

**Regular school attendance is critical for academic success.** Our goal is to ensure that every student attends school regularly and on time. *Showing up for school has a huge impact on a student's academic success, starting in kindergarten and continuing through high school. Even as children grow older and more independent, families play a key role in making sure students get to school safely every day and understand why attendance is so important for success in school and in life.*

We realize some absences are unavoidable due to health problems or other circumstances. But, we also know that when students miss too much school—**excused or unexcused**—they can fall behind academically. Your child is less likely to succeed if he or she is chronically absent—which means missing 18 or more days in a school year. Research shows that:

- Children that are chronically absent in kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade are much less likely to read at grade level by the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.
- By 6<sup>th</sup> grade, chronic absence is a warning sign for students at risk of dropping out of school.
- By 9<sup>th</sup> grade, good attendance can predict graduation rates even better than 8<sup>th</sup> grade test scores.



## Is school attendance required?

**Yes. School attendance is required by law** for all students who reach five years of age on or before September 30 of the current school year. Students must attend school daily until they meet high school graduation requirements or reach their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

## What are the attendance expectations for students?

- **Arrive on time** to school and to class each day.
- **Bring your books** and materials to class.
- **Ask your teacher for missed work** or make-up assignments for days you were absent.
- **Ask school staff for help** if you have academic or other concerns (e.g. safety or lack of transportation) preventing you from coming to school.

## How can families help their student succeed?

- Let your child know that you think **school is important**.
- Set a **regular bedtime** and enforce it.
- Provide your child with **plenty of time to get ready** for school.
- Provide an **alternate transportation plan** for getting your child to school on time.
- Make sure your child arrives at school on time daily. **Classes begin promptly at 8:45 a.m.** Students should arrive at least ten minutes early.
- Plan medical, dental, and other **appointments before and after school if possible**. If appointments must be during the school day, plan them so that your child does not miss the same class every time.
- **Request a meeting** with your school's attendance committee or student support team to discuss your child's attendance concerns.

## What are excused and unexcused absences?

**Excused absences** are when school-aged students are absent from school with a valid excuse and parental approval.

Examples of excused absences include:

- Student **illness** (a doctor's note is required if a student is absent for more than five days);
- Death in the student's immediate family;
- Necessity for a student to attend a **judicial proceeding** as a plaintiff, defendant, witness or juror;
- Observance of a **religious holiday**;
- Temporary **school closings** due to weather, unsafe conditions or other emergencies;
- **Medical reasons** such as a doctor's appointment (a doctor's note is required);
- Failure of DC to provide transportation where legally responsible; and
- **Emergency circumstances** approved by the Chancellor's Office.

**Unexcused absences** are when school-aged students are absent from school without a valid excuse, with or without parental approval. Examples of unexcused absences include:

- Babysitting
- Oversleeping
- Doing errands
- Cutting classes
- Extended travel (domestic or international)

Students who miss 26% to 59% of the school day will receive a half-day absence. Students who miss 60% of the day will receive an unexcused absence for the full day.

**When a student returns to school after an absence**, a note should be sent to the teacher or attendance counselor. The note should include the date(s) of the absence and the reason. A doctor's note should be provided if required. Student absences without notes will be marked unexcused. If absences are due to chronic health issues, i.e. asthma, the school nurse will develop an Individual Health Plan.

## What happens if a student misses school?

Students who cut class or are absent may be subject to the following responses:

- Individual/group counseling to address attendance needs.
- Participation in the creation of, and adherence to, an attendance support plan.
- Parents of students with **five (5) unexcused absences** will be requested to participate in a truancy conference.
- Parents of students with **ten (10) total absences – excused or unexcused**–will be requested to participate in an attendance conference.
- Students ages 5-13 with **ten (10) unexcused absences** will be referred to the **Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA)** for suspected educational neglect.
- High school students with **ten (10) unexcused absences** will be referred to the school’s attendance committee.
- Students ages 14-17 with **twenty five (25) unexcused absences** will be referred to Court Social Services.
- **Course grades or year-end promotion may be affected by unexcused absences.**

## My child is skipping school. Who can I talk to?

- Your school’s attendance counselor.
- The Office of Youth Engagement attendance specialists (202) 442-4404.

## What happens when a truant is picked up by police?

All uniformed law enforcement officers in the District are responsible for truancy enforcement.

- Students are transported in a police vehicle to their school.
- Parents are notified of the student’s truancy status.
- Parents and students attend a truancy conference at the local school.

## What is truancy?

Truancy is the unexcused absence from school by a minor (5-17 years of age) with or without approval, parental knowledge, or consent.

## What is the school attendance law?

**The District of Columbia Compulsory School Attendance Law 8-247 and DC Municipal Regulations Title V Ch. 21** govern mandatory school attendance and the ways schools must respond when students are truant.

The Compulsory School Attendance Law states that parents/guardians who fail to have their children attend school are subject to the following:

- Truancy charges may be filed against the student or parent;
- Neglect charges may be filed against the parent;
- Parents may be fined or jailed;
- School-aged students may be picked up by law enforcement officers during school hours for suspected truancy;
- Students may be referred to Court Diversion and other community based interventions; and
- Parents and students may be assigned community service and placed under court supervision/probation.

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# Parent and Student Guide to School Attendance



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