

STUDENTS AND INSTRUCTION 5000

ATTENDANCE 5100

SCHOOL AGE AND ATTENDANCE 5101

Attendance is vital for student learning. For this reason, the Salem Public Schools encourage families to ensure that students are in school, on time every day. Under Massachusetts General Law (School Attendance, Chapter 76) attendance is compulsory. This means that, at a minimum, all children between the ages of six and sixteen are required to attend school daily. The School Committee also believes that daily attendance up to a student's graduation is essential to optimize learning.

Under the law, students with 8 or more unexcused absences or 15 unexcused half-days in any period of six months may, upon the recommendation of the school principal or designee, be referred to the Supervisor of Attendance for intervention or action. Every absence impacts student learning, however, regardless whether it is excused, unexcused, a tardy, or an early dismissal. Any student with 8 or more absences (excused or unexcused) may be referred to the school student support team. Considered together, absences for any reason can have an impact on student learning and academic and social emotional outcomes.

Students absent from school for a full-day may not participate in school-sponsored activities on the day or evening of the absence.

Excused Absences

Salem Public Schools recognizes that students will, at times, have legitimate reasons to be absent. Potential reasons for excused absences include the following:

- Student's illness or injury
- Death of a close family member
- Observance of a major religious holiday
- Court summons (student's name must appear on the summons)
- School/administration approved activities
- College visits (documentation required)
- Legal, immigration, military or other similar obligations
- Medical or psychological appointments during the school day
- Suspension

Parents/guardians are expected to call in a student's absence into the school's absence reporting system each day the student is absent. To be eligible for an excused absence, the parent/guardian shall provide the school with notice explaining the absence as soon as possible and within no more than 5 days of the return to school.

Medical Documentation Requirements

To be deemed excused, an absence of more than 3 consecutive days must be documented in writing by an appropriately licensed medical professional, e.g. physician, nurse practitioner, physician's assistant, psychiatrist, psychologist, therapist, or dentist who has physically assessed the student.

Unexcused Absences

An absence is considered unexcused when a student misses school for reasons that fail to meet the criteria for an excused absence as defined above.

Annual School Absence Protocol and Notification

The Salem School Committee requires that each school establish a student absence protocol and notification system. Principals shall send, at the beginning of each school year, notifications to the parent/guardian of each student regarding the school's protocol.

Truancy and Habitual Truancy

A student is considered truant when they miss school without permission or a valid excuse. Parents/guardians will be notified if a student is suspected of being truant.

A student is considered habitually truant if they are willfully failing to attend school for eight (8) or more school days in a quarter without a lawful and reasonable excuse as outlined above. For schools not operating on a quarter system, sixteen (16) missed days per semester or eleven (11) missed days per trimester shall apply.

Parent/Guardian and School Responsibilities

Parents/guardians are legally responsible for ensuring that their child attends school daily. Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 76, § 1B, the school will notify the parent/guardian of a student who has missed 5 or more school days unexcused in a school year. The school administrator/designee will make a reasonable effort to meet with the parent/guardian of a student who has 5 or more unexcused absences to develop action steps for student attendance. The action steps shall be developed jointly and agreed upon by the school principal, or a designee, the student and the student's parent/guardian and with input from other relevant school personnel and officials from public safety, health and human service, housing and nonprofit agencies.

Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic Absence is defined as a student missing 10% or more days of school within a school calendar year including all absences regardless of whether they are excused or unexcused. Starting as early as preschool and kindergarten, students' chronic absence is a primary cause of low academic achievement and a powerful predictor of which students will eventually drop out

of school. Students who have poor attendance over multiple years will struggle to make up for the lost time in the classroom. Students' chronic absenteeism can leave third graders unable to read proficiently, sixth graders struggling with coursework and high school students off track for graduation.

Plan for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

The Superintendent shall track and measure chronic absenteeism across the district and shall develop a comprehensive plan to reduce chronic absenteeism wherever concerning patterns exist. Each school shall also develop its own plan to reduce chronic absenteeism that shall be included in its School Improvement Plan. Such plans should be proactive in reducing barriers to consistent student attendance, responsive to student and family needs, and involve key school staff members (such as a Student Support Team), and other stakeholders including community partners.

Enforcement of Student Attendance

Salem Public Schools exercises its rights to enforce M.G.L. 76, §1 or Chapter 119, §51A. The Salem School District will be proactive in efforts to intervene when absenteeism is high and/or impacts student learning. For such irregular attendance of any kind, a student shall be referred to the school attendance team. Students who are identified as habitually truant (as defined above) will be referred to the district's Supervisor of Attendance and potentially other forms of intervention or action.

Educational Services Due to Absences for Illness/Injury

For absences of several days due to illness or injuries, students and families should contact teachers to establish a reasonable schedule for making up missed work. Students in middle and high school are strongly encouraged to seek out extra help before or after school, or at some other mutually agreeable time if they need assistance from a teacher as the result of an absence.

Per 603 CMR 28.03(3)(c) and 28.04(4), parents/guardians of students who are absent because of illness or injury for 14 consecutive school days, or students with chronic illnesses who have recurring home/hospital stays of less than 14 consecutive school days, when such recurrences have added up to or are expected to add up to more than 14 school days in a school year, are eligible for home or hospital educational services if they are requested and the medical need is documented by the treating physician. In these cases, the parent/guardian should contact the Office of Student Services and Family Supports to set up educational services that will enable the student to keep up in their courses of study and minimize the educational loss that might occur during the period of confinement at home or hospital.

Legal References: MGL 76:1, 1A, 1B, 2, 4, 5, 20 and 119: 51A

603 CMR 28.03(3)(c)

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<https://www.mass.gov/juvenile-court-rules/juvenile-court-standing-order-3-21-child-requiring-assistance-proceedings>

www.attendanceworks.org/research/

APPROVED: 2/6/23

