

**MEXICO ACADEMY AND CENTRAL SCHOOL
COMPREHENSIVE STUDENT ATTENDANCE POLICY**

1. Statement of Overall Objectives

School attendance is both a right and a responsibility. The School District is an active partner with students and parents in the task of ensuring that all students meet or exceed the New York State Learning Standards. Because the School District recognizes that consistent school attendance, academic success and school completion have a positive correlation, the School District will develop, review and, if necessary, revise a Comprehensive Student Attendance Policy to meet the following objectives:

- a) To increase school completion for all students;
- b) To raise student achievement and close gaps in student performance;
- c) To identify attendance patterns in order to design attendance improvement efforts;
- d) To know the whereabouts of every student for safety and other reasons;
- e) To verify that individual students are complying with education laws relating to compulsory attendance;
- f) To determine the District's average daily attendance for State aid purposes.

2. Description of Strategies to Meet Objectives

The School District will:

- a) Create and maintain a positive school building culture by fostering a positive physical and psychological environment where the presence of strong adult role models encourages respectful and nurturing interactions between adults and students. This positive school culture is aimed at encouraging a high level of student bonding to the school, which in turn should lead to increased attendance.
- b) Develop a Comprehensive Student Attendance Policy based upon the recommendations of a multifaceted District Policy Development Team that includes representation from the Board of Education, administrators, teachers, students, parents and the community. The District will hold at least one public hearing prior to the adoption of this collaboratively developed Comprehensive Student Attendance Policy.
- c) Maintain accurate recordkeeping via a Register of Attendance to record attendance, absence, tardiness or early departure of each student.
- d) Utilize data analysis systems for tracking individual student attendance and individual and group trends in student attendance problems.
- e) Develop early intervention strategies to improve school attendance for all students.
- f) The school will reach out to students with poor attendance to design individual plans for student success.

3. Determination of Excused and Unexcused Absences, Tardiness, Early Departures, and Late Arrivals

Based upon our District's education and community needs, values and priorities, the School District has determined that absences, tardiness and early departures will be considered excused or unexcused according to the following standards:

- a) **Excused:** An absence, tardiness, late arrival or early departure may be excused if due to personal illness, illness or death in the family, impassable roads for school buses as determined by the superintendent, religious observance, quarantine, required court appearances, attendance at health related appointments or hospitals, approved college visits, approved cooperative work programs, military obligations, or other such reasons may be approved by building administrator and/or the superintendent.
- b) **Unexcused:** An absence, tardiness, late arrival, early departure or late arrival is considered unexcused if the reason for the lack of attendance does not fall into the above categories (e.g. family vacation, hunting, babysitting, hair cut, obtaining learner's permit, road test, oversleeping, out-of-school suspension without tutoring or other such reasons that may be determined by the building administrator and/or superintendent).
- c) All absences will be considered "unexcused" until such time as appropriate written notification is received from the parent/guardian giving the reason for the student's absence. Such parental notification must be received in the school within 10 school days of the absence and will be evaluated according to a) and b) above.

4. Student Attendance Recordkeeping/Data Collection

The record of each student's presence, absence, tardiness and early departure shall be kept in a Register of Attendance in a manner consistent with Commissioner's Regulations. An absence, tardiness or early departure will be entered as "excused" or "unexcused" along with the District Code for the reason.

Commencing July 1, 2003, attendance shall be taken and recorded in accordance with the following:

- a) For students in non-departmentalized kindergarten through grade eight (i.e., self-contained classrooms and supervised group movement to other scheduled school activities such as physical education in the gym, assembly, etc.), such student's presence or absence shall be recorded after the taking of attendance once per school day, provided that students are not dismissed from school grounds during a lunch period. Where students are dismissed for lunch, their presence or absence shall also be recorded after the taking of attendance a second time upon the student's return from lunch.
- b) For students in grades nine through twelve or in departmentalized schools at any grade level (i.e., students pass individually to different classes throughout the day), each student's presence or absence shall be recorded each period of scheduled instruction except that where students do not change classrooms for each period of scheduled instruction, attendance shall be taken in accordance with paragraph "a" above.

- c) Any absence for a school day or portion thereof shall be recorded as excused or unexcused in accordance with the standards articulated in this policy.
- d) In the event that a student at any instructional level from kindergarten through grade twelve arrives late for or departs early from scheduled instruction, such late arrivals or early departure shall be recorded as excused or unexcused in accordance with the standards articulated in this policy.

