



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



TO: Superintendents of Schools
Principals of Schools

FROM: Stefan Pryor 
Commissioner of Education

DATE: May 15, 2013

SUBJECT: Guidelines for Excused and Unexcused Absences

On June 27, 2012, the State Board of Education adopted definitions for excused and unexcused absences for use by schools and districts in order to implement the statutory policies and procedures concerning truants, and the reporting of truancy. The Connecticut State Department of Education was asked to issue guidance to help districts in implementing the new definitions. Attached is a copy of that guidance.

In addition, these guidelines discuss nationally recognized best practices that are aimed at improving student attendance. Valuable feedback in the creation of this document was received from: Attendance Works – a national leader in school attendance issues; members of Connecticut’s education community; and the Policy Development Committee of the State Board of Education.

We hope that these guidelines serve as a valuable resource to help decrease rates of chronic absenteeism and enhance student outcomes. If you have any questions regarding this guidance or the State Board definitions, please contact Raymond Martin at 860-713-6876 or raymond.martin@ct.gov.

SP:rjm

cc: Charlene Russell-Tucker, Chief Operating Officer
Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Chief, Bureau of Data Collection, Research and Evaluation

Attachment

Connecticut State Department of Education



Guidelines for Implementation of the Definitions of Excused and Unexcused Absences and Best Practices for Absence Prevention and Intervention

April 2013

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Introduction

On July 8, 2011, Governor Dannel P. Malloy signed into law Public Act 11-136, *An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to the Education Statutes*. Section 18 of that act requires the State Board of Education to define “excused” and “unexcused” absences. On June 27, 2012, the State Board of Education adopted the required definitions (see attachment A). Schools and districts are to use these definitions to judge if a student’s absence is excused, unexcused, or of a disciplinary nature for the purposes of carrying out the provisions of section 10-198a of the Connecticut General Statutes (Policies and procedures concerning truants), and for reporting truancy. This guidance document is designed to assist schools and districts in implementing these new definitions.

According to these definitions, the number of unexcused absences determines if the student is truant or at risk of becoming truant. According to Connecticut General Statutes section 10-198a, a “truant” means a child who has four unexcused absences in a month or 10 unexcused absences in a school year (see attachment B for the statutory language). The statute also prescribes interventions the school must take with the student and the student’s family once the student has qualified as truant and establishes criteria by which a student’s actions or that of the student’s family may lead to a student’s family being classified as a family with service needs under section 46b-149 of the Connecticut General Statutes.

Please note that these definitions do not preclude districts from maintaining different local definitions of these terms for local uses. For example, a district can use its own definition of excused absences for grading purposes or eligibility to participate in extracurricular sports; these areas do not pertain to the truancy law and do not affect the reporting of truants to the state.

Definition of an Absence

State Board of Education policy states:

A student is considered to be “in attendance” if present at his/her assigned school, or an activity sponsored by the school (e.g., 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. **The State Board definitions of excused and unexcused absences apply only to those absences that meet the standards of the above policy.** For example, the definitions do not apply to tardy students (i.e., those late for school but who would be considered as “in attendance” according to the above policy). Districts may use days tardy for local purposes as necessary.

The Two-level Approach to Excused Absences

The State Board of Education definitions establish two levels of criteria for an absence to be considered an excused absence (see table below).

| Level | Total # of Days Absent* | Acceptable Reasons for a Student Absence to Be Considered Excused | Documentation Required within 10 Days |
|-------|-------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | One through nine | Any reason that the student's parent or guardian approves. | Parent or guardian note only. |
| 2 | 10 and above | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student illness (<i>Note: to be deemed excused, an appropriately licensed medical professional must verify all student illness absences, regardless of the absence's length.</i>) • Student's observance of a religious holiday. • Death in the student's family or other emergency beyond the control of the student's family. • Mandated court appearances (additional documentation required). • The lack of transportation that is normally provided by a district other than the one the student attends (parental documentation is not required for this reason). • Extraordinary educational opportunities pre-approved by district administrators. (Opportunities must meet certain criteria. See below for details). | Parent or guardian note and in some cases additional documentation (see details of specific reason). |

* Note: The total number of days absent includes both excused and unexcused absences.

