



WEST ALLEGHENY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Memorandum Regarding Truancy and Dependency Action Procedures

The purpose of this Memorandum is to provide an overview of the District's truancy and dependency procedure and policy.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POLICY

The West Allegheny School Board believes that there is a strong correlation between regular school attendance and the academic achievement of students in the District.

The compulsory school attendance law of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania requires every child of compulsory school age to be in school attendance, unless absent for an approved reason, and charges the parent/guardian of the child with the responsibility for the child's school attendance. A maximum of eight (8) days of cumulative, lawful absences verified by parental notification may be permitted during a school year. All absences beyond eight (8) cumulative days shall require an excuse from a state licensed health care practitioner. Students who miss ten consecutive days shall be dropped from the active membership role unless the school is provided with evidence the excuse is legal or the school is pursuing compulsory attendance prosecution.

Excused Absences for Temporary Periods.

The following are reasons for excused absence for temporary periods of time from school:

a. Religious Holidays. A student may be excused from school for the observance of a bona fide religious holiday by particular religious groups.

b. Health Care. A student may be excused during school hours for the purpose of obtaining non-school professional health care under the following circumstances:

- (1) The health care services are rendered by state licensed health care practitioner.
- (2) There has been established reasonable cooperation between the school authorities and practitioners in providing services to school children outside school hours.
- (3) The time of necessary absence from school involves a minimum of interference with schoolwork.

NOTE: Every principal may require a written statement signed by the state licensed health care practitioner stating the time of the student's appointment.

c. Illness or Other Urgent Reasons. Upon receipt of satisfactory evidence of mental, physical, or other urgent reasons, every principal or teacher may excuse a student for non-attendance from school during a temporary period.

d. Educational Trip. Upon receipt of a written request from the parent/guardian, at least one week in advance of the trip, students may be excused from school attendance to participate in an educational tour or trip provided during the school term at then evaluated by the school principal and student participants therein are subject to direction and supervision by an adult personage acceptable to the principal and the parent/guardian of the students concerned. If above procedure is not completed, any absence will be considered illegal. Educational trips are to equal no more than five (5) days in a school year. Educational trips overseas may be given consideration for up to 10 (ten) days in a school year. In addition, trips will not be approved during state standardized testing periods, and/or for students with eight (8) or more absences.

e. Homebound Instruction. A child of school age enrolled in the public schools who is homebound and unable to attend the public schools as determined by a medical examination, and who is receiving approved homebound instruction or instruction in the home, shall be counted for attendance purposes as if in regular school attendance. During the time such homebound student is able to receive instruction in the home, the District or intermediate unit or both shall provide such homebound instruction or instruction in the home.

Written Statement Required for All Absences.

Upon return from an absence from school for any reason, the student shall present to the appropriate attendance teacher or officer a written statement, signed by the student's parent/guardian, giving the date of the absence and reason for the absence. Students of compulsory school age must submit a written statement within three (3) days of the student's return to school or the absence shall be considered as an illegal absence. Medical excuses are required for absences of five (5) or more consecutive days. All absences beyond eight (8) cumulative days shall require an excuse from a licensed medical provider.

Habitual Truancy

Upon accumulation of three (3) illegal absences, the home and school visitor will contact the parents/guardians to compulsory-age students to discuss attendance concerns, in writing, within 10 school days of the student's third unexcused absence. The parental notice must contain a description of the consequences that will follow if the child becomes habitually truant, must be in the parent's preferred language, and may include the offer of a School Attendance Improvement Conference (SAIC). When this notice is sent to an individual who is not the student's biological or adoptive parent, the school or nonpublic must also provide the notice to the student's biological or adoptive parent if the address is on file with the school and that person is not precluded by a court order from receiving the information.

If the student continues to incur additional unexcused absences after the school has issued the notice, the school or nonpublic must, if not already offered, offer the student and parent a SAIC.

Prior to the SAIC, a social worker or personnel from the school's counseling office should make every attempt to contact the person in parental relation to discuss the attendance of the student, to explain the SAIC process, and to solicit input regarding the student's attendance from

the person in parental relation. Any communications with the person in parental relation, written and oral, that are related to the attendance of the student, should be provided by the District in the person's preferred language.

All of the following individuals must be invited to the conference:

1. The student
2. The student's person in parental relation
3. Other individuals identified by the person in parental relation who may be a resource
4. Appropriate school personnel, including a social worker or personnel from the school's counselling office
5. Recommended service providers

* If a student with a disability is truant or chronically absent, the school should convene the student's IEP team to determine whether revisions to the student's IEP are necessary or appropriate. In those instances, the administrator responsible for handling truancy-related matters should be a participating member of the IEP team process.

There is no legal requirement for either the student or person in parental relation to attend a SAIC. However, schools and nonpublic schools should make every attempt to conduct the SAIC with the person in parental relation present. All attempts to contact the person in parental relation must be in the preferred language of the person in the parental relation and must be documented in the student's file.

The school must hold the SAIC conference even if the person in parental relation declines to participate or fails to attend after the school or nonpublic school provides advance written notice and makes attempts to communicate with the individual via telephone. Additionally, the school or nonpublic school must invite recommended service providers to the SAIC. However, the SAIC shall not be delayed pending a response from the service provider(s).

The school must document the outcome of any SAIC in a written school attendance improvement plan (SAIP). A form for the SAIP is available from PDE here:

<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/resources/Pages/Pennsylvania-School-Attendance-Improvement-and-Truancy-Reduction-Toolkit.aspx>.

The SAIP should include

- a. Accessing academic and social/health supports from the school and community organizations,
- b. An outline of family/parent and student responsibilities, and
- c. Levels of performance monitoring that include rewards and consequences.

The school must use the School Attendance Improvement Plan Form created by PDE or a similar form to document the SAIP. School and nonpublic schools must provide the plan to the person in parental relationship, in their preferred language, within 10 days of the SAIC regardless of whether the person in the parental relationship attends the SAIC.

Schools may not expel or suspend (out-of-school) a student or reassign or transfer a student to an alternative education for disruptive youth (AEDY) program, for truant behavior and these actions may not be included in a SAIP. An in-school suspension is not considered a disciplinary reassignment. Additionally, schools may not initiate truancy proceedings (e.g., the filing of a truancy citation) until after a SAIC is held.

Procedure After SAIC Held

If the student continues to accumulate illegal absences after a SAIC is held, the District will implement the following procedure.

After four (4) illegal absences, a warning letter will be sent to the student's parent/guardian stating a truancy citation with the magistrate may be filed. At five (5) illegal absences, truancy charges will be filed with the magistrate. The school will notify the parent/guardian in writing.

Child Dependency

If the above procedures fail to remedy a student's habitual truancy, the District may proceed against the student by filing a dependency petition in juvenile court. The responsible District staff shall notify the District Superintendent of their intent to submit any such petition. The District Superintendent's approval is required prior to the submission of any such petition.