

ATTENDANCE, ABSENCES, AND EXCUSES

The Gloucester City Board of Education believes that the regular attendance of students in each class and in school in general is critical to its educational mission. The district shall endeavor to achieve the ninety percent (90%) attendance rate required by the New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC). Continuity of instruction is an essential element in student performance and allows students the greatest opportunity to succeed at meeting the state learning standards in the Core Curriculum Content Standards. The superintendent shall oversee the development of effective strategies that maximize student attendance at all scheduled periods of actual instruction or supervised study activities and strive to:

- A. Encourage good attendance;
- B. Discourage unexcused absences;
- C. Identify patterns of absence, tardiness and early departures from school; and
- D. Intervene to prevent and correct problems with attendance.

Definitions

- A. "Attendance" is a student's presence in school and in the classroom to which he or she is assigned at the times scheduled for instruction or other school activities. A school day shall consist of not less than four hours of actual instruction. An approved Kindergarten school day should consist of one continuous session of 4 hours to be considered a full day.

The mere presence of a student at roll call shall not be regarded as sufficient to be considered in attendance for a school day. A student shall be present at least one hour during both the forenoon and the afternoon in order to be recorded as present for the full day. In a school which is in session during either the forenoon or the afternoon, a student shall be present at least two hours in the session in order to be recorded as present for the full day.

A student not present in school because of his or her participation in an approved school activity, such as a field trip, meeting, cooperative education assignment, or athletic competition will be considered to be in attendance.

- B. "Excused absence" is a student's absence from school for a full day or a portion of a day for one or more of the following reasons:
 - 1. The student's illness; with Dr. note for attendance officer's review.
 - 1. Requirements of a student's individual health care plan;
 - 2. A death or critical illness in the student's immediate family, or others with permission of principal;
 - 3. Quarantine;
 - 4. Observance of the student's religion on a day approved for that purpose by the State Board of Education;
 - 5. Religious holiday;
 - 6. The student's suspension from school;

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7. Requirements of the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP);
 8. Alternate short or long term accommodations for students with disabilities;
 9. The student's required attendance in court;
 10. Interviews with an admissions officer of an educational institution with documentation.
 11. Such good cause as may be acceptable to the principal
- C. "Unexcused absence" is a student's absence for all or part of a school day for any reason other than those listed in paragraph "Excused Absences" above. Absence is expressly not excused for any of the following purposes (this list is intended to be illustrative and is not inclusive):
1. Family travel; vacations
 2. Performance of household or babysitting duties; and
 3. Other daytime activities unrelated to the school program.

Attendance need not always be within the school facilities. A student will be considered to be in attendance if he/she is present at any place where school is in session by authority of the board. The board shall consider each student assigned to a program of independent study, with parent/guardian permission, to be in regular attendance for that program, provided that he/she is under the guidance of a staff member so assigned, reports daily or weekly, as prescribed, to such staff member the place in which he/she is conducting his/her study, and regularly demonstrates progress toward the objectives of his/her course of study.

Tardiness

The orderly conduct of school and class activity is predicated upon the prompt and precise beginning of the program. Tardiness hinders the proper conduct of school activity imposes a distraction which leads to a loss of instructional time for students properly in attendance, and denotes school time loss by the tardy student.

All students must have admission slips (Excused or Unexcused) in order to be admitted to any classroom following an absence except for absence due to religious observance. Students who are going to be absent because of religious holidays are to have their excuse notes in the Attendance Office the day before the holiday. The names of these students will be so noted in the Daily Absentee Bulletin and will not be required to report to the office for an admission slip following the holiday.

Students requesting to leave school early must be signed out by a parent or guardian.

Attendance

In order for the board of education to fulfill its responsibility for providing a thorough and efficient education for each student, the complete cooperation of parents/guardians and students is required to maintain a high level of school attendance.

