

**ABSENCES AND TRUANCY**

The Ledyard Board of Education believes that regular attendance at school is critical to students being able to master the necessary skills for academic success in Ledyard Public Schools. A growing body of research indicates that missing an excessive number of school days, regardless of the reason, can place a child at risk of falling behind his or her peers academically. The goal of this policy is to identify those students at risk based on their absenteeism and implement appropriate levels of intervention.

Connecticut State Board of Education policy states that, *“A student is considered to be “in attendance” if present at his/her assigned school, or an activity sponsored by the school (e.g., a field trip), for at least half of the regular school day. A student who is serving an out-of-school suspension or expulsion should always be considered absent.”* According to this policy, a student who is not “in attendance” is considered absent.

In order to identify those students who are chronically absent and at risk of becoming truant and to provide clear guidance to school districts for complying with truancy laws and reporting student truancy statistics, the State Board of Education has adopted the following definitions and guidance regarding student absences:

**Disciplinary Absences** – Absences that are the result of school or District-level disciplinary action (e.g., out-of-school suspension and expulsion) are excluded from State-level accounting and will not be counted against the student for the purposes of this policy.

**Excused Absences** – A student’s absence from school shall be considered excused if written documentation of the reason for the absence has been submitted within ten (10) school days of the student’s return to school, or the absence is in accordance with section 10-210 of the Connecticut General Statutes (exclusion for medical reasons), and student’s absence meets the following criteria:

A. For absences one through nine (1-9), a student’s absences from school are considered excused when the student’s parent/guardian approves such absence, regardless of the reason, and submits appropriate documentation; and

B. For the tenth and subsequent absences, a student’s absences are considered excused for the following reasons:

1. Student illness (Note: all student illness absences must be verified by an appropriately licensed medical professional for the absence to be excused, regardless of the length of the absence);
2. Student’s observance of a religious holiday;
3. Death in the student’s family or other emergency beyond the control of the student’s family;
4. Mandated court appearances (additional documentation required);
5. The lack of transportation that is normally provided by a school district other than Ledyard (no parental documentation is required for this reason); and
6. Extraordinary educational opportunities pre-approved by the Principal, or his/her designee, per the guidance in this policy.

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**Unexcused Absences** – A student’s absence from school shall be considered unexcused unless it meets the definition of an excused absence (including the documentation requirements) or the absence was a disciplinary absence.

Note that the State Board of Education’s policy only considers a student absent when he/she misses half or more of the normal school day. A student missing less than half the school day will be considered tardy; student tardiness shall be dealt with at the school building level. Additionally, while the state looks at student absences on a daily basis, Ledyard Middle School and Ledyard High School shall also track absences for each class and take the appropriate actions as outlined in this policy.

**Documentation of Student Absences**

The State Board of Education requires careful and thorough documentation of all student absences. Parent and guardian notes and other documentation are central to determining whether a student’s absence is excused or unexcused. While a written note from a parent or guardian will likely be the most common form of documentation, other methods of reporting a student’s absence are acceptable, such as a parent/guardian making a report in person to the designated school staff member, through an online system with controlled access, or via video chat. E-mail and texting do not meet the State’s security requirements; however, e-mail may be used to deliver a scanned image of a note.

The bottom line is that the school staff must be certain that the student’s parent/guardian was the one providing the information regarding the student’s absence in order for it to be excused should the absence meet all the applicable criteria specified herein.

School staff must receive or generate documentation for each instance of absence, which is one or more consecutive school days absent. Schools should only accept notes covering a series of absences for non-consecutive school days if the absences share a common cause.

Once a student has accrued a total of nine absences, including both excused and unexcused, additional documentation (besides the note from the student’s parent/guardian) is required in order for absences resulting from illness or mandated court appearances to be excused:

- A. Students missing school for mandated court appearances must provide additional documentation such as a police summons, a subpoena, a notice to appear, or a signed note from a court official.
  