It is important to note that while the first nine absences in a school year can be deemed excused for any reason the parent or guardian provides, the 10th and each subsequent absence establish a more stringent and specific set of reasons for the absence to qualify as excused. The flow chart (attachment C) offers a visual tool to help determine if an absence is excused or unexcused.

In cases where a student's extended absence crosses levels, the rules should be applied as if there were two separate absences, one under Level 1 and the other under Level 2. For example, if a student is absent for five days on a family vacation and those absences represent numbers seven through 11, absences seven, eight, and nine would fall under Level 1 rules and can be accepted as excused; absences 10 and 11 would fall under Level 2 rules and would not be considered excused.

It is critical for schools to communicate the different levels of criteria to parents and develop feedback methods so parents can track their child's excused and unexcused absences. Schools are strongly encouraged to inform parents when their child has reached his or her sixth and ninth absences and remind them of the stricter rules that apply to absence number 10 and above.

Documentation

Parent or guardian notes and other documentation are central to determining whether a student’s absence is excused or unexcused. While a 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. For example, a parent or guardian can report the student’s absence in person to an authorized school official, such as an attendance clerk. The table below details the different types of acceptable absence documentation and the required elements for each type.

| Parent or Guardian Note | In-Person Explanation from Parent or Guardian to an Authorized School Staff Member | School Nurse Evaluation (either in person or telephone consultation) |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Dates of absence | Dates of absence | Dates of absence |
| Reason for absence | Reason for absence parent or guardian reports | Reason for absence |
| Signature of parent or guardian | Name of parent or guardian reporting the absence | Date and location of the consultation |
| | Date and location of the report by parent or guardian | Type of the consultation (i.e., did they see the student themselves or speak to a parent about the student) |
| | Signature of staff member receiving report | Signature of school nurse |

School staff must receive or generate documentation for each incidence of absence. An incidence of absence is a set of consecutive school days absent. If a student is out three consecutive days, that is one incidence of absence; therefore, only one note is needed. If the student is out three days but attended school one day between day two and three, the student has two incidences of absence and needs two notes. Schools should accept notes covering a series of absences only if the absences share a common cause.

Certain types of absences in Level 2 require additional documentation or verification. Absences due to student illnesses and mandated court appearances require this additional information once the student has accrued more than nine absences (entered Level 2). For students in Level 1, these additional requirements do not apply. For absences due to student illness, Level 2 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 his or her school nurse verify the student’s absence with the medical professional treating the student. The medical professional who is treating the student can be the school nurse at the student’s school.

Mandated court appearances also require additional documentation. Students missing school to make mandated court appearances must provide documentation such as:

- a police summons
- a subpoena
- a notice to appear
- a signed note from a court official

Alternative Documentation Methods

While notes will be the most prominent method of reporting and confirming student absences, technology may make other approaches possible. Online systems may allow for parent access to an absence application, or districts may develop systems to allow school staff, including school nurses, to report information on student absences. Such systems would have to collect all of the information that would be required in a note, but replace the signature with a personal identification number (PIN) or password. Any systems of this sort would need to have a high level of security and strictly controlled access.

Technologies, such as video chat, that allow school officials to have a remote conversation with the parent can be used in lieu of an in-person conversation, provided that the systems allow for two-way visual and audio interaction. Such conversations would be documented as in-person conversation.

Current e-mail and text messaging technology do not meet the level of security and controlled access necessary to be used to in this manner, so an e-mail or text message would not qualify. Under certain circumstances, e-mail could be an acceptable method for a parent to deliver a scanned image of a note.

Accommodations for Parents

With Connecticut's diverse student population, most if not all schools will likely encounter a student whose parent or guardian is not proficient in writing in English. These parents may or may not be proficient in writing in another language. Schools should make efforts to help these parents report their child's absences. For parents who are proficient in a language other than English, schools should accept absence notes in the parents' proficient language. 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.

