

## Truancy K-12

Truancy is a sign of serious trouble; an indicator that a young person is giving up and losing his or her way. Students who become truant oftentimes drop out of school thus putting themselves at a long-term disadvantage in becoming productive citizens. High school dropouts, for example, are two and a half times more likely to be on welfare than high school graduates. High school dropouts are almost twice as likely to be unemployed as high school graduates. Those dropouts who somehow manage to find employment earn much lower salaries. In addition, truancy is a gateway to crime.

Principals, guidance counselors, teachers and home-school coordinators must work together to resolve truancy cases. Generally, there are four general factors influencing student attendance. School personnel will do well to consider each as they attempt to resolve attendance issues.

- **Family factors:** These include a lack of guidance or parental supervision, domestic violence, poverty, drug or alcohol abuse on the part of the parent, lack of knowledge of the school attendance law, and differing attitudes toward education.
- **School factors:** These include school climate issues such as attitudes of teachers, other students and administrators as well as the school's inflexibility in meeting the student's unique learning style.
- **Economic influences:** These include employed students, single-parent homes, a high family mobility rate, parents holding multiple jobs, a lack of transportation or childcare.
- **Student variables:** These include drug and alcohol abuse, learning difficulties, lack of social competence, mental health difficulties, and poor physical health.

The purpose of this regulation is to offer guidance when dealing with truant students and their families. Below are steps that should be taken to address the problem. School personnel should be certain to document all efforts and include such documentation in the cumulative file. While a student may not become a habitual truant in one school year, they may in the next and successful efforts on the part of school personnel could be helpful.

1. Efforts to correct truancy begin with the first unexcused absence of the school year. School personnel should contact parents personally to explain district attendance policy. At this time it would be helpful to consider relevant factors influencing truancy and determine what steps should be taken to ensure good attendance in the future. If one suspects that a learning problem exists, a PET referral is in order. If the student is on informal adjustment or probation with the Department of Corrections, the juvenile caseworker should be immediately notified. If the situation warrants, a referral to the Department of Human Services, the school nurse or guidance counselor may be in order.
2. A second unexcused absence will result in a letter from the principal. The third instance will include a home visit by the home-school coordinator. Again, the tenor of the contact should be positive with the intention of resolving those problems that prevent the student from attending school regularly. The principal or attendance officer should also mail a follow-up

letter and include a copy of Policy JHB *Truancy*. At this point, guidance counselors should meet with the student and his or her parents to develop a plan to resolve the problem. Is alternative school programming or other services warranted? If so, steps to enroll the student should be taken as soon as possible.

3. Subsequent instances should include all of the above until the student attains the equivalent of ten full days of non-excused absences or seven school days of non-excused absences during a school year. At that point the principal or their designee should send a memo to the Superintendent outlining the following:
  - a. Student's name, parent or guardian's name, address and telephone number.
  - b. A chronological history, including steps taken to improve attendance.
  - c. A description of the student's academic performance, his or her school history, relevant disabilities, required special services and the student's disciplinary record.
4. Once notified, the Superintendent shall meet at a mutually convenient time with the student, parent(s) or guardian(s) and principal to impress upon the family the importance of a good education. If regular day school is not possible, the Superintendent shall explore appropriate alternative educational programs, adult education or a general equivalency diploma program. Following this meeting, the principal shall notify the superintendent of subsequent unexcused absences.
5. If all efforts are deemed unsuccessful by the Superintendent, he/she shall refer the matter to the SAD #3 Board of Directors. A hearing shall be scheduled as soon as possible. A notice will be sent to student's parents by certified mail at least seven (7) days in advance of the hearing. All correspondence shall be placed in the student's cumulative folder.
6. If the Board determines the student is a habitual truant it shall either instruct him or her to attend school or waive attendance requirements if the student is at least 15 years old. The board shall make its findings in writing and send a copy to the parent or guardian enclosing information should the family choose to appeal the Board's decision to the Commissioner of Education.
7. If the student is instructed by the Board to attend school and continues to violate Maine's compulsory attendance law and the Superintendent has made a good faith effort to correct the problem; the student will be dropped from the school roll.

Issued: October 12, 2003