A record shall be kept of each scheduled day of instruction during which the school is closed for all or part of the day because of extraordinary circumstances including adverse weather conditions, impairment of heating facilities, insufficiency of water supply, shortage of fuel, destruction of or damage to a school building, or such other cause as may be found satisfactory to the Commissioner of Education.

Attendance records shall also indicate the date when a student withdraws from enrollment or is dropped from enrollment in accordance with Education Law Section 3202(1-a).

At the conclusion of each class period or school day, all attendance information shall be compiled and provided to the designated school personnel who are responsible for attendance. The nature of the absence, tardiness, early departure or late arrival shall be coded on a student's record in accordance with the established District/building procedures.

5. Student Attendance/Course Credit

a) Credit-Bearing Courses (Secondary courses leading toward a high school diploma):

The District believes that classroom attendance is related to and affects a student's performance and grasp of the subject matter and, as such, is properly reflected in a student's final grade. Refer to Board Policy #4710 ("Grading Systems")

Any student with more than 10% absences in a credit-bearing course will not receive credit for the course if absences are not made up according to procedures for credit-bearing courses. However, it is District policy that properly excused absences, tardiness and early departures for which the student has performed any assigned make-up work, assignments and/or tests as specified by attendance procedures shall not be counted as an absence for the purpose of determining the student's eligibility for course credit. Procedures for credit-bearing courses will specify how student tardiness and early departures will be calculated and factored into the District's minimum attendance standard.

For courses meeting $\frac{1}{2}$ year or $\frac{1}{4}$ year, the same policy will apply and a calculation of the absences will be prorated accordingly.

Transfer students and students re-enrolling after having dropped out will be expected to attend a prorated minimum number of the scheduled class meetings during their time of enrollment.

A student will be considered in attendance if the student is:

- 1) physically present in the class or working under the direction of the classroom teacher during the class scheduled meeting time; or

- 2) Working pursuant to an approved independent study program; or
- 3) Receiving approved alternative instruction. (e.g. ISS, OSS w/tutor, other tutoring)

Students who are absent from class due to their participation in a school-sponsored activity (e.g. athletic sectionals, music competitions) are to arrange with their teachers to make up any work missed in a timely manner as specified by building level procedures. Attendance at school-sponsored events where instruction is substantially equivalent to the instruction which was missed shall be counted as the equivalent of regular attendance in class.

Upon returning to school following a properly excused absence, tardiness, early departure or late arrival it shall be the responsibility of the student to consult with his/her teacher(s) regarding arrangements to make up missed work, assignments and/or tests in accordance with the time specified by building level procedure.

b) Non-Credit Bearing Courses Grades K-8: At the elementary and middle school levels, in instances where the concept of course credit does not apply, it is important to communicate to parents and students the loss of learning opportunities that occurs when a student is excessively absent. Excessive absences, tardiness, early departures or late arrivals may be a factor in retention decisions.

c) Parental Notification: See Section 7c for the description of parental notices and Section 8 for the description of strategies to be employed prior to the denial of course credit.

6.1 Attendance Incentives

In order to encourage student attendance, the District will develop and implement grade appropriate/building-level strategies and programs which may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Attendance honor rolls to be posted in prominent places in District buildings and included in District newsletters and in community publications (consistent with Board Policy);
- b) Poll students to find out what incentives would bring them to school on a regular basis;
- c) Special events (e.g., assemblies, guest speakers, field days) scheduled on days that historically have high absenteeism (e.g., Mondays, Fridays, day before vacation);
- d) Grade-level or classroom rewards at each building for meeting attendance goals;
- e) Classroom acknowledgement of the importance of good attendance (e.g., individual certificates, recognition chart, bulletin boards);
- f) Annual poster/essay contest on importance of good attendance;
- g) Assemblies collaboratively developed and promoted by student council, administration, PTA/PTO and other community groups to promote good attendance.

- h) In case of students exceeding the 10% offer special make up classes on Saturdays and/or after school to provide an opportunity to make up unexcused absences.

6.2 Disciplinary Consequences

Unexcused absences, tardiness, early departures, and late arrivals will result in disciplinary sanctions as described in the District's Code of Conduct. At grades 5-12, consequences may include, but are not limited to, in-school suspension, detention and denial of participation in interscholastic and extracurricular activities. For all grades, parents/persons in parental relation will be notified by designated District personnel at periodic intervals to discuss their child's absences, tardiness, early departures or late arrivals and the importance of class attendance and appropriate interventions. Individual buildings/grade levels will address procedures to implement the notification process to the parent/person in parental relation of the disciplinary consequences to be imposed.