The frequent absence of students from classroom learning experiences disrupts the continuity of the instructional process and limits the ability of students to complete the prescribed curriculum requirements successfully. The following rules shall apply for student absences:

- A. A student shall be considered absent from class for tardiness in excess of one half of the total class period.
- B. A student shall be considered absent from school for participation in less than 4 instructional hours during the school day.

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A student must be in attendance for 172 or more school days in order to be considered to have successfully completed the attendance requirements of the grade/course to which she/he is assigned.

A waiver of these attendance requirements may be granted for good cause by the school principal. The involvement of the Attendance Appeal Committee, appointed by the principal and consisting of representative staff, including student service personnel and classroom teachers may be requested when needed. Waivers will not be granted for vacations.

In granting a waiver of this attendance requirement, the principal and/or the Attendance Appeal Committee shall consider the nature and cause of all absences during the total instructional year. Documentation of the nature and causes of these absences shall be the responsibility of the students and the parent/guardian.

Parents/guardians are responsible for notifying the school early in the day when a child will be absent and for informing the school of the reason for the absence.

Unexcused Absences

When a student fails to report to class or school accumulating up to four unexcused absences, the district shall:

- A. Make a reasonable attempt to notify the student's parents/guardians of each unexcused absence the day of the unexcused absence;
- B. Attempt to contact the parents/guardians by telephone, email and/or cellular phone to determine the cause of the unexcused absence;
- C. Develop an action plan to assist the student to return to school and maintain regular attendance.

If contact through these means is unsuccessful the district may follow-up with another attempt to contact the parents/guardians or send a letter reporting the unexcused absence and requesting the parent/guardian to contact the school.

If at any time it is suspected that there is a potential of abuse, neglect and/or a student is potentially missing the district shall implement all procedures required by law including reporting protocols, notification of parents/guardians and cooperation with law enforcement and other authorities and agencies, as appropriate.

Persistent Absences

If the pattern of unexcused absences continues and three to nine unexcused absences are accumulated the district shall:

- A. Make a reasonable attempt to notify the student's parents/guardians of each unexcused absence the day of the unexcused absence;
- B. Attempt to contact the parents/guardians by telephone, e-mail, mail and/or cellular phone to determine the cause of the unexcused absence.
- C. Conduct a follow-up investigation by contacting the student's parents/guardians in writing to determine the cause of each unexcused absence

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D. The principal or his or her designee shall schedule a meeting with the parent/guardian and the student.

The purpose of this meeting shall be to evaluate the appropriateness of the action plan to assist the student to return to school and maintain regular attendance. The plan shall be reviewed and revised in coordination with the parent/guardian and may include the participation of the classroom teacher, school nurse, guidance counselor, principal or other appropriate staff. The plan shall establish outcomes based upon the student's needs and specify the interventions for achieving the outcomes and supporting the student's return to school and regular attendance. That plan may include any or all of the following:

1. Referral or consultation with the building's Intervention and Referral Services team;
2. Testing, assessments or evaluations of the student's academic, behavioral and health needs;
3. The consideration of an alternate educational placement;
4. Referral to a community-based social and health provider agency or other community resource;
5. Referral to the court program designated by the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts;
6. The implementation of all required procedures for potential abuse, neglect or missing child including cooperation with law enforcement and other authorities and agencies, as appropriate.

Discipline

All discipline regarding the attendance of students shall be consistent with the board policy 5131 Conduct and Discipline and the code of student conduct. Consequences for absences may include:

- A. Students may be denied participation in co-curricular activities if their attendance fails to meet the standards set forth herein;
- B. Students may be denied participation in athletic competition if their attendance fails to meet the standards set forth herein;
- C. Loss of partial or total course credit;
- D. Detention or suspension.

No student who is absent from school for observance of a religious holiday or other excused absence shall be disciplined and/or deprived of any award or of eligibility for or opportunity to compete for any award because of the absence.

Students, parents and guardians shall be notified of disciplinary actions for attendance including loss of credit and may appeal this determination through the procedure as set forth in board policy 5145.6 Student Grievance Procedure.

