

# Jackson County

# Attendance:

## Attendance and Absenteeism Protocol



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**Jackson County  
Attendance and Absenteeism Protocol**

**Introduction:**

Jackson County, in partnership with the School Justice Partnership Committee, created this document in an effort to create clear, countywide definitions, policies, and collaborative steps to improve student attendance. Regular attendance is critical in the development and learning of all students. Research shows students with chronic absenteeism have lower grades and are more likely to dropout than students with better attendance. Truancy is not only detrimental to student success, but is also detrimental to our community as truancy is one of the most powerful predictors of delinquent and criminal activity.<sup>1</sup>

**Definitions:**<sup>2</sup>

- **Chronically absent** means absent for 10% or more of the enrolled school days in a school year, whether absenteeism is due to unexcused, excused, or disciplinary absences. (For instance, missing 3 days of school the first month of the year; 8 days in the first half of the year; or 18 days in the entire school year.) Note: All absences for the school year should be counted, even if they have carried over from a different school.
- **Disciplinary absence** means absences that result from school or district disciplinary action and are neither unexcused or excused absences.
- **Excused absence** means the following:
  - Student illness/injury with doctor's note
  - Medical appointments
  - Religious holidays
  - Extreme family emergencies
  - Lice (3 days)
  - Funeral/death in family
  - Mandated court appearances (documented)
  - Placement by Juvenile Court in detention, shelter care, foster care or residential placement
  - Educational opportunities approved by school officials
  - Homelessness
- **Unexcused absence** is any absence not accounted for above, examples of unexcused absences include, but not limited to:
  - Staying home to baby-sit
  - Overslept
  - Travel
  - Needed at home
  - Weather
  - Missed bus
  - Child is not immunized
  - Sickness (not documented)
  - Willful truancy (skipping)
- **Truant** means a child who has ten (10) or more unexcused absences per school year. A child should be counted as truant only once in a given school year. Once deemed truant, a child shall be

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<sup>1</sup> Attendance Works – <http://www.attendanceworks.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Proposed Amendments to Truancy/Chronic Absenteeism Laws  
Office of the Prosecuting Attorney Letter– Jerard Jarzynka

monitored throughout the school year until improved attendance is consistent.

- **Tardy/Late Absences** A student who enters a classroom after the bell is considered tardy, unless excused. Tardy students not only miss learning time, but also interrupt the learning of other students in class.

### **PowerSchool Codes:**

In order for significant data to be collected it is important schools use PowerSchool codes with consistent definitions. The following PowerSchool codes are necessary for tracking student attendance.

- **EA** – Excused Absence
- **UA** – Unexcused Absence
- **AN** – Absent Notified
- **T** – Tardy
- **ISS** – In School Suspension (if applicable to building)
- **OSS** – Out of School Suspension
- **SS** – School sponsored event such as a field trip, athletic, or academic event.

### **Michigan Compulsory Attendance Law:**

The law in Michigan governing compulsory attendance requires a parent, legal guardian, or other person having control or charge of a child age six to sixteen to send the child to school during the entire school year, except under the limited circumstances specified in subsection (3) of section 380.1561. A child who was age eleven on or after December 1, 2009 or who was age eleven before that date and entered grade 6 in 2009 or later shall attend school from age six to eighteen. The exceptions include, but are not limited to, sending the child to a state-approved, nonpublic school or educating the child at home in an organized educational program. Although the compulsory school attendance law does not apply to children under the age of six, a child who is at least five years of age by December 1 of the school year and is a resident of a school district which provides kindergarten work is entitled to enroll in the kindergarten [MCL 380.1147].

### **Pre-Referral Process (Tier 1- Prevention)**

Prior to making a referral to the county attendance officer, it is necessary that school districts utilize all resources and make every effort to resolve students' attendance issue.

District/School will

- Monitor student attendance.
- Accurately document absences.
- Build a culture of attendance.
  - Recognize good and improved attendance.
  - Reinforce good and improved attendance.
- Build a positive and engaging school climate.
- Proactively engage parents/guardians/caretakers in the discussions regarding attendance.
  - Reinforce to parents/guardians/caretakers the importance of attendance through letters home, conversations at school meetings, articles in school newsletters, etc.
  - Notify students, parents/guardians/caretakers of the school's attendance policies and procedures for reporting absences.
  - Inform parents/guardians/caretakers when the child is not in school. Letters sent home with students might not be adequate to ensure parents are notified. Phone calls, texts, emails and/or home visits may be necessary.

- Identify root causes for absenteeism, including but not limited to the following:
  - lack of academic proficiency
  - social-emotional and/or physical health
  - transportation
  - bullying
  - family situations, such as homelessness, death, divorce, unemployment, declined health of family member, lack of childcare.
  - school culture and climate, family-student-school environment fit, family or student perception of school, cultural-related concerns.
- Offer support to students and families
  - Provide personalized early outreach
  - Develop programmatic responses to barriers
  - Connect families to community and/or school resources
- Identify and closely monitor students with a history of absenteeism
  - Intervention for students with a history of absenteeism should be started earlier than recommended in this protocol

### Early Intervention (Tier-2)

Though Jackson County defines truancy as 10 unexcused absences in a school year, it is necessary to monitor and intervene before the point of truancy. Research shows students who miss 2-4 days in September were 5 times more likely to be chronically absent, and students who miss more than 4 days in September are over 16 times more likely. Due to these facts, the collaborative steps below ensure schools, parents, and students are working toward improving attendance.

