



District of Columbia  
Office of the State Superintendent of Education  
1050 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002

# ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY RESOURCES

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Attending school daily supports the continuity of learning and positions your child for academic success.

Daily school attendance is critical to every student's success and both excused and unexcused absences can have a negative impact on your child's education. **Your child's school has notified the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) that your child accumulated 10 or more unexcused absences for the 2020-21 school year.** District of Columbia law requires that we provide this resource guide to you when your child accumulates 10 or more unexcused absences, which is defined as truancy in the District of Columbia.

Learning can only happen when your student attends school. As the 2021-22 school year begins, attendance and participation in learning will continue to remain a key factor in your child's success. Included with this letter are resources to support your family in the prevention of truancy.

These resources include the following:

- Information on what you can do as a parent or legal guardian to prevent truancy;
- An explanation of the District of Columbia's (DC) laws and regulations related to absenteeism and truancy; and
- A list of organizations that can help you and your family.

If you have questions about your child's attendance records, including whether there is an error in his or her attendance records for 2020-21 school year, please contact your child's school directly. To receive additional assistance on attendance matters, or to learn about additional resources, parents may also contact the following:

- DC Public Schools (DCPS) Office of Youth Engagement at (202) 727-0488 (For DCPS parents only),
- DC Office of the Student Advocate, (202) 741-4692 or [student.advocate@dc.gov](mailto:student.advocate@dc.gov), and
- DC Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education, (202) 741-0886 or [ombudsman@dc.gov](mailto:ombudsman@dc.gov).

We look forward to supporting you to make every day count by ensuring your child's regular attendance in school. To learn more about the resources available to support student attendance, please see the resources section included in this document or visit [attendance.dc.gov](http://attendance.dc.gov).

Sincerely,



Christina Grant, Ed.D.  
Acting State Superintendent

## WHAT IS TRUANCY?

Truancy occurs when a student is absent from school without a valid excuse. If a student accumulates 10 or more such unexcused absences within a single school year, this is known as chronic truancy. (5A DCMR § 2199). This is different from chronic absenteeism, in that students who are chronically absent may have accumulated both excused and unexcused absences that total more than 10 percent of the school days. (5A DCMR § 2199). A student is chronically absent if he or she misses as few as two school days per month.

2 Days Per Month x 9 Months = 18 Days = 10 Percent of 180 School Days

## HOW CAN I ADDRESS ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY?

Parent involvement can reduce truancy and promote attendance and participation in learning. Parents can ensure students are present at school by making school attendance a priority.

## HOW CAN I WORK WITH MY CHILD?

- **Set and maintain a routine:** Stick to a regular schedule for bedtime, waking up, eating meals, and doing homework.
- **Stay informed:** Know the school's attendance policy, be familiar with the time school starts, and know the difference between excused and unexcused absences.
- **Know the facts about COVID-19:** Recognize the symptoms of COVID-19 and contact your health care provider if there is cause for concern. If your child is sick, keep them home, notify the school of your child's illness, and follow all guidance from the school and DC Health regarding next steps.
- **Stay up-to-date on the latest COVID-19 Information:** For more information on the District of Columbia Governments coronavirus (COVID-19) response and recovery efforts, please visit [coronavirus.dc.gov](https://coronavirus.dc.gov).

## TALK TO YOUR CHILD AND LOOK FOR EARLY WARNING SIGNS

- **Ask questions:** Take an active interest in your children's schooling. Ask them to demonstrate what they have learned, and make time to collaborate with your child's teacher(s) about instruction and your child's progress.
- **Be alert:** Look for early signs that a child is losing interest in school. Monitor changes in friendships, teachers or even changes in relationships at home. All of these things contribute to reasons why children may lose interest in school. If you notice changes, get help! Information on counseling and mental health services, can be found at [attendance.dc.gov](https://attendance.dc.gov).
- **Monitor behavior:** Look for negative behavior changes. Seek a counselor if your child's behavior becomes distant, withdrawn, anxious, depressed, delinquent or aggressive.



## Your child has a right to remain enrolled even when experiencing homelessness.

Your child may continue enrollment in their school of origin for the period of time your family is experiencing homelessness. The school of origin is the school your child attended prior to becoming homeless or the school in which your child was last enrolled. You may also enroll your child in the school for the attendance area where the child is living temporarily. (42 USC 11432(g)(3)(A))

### HOW CAN I WORK WITH MY CHILD'S SCHOOL?

Communicate with the school. The school can provide support to help you prevent your child from skipping school or missing classes. Schools are expected to communicate with parents about expectations for attendance and set up ways for parents to communicate with teachers and the school. Remember, the school needs your help also.

- **Be available:** Make sure the school has your correct contact information. Provide work, home, cell and, if necessary, caretaker phone numbers. Additional options for staying connected include email, social media and other physically distant methods.
- **Be honest:** Talk with the principal and school social worker regarding changes that may affect your child's behavior such as divorce, death or sickness in the family, a missing pet or a possible move/homelessness. Help the teacher connect with your child; tell the teacher about your child's hobbies, interests, or learning challenges.
- **Be open-minded:** Inform school officials and teachers of your interest in receiving feedback on your child's progress, attendance and behavior.
- **Follow-up:** When your child must miss school, contact the school immediately and arrange to have assignments sent to you, if necessary. Finally, make certain that your child returns to school or distance learning with a valid excuse.

