

This DCPS Attendance and Truancy Policy rescinds and supersedes all previous policy, memoranda and/or guidance promulgated by DCPS on this matter.

Chancellor Approval: 
Effective: August 13, 2018

DCPS Attendance and Truancy Policy

I. Purpose

The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) is committed to ensuring every student feels loved, challenged, and prepared to positively influence society and thrive in life by providing rigorous and inclusive learning environments for all students. DCPS is focused on accelerating growth for students of all identities and abilities by ensuring equitable access to opportunity and removing barriers to learning. This policy conveys DCPS requirements on attendance and the protocols school officials will implement if a student is absent or truant.

II. Authority¹

Source	Citation
Code of the District of Columbia	DC Code § 38-202 – Establishment of School Attendance Requirements DC Code § 38-203 – Enforcement; Penalties
District of Columbia Municipal Regulations (Office of the State Superintendent of Education)	5-A DCMR § 2100 – General Provisions 5-A DCMR § 2101 – Attendance Records and Reporting 5-A DCMR § 2102 – Absences 5-A DCMR § 2103 – Absentee Intervention and School-Based Student Support Teams 5-A DCMR § 2199 – Definitions
District of Columbia Municipal Regulations (District of Columbia Public Schools)	5-E DCMR § 2100—Attendance 5-E DCMR § 2101—Absences 5-E DCMR § 2103—Truancy 5-E DCMR § 2199—Definitions

III. Key Terms and Definitions

- A. **Absence:** A full or partial school day in which a student is not physically in attendance during scheduled periods of instruction and is not in attendance at a school-approved activity that constitutes part of the approved school program.² DCPS differentiates between excused and unexcused absences, as explained further in this policy below.
- B. **Absenteeism:** A pattern of not attending school, including the total number of school days within one school year on which a student is marked with an excused or unexcused absence.³
- C. **Action Plan:** A written document that is designed to meet the individual and specialized needs of a student and contains the relevant details of the student’s attendance record, the school-based or third-party-provided interventions toward addressing the underlying causes of truancy as

¹ Nothing in this policy shall supersede federal, state, or local law.
² 5-A DCMR § 2199.
³ Id.

determined by the school-based student support team, and expected attendance goals.⁴

- D. Attendance Monitor:** The person(s) designated by the principal or chief school administrator of an educational institution to be responsible for collecting, maintaining, and reporting attendance records that are required pursuant to District of Columbia compulsory education and school attendance laws, regulations, and OSSE policies for each student enrolled in the educational institution.⁵
- E. Chronic Absenteeism:** The incidence of students missing more than 10 percent of school days within a single school year, including excused and unexcused absences.⁶
- F. Chronically Truant:** A school-aged child with ten (10) or more days of unexcused absences within a single school year.⁷
- G. Full School Day:** The entirety of the instructional period regularly provided on a single school day.⁸
- H. In-Seat Attendance:** The percent of enrolled days that a student is present.
- I. Parent:** A parent, guardian, or other person who resides in the District of Columbia and who has custody or control of a minor five (5) years of age or older.⁹
- J. Present:** A full or partial school day in which a student is physically in attendance for at least eighty percent (80 percent) of the scheduled instructional period, including participation in school-sponsored activities that constitute part of the approved school program.¹⁰
- K. Period Absence:** A scheduled period of instruction for which a student is not physically in attendance and is not in attendance at a school-sponsored activity that constitutes part of the approved school program. DCPS differentiates between excused and unexcused absences. Period absences are combined to determine daily absences. Students who are absent for more than twenty (20) percent of the scheduled class periods are marked absent for the day.
- L. Student Support Team:** A team formed to support the individual student by developing and implementing action plans and intervention strategies that are school-based or community-based and are designed to enhance the student's success.¹¹
- M. Truant:** A child of compulsory attendance age, as defined by DC Code § 38-202(a), who is absent from school and whose absence is unexcused.¹²
- N. Truancy Rate:** The incidence of students of compulsory attendance age enrolled at a school at any point in a given school year, with ten (10) or more days of unexcused absences within a single school year, divided by the total number of students of compulsory attendance age ever enrolled at any time during the corresponding school year.¹³

IV. Required Activities

A. General Attendance Requirements

All children who reach five (5) years of age on or before September 30th of the current school year are considered school-aged and must attend school on time every day until they meet high school

⁴ Id.