- B. For absences resulting from illness, students must either provide a signed note from a medical professional who has evaluated the student confirming the absence and giving an expected return date or have the school nurse verify the student’s absence with the medical professional treating the student. Families who lack health insurance and/or those with limited means may find it challenging to meet this requirement to obtain a note from a licensed medical professional. In these cases, school nurses can evaluate the ill student, either in person or over the telephone, and, where appropriate, provide the required documentation for an excused absence.

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For parents/guardians who are not proficient in reading or writing English, the schools shall make efforts to help these parents report their child's absences, including accepting notes in languages other than English. For parents who are not proficient in writing in any language, schools should verbally inform them of the attendance requirements and that they may report a student's absence in person at the school.

**Absences for Emergency Situations**

For the purposes of the definition of excused absences, emergencies are generally significant events that are outside of the control of the student's family. They are normally short absences consisting of a few days at most. The only required documentation is a parental note clearly explaining the emergency situation that resulted in the student's absence. Examples of emergencies include, but are not limited to:

- Family member who is very ill and close to dying;
- Student's home is lost to fire or eviction;
- Family's home being quarantined;
- Natural disaster;
- A student who is a parent and whose child needs to go to the hospital; or
- A family member's military deployment or return from deployment.

**Absences for Extraordinary Educational Opportunities**

From time to time, students may be presented with an exceptional opportunity for an experience of an educational nature. While these events may not be part of the student's normal schoolwork, they can provide an excellent chance to further their education. Students and their parents/guardians must understand that approval as an excused absence is made on a case-by-case basis, in consideration of a number of factors, and that opportunities approved for one student may not be approved for another. Under the specific criteria outlined herein, the days devoted to these opportunities can count as excused absences:

- The opportunity must be educational in nature and have a learning objective related to the student's coursework or plan of study;
- It must be an opportunity not ordinarily available to the student;
- It must be grade and developmentally appropriate; and
- The content of the experience must be highly relevant to the student.

It is important that the school administration, the student, and the student's family all have a common understanding of the extraordinary educational opportunity that is being requested and approved. To that end, building-specific procedures implementing this policy shall include the following:

- All requests for approval of an exceptional educational opportunity as an excused absence must be submitted in writing prior to the event, bear the signature of the student and his/her parent or guardian, describe the learning objective of the opportunity, and detail how the objective is linked to the student's coursework or plan of study; include additional documentation as appropriate to support a full understanding of the opportunity.

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- Approval of an exceptional educational opportunity as an excused absence should be in writing, detail any requirements placed upon the student as a condition of approval, include the specific days approved for the opportunity, and include the caveat that the school administration may withdraw its approval if the opportunity is canceled or the student fails to meet the mutually-agreed-upon requirements of the approval.

Within ten (10) days after the end of the approved period for the extraordinary educational opportunity, the student must submit all required documentation as specified during the approval process, or the time away from school will be considered an unexcused absence.

**Students from Military Families**

A student, whose parent or legal guardian is an active duty member of the Armed Forces and has been called to duty for, is on leave from, or has immediately returned from deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting, shall be granted an additional ten (10) days of excused absences in any school year to visit the student's parent or legal guardian during the period of leave, prior to deployment and after return from deployment. The Superintendent, at her/his discretion, may authorize additional excused absences in a school year beyond the initial ten (10) mandated herein.

In the case of excused absences which have been granted in accordance with the above paragraph, the student and their parent/legal guardian shall be responsible for obtaining assignments from the student's teacher(s) prior to any period of excused absence and for ensuring that such assignments are completed by the student prior to his/her return to school from the period of excused absence.

**Truancy**

Connecticut State law defines a "truant" as a child age five to eighteen years, inclusive, who is enrolled in Ledyard Public Schools and has four (4) unexcused absences from school in any one month or ten (10) unexcused absences from school in any school year. Studies have shown that students who are truant are in danger of having significant difficulty in making the same academic progress as their peers who regularly attend school.

Within ten (10) school days after a student's fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) unexcused absence in a month or tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) unexcused absence in a school year, the school administration shall hold a meeting with the parent/guardian of the student who has become truant, or with such other person having control of the truant student, to review and evaluate the reasons for the child being truant.