Families without Health Insurance

Families who lack health insurance and/or those with limited means may find it challenging to meet the Level 2 requirement to obtain a note from a licensed medical professional for absences due to illness. 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.

School nurses can further assist schools and families by:

- assisting parents with accessing publicly supported health insurance for those children who are uninsured;

- gaining permission from parents to communicate with health care providers regarding students' health status; and
- providing schools with a perspective that validates why students with confirmed diagnoses may be frequently absent from school due to illnesses or for therapies essential to maintaining their health.

Exceptions to the Documentation Requirement

Two types of absences do not require documentation.

1. Absences that result from a student not receiving transportation from one school district to attend school in another district must be deemed as an excused absence. For example:
 - One district provides transportation for students of its town or region to attend schools run by another district, *and* the district providing the transportation shuts down due to inclement weather or other emergency, but the district that the student attends stays open.

In this situation, the student would be absent but would not need a parental note to that effect; such absence would be deemed excused.

2. The second type of absence that would not require documentation would be absences that are the result of disciplinary actions taken by the district. These disciplinary absences are neither excused nor unexcused.

Best Practices in Documentation of Absences

Districts can take some of the following steps to improve overall attendance and compliance to attendance policies:

1. Leveraging school nurses: School nurses can be a great resource in dealing with medical related absences. Using their expertise can especially benefit those students who have limited access to medical professionals.
2. Auditing notes: Schools may choose to include in their attendance policies a provision for verification of documentation. By auditing even a small percentage of notes, the school will reduce the likelihood of receiving questionable notes.
3. Posting policies and sample notes in multiple languages: Though many districts send attendance policies home to students, it is suggested that districts also post them in the school and on their Web site. Including sample notes of what is an acceptable note and what is an unacceptable note may also be valuable as it helps parents understand what needs to be in a parent note.
4. Working with parents: There will be times that schools need to work with parents to receive the required documentation in the acceptable timeframe. For example, the school may receive a parent note within the 10-school-day period, but the note is missing a required element, or a parent may experience difficulty procuring a doctor's note. In these cases, schools should work

with the parents to get the required documentation. These efforts can include an extension of the 10-day requirement, but only for absences in which some documentation was received within the 10 days. Such extensions cannot exceed an additional five days.

Emergencies

One of the acceptable reasons for a Level 2 student to be absent is a death in the family or other emergency beyond the control of the family. 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.

Examples of emergencies include:

- 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.

Some unexpected absences will not qualify as an emergency. These include:

- staying home to meet the plumber or other tradesman;
- routine childcare of a younger child by the student; or
- opportunity to work an extra shift at afterschool job.

Extended absences would be considered an emergency only under extreme circumstances. For example, if an order of the community health department quarantined a family's home for an extended period, such quarantine would be an extended emergency.

Absences due to family emergencies do not require additional documentation. A parental note explaining the emergency received within 10 school days is sufficient, but it is essential that the note explain the emergency so school staff can evaluate if the situation was indeed an emergency.

Extraordinary Educational Opportunities

From time to time, students encounter an exceptional opportunity for an experience of an educational nature. While these events may not be part of their schoolwork, they provide an excellent chance to further their education. Under certain circumstances, the days devoted to these opportunities can count as excused absences for Level 2 students.

To qualify as an extraordinary educational opportunity, it must meet the following criteria:

- a) The opportunity must be educational in nature. It must have a learning objective related to the student's course work or plan of study. Not all memorable and/or life experiences would be considered educational and, therefore, would not be available for this exemption.
- b) It must be an opportunity not ordinarily available to the student.
- c) It must be grade and developmentally appropriate.
- d) The content of the experience must be highly relevant to the student. While some opportunities will be relevant to all students, others will contain very specific content that would limit their relevance to a smaller group of students. For example, a trumpet lesson from jazz great Wynton Marsalis would be very relevant to students who play trumpet, but not to others who do not play trumpet.

Note: Criteria c) and d) above may mean that an exceptional educational opportunity exemption may be approved for one family member but not another attending the same event/opportunity.