⁵ Id.

⁶ Id.

⁷ Id.

⁸ Id.

⁹ Id.

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ See 5-A DCMR § 2103.4.

¹² 5-A DCMR § 2199.

¹³ Id.

graduation requirements or reach their 18th birthday.^{14 15}

DC Code § 38-202(b)-(c) establishes the justification for requiring no further attendance for minors who graduate from high school and flexible school hours for students who reach 17 years of age and are gainfully employed.

(b) Any minor who has satisfactorily completed the senior high school course of study prescribed by [DCPS] and has been granted a diploma that certifies his or her graduation from high school, or who holds a diploma or certificate of graduation from another course of study determined by [DCPS] to be at least equivalent to that required by [DCPS] for graduation from the public senior high schools, shall be excused from further attendance at school.

(c) Any minor who has reached the age of 17 years may be allowed flexible school hours by the head of the educational institution in which the minor is enrolled provided he or she is actually, lawfully, gainfully, and regularly employed, but in no case shall he or she be excused entirely from regular attendance or excused to the extent that his or her timely graduation would be jeopardized or prevented.

B. School Expectations

All schools shall implement a specific protocol for attendance monitoring and absenteeism, including a focus on prevention of unexcused absences and the use of academic and behavioral interventions to address the needs of students. School officials are responsible for taking attendance accurately every day in the student information system (SIS).

A written note must be provided to the school by the student's parent within five (5) school days after the student's return to school in order for an absence to be excused. Upon receipt of appropriate documentation within this time period, schools must update absences as excused within 48 hours.

C. Excused Absences

The following absences may be classified as an excused absence:

- Illness of the student (a doctor's note is required for a student absent five or more days in a term)¹⁶;
- Illness of a child for parenting students (a doctor's note is required for a student absent five or more days in a term);
- Medical or dental appointments for the student;
- Death in the student's immediate family;
- Exclusion by direction of the authorities of the District of Columbia, due to quarantine, contagious disease, infection, infestation, or other condition requiring separation from other students for medical or health reasons;
- Necessity for a student to attend a judicial proceeding, or court-ordered activity, as a party

¹⁴ DC Code § 38-202.

¹⁵ Pursuant to 5-E DCMR §3002.1(b), a child found by DCPS to be eligible for special education shall remain eligible to receive services through the end of the semester they turn 22

¹⁶ Students whose illness requires hospitalization or who are home-bound for more than three weeks may be eligible for the Home and Hospital Instruction Program (HHIP). For more information, see relevant DCPS policy at <https://dcps.dc.gov/service/home-and-hospital-instruction>.

- to the action or under subpoena;
- Observance of a religious holiday;
- Absences to allow students to visit their parent who is in the military, immediately before, during, or after deployment;
- College visits for students in 9th- 12th grades (up to three cumulative days);
- School visits for students in K through 8th grades (one day);
- Absences of expectant or parenting students for a time period specified by their doctor and any accommodations mandated by law;
- Take Our Daughters & Sons to Work Day;
- Religious event or celebration outside of a religious holiday (up to five cumulative days); and
- An emergency or other circumstance approved by DCPS.

The following absences may also be excused without written documentation from the parent, as verified by the school:

- Lawful out of school suspension or exclusion by school authorities;
- Temporary closing of facilities or suspension of classes due to severe weather, official activities, holidays, malfunctioning equipment, unsafe or unsanitary conditions, or other condition(s) or emergency requiring a school closing or suspension of classes;
- Failure of the District of Columbia to provide transportation in cases where the District of Columbia has a legal responsibility for the transportation of the student; and
- An emergency or other circumstance approved by DCPS.

If a student or parent anticipates an absence not covered by the excused absences listed above, they may submit a request for an excused absence due to a special circumstance to the school principal. The principal shall consult with his or her Instructional Superintendent before determining whether to grant the excused absence request.