Truancy

For cumulative unexcused absences of 10 or more, the student between the ages of six and 16 is truant, pursuant to law. The district shall:

- A. Make a mandatory referral to the court program required by the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts;
- B. Make a reasonable attempt to notify the student's parents of the mandatory referral;

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- C. Continue to consult with the parent and the involved agencies to support the student's return to school and regular attendance;
- D. Cooperate with law enforcement and other authorities and agencies, as appropriate;
- E. Follow all procedures required by N.J.S.A. 18A:38-28 through 31, Article 3B, Compelling Attendance at School and other applicable state and federal statutes.

The board will report to appropriate authority any infractions of the law regarding the attendance of students below the age of 16. Repeated infractions of board policy requiring the attendance of enrolled students over the age of 16 may result in the exclusion of the student. Students over the age of 16 who flagrantly violate the attendance policy and cannot successfully appeal their excessive absence will be excluded for the remainder of the school year and may ask to be reinstated at the beginning of the next school year at the discretion of the administration and/or the school board.

Unexcused Absences for Students in Special Education

The attendance guidelines, discipline and remedial measures set forth in this policy shall apply to classified students where appropriate and in accordance with the student's:

- A. Individualized Education Program (IEP);
- B. Procedural protections set forth in N.J.A.C. 6A:14;
- C. Alternate short or long term accommodations for students with disabilities as required by law;
- D. Requirements of a student's individual health care plan.

Regular Release of Students Before the End of the Normal School Day

There are varying situations which may justify release of certain students from school before the normal time for closing. Such situations are justifiable only if the release does not jeopardize the student's educational program and the reasons for such release can be shown to have positive benefits for the student.

Late Arrival and Early Dismissal

The board recognizes that from time to time compelling circumstances will require that a student be late to school or dismissed before the end of the school day.

As agent responsible for the education of the children of this district, the board shall require that the school be notified in advance of such absences by written request of the student's parent/guardian, which shall state the reason for the tardiness or early dismissal. Justifiable reasons may include:

- A. Medical or dental appointments which cannot be scheduled outside of school hours;
- B. Requirements of a student's individual health care plan;
- C. Requirements of the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP);
- D. Alternate short or long term accommodations for students with disabilities;
- E. Medical disability;

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- F. Motor vehicle driver's test;
- G. Interview for college entrance or employment;
- H. Family emergency;
- I. Court appearance;
- J. Such good cause as may be acceptable to the administration.

No student in grades preschool through three shall be permitted to leave the school before the close of the school day unless he/she is met in the school office by his/her parent/guardian or a person authorized by the parent/guardian to act in his/her behalf.

For students in grade 7 through 12, early dismissal requests will be honored under the following procedures:

- A. If a student has a doctor or dentist appointment during school hours, parents must write a note requesting early dismissal. The note must include the name of the doctor or dentist or other information as applicable (motor vehicle department, court appearance). A phone number for verification purpose is required;
- B. Upon verification, students will be issued written office permits to be excused early;
- C. Notes must be presented either the day before or during homeroom period of the day of early dismissal;
- D. If time permits, students must return to school to complete the school day. Students who do not meet the minimum of four hours will be counted absent for the day;
- E. In cases of emergency the parent or legal guardian, upon presentation of identification, may appear and sign the child out of school. Under no condition will children be released from school as a result of telephone requests.

Tardiness not covered by the causes listed shall be cumulative, and may affect course credit.

Legal Custody

A record shall be kept indicating the legal custodian of each student. Such custodian shall be responsible for informing the board of any change in the student's custodian. If on parent/guardian has been awarded custody of the student in a divorce settlement, the other parent/guardian shall present to the principal a letter authorizing him/her to accompany the child from school before the child may be released to him/her. The principal may take such steps as seem necessary to ensure that the child is released only to proper custody.

