etc. as determined by the building administrator and/or classroom teacher.

Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes. Classroom participation, student absences, tardiness and early departures may affect a student's grade, including credit for classroom participation, for the marking period.

For summer school and courses meeting 1/2 year or 1/4 year the same policy will apply and a calculation of the absences will be prorated accordingly.

Transfer students and students re-enrolling after having dropped out will be expected to attend a prorated minimum number of the scheduled class meetings during their time of enrollment.

Students will be considered in attendance if the student is:

a) physically present in the classroom or working under the direction of the classroom teacher during the class scheduled meeting time and misses less than 20 minutes of class whether through tardiness or early departure unless accounted for by an authorized person; or
b) working pursuant to an approved independent study program; or
c) receiving approved alternative instruction.

Students who are absent from class due to their participation in a school sponsored activity are to arrange with their teachers to make up any work missed in a timely manner as determined by the student's teacher. Attendance at school sponsored events where instruction is substantially equivalent to the instruction which was missed shall be counted as the equivalent of regular attendance in class.

Upon returning to school following any absence, tardiness or early departure, or prior to such absence, if possible, it shall be the responsibility of the student to consult with his/her teacher(s) regarding arrangements to make up missed work, assignments and/or tests in accordance with the time schedule specified by the teacher. The student may request additional time to complete missed work upon written request to the principal which shall detail the reasons for the request. The principal may provide additional time if it is reasonable based on the circumstances.

Notice of Minimum Attendance Standard/Intervention Strategies Prior to the Denial of Course Credit

In order to ensure that parents/guardians and students are informed of the district's Policy regarding minimum attendance and course credit and the implementation of specific intervention strategies to be employed prior to the denial of course credit to the student for insufficient attendance, the following guidelines shall be followed:

a) Copies of the district's Comprehensive Student Attendance Policy will be provided to parents/guardians and distributed to students at the beginning of each school year or at the time of enrollment in the district.
b) School newsletters and publications will include periodic reminders of the components of the district's Comprehensive Student Attendance Policy. Copies of the Attendance Policy will also be included in parent/guardian/student handbooks.
c) At periodic intervals a designated staff member(s) will notify by telephone and/or email the parent/guardian of the student's absence, tardiness or early departure and explain the relationship of the student's attendance to his/her ability to receive course credit. If the parent/guardian cannot be reached by telephone, a letter shall be sent detailing this information.
d) A designated staff member will review the district's Attendance Policy with students who have excessive and/or unexcused absences, tardiness or early departures. The principal will work with student prior to decision.

Notice

In order to avoid loss of credit for failure to attend, the district will take the following steps:

A designated staff member shall notify by telephone the parent/guardian to a student who is absent, tardy or departs early without proper excuse. The staff member shall explain the Policy, the district's/building level intervention procedures and, if appropriate, the relationship between student attendance and course credit. If the parent/guardian cannot be reached by telephone, the staff member will provide such notification by mail. Further, the Policy will be mailed to the parent/guardian to promote awareness and help ensure compliance.

If deemed necessary by appropriate school officials or if requested by the parent/guardian, a school conference shall be scheduled between the parent/guardian and appropriate staff members in order to address the student's attendance. The student may also be requested to attend this conference in order to address appropriate intervention strategies that best meet the needs of the student.

Notwithstanding the above, when the student reaches the seven (7), fourteen (14), and twenty-one (21) absences for a full year course or the prorated number for other classes, the parents/guardians will be sent a written notification warning about the potential effect of absences on the loss of credit. If the student exceeds the limit, the parents/guardians will again be sent a written notification. The parents/guardians may review the dates with the teacher and the principal.

Attendance Incentives

In order to encourage student attendance the district may develop and implement grade appropriate/building-level strategies and programs such as:

- Classroom acknowledgment of the importance of good attendance (e.g., individual certificates, recognition chart, bulletin boards);
- Annual poster/essay contest on importance of good attendance;
- Assemblies collaboratively developed and promoted by student council, administration, PTA/PTO and other community groups to promote good attendance.

Disciplinary Consequences

Unexcused absences, tardiness and early departures may result in discipline as described in the district's Code of Conduct. Consequences may include, but are not limited to, in-school suspension, detention and denial of participation in interscholastic and extracurricular activities. Parents/guardians will be notified by designated district personnel at periodic intervals to discuss their child's absences, tardiness or early departures and the importance of class attendance and appropriate interventions. Individual buildings/grade levels will address procedures to implement the notification process to the parent/guardian.

Intervention Strategy Process

In order to effectively intervene when an identified pattern of unexcused absences, tardiness or early departures occur, designated district personnel will pursue the following:

a) identify specific element(s) of the pattern (e.g., grade level, building, time frame, type of unexcused absences, tardiness or early departures);
b) contact the district staff most closely associated with the element. In specific cases where the pattern involves an individual student, the student and parent/guardian will be contacted;
c) discuss strategies to directly intervene with specific element; and
d) recommend intervention to Superintendent or his/her designee if it relates to change in district policy or procedure.

Implement changes as approved by appropriate administration, and

a) utilize appropriate district and/or community resources to address and help remediate student unexcused absences, tardiness or early departures; and
b) monitor and report short and long term effects of intervention.

Appeal Process

A parent/guardian may request a building level review of their child's attendance record.

Building Review of Attendance Records

The building principal will work in conjunction with designated staff in reviewing attendance records at the end of each term. This review is conducted to identify individual and group attendance patterns and to initiate appropriate action to address the problem of unexcused absences, tardiness and early departures.

Annual Review by the Board of Education

The Board of Education shall annually review the building level student attendance records and if such records show a decline in student attendance, the Board shall make any revisions to the Policy and plan deemed necessary to improve student attendance.

Community Awareness

The Board of Education shall promote necessary community awareness of this Policy by:

a) providing a plain language summary of the Policy to parents/guardians and to students at the beginning of each school year and promoting the understanding of such a Policy to students and their parents/guardians;
b) providing each teacher at the beginning of the school year or upon employment with a copy of the Policy; and
c) providing copies of the Policy to any other member of the community upon request.

Education Law Sections 3024, 3025, 3202, 3205, 3206, 3210, 3211 and 3213
8 New York Code of Rules and Regulations (NYCRR) Sections 104.1, 109.2 and 175.6