

STUDENT ABSENCES AND EXCUSES

Code **JH** Issued **9/10**

Purpose: To establish the basic structure for allowing and excusing student absences.

The board believes that attendance is a key factor in student achievement. Any absence from school represents an educational loss to the student. However, the board recognizes that some absences are unavoidable.

In order to receive credit for a high school course, a student must attend at least 85 days (for a 90-day semester course) or 170 days (for a 180-day year course). The board may grant approval of excessive absences in accordance with board policy.

The district will utilize a written intervention plan for improving student attendance. The purpose of the plan will be to link students with attendance problems and their families to all appropriate school and community resources.

The board recognizes that truancy is primarily an educational issue and will take all reasonable, educationally sound and corrective actions prior to resorting to the juvenile justice system.

Any student who misses school must present a written excuse, signed by his/her parent/legal guardian. The excuse will contain such other information as directed by the administration. The school administration will keep all excuses confidential.

If a student fails to bring a valid excuse to school, he/she will automatically receive an unexcused absence. If a student brings a false (or forged) excuse, the teacher will refer the student to the school administration for appropriate action.

The district will consider students **lawfully** absent under the following circumstances.

They are ill and their attendance in school would endanger their health or the health of others.

- There is a death or serious illness in their immediate family.
- There is a recognized religious holiday of their faith.
- Prearranged absences for other reasons and/or extreme hardships at the discretion of the principal.
- A child in foster care must be absent due to a certified court appearance or related court ordered activity including, but not limited to, court ordered treatment services.

The district will consider students **unlawfully** absent under the following circumstances.

- They are willfully absent from school without the knowledge of their parent/legal guardian.
- They are absent without acceptable cause with the knowledge of their parent/legal guardian.

Suspension is not to be counted as an unlawful absence for truancy purposes.

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Intervention plans

After three consecutive **unlawful** absences or a total of five **unlawful** absences, school officials will make every reasonable effort to meet with the parent/legal guardian to identify the reason for the student's continued absence. These efforts should include telephone calls and home visits, both during and after normal business hours, as well as written messages and e-mails.

Once a child is determined to be truant, school officials must develop a written intervention plan to address the student's continued absence in conjunction with the student and parents/legal guardians to improve future attendance. The intervention plan must comply with state board of education regulation 43-274.

Transfer of intervention plans

If a student transfers to another public school in South Carolina, the district will forward the student's intervention plan to the receiving school.

Truant

A child ages six to 17 years meets the definition of a truant when the child has three consecutive unlawful absences or a total of five unlawful absences.

Habitual and chronic truants

The district may refer habitual and chronic truants to the family court in accord with state board of education regulation 43-274. A "habitual" truant is a child, ages 12 to 17 years, who fails to comply with the intervention plan developed by the school, the child and the parents/legal guardians, and who accumulates two or more additional unlawful absences. A "chronic" truant is a child, ages 12 to 17 years, who has been through the school intervention process, has reached the level of a "habitual" truant, has been referred to family court and placed on an order to attend school and continues to accumulate unlawful absences.

Approval of absences

The board authorizes school principals to promptly approve or disapprove any student's absence, lawful, unlawful or a combination thereof, of more than 10 days.

Approval of absences in excess of 10 days and approval of high school credits

In order to receive one Carnegie unit of credit, a student must be in attendance at least 120 hours per unit regardless of the number of days missed. Students whose absences are approved should be allowed to make up any work missed in order to satisfy the 120-hour requirement. Examples of make-up work may include after school, summer school, weekend makeup or extended year programs. All make up work should be completed within 14 days from the last day of the course; however, the superintendent or his/her designee may extend the time for completion of the requirements due to a student's medical circumstances.

Make up work for elementary, middle and secondary school students

Teachers will permit students to make up work missed during a lawful absence so long as the student or his/her parent/legal guardian makes appropriate arrangements with the teacher(s) no later than the student's fifth day back at school. The student must complete the make up work within 10 days after his/her return to school.

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Medical homebound

The principal or his/her designee will be responsible for implementing and expediting the medical homebound program for students experiencing a prolonged illness or injury which requires the students to be absent from school.

Adopted 3/16/82; Revised 10/16/84, 8/13/91, 6/14/05, 9/14/10

Legal references:

A. Federal law:

1. 20 U.S.C. Section 7112 (2002) - No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.
2. 42 U.S.C. Section 5601, et seq. (2002) - Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974.
3. McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Improvements Act of 2001, P.L. 107-110, 42 U.S.C. Sections 11431-11435.

B. S. C. Code, 1976, as amended:

1. Section 59-65-90 - State Board to establish rules and regulations defining lawful and unlawful absences.
2. Section 59-38-10 - South Carolina Education Bill of Rights for Children in Foster Care.

C. State Board of Education Regulations:

1. R-43-274 - Student attendance.