Potentially Missing Children

- A. If daily attendance records indicate a child is absent and the parent/guardian has not called, the district shall attempt to contact them.
- B. If no telephone contact can be made, the attendance officer shall investigate;
- C. If the attendance officer cannot locate the child, he/she shall inform the principal, who shall inform the appropriate local authorities;
- D. If a child who was present in the morning is absent after lunch, the same procedure shall be followed.

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Whenever the superintendent receives notice from the Missing Persons Unit that a child has been reported missing, he/she shall mark the child's records in such a way that whenever a copy of or information regarding the record is requested, district personnel will be aware that the record is that of a missing child. If a copy of a marked school record is requested, the superintendent shall supply the record to the requestor without alerting him/her to the fact that the record has been marked, according to provisions in code and statute on accessing student records (see policy 5125 Student records). After the superintendent has complied with the request for copies of records or information, he/she shall immediately report the inquiry or any knowledge as to the whereabouts of the missing child to the Missing Persons Unit.

Regulations

The superintendent shall develop procedures for the attendance of students which:

- A. Ensure a school session which is in conformity with requirements of the rules of the state board;
- B. Identify potentially missing and/or abused students;
- C. Govern the keeping of attendance records in accordance with rules of the state board at N.J.A.C. 6A:16-1.1 et seq., including students serving in- or out-of-school suspensions, or excluded for health and cleanliness reasons;
- D. Impose on truant students such disciplinary measures as may be appropriate for infractions of school regulations, but no such penalty may have an irredeemable negative effect on the student's record of achievement beyond that which naturally follows his/her absence from school activities;
- E. Identify the habitual truant, investigate the causes of his/her behavior, and consider modification of his/her educational program to meet his/her particular needs and interests;
- F. Address tardiness and class cutting in terms of the intent of this policy;
- G. Ensure that students absent for any reason have an opportunity to make up work they missed;
- H. Recognize exemplary attendance.

Absence Notes

Students who are absent from school are required to present a written explanation from a doctor, parent/guardian stating the reason for the absence promptly upon return to school. All notes should be turned in to the attendance office within 48 hours of the absence.

All notes from home should contain the following information:

- A. Date excuse was written;
- B. Date or dates of absence;
- C. Name of student, grade and homeroom;
- D. Reason for absence
- E. Signature of parent/guardian.

ATTENDANCE, ABSENCES AND EXCUSES (continued)Appeals (Grades 7-12)

The Gloucester City Board of Education is cognizant of possible unforeseen factors which may create hardships relating to the operation of the attendance policy.

A. Petition for Hearing

A written petition for a hearing must be presented to the principal by the parent/guardian no later than five (5) school days after notification of violation of the policy. Any and all materials to be considered as basis for an appeal must be delivered to the principal prior to an assigned hearing date. Data should include documentation for all days absent, not just for those days in excess of the policy.

B. Attendance Appeals Committee

In keeping with the dictates of fairness and procedural due process, a school-based Attendance Appeals Committee will be established to hear cases brought by petition from parents/guardians concerning loss of credit status. The committee may excuse one or more absences for reasons of sickness, hardship, or other extenuating circumstances in making its decision.

The committee will be comprised of five people, one from each of the following capacities:

1. Principal;
2. Assistant Principal;
3. Department Chairperson;
4. Guidance Counselor;
5. Teacher.

C. Appeals Procedure

1. Appeals to the office of the superintendent of schools relating to decisions of the attendance appeals committee must be in writing and within seven (7) school days of receipt of the attendance appeals committee's decision.
2. Appeals to the board of education relating to the decision of the office of the superintendent must be made within ten (10) days of receipt of the decision.
3. Board of Education decisions may be appealed to the Commissioner of Education.
4. Students above the age of 16 are to be notified that they have 10 days to provide an explanation to the attendance officer/principal to determine whether the student is to be excluded for the remainder of the school year.