Some examples of extraordinary educational opportunities include:

- the opportunity to meet the president of the United States or a foreign head of state; or
- a behind the scenes tour of the Kennedy Space Center.

Some examples of activities that do not qualify as extraordinary educational opportunities include:

- family vacations; or
- going to a concert of a favorite pop star.

Best Practices for Extraordinary Educational Opportunities

It is important that the school, the student, and the student's family all have a common understanding of the opportunity that is being requested and approved. To that end, the Department suggests that schools include the following elements in their plans and procedures for approving extraordinary educational opportunities:

- a) Requests: All requests for approval of exceptional educational opportunities should be submitted in writing, bear the signature of the student and his or her parent or guardian, outline 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 (where available), and be submitted prior to the opportunity.
- b) Approvals: All approvals for opportunities should:
 - be in written form;
 - detail any requirements placed upon the student as a condition of approval;

- include the specific days approved for the opportunities;* and
 - include in the approval the caveat that the administration may withdraw its approval if the opportunity is canceled or the student fails to meet the mutually agreed on requirements of the approval.
- c) Requirement to share: Schools should expect students to share their experience with other students and/or staff when they return. This will benefit the larger school community.
- d) Approval not assured: Schools should inform parents that approvals are awarded on a case-by-case basis, are based on a number of factors, and that opportunities approved for one student may not be approved for another.

Attendance and Absences: Prevention and Intervention Activities

A growing body of research illustrates that missing an excessive number of school days, regardless of reason, can place a child at risk of falling behind his or her peers academically. Additionally, some students may exhibit patterns of absence that foretell future attendance and academic problems. A report by John Hopkins University (Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012) highlights the association of chronic absenteeism (i.e., missing 10 percent or greater of the total number of days enrolled in the school year for any reason) to student academic achievement and high school graduation.

Chronic absenteeism is also emerging as an early indicator of future academic difficulty. Children who are chronically absent in both kindergarten and first grade are much less likely to read proficiently by the end of third grade (Attendance Works, 2011). If chronic early absence is not addressed at the elementary level, then it may worsen in the higher grades (Chang and Romero, 2008). By sixth grade, chronic absence is a key early indicator of dropout from high school (Baltimore Education Research Consortium, 2011). By ninth grade, attendance may be a better indicator of dropout than eighth-grade test scores (Allensworth and Easton, 2007).

To reduce the number of students qualifying as chronically absent, the definition of excused absences is much stricter after a student's ninth absence (the halfway point to the chronic absenteeism standard). It is, therefore, extremely important that schools monitor absences closely, especially after a student has missed nine days.

To help Connecticut school districts develop policies, procedures, and programs that improve student attendance and address the newly revised definitions of excused and unexcused absences, the following recommendations and guidance are offered.

Schools should consider developing proactive community collaborations to assist in addressing a student's personal or family issues that may be affecting his or her ability to attend school consistently. Effective prevention activities will not only consider the obstacles that the students themselves face but

* For approved opportunities that occur during longer absences (e.g., during a vacation), limit the number of days that are considered excused to reasonable travel time to and from the opportunity and the days of the opportunity.

will consider the needs of the families and act as a conduit for information, referral and guidance in obtaining community-based services to address these concerns. As with existing academic and social-emotional supports, schools should structure their attendance policies and programs around Scientific Research Based Interventions (SRBI). Within this framework, schools will develop clear and comprehensive universal programming that includes consistent encouragement for attendance; uniform understanding among students, staff and parents of the requirements for excused absences; the potential of consequences for unexcused absence; 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. Schools should incorporate clear messaging present throughout the campus that normalizes regular attendance and informs students of resources available to them if they are experiencing attendance problems. These Tier I efforts will contribute to establishing the norms, expectations and initial supports to assist students in attending regularly.