7. Notice of Minimum Attendance Standards

In order to ensure that the parents/persons in parental relation and students are informed of the District's policy regarding minimum attendance and course credit, and the implementation of specific intervention strategies to be employed prior to the denial of course credit to the student for insufficient attendance, the following guidelines shall be followed:

- a) Copies of the District's Comprehensive Student Attendance Policy will be mailed to parents/persons in parental relation and provided to students at the beginning of each school year or at the time of enrollment in the District.
- b) School newsletters and publications will include periodic reminders of the components of the District's Comprehensive Student Attendance Policy. Copies of the Attendance Policy will also be included in parent/student handbooks.
- c) Appropriate personnel will review attendance patterns every five weeks to determine whether interventions are necessary. At periodic intervals, a designated staff member(s) will notify, by telephone, the parent/person in parental relation of the student's absence, tardiness, early departure or late arrival to explain the relationship of the student's attendance to his/her ability to receive course credit. If the parent/person in parental relation cannot be reached by telephone, a letter, certified if necessary, shall be sent detailing this information.
 - c.1 – Grades K-8: Letters will emphasize importance of attendance and give cautions concerning the difficulty students may experience making up work at this level. Excessive absences will impact a student's education, and may result in retention. In extreme cases, the District may have to file for "educational neglect."
 - c.2 – Grades 8-12 (credit-bearing courses): Certified letters will emphasize that absences in excess of 10% of the course meeting time will result in loss of course credit if not made up in accordance with building-level procedures. This may result in loss of credits needed for graduation and/or a high school diploma.
- d) A designated staff member will review the District's Attendance Policy with student and parents/persons in parental relation who have excessive and/or unexcused absences,

tardiness, early departures or late arrivals. Further, appropriate student support services/personnel within the District, as well as the possible collaboration/referral to community support services and agencies, will be implemented prior to the denial of course credit for insufficient attendance by the student.

- e) If deemed necessary by appropriate school officials, or if requested by the parent/person in parental relation, a school conference shall be scheduled between the parent/person in parental relation and appropriate staff members in order to address the student's attendance. The student may also be requested to attend this conference in order to address appropriate intervention strategies that best meet the needs of the student.
- f) All steps will be documented consistently by appropriate personnel.

8. Intervention Strategy Process

In order to effectively intervene when an identified pattern of unexcused absences, tardiness or early departures occur, designated District personnel will pursue the following:

- a) Identify specific characteristics of the attendance pattern (e.g., grade level, building, time frame, type of unexcused absences, tardiness or early departures);
- b) Contact the District staff most closely associated with the identified characteristic. In specific cases where the pattern involves an individual student, the student and parent/person in parental relation will be contacted;
- c) Discuss strategies to directly intervene with specific strategies designed to remediate the identified characteristic;
- d) Utilize appropriate District and/or community resources to address and help remediate student unexcused absences, tardiness, early departures or late arrivals;
- e) Monitor and report short and long term effects of intervention.
- f) Recommend intervention to Superintendent or his/her designee if it relates to change in District policy or procedure;
- g) Implement changes, as approved by appropriate administration.

9. Identification of Responsible School Official

The building principals shall be the district officials charged with the responsibility of reviewing attendance records to determine if/when corrective action needs to be taken.

10. Other

(a) Appeal Process

A parent/person in parental relation may request a building level review of their child's attendance record. District appeal process (as described in BOE Policy #1400) should be followed in cases where parent is unsatisfied with a building-level decision.

(b) Building Review of Attendance Records

Commencing with the 2003-04 school year, the building principal will work in conjunction with the building attendance clerk and other designated staff in reviewing attendance records at the end of each 5-week term. This review is conducted to identify individual and group attendance patterns and to initiate appropriate action to address the problem of unexcused absences, tardiness and early departures.

(c) Annual Review by the Board of Education

The Board of Education shall annually review the district's student attendance data by building level. The Board shall make any revisions to the Policy deemed necessary to improve student attendance.

(d) Community Awareness

The Board of Education shall promote necessary community awareness of the District's Comprehensive Student Attendance Policy by:

- d.1) Providing a plain language summary of the policy to students and parents or persons in parental relation to students at the beginning of each school year and promoting the understanding of such a policy to students and their parents/persons on parental relation;
- d.2) Providing each staff member, at the beginning of the school year or upon employment, with a copy of the policy; and
- d.3) Providing copies of the policy to any other member of the community upon request.

*Education Law Sections 3024, 3025, 3202, 3205, 3206, 3210, 3211, and 3213
8 New York Code of Rules and Regulations
(NYCRR) Sections 104.1, 109.2 and 175.6*

First Reading: 2/11/03

Second Reading: 3/11/03