Recordkeeping

Reporting student absences is a primary responsibility of the school and shall be accomplished in the following manner:

- A. Absences from school shall be recorded in an appropriate manner on report cards issued every marking period;

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- B. Tardiness to school shall likewise be recorded on report cards;
- C. A letter of notification will be mailed to parent/guardian alerting them of the danger of non-compliance with the attendance requirements.;

Whole Year Course: Letters will be mailed upon the occasion of the third, sixth and ninth absences.

- D. The teaching staff shall be responsible for keeping the attendance office apprised of the appropriate number of absences so that the proper notification can be mailed to parents using the official attendance system.
- E. The principal and/or his/her designee shall be authorized to waive the application of this policy when appropriate evidence has been submitted.

Dissemination and Implementation

The superintendent shall take all necessary steps to publicize this policy and may include these rules in district handbooks and/or on the district website. Parents/Guardians and students shall be notified annually of the attendance policy.

The superintendent shall ensure that the rules for this policy are applied consistently and uniformly, and that all disciplinary sanctions are carried out with necessary due process.

The board shall review the attendance policy on a regular basis.

Adopted: No date
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 Readopted:

Key Words

Student Attendance, Attendance, Absences and Excuses

<u>Legal References:</u>	<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 18A:11-1	General mandatory powers and duties
	<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 18A:35-4.9	Student promotion and remediation; policies and procedures
	<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 18A:36-14, -15, -16	Religious holidays; absence of students on; effect
	<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 18A:36-19a	Newly enrolled students; records and identification
	<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 18A:36-24	
	through -26	Missing children; legislative findings and declarations ...
	<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 18A:38-25	Attendance required of children between six and 16; exceptions
	<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 18A:38-26	Days when attendance required; exceptions
	<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 18A:38-27	Truancy and juvenile delinquency defined
	<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 18A:38-31	Violations of article by parents or guardians; penalties
	<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 18A:38-32	District and county vocational school attendance officers
	<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 18A:40-7	Exclusion of students who are ill
	<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 18A:40-8	Exclusion of students whose presence is detrimental to health and cleanliness
	<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 18A:40-9	Failure of parent to remove cause for exclusion; penalty
	<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 18A:40-10	Exclusion of teachers and students exposed to disease
	<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 18A:40-11	Exclusion of students having communicable tuberculosis

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<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 18A:40-12	Closing schools during epidemic
<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 18A:54-20	Powers of board (county vocational schools)
<u>N.J.S.A.</u> 52:17B-9.8a through -9.8c	Marking of missing child's school record
<u>N.J.A.C.</u> 6A:8-5.1	Graduation requirements
<u>N.J.A.C.</u> 6A:16-1 <u>et seq.</u>	Programs to support student development
<u>N.J.A.C.</u> 6A:30-1.1 <u>et seq.</u>	Evaluation of the Performance of School Districts
<u>N.J.A.C.</u> 6A:32-8.1 <u>et seq.</u>	Student Attendance and Accounting
<u>N.J.A.C.</u> 6A:32-8.3	Student attendance

Wetherell v. Board of Education of Township of Burlington, 1978 S.L.D. 794

Wheatley v. Board of Education of City of Burlington, 1974 S.L.D. 851

C.R., on behalf of J.R., v. Board of Education of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Regional School District, 1988 S.L.D. (June 22)

Student Attendance Policies and Procedures Compliance Checklist, New Jersey Department of Education

Possible

<u>Cross References:</u>	*5020	Role of parents/guardians
	*5111	Admission
	*5114	Suspension and expulsion
	*5124	Reporting to parents/guardians
	*5125	Student records
	*5141.2	Illness
	*5141.4	Child abuse and neglect
	*5142	Student safety
	*6146	Graduation requirements
	*6146.2	Promotion/retention
	*6147	Standards of proficiency
	*6147.1	Evaluation of individual student performance
	*6154	Homework/makeup work
	*6171.4	Special education
	*6173	Home instruction

*Indicates policy is included in the Critical Policy Reference Manual.