Even with well-established Tier I interventions, some students may be absent so frequently that it begins to affect their participation and success in school. Most of these students will benefit from and positively respond to Tier II interventions, while a few may continue to have attendance problems and require more intense and individualized intervention at the Tier III level. Developing effective, coordinated, and comprehensive programs addressing the needs of students will require districts to develop community school structures and increase communication with local service agencies. The following suggestions will assist in identifying those students requiring more intensive levels of support and some of the resources available to schools in developing their supports and interventions. Along with the other supports provided to students through tiered interventions, each individual receiving Tier II or Tier III interventions should have explicit goals, objectives, and outcomes included in his or her student success plan. Students identified as having special education needs can receive at any time tiered interventions in addition to the supports delineated in their individualized education program.

Tier I Universal

- All students, staff, administrators, and parents know and understand the requirements for attendance as described in sections 10-184 (Duties of parents. School attendance age requirements), 10-186 (Duties of local and regional boards of education re school attendance), 10-198a (Policies and procedures concerning truants), and 10-200 (Habitual truants) of the Connecticut General Statutes and the districts' own policies addressing attendance — this should be sent out to families at the beginning of each school year, asking that the student and parent both sign and return an acknowledgment of the requirements.
- Notices to families are in plain language and avoid jargon that may not be clear to the reader.
- Alternative language materials are available for families whose primary language in the home is not English.
- Staff is aware of the academic and behavioral supports available through district resources and the local community to assist students who may be lagging behind their peers due to attendance-related issues.

- The school environment, staff and larger community clearly communicate expectations around attendance, along with the anticipated benefits of full participation and the potential consequences for truancy and tardiness.

Tier II Targeted

- The school counselor, social worker or teacher should visit the home and the parents of students who initially attended and are still enrolled but are no longer attending.
- Schools should evaluate students exhibiting early indications of attendance problems for possible placement in special education or for the development of a 504 plan when classroom learning difficulties are present.
- Schools should schedule for students with chronic tardiness or three to six unexcused absences a review through their Student Assistance Team (or similar model), which will then generate a plan to address the student's needs.
- Schools shall schedule meetings with parents and the student within 10 days of the student's fourth unexcused absence in a month or 10th unexcused absence in the school year.
- Students who have more than four unexcused absences in a month or 10 unexcused absences in the academic year shall be referred to a community agency capable of supporting, through case management activities, any student-based needs that may be affecting the student's attendance, in addition to school-based supports.

Strategies and programs to consider for Tier II supports:

- Attendance groups that identify obstacles to attendance and possible solutions.
- Caregiver workshops to assist parents with strategies to guide their students in academic achievement.
- Flexible class scheduling.
- Tutoring focused on the student's specific academic needs.
- Extended-day programs that might provide flexible scheduling more accessible to the student.
- Individualized student assignments.
- A change of instructors.
- Attendance reward systems.
- Vocational placement or worksite enrichment as a school alternative to regular classroom instruction.
- School-based counseling specifically targeting the student's social, emotional, developmental and academic needs.
- Homework support.
- Online learning opportunities.
- Schools with coordinated school health plans should direct the activities of these programs to those students exhibiting any variety of risk factors, including absenteeism.

Tier III Intensive

- Students who have more than six unexcused absences should be referred to a community agency capable of supporting, through case management activities, any family needs that may be affecting the student's attendance, in addition to school-based supports.

- Schools should generate a family with service needs (FWSN) petition for students with four or more unexcused absences in a month and 10 or more unexcused absences in the school year, after having referred the student to supportive programs in the community addressing truancy, e.g., through the local Youth Service Bureau.
- Students continuing to experience attendance problems despite earlier intervention and supports should be provided Tier III intervention as early as possible.
- Parents should be informed that the student is receiving additional (Tier III) supports to improve attendance, and that the problems associated with poor attendance may affect the student's achievement for that school year.