If the truant student's parent/guardian, or other person having control of the truant student, fails to attend the above required meeting or if such parent/guardian or other person otherwise fails to cooperate with the school administration in attempting to solve the truancy problem, the Superintendent shall file a written complaint with the Superior Court pursuant to section 46b-149 of the Connecticut General Statutes alleging the belief that the acts or omissions of the child are such that the child's family is a family with service needs. This written complaint shall be filed within fifteen (15) calendar days after the truant student's parents/guardians or other person having control of the child

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fails to attend the required meeting or fails to cooperate with the school administration in attempting to solve the truancy problem.

**Investigating Student Absences**

The Superintendent is authorized by the Board to designate one or more District employees to serve as an attendance officer for the purpose of investigating student absences. The role of an attendance officer is to gather/verify information so that school personnel may better understand the factors contributing to the student's absenteeism. This may include a visit to the student's residence.

When a Principal believes that a student's absences, excused or not, are having a negative impact on the student's academic performance and that more information is needed regarding the factors behind the student's absenteeism, the Principal shall recommend to the Superintendent that an attendance officer be assigned to further investigate the situation. Only the Superintendent, or her/his designee, may authorize the use of an attendance officer in Ledyard Public Schools.

**Implementation**

The Superintendent is responsible for the development of District-wide and building-specific procedures to implement the requirements of this policy. All elementary schools shall use a common procedure regarding student tardiness, absenteeism and truancy. These procedures shall provide for:

- the clear expectation among students and their parents/guardians regarding the need for regular, consistent attendance at school;
- a uniform understanding among staff, students and their parents/guardians of the requirements for excused absences;
- the potential of consequences for unexcused absences; and
- the possibility that a student may be required to receive remedial assistance even when all absences are excused but potentially have negatively impacted their education.

The Board requires that District and building-level procedures developed to implement this policy contain the following specific elements:

1. Annually at the beginning of each school year and upon enrollment during the school year, the school administration shall inform students and their parents/guardians of the school attendance requirements, the building-specific procedures regarding absenteeism, and obtain a phone number or other means of contacting the parents/guardians during the school day. This and all subsequent notifications regarding student absenteeism shall be made in such a manner as to be easily understood by both students and their parents/guardians (for example, using an alternative language when the primary language in the home is not English).
2. Each school shall monitor individual student absences; additionally, Ledyard Middle School and Ledyard High School will track student absences for each class.

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3. Whenever a child enrolled in grades kindergarten to eight fails to report to school on a regularly scheduled school day and no indication has been received by school personnel that the child's parent or other person having control of the child is aware of the pupil's absence, school personnel shall make a reasonable effort to contact the student's parents/guardians by telephone in regard to the student's absence. If school personnel are unable to reach the student's parents/guardians via telephone, then a letter will be sent to the student's home address requiring the parents/guardians to contact the school. The letter shall include a warning that two (2) unexcused absences from school in a month or five (5) unexcused absences in a school year may result in a complaint filed with the Superior Court pursuant to section 46b-149 of the Connecticut General Statutes alleging the belief that the child's family is a family with service needs.
4. The District and each school shall have procedures for coordinating services with and making referrals to community agencies providing child and family services. These organizations should be used to address, where appropriate, the student's personal or family issues that may be affecting his or her ability to attend school on a regular basis.
5. Student tardiness and unexcused absences shall be used as factors in determining eligibility to participate in extra-curricular activities.
6. In an effort to prevent absenteeism from rising to the level that it affects a student's academic performance, building-level procedures implementing this policy shall include a tiered series of interventions designed to recognize the factors uniquely affecting a student's attendance and put in place various support actions that can have a positive effect on both their future attendance and academic performance.

**Legal References:**

Connecticut General Statutes

- 10-184. Duties of parents. School attendance age requirements.
- 10-198a. Policies and procedures concerning truants. (as amended by Public Act 14-198)
- 10-198b. State Board of Education to define "excused absence" and "unexcused absence" for purpose of reporting truancy.
- 10-199. Attendance officers. Duties.
- 10-210. Notice of disease to be given parent or guardian.
- 10-220. Duties of boards of education.

State Board of Education "*Guidelines for Excused and Unexcused Absences*" dated May 15, 2013

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