Any absence that does not meet the criteria of an excused absence or fails to satisfy the documentation requirement of an excused absence within the allowable timeframe will be classified as an unexcused absence.

If a student is absent for a total of up to **four (4) cumulative days** in each grading period, a parent's written excuse is sufficient for explaining the absence. Such absence will be excused if it falls under one of the excused absence reasons noted above.

If a student is absent for **five (5) or more cumulative days** per term, further documentation is required beyond communication by the parent for the absence to be excused. Written explanation of the student's absence must be submitted by a doctor or staff of a relevant agency, on official doctor's office/agency letterhead and signed by a relevant official. Note:

- Medical or dental absences must be submitted on official doctor/dentist office stationery or form; and
- Student's required presence at judicial proceedings must be documented by a document from the court stating the need for the student's presence on all the relevant dates.
- Funeral programs may be accepted as appropriate documentation.

D. Absences Due to School-Sponsored Activities

1. Athletics

Students participating in DCPS-sponsored athletic events during regular school class hours are considered present. Students must adhere to all attendance requirements as dictated by state regulations. In order to participate in any athletic tryout, practice, game or match, a student must be present in school on the day of that event, unless the student has an excused absence.¹⁷

2. Other Activities

Students participating in DCPS-sponsored events, field trips, or study abroad travel during the regular school day are considered present.

3. IEP or 504 Plan Service Delivery

Students who miss class to receive related services documented on their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 plans are considered present.

4. Suspensions

Students shall be marked present while serving in-school suspension. Student absences due to out of school suspension shall be classified as excused.

E. School-Based Attendance Interventions Related to Absences

1 day of unexcused absence	Contact parent on the same day and each time a student has the equivalent of one day of unexcused absence, with daily follow-ups as necessary. ¹⁸
3 days of unexcused cumulative absences	Send 3-Day Unexcused Absence Letter to parent.
4 days of absences (excused or unexcused)	Phone call home after four absences to discuss the student’s attendance.
5 days of unexcused cumulative absences	Send 5-Day Unexcused Absence Letter to parent and refer student to Student Support Team (SST) for an attendance intervention conference to be held within five days of the referral. (Applicable to five unexcused absences within one term.) The SST will develop an action plan in partnership with the student and the student’s parent.

¹⁷ 5-A DCMR § 2704.8.

¹⁸ 5-A DCMR § 2103.2(c)(1).

7 days of unexcused cumulative absences	Send Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) warning letter to parent. ¹⁹
10 days of unexcused cumulative absences ²⁰	Student is considered chronically truant. Contact the District Child Family Services Agency (CFSA) for students aged 5-13. Refer student for follow-up attendance SST interventions for students aged 14 and older. The SST assigned to the student will notify school leader of action plan within two days of the referral.
15 days of unexcused cumulative absences ²¹	Submit referral within two days to Court Social Services Division (CSS) for students aged 14 through 17.
20 days of unexcused consecutive absences	Notify parent that student is eligible for withdrawal due to 20 consecutive days of unexcused absences.

F. Prohibited Actions Related to Absenteeism

DC law prohibits specific actions related to student truancy and absenteeism as follows:

- No minor may be expelled or receive an out-of-school suspension due to an unexcused absence or due to a late arrival to school.
- No minor may be un-enrolled from DCPS due to unexcused absences or due to late arrival to school unless the student has accumulated 20 or more full-school-day consecutive unexcused absences.²²
- No student will be transferred from their school for absenteeism, including students who are attending an out of boundary school.
- At the beginning of the school year, no student should be withdrawn unless they fail to attend at least one (1) day of school in the first three (3) weeks of school without notification for such absence; or transfers to another educational institution.

G. Attendance, Grading, and Promotion

Student grading and promotion can be impacted by an accrual of unexcused absences as follows:

- Secondary students with ten (10) unexcused absences in any class shall receive an initial written notice that they are at risk of receiving a grade of “FA” (failure due to absences) in that subject upon accumulating more than thirty (30) unexcused absences, unless an

¹⁹ While DC Code § 38-207(c)(1) requires this action at 10 days, DCPS policy is for this letter to be sent at seven days.