Strategies and programs to consider for Tier III supports:

- Check-in/check-out programs, e.g., Check and Connect or Behavior Education Program (BEP).
- Assigning a mentor from within the school community.
- Establishing a mentor for the student from within the business community.
- Cognitive-based therapies, such as relaxation techniques, and problem solving strategies.
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT).
- Individualized caregiver training.
- Community-based court approach, e.g., juvenile review boards.
- Mediation (when relationships or conflicts are contributing to the student's attendance problems).
- Frequent, scheduled home visits.
- Online credit recovery programs.
- A staged approach wherein increasingly intensive interventions, supports and consequences are thoughtfully developed and administered progressively — this intervention works especially well when included with a reward system that acknowledges the student for his or her efforts.
- A multifaceted approach that integrates community and school-based intervention, counseling, support and direction.
- Transfer to an alternative education setting (see forthcoming guidance from the State Department of Education concerning the development and administration of alternative education settings).
- Collaboration with the judicial branch i.e., through probationary supports when the courts have accepted an FWSN petition.

Resources

1. *Mandatory Student Withdrawal Age from School*, Series 2011-12 Circular Letter C-5
<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/circ/circ11-12/c5.pdf>
2. *Guidance and Update on the Implementation of Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) in Connecticut Public Schools*, Series 2010-11 Circular Letter C-2 – Revised
<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/circ/circ10-11/c2.pdf>
3. *Utilizing Local Support Resources Prior to Referral of Students for Family With Service Needs* Series 2009-10 Circular Letter C-2
<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/circ/circ09-10/c2.pdf>

4. *Position Statement on Creating a Healthy Learning Environment that is Physically, Emotionally and Intellectually Safe*
http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/LIB/sde/pdf/board/Creating_Learning_Environment.pdf
5. *Position Statement on Principles Underlying Education, Prekindergarten Through Grade 12*
http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/LIB/sde/pdf/board/ed_principles.pdf
6. *Position Statement on School-Family-Community Partnerships for Student Success*
<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/LIB/sde/pdf/board/SFCP.pdf>
7. *Policy Guidance for School-Family-Community Partnerships for Student Success*
<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/LIB/sde/pdf/board/SFCPPolicyGuidance.pdf>
8. *Position Statement on Student Support Services*
<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/LIB/sde/pdf/board/stusuptserv.pdf>
9. *Position Statement on a Coordinated Approach to School Health*
http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/LIB/sde/pdf/board/csh_position_statement.pdf

Acknowledgment

The Connecticut State Department of Education would like to thank the staff of Attendance Works for helping to review this guidance and for sharing expertise in this important area. A wide variety of resources on attendance and chronic absenteeism can be accessed at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/>.

Attachment A: State Board of Education Definitions

Connecticut State Board of Education Definitions of Excused and Unexcused Absences Adopted June 27, 2012

The following definitions are for use by Connecticut school districts and schools for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of section 10-198a of the Connecticut General Statutes (Policies and procedures concerning truants), and for the purpose of reporting truancy, pursuant to subsection (c) of Section 10-220 of the Connecticut General Statutes. The use of these definitions for state purposes does not preclude districts from using separate definitions of excused and unexcused absences for their internal uses (including decisions on promotion/retention, grading and disciplinary action).

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 school days of the student's return to school or in accordance with Section 10-210 of the Connecticut General Statutes and meets the following criteria:

- A. For absences one through nine, a student's absences from school are considered excused when the student's parent/guardian approves such absence and submits appropriate documentation; and
- B. For the tenth absence and all absences thereafter, a student's absences from school are considered excused for the following reasons:
 1. student illness (Note: all student illness absences must be verified by an appropriately licensed medical professional to be deemed excused, regardless of the length of 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 district other than the one the student attends (no parental documentation is required for this reason); or
 6. extraordinary educational opportunities pre-approved by district administrators and in accordance with Connecticut State Department of Education guidance.

Unexcused Absences

A student's absence from school shall be considered unexcused unless they meet one of the following criteria:

- A. the absence meets the definition for an excused absence (including documentation requirements); or
- B. the absence meets the definition of a disciplinary absence.

Disciplinary Absences

Absences that are the result of school or district disciplinary action are excluded from these definitions.

* The 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., 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." A student not meeting the definition of 'in attendance' is considered absent.