<u>Step 1</u>	3 consecutive unexcused absences or 3 non-consecutive unexcused absences within a 45-day period or 3 absences of any kind in September.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Contact parent via call, text or email to express concern</li> <li>● Explore causes for absences</li> <li>● Restate attendance policy and importance of attendance</li> <li>● Connect student/parent to appropriate resources to overcome any barriers to attendance</li> </ul>
<u>Step 2</u>	10 absences (excused, unexcused, or disciplinary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Explore root causes for absences.</li> <li>● Engage students in conversations about the importance of attendance, as well as problem-solving and goal-setting conversations to prevent future absences.</li> <li>● Send letter and informational sheet to parents/guardians/caretakers, indicating there is an attendance problem.</li> <li>● Schedule a meeting with parents/guardians/caretakers and student. In the meeting, the following should be explored: the reason for the absences, available resources and support, the consequences of chronic absences, and an agreement to improve attendance.</li> <li>● Utilize resources within the school</li> </ul>

		<p>(Counselor, social worker, psychologist, special education services, student study team etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Explore the appropriateness of a call to Centralized Intake</li> </ul>
<u>Step 3</u>	10 UE absences or 15 absences (excused, unexcused, or disciplinary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Student is considered truant after 10 UE absences.</li> <li>● Second letter should be sent, phone call made, and meeting scheduled.</li> <li>● Referral to outside agency (refer to community resources)</li> <li>● Explore need for a “wellness check” with LifeWays or school based mental health service provider</li> </ul>

### Specialized Supports (Tier-3)

If absences continue then a referral to the attendance officer is made. Attendance officer works collaboratively with school, student, and guardian to improve attendance. Attendance officer contacts student’s guardians and reiterates importance of attendance and attempts to resolve barriers to consistent attendance. If attendance does not improve petition to court could be made.

#### County Attendance Officer Procedure:

1. Attendance Officer receives completed referral form, determines if local school district procedures have been followed and that referral is appropriate.
2. Attendance Officer attempts phone contact.
3. Attendance Officer sends formal notice to parents. The letter serves as a notice to schools that the case is active with the attendance office and explains legal consequences for ongoing truancy.
  - a. The school is to send the attendance office updates on student’s attendance weekly.
4. Attendance Officer will attempt to schedule a meeting with the family as the final attempt to assist family in resolving attendance problems.
5. If attendance still does not improve, appropriate petition to court is filed.
  - a. Educational neglect petition is filed against the parent(s) of a youth aged 6-11 who is considered truant.
  - b. Truancy petition is filed for a youth aged 12-18 who is considered truant.

#### Court Procedure:

##### Truancy Petition

1. Prosecutor’s Office authorizes petition.
2. If youth’s first offense the Youth Services Director holds a diversion conference.
  - a. Youth receives MAYSI mental health assessment.
  - b. Youth referred to diversion program/mental health counseling as appropriate.
3. If youth has prior offenses then an Inquiry Hearing is scheduled.
  - a. Youth is assigned a probation officer through the Court Referee.
    - i. Completes informal probation and released on Consent (no record)
    - ii. Youth is adjudicated and requires formal probation (goes on their record).

## Educational Neglect Petition

1. Parent is referred to Child & Parent Center for home visit/assessment.
2. Judge receives assessment and holds a formal hearing.

## Strategies Schools Can Use to Improve Attendance

### *Create Awareness*

- Within Schools
  - Keep teachers, students, and staff updated on students' daily attendance and attendance improvement month-by-month by
    - Using attendance boards to record students' attendance publicly.
    - Creating "real-time" graphs and dashboards to portray students' performance and attendance.
- Within Communities
  - Increase awareness among families, and community organization by
    - Using signage and other media to promote the value that school matters.

### *Create Incentives for Good Attendance and Attendance Improvements*

Incentives provide a positive consequence and can be material and experiential; incentives do not need to be costly.

- Jackson County Attendance Initiative
  - A School Based Attendance Challenge which informs students and families of the importance of attendance as well as gives school a chance to create a positive incentive for students taking a pledge to attend school regularly. "Future Forward Challenge" cards available for all schools participating.
- Interclass-competition
  - Schools reward classes with highest attendance every month by
    - Allowing the class to dance in the hallway.
    - Permitting the class to sit in a reserved classroom for lunchtime.
    - Sending the class to recess 5 minutes earlier than other classes.
    - Giving the class extra gym time.
    - Offering the class a homework pass.
- Recognition of individual students improvements
  - Schools reward students who have attended  $\geq 95\%$  school days at the end of each academic term by
    - Praising them on school-wide announcements.
    - Giving them first choice in selecting work materials (e.g., scissors, paper) or seating assignments.
    - Sending parents/guardians/caretakers letters with positive notes about the students.

### *Create Potential "Aha" Moments for Students*

Create "awakening" opportunities for students, especially for younger youth who just transition to high school, to understand the importance of school to their futures.

- Schools begin the academic year with a module, "It is About Your Future" or "The Game of Life".
  - The module should
    - Present information about earnings of dropouts, high school graduates, and

post-secondary completers, and have students do “family” budgets based on each.

- Talk about the quality of life students would like in their future.
- Lead them to conclude that education is important.

#### *Other Intervention Options to Explore*

- Purchasing an alarm clock in collaboration with a community agency.
- Setting an alert on a student cell phone.
- Creating a morning and/or bedtime routine.
- Work with teachers or school staff to provide student with meaningful roles in the school, class or special project.
- Work with teachers to engage student in more meaningful projects related to student’s interests or future goals.
- Implement self-monitoring interventions such as a calendar check sheet in locker or assignment notebook.
- Discuss how school attendance develops positive work habits that are necessary for postsecondary school and work.

