

ATTENDANCE, TARDINESS AND TRUANCY POLICY

I. Purpose and Intent

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that students are in school and learning. School attendance is critical to successful school performance. Class discussions, student collaborative work, and teacher guidance and directives all offer learning opportunities that are hard to make up outside the classroom. In order to be successful, students must attend school and be on time for classes and other scheduled activities. Tardiness is a disruption to the educational process. It sets a tone that de-values education, detracts from lessons, is discourteous to the teacher and other students, and results in a loss of instructional time.

II. Parent/Guardian, Student, and School Responsibilities

Parents/Guardians, students, school administrators, and teachers all have important responsibilities to ensure that students attend school and are on time.

Students have an obligation to attend school and to be on time for class and scheduled activities.

Parents have an obligation to avoid whenever possible disruptions of the academic year by planning medical appointments and vacations at times that will not require students to be out of school.

Under New Hampshire law, specifically RSA 193:1, parents/guardians have a legal obligation to make sure that their children who are at least 6 years of age and under 18 years of age attend school for the entire school year and during all the time that public schools are in session. Parents/Guardians should, therefore, plan activities and appointments for their children at times when school is not in session. Parents/Guardians must contact the school to inform the school of their child's absence.

School officials determine whether students' absences are excused or unexcused. The school must also maintain accurate attendance records for each student. Each teacher must accurately report daily attendance and punctuality.

The building principal is designated as the person responsible for truancy issues. The building principal must submit attendance information to the Superintendent's Office and must communicate with parents when a student's attendance becomes a concern or as required by this Policy. School officials and parents/guardians must then work together to come up with a plan to address the child's absences/or tardiness.

III. Policy Development

It is the intent of the Derry Cooperative School Board to involve parents/guardians in the development of its Attendance, Tardiness and Truancy Policy and any amendments to the Policy. The School Board will notify parents about the proposed Policy or amendments through appropriate communication channels. The School Board will also invite parents to attend the School Board meeting at which the proposed Policy or amendments will be discussed.

IV. Excused and Unexcused Absences Defined

The School Board recognizes that absences from school may be necessary under certain circumstances. The School District recognizes two kinds of absences from school: excused and unexcused absences.

Excused absences are limited to the following situations:

1. School sponsored events such as field trips or athletic events.
2. Absences due to chronic health conditions or illness documented by a physician (includes dentists and orthodontists).
3. An illness that requires up to a three-day absence from school, without a doctor's note.
4. Death of a family member.
5. Religious holidays or attendance at religious ceremonies.
6. Generally, absences other than illness during the school year are discouraged. The school principal or his/her designee may, however, grant special approval of absence for family vacations, provided written approval is given in advance. Parents are asked to write a note to their child's teacher at least two weeks before the trip.
7. Absences as a result of waivers from the Superintendent for alternative learning plans under RSA 193:1, I(h).
8. Mandated court appearances.
9. Extreme weather conditions as determined by administration.
10. Private parent concerns relating to student's well being discussed, approved, and documented by school principal or designee.
11. State notified health alert.

Unexcused absences are all other absences and include but are not limited to vacations that are outside the limit noted above, absences for other personal reasons, tardiness, cutting classes, dismissals, truancy, absence from any class or activity for which the student is scheduled, and absence from any after-school help session or disciplinary session which a student has been directed to attend.

V. Limitations on Unexcused Absences

A half-day absence is defined as missing up to half of the total minutes in a school day. Missing more than half the total minutes in a school day is two half-day absences.

Unexcused absences from school are considered truancy. A student who skips class or a scheduled activity, arrives late for class or a scheduled activity, or leaves a class or scheduled activity without permission of school personnel is considered truant and will be deemed to have missed the entire class or scheduled activity.

Ten half-days of unexcused absence during a school year shall constitute habitual truancy. Under New Hampshire law, habitual truancy is a ground for filing a petition in the local district court to establish the student is a child in need of services (CHINS). A truant officer or school official shall not file a petition alleging that the child is in need of services (CHINS) pursuant to RSA 169-D:2, II(a) until all steps in the school district's intervention process under RSA 189:34, II have been followed.

VI. Intervention Process

After six half-days of unexcused absences, the building principal or designee shall contact the parent/guardian by telephone and in writing requesting a meeting within three school days to discuss the matter and to develop a plan to prevent any further unexcused absences.

In accordance with New Hampshire law, the building principal shall enclose copies of RSA 193:1, this Policy, and the student's attendance record. The building principal will send a copy of the letter to the District's truant officer and the Superintendent.

If a student has 10 half-days of unexcused absences in the school year, the building principal shall notify the Superintendent, parents/guardians, and truant officer. The building principal shall schedule a meeting with the parent/guardian, truant officer, and appropriate school personnel. The purpose of the meeting shall be to develop a revised plan to address the habitual truancy. At the meeting, the building principal and truant officer shall inform the parent/guardian that additional unexcused absences may result in a report to the Division of Children Youth and Families (DCYF) and/or the filing of the appropriate action (usually a CHINS petition under RSA 169-D:2, III(a)) in the local district court.

If the student fails to comply with the revised plan and has more than 20 half-days of unexcused absences, the building principal and truant officer shall consult with the Superintendent to determine whether DCYF should be notified and/or a court action filed.

VII. Appeal

Each school shall have a School Attendance Committee consisting of two teachers, a guidance counselor/social worker and principal or assistant principal. The School Attendance Committee shall consider the following factors in reviewing a request or appeal:

1. The spirit and intent of the Policy.
2. Whether the absence was due to the action or inaction of the student or parents.
3. Whether exceptional circumstances exist that warrant an exception to the Policy.

A student seeking an exception for an absence that is not otherwise excused may file a request with the School Attendance Committee. A student may also appeal to the School Attendance Committee the following:

1. A determination that a specific absence/tardy, etc., was unexcused;
2. A determination that an absence occurred at all; or
3. Whether exceptional circumstances exist which make strict application of this Policy inappropriate with respect to one or more absences.

The decision of the School Attendance Committee shall be final.