† Such documentation should include a signed note from the student's parent/guardian, a signed note from a school official that spoke in person with the parent/guardian regarding the absence, or a note confirming the absence by the school nurse or by a licensed medical professional, as appropriate. Documentation should explain the nature of and the reason for the absence as well as the length of the absence. Separate documentation must be submitted for each incidence of absenteeism. For example, if a student is out sick two consecutive days, that student must submit the appropriate documentation covering both sick days. If a student is out sick two nonconsecutive days, that student must submit the appropriate documentation following each absence. Schools should take steps to allow non-English-speaking parents/guardians to submit documentation in their native language.

Attachment B: Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-198a

Section 10-198a Policies and procedures concerning truants. (a) For purposes of this section, "truant" means a child age five to eighteen, inclusive, who is enrolled in a public or private school and has four unexcused absences from school in any one month or ten unexcused absences from school in any school year.

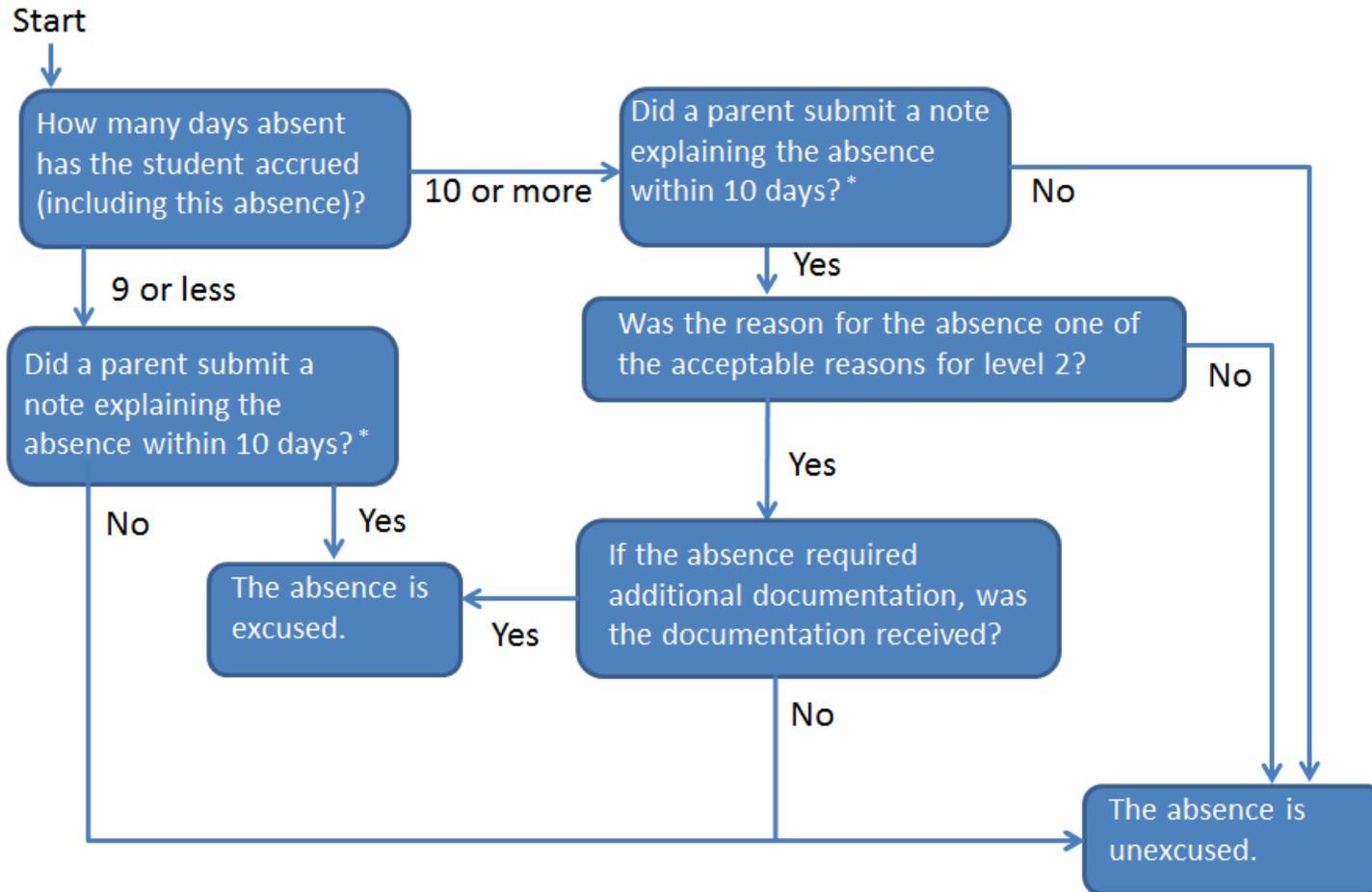
(b) Each local and regional board of education shall adopt and implement policies and procedures concerning truants who are enrolled in schools under the jurisdiction of such board of education. Such policies and procedures shall include, but need not be limited to, the following: (1) The holding of a meeting with the parent of each child who is a truant, or other person having control of such child, and appropriate school personnel to review and evaluate the reasons for the child being a truant, provided such meeting shall be held not later than ten school days after the child's fourth unexcused absence in a month or tenth unexcused absence in a school year, (2) coordinating services with and referrals of children to community agencies providing child and family services, (3) annually at the beginning of the school year and upon any enrollment during the school year, notifying the parent or other person having control of each child enrolled in a grade from kindergarten to eight, inclusive, in the public schools in writing of the obligations of the parent or such other person pursuant to section 10-184, (4) annually at the beginning of the school year and upon any enrollment during the school year, obtaining from the parent or other person having control of each child in a grade from kindergarten to eight, inclusive, a telephone number or other means of contacting such parent or such other person during the school day, and (5) a system of monitoring individual unexcused absences of children in grades kindergarten to eight, inclusive, which shall provide that whenever a child enrolled in school in any such grade 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, a reasonable effort to notify, by telephone and by mail, the parent or such other person shall be made by school personnel or volunteers under the direction of school personnel. Such mailed notice shall include a warning that two unexcused absences from school in a month or five unexcused absences in a school year may result in a complaint filed with the Superior Court pursuant to section 46b-149 alleging the belief that the acts or omissions of the child are such that the child's family is a family with service needs. Any person who, in good faith, gives or fails to give notice pursuant to subdivision (5) of this subsection shall be immune from any liability, civil or criminal, which might otherwise be incurred or imposed and shall have the same immunity with respect to any judicial proceeding which results from such notice or failure to give such notice.