²⁰ Please note that pursuant to DC Code 38-208 c (1)(A), which was amended by D.C. Law 21-140, the School Attendance Clarification Amendment Act of 2016, only students with 10 full day absences are required to be referred to CFSA.

²¹ Please note that pursuant to DC Code 38-208 c (1)(A), which was amended by D.C. Law 21-140, the School Attendance Clarification Amendment Act of 2016, only students with 15 full day absences are required to be referred to CSS.

²² DC Code § 38-203 (f-1), (f-2).

exception applies.²³

- Secondary students with fifteen (15) unexcused absences in any class shall receive an additional written warning that they are at risk of receiving a grade of “FA” (failure due to absences) in that subject upon accumulating more than thirty (30) unexcused absences.²⁴
- Secondary students accumulating more than thirty (30) unexcused absences in a course within a full school year shall receive a failing final grade in that course with a resulting loss of course credit.²⁵
- Students accumulating more than thirty (30) unexcused absences within a school year shall only be promoted if a written justification is submitted by the principal to the Chancellor,²⁶ or the student attends summer school and is reevaluated for promotion.²⁷

H. Late Arrival for Secondary Students

- Students will be marked tardy if they arrive in class 5 minutes or more after the official start of the period.
- Students who enter class late should be given clear guidance regarding how to get caught up with the class lesson.
- Students will be allowed to enter their scheduled course regardless of what time they arrive. Teachers should make every effort to make late arriving students feel welcomed.
- There is no point in a class period that a tardy will convert to an absence. If a student attends a portion of the class, he or she will be considered present and tardy.
- Students must always have access to make-up work.
- Multiple instances of a student being tardy may not be accumulated to count as an absence.
- Responses to student tardiness should be appropriate and logical. A student should never be suspended due to being tardy.

I. Early Dismissal

DCPS will not recognize early dismissal of students unless that dismissal is related to an excused absence. Parents must notify the school when requesting an early dismissal.

J. Pre-K Students

Pre-K students are subject to the same requirements regarding excused and unexcused absences. Schools are expected to implement school-based attendance interventions as follows:^{28,14}

1 day of unexcused cumulative absences	Contact parent on the same day and each time a student has the equivalent of one day of unexcused absence, with daily follow-ups as necessary.
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²³ 5-E DCMR § 2103.4.

²⁴ 5-E DCMR § 2103.5.

²⁵ 5-E DCMR § 2103.6

²⁶ DC Code § 38-781.02(c)(2).

²⁷ DC Code § 38-781.05.

²⁸ Because pre-K students are not of compulsory age, they are not subject to truancy consequences.

3 days of unexcused cumulative absences	Send 3-day Unexcused Absence Letter to parent.
5 days of unexcused cumulative absences	Send 5-day Unexcused Absence Letter to parent and refer student to Student Support Team (SST) for an attendance intervention conference to be held within five days of the referral. (Applicable to five unexcused absences within one term.) The SST will develop an action plan in partnership with the student and the student’s parent. In addition to the SST, a referral should be made to the ECE Family Services Team (FST).

No pre-K student may be un-enrolled due to unexcused absences unless the student has accumulated 20 or more full-school-day consecutive unexcused absences and the school has documented all instances of family outreach, and offers of support services. No student may be unenrolled due to late arrival to school.

V. Requirements for Policy Implementation

All DCPS employees are required to comply with the requirements set forth in this policy. In order to support its implementation, principals are expected to make all staff aware of required activities and timelines on an annual basis.

Implementation of this policy will be reinforced through a central oversight process that includes regular data reviews, record sampling, reviews of underlying documentation, and, as needed, site visits.

This framework will ensure that together we build a system of continuous improvement and prevent noncompliance. For key guidance and support with questions, training, or implementation, please visit dcps.dc.gov.

DCPS is committed to serving every student with equity, excellence, transparency, and accountability. For any concerns or violations about this directive, contact the Chief Integrity Officer either by completing the [Online Referral Form](#) or send your concern via email to dcps.cio@dc.gov.