



# Wicomico County Board of Education

## Student Attendance Policy

### I. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish the requirements for student attendance, guidelines for attendance monitoring and recording, and procedures for incentives for rewarding regular school attendance and supporting chronically absent and habitually truant students. This policy will guide decisions consistently regarding student attendance within Wicomico County Public Schools, including ages for compulsory attendance in compliance with Maryland Education Article §7-301.

### II. Policy Statement & Rationale

The Wicomico County Board of Education recognizes that regular school attendance is vital to student success in school. We believe that the responsibility for regular, daily punctual attendance is shared by the community, the home, students, and school personnel, and we must work together to promote proper attendance to the fullest extent possible. The Wicomico County Attendance Policy is based on the premise that student success in school is directly connected to a continuous, consistent classroom instructional experience. Furthermore, the Wicomico County Board of Education believes that consistent attendance leads to academic success, the completion of school, and the development of students as productive members of society.

### III. Scope

This policy applies to all students in grades K-12. Parents and guardians are responsible for ensuring the proper attendance of their children within the Wicomico County Public School System. School administrators will be responsible for implementing any corrective actions necessary to ensure proper attendance.

### IV. Definitions

- A. “Absence” – the act of a student not being physically present in school/class or at a school related activity during the school day.
- B. “Attendance” – the act of being physically present at school or school-sponsored activities during the school day, and when the participation is approved by the local Superintendent of Schools or the school principal. (*COMAR 13A.08.01.01D*)
- C. “Chronically Absent” – an absence rate of 10% or more unlawful absences during any given quarter, semester, or academic year. (Maryland General Assembly, House Bill 207, Oct 1, 2013).
- D. “Truant” – any student who is absent for a school day or portion thereof without lawful cause. (*COMAR 13A.08.01.04B*).
- E. “Habitual Truant” – any student who has been enrolled in a school for 91 or more days in a school year and is unlawfully absent from school for a number of days or portion of days 20% or more of the school days within any marking period, semester, or year. (*COMAR 13A.08.01.04C*)
- F. “Tardy” – any student not being in the classroom when the class period starts.

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- G. “School-sponsored Activity” – any school sponsored activity approved by the local Superintendent of Schools or the school principal, or their designee.
- H. “Continuously Absent”- five consecutive unexcused absences or a total number of unexcused absences in excess of ten days.
- I. “Excessive Tardies” – any student who has been late to school or class nine times within the school year. An accumulation of nine tardies, at any time throughout the school year. This can be combined with early dismissals.
- J. “Excessive Early Dismissals” – any student who has been dismissed early by the parent or guardian nine times within the school year. This can be combined with tardies.
- K. “Lawful Absence” - equivalent to an excused absence
- L. “Unlawful Absence” – equivalent to an unexcused absence
- M. “Immediate Family”- (step) parent, (step) brother, (step) sister, grandparents, a person(s) who is the primary care provider, anyone who lives regularly in the household of the student and others as determined by the school principal.

## V. Policy

### A. Rules, Definitions, and Procedures for Policy Implementation

#### 1. General Attendance Regulation (*COMAR 13A.08.01.01*)

- a. Compulsory school attendance requires that each child who resides within the state of Maryland and is five years old or older and under sixteen years of age shall attend a public school regularly during the entire school year unless the child is otherwise receiving regular, thorough instruction during the school year taught in the public schools to children the same age, or is exempted from attendance as provided by law.
- b. A student is considered in attendance at school when participating in school-sponsored activities during the school day, and when that participation is approved by the local Superintendent of Schools or the school principal, or their designees. Students shall be considered in attendance in an alternative program setting when participating in activities during the day sponsored by the alternative program, and when that participation is approved by the director of a licensed child care center, registered family day care, or Head Start 5-year-old program.

#### 2. Lawful and Unlawful absences as defined in COMAR 13A.08.01.03 and 13A.08.01.04C

- a. Lawful Absence - Students presently enrolled in public schools are considered lawfully absent from school, including absence for any portion of the day, only under the following conditions:
  - 1. Death in the immediate family. The local school system shall determine what relationships constitute the immediate family. Excused absences for a death in the “immediate family” are not to exceed five per instance.

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2. Illness of the student. The principal or a pupil personnel worker shall require a physician's certificate from the parent or guardian of a student reported continuously absent for illness. Students receiving Home and Hospital Teaching will be maintained on the regular school rolls and counted as present except when students are not available for home and hospital teaching, in which case they are marked absent.
  3. Court summons.
  4. Hazardous weather conditions. Hazardous weather conditions shall be interpreted to mean weather conditions which would endanger the health or safety of the student when in transit to and from school.
  5. Work approved or sponsored by the school, the local school system, or the State Department of Education, accepted by the local Superintendent of Schools or the school principal, or their designees as reason for excusing the students.
  6. Observance of a religious holiday.
  7. State emergency.
  8. Suspension. Suspension is a lawful/excused absence and the days of suspension status cannot be used when determining "habitual truancy." However, suspension days can be considered unlawful/unexcused if the student is currently adjudicated as truant.
  9. Lack of authorized transportation. A student may be excused when the school system authorized transportation is not available for reasons beyond the parent's or student's control (ex: students living in transition). This does not include students denied authorized transportation for disciplinary reasons.
  10. Other emergency or set of circumstances, which, in the judgment of the Superintendent of Schools or designee, constitutes a good and sufficient cause for absence from school.
  11. Health Exclusion– Used when the school is excluding a student because of health concerns (i.e., lack of immunization, conjunctivitis, lice infestation, etc.)
    - b. Unlawful absence, including absence for any portion of the day, for any reason other than those cited as lawful are presumed to be unlawful and may constitute truancy. Local school systems may add specified criteria for unlawful absences to local board-approved policies.
3. Absences of an Emergency Nature
    - a. Such absences will be reviewed by the principal in consultation with the Elementary and/or Secondary Director along with the Director of Student and Family Services to determine whether the absences will be lawful/excused or unlawful/unexcused.
  4. Absences for Non-emergency Circumstances

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- a. To be given consideration, a written request for lawful/excused absences should be submitted **in advance** to the principal/designee. The request should be made to the principal and state the purpose or special significance of the absence, duration of the absence, number of lawful and unlawful absences the student has accumulated to date, the student’s current academic progress and the options and plan for make-up work.
  - b. If approved, the maximum number of lawful days for family vacations and family trips for any school year should not exceed five (5) days. The principal will make the decision to extend the maximum number of excused days, when special circumstances arise.
  - c. Such absences may not occur during exam or state-mandated testing periods unless authorized by the principal/designee.
5. Other Lawful absences
- a. A number of activities or work situations that the principal/designee should accept as lawful when approval for the absence has been requested **in advance**, in writing from the parent/guardian are included below:
    - 1. Visits to college campuses and participation in college orientation programs.
    - 2. Scheduled interview with prospective employers.
    - 3. Short-term full-time work assignments for students not enrolled in a cooperative education program.
  - b. For absences of these (other lawful/excused absences) in excess of three days per year, or a pattern of continuous lawful/excused absences, the principal will determine whether the absences will be lawful/excused or unlawful/unexcused.

## VI. Implementation

Implementation procedures can be found in the Student Attendance Procedures, document code INS-SFS-PR-002.

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