(c) If the parent or other person having control of a child who is a truant fails to attend the meeting held pursuant to subdivision (1) of subsection (b) of this section or if such parent or other person otherwise fails to cooperate with the school in attempting to solve the truancy problem, such policies and procedures shall require the superintendent of schools to file, not later than fifteen calendar days after such failure to attend such meeting or such failure to cooperate with the school attempting to solve the truancy problem, for each such truant enrolled in the schools under his jurisdiction a written complaint with the Superior Court pursuant to section 46b-149 alleging the belief that the acts or omissions of the child are such that the child's family is a family with service needs.

(d) Nothing in subsections (a) to (c), inclusive, of this section shall preclude a local or regional board of education from adopting policies and procedures pursuant to this section which exceed the requirements of said subsections.

(e) The provisions of this section shall not apply to any child receiving equivalent instruction pursuant to section 10-184.

Attachment C: Is the Absence Excused or Unexcused? (Decision Flow Chart)



Note: Absences due to a second district not providing transportation do not require documentation and are considered excused. Absences due to disciplinary actions taken by the district do not require documentation and are considered neither excused nor unexcused. They are considered disciplinary absences

References

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- Attendance Works. 2011. *Attendance in the Early Elementary Grades: Associations with Student Characteristics, Schools Readiness and Third Grade Outcomes*. San Francisco: Attendance Works.
- Balfanz, Robert, and Byrnes, Vince. 2012. *Chronic Absenteeism: Summarizing What We Know From Nationally Available Data*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools.
- Baltimore Education Research Consortium. 2011. *Destination Graduation: Sixth Grade Early Warning Indicators for Baltimore City Schools, their Prevalence and Impact*. Baltimore: Baltimore Education Research Consortium.
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