

New York Conference
Education Department
Comprehensive Attendance Policy

The Need

New York State Department of Education requires that each public school district, board of cooperative educational services (BOCES), charter school, county vocational education and extension board and nonpublic elementary, middle and secondary school shall adopt a comprehensive attendance policy. The purpose of the policy shall be to ensure the maintenance of an adequate record verifying the attendance of all children at instruction and establish a mechanism by which the patterns of pupil absence can be examined to develop effective intervention strategies to improve school attendance.

An additional reason for the schools of the New York Conference to adopt a comprehensive attendance policy is that, particularly in our smaller schools, many parents and students have acquired a casual attitude toward attendance. This seems to be based, at least in part, on the belief that since the schools are small and somewhat family-like, parents are not obligated to a high standard of attendance. This often results in as many as half or more of the students arriving 15-30 minutes or more after the designated start time. Teachers are then forced to choose between having those students who arrived on time wait for the arrival of the others, or starting without those who are tardy and then having to find a way to make up for the instruction they did not receive. Likewise, it not uncommon for parents to remove students from school for family vacations or other events as well, adding to the burden of the teacher to provide lesson materials in advance. Often these must be modified plans as it is not possible for students to experience out of school the same learning opportunities which have been planned for those in class.

The Policy

OBJECTIVES:

1. To establish a system of regular and accurate record keeping pertaining to the attendance of students.
2. To communicate with parents and students the value and necessity of responsible school attendance.
3. To establish criteria to define problematic attendance and consequences related to it, including notification of parents.
4. To identify the person(s) responsible for reviewing pupil attendance records and initiating appropriate action to address unexcused pupil absence, tardiness and/or early departure.
5. To establish a plan for reviewing the Comprehensive Attendance Policy and for making revisions to it.

RECORD KEEPING:

1. It is the responsibility of each classroom teacher to maintain accurate written attendance records. Student attendance may be kept on a hard copy over the course of the week but must be entered into Renweb's attendance program by the last day of the week for which school is in session.
2. The following code will be used to indicate the nature of the tardy or absence:
 - P= present
 - AE= excused absence
 - AEA= excused absence afternoon
 - AEM= excused absence morning
 - AU= unexcused absence
 - AUA= unexcused absence afternoon
 - AUM= unexcused absence morning
 - E= entered (the date on which the student entered the school)
 - TE= tardy excused
 - TU= tardy unexcused
 - W= withdrawn

3. In schools which have more than one teacher, it is the responsibility of the principal to verify that teachers are maintaining accurate and up-to-date attendance records.
4. Written excuses are required for all excused absences and tardies. These should be kept on record until the end of the school year.

COMMUNICATING THE VALUE OF RESPONSIBLE ATTENDANCE:

1. Each school handbook shall contain the following statement regarding attendance:

This school exists to develop in its students, spiritual, academic and social skills to the highest standards possible. It is also attempting to form in students responsible behaviors including punctuality. Parents who value these standards in education will assist the school by ensuring that students arrive 5-10 minutes prior to the start of the school day and that they be present throughout the entire school day. Absences from class should be limited to those which are due to emergency, student illness, death in the family or court appearance. Every effort should be made to arrange medical appointments outside of school hours. In the event this is not possible, students will be excused for the time necessary to attend the medical appointment. The attendance records of a student who is tardy more than 20% or absent more than 15% of the time for a grading period, will be referred to the school board.

2. In the event that school handbooks have already been printed and distributed, a letter must be either hand-delivered or sent by standard mail to parents explaining relevant details of the comprehensive attendance policy.

UNACCEPTABLE ATTENDANCE AND RESPONSES TO IT:

1. A student shall be determined to have an unacceptable attendance record who:
 - is tardy more than 20% or absent more than 15% of the time for a grading period.
 - accumulates three unexcused absences and/or six unexcused tardies for a grading period.

2. When a student reaches the criteria described above, a form letter will be sent home by mail notifying parents that any additional unexcused infractions will result in the student's records being referred to the school board.
3. Upon the review of the student's record, the school board may:
 - Request the parents to submit a written plan to address the problem;
 - Require the parents to meet with the board to seek a solution;
 - Recommend that the principal contact local truancy officers;
 - Dismiss the student.
4. A student who is absent as many as seven days out of a grading period, for whatever cause, may receive incomplete or failing grades unless it is evident to the teacher that his work has been satisfactorily made up.
5. Exceptions may be made for extended excused absences or unusual circumstances with approval from the classroom teacher and the school board.

PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE FOR REVIEWING ATTENDANCE AND INITIATING ACTION:

1. It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to inform the principal of students who are out of compliance with the attendance policy.
2. It is the responsibility of the principal to send the form letter notifying parents that a student has reached the maximum number of absences/tardies.
3. It is the responsibility of the principal to inform the school board that disciplinary action may be called for in the case of a particular student.
4. It is the responsibility of the school board chair or his/her designee to inform the parent of the decision of the school board.

REVIEW OF THE COMPREHENSIVE ATTENDANCE POLICY

It is the responsibility of the school board to review the comprehensive attendance policy and revise it if necessary. Revisions should be submitted to the conference office for approval.

Questions:

What does this add to the policies of the AU code book?

Can a school board revise the policy without approval from the conference?

What will the board do when it reviews a student's record and determines that the student is out of compliance with the policy?