### HOW CAN I WORK WITH MY COMMUNITY?

Involve trustworthy people, churches, businesses and community-based organizations in the education of your child.

- **Participate:** Sign up for and attend parenting education programs. This is a great way to learn new techniques and share what you have learned.
- **Seek support from others:** Talk with neighbors about one another's children and experiences in school, including strategies you each use to ensure that your children go to and remain in school every day. Exchange phone numbers with other parents in the neighborhood for mutual support.



**Children may NOT be suspended or expelled for unexcused absences.**

Children ages 5-17 may not be suspended or expelled for unexcused absences or late arrivals to school. (DC Code §38-236.04(c))

**In most cases, children may NOT be unenrolled for unexcused absences.**

Children ages 5-17 may not be unenrolled due to unexcused absences or late arrivals to school unless the student has accumulated 20 or more consecutive full school day unexcused absences. (DC Code §38-236.04(c))

## WHAT DC ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY LAWS AND REGULATIONS SHOULD FAMILIES KNOW?<sup>1</sup>

DC laws (DC Code) can be found here: [dcode.elaws.us/](http://dcode.elaws.us/)  
DC Municipal Regulations (DCMR) can be found here: [dcregs.dc.gov](http://dcregs.dc.gov)

### Who is required to attend school?

Subject to some exceptions, all children residing in the District of Columbia are required to attend school during the regular school year from age 5 (if the child reaches age 5 by Sept. 30 of the school year) until age 18. This requirement is called compulsory attendance. *DC Code § 38-202(a)*. Enrollment in school and attendance are required whether school is in-person or virtual.

### If a school is operating fully virtually (online/distance learning), what does it mean to attend school?

To attend virtual school, students must engage in learning by logging on, participating in learning, and completing work, in accordance with the attendance requirements as outlined in the school's virtual attendance policy.

### Who is responsible for making sure that children attend school?

Parents, guardians and other persons with custody of a child are responsible for ensuring that students attend school every day unless the child has a valid excuse to be absent. *DC Code § 38-202(a)*.

### How long does a parent have to provide the school with a valid excuse?

Valid excuses for absences must be provided within five school days of your child's return to school. Schools are required to mark all absences as unexcused unless a valid excuse is provided by a parent or guardian within five days of the student returning to school. *5A DCMR §2102.4*.

Schools are required to list the categories of absences that they will accept as excused. These policies must be clearly explained in a school's parent or student handbook that is distributed at the beginning of every school year or when a student is enrolled in school.

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<sup>1</sup>For parents of private school students, please be aware that the requirements in this guide related to school-level interventions (for example, student support teams) applicable to public school students do not apply to students attending private schools.

**What is an excused absence?**

All schools are required to list the categories of absences they will accept as excused. (5A DCMR §2102.2.) These categories should be clearly explained in the school's parent or student handbook or otherwise made available to the parent. While schools may have different policies, all schools must include, at a minimum, the categories of excused absences listed below. In addition to the listed categories below, your school may have other categories of excused absences.

- a) Illness or other bona fide (legitimate) medical cause experienced by the student;
- b) Exclusion, by direction of DC authorities, due to quarantine, contagious disease, infection, infestation, or other condition requiring separation from other students for medical or health reasons;
- c) Death in the student's family;
- d) Necessity for a student to attend judiciary or administrative proceedings as a party to the action or under subpoena;
- e) Observance of a religious holiday;
- f) Lawful suspension or exclusion from school by school authorities;
- g) Temporary closing of facilities or suspension of classes due to severe weather, official activities, holidays, malfunctioning equipment, unsafe or unsanitary conditions, or other condition(s) or emergency requiring a school closing or suspension of classes;
- h) Failure of DC to provide transportation in cases where there is a legal responsibility for the transportation of the student;
- i) Medical or dental appointments for the student;
- j) Absences to allow students to visit their parent or a legal guardian, who is in the military; immediately before, during, or after deployment; and
- k) An emergency or other circumstances approved by an educational institution.

**What is an unexcused absence?**

Any absence that does not fall into one of the excused categories as defined by your child's school, including the excused categories listed above, is an unexcused absence. Also, any absence that is not timely reported to the school by the parent or guardian is an unexcused absence. *DC Code § 38-203(c)(2)*

*Important Tip: Check with your child's school! Some schools require notes to be submitted more quickly than five school days. Most schools also have their own policies about what must be submitted as documentation of an excused absence. If you do not already have one, ask for a copy of the parent or student handbook or other document containing the school's attendance policies and procedures from your child's school.*

### WHAT STEPS MUST THE SCHOOL TAKE?

Schools must create a process, including specific due process procedures, for a parent, guardian, or student to appeal any attendance violation decisions made by the school. (5A DCMR §2103.2(c)(5).

- **After the first unexcused absence:** Schools must contact the parent the first day that an absence is deemed unexcused. (5A DCMR §2103.2(c)(1)).
- **After the fifth unexcused absence:** Schools must refer the student to a school-based student support team (SST) within two school days of the fifth unexcused absence within a marking period. (5A DCMR §2103.2(c)(3)). The SST team will:
  - Make reasonable and diligent efforts to communicate and collaborate with the student’s parent or guardian;
  - Review and address the student’s attendance and determine the underlying cause for the unexcused absences;
  - Communicate and collaborate with the student’s existing individualized education program (IEP) team, if applicable;
  - Provide timely response to the student’s truant behavior;
  - Make recommendations for academic, diagnostic, or social work services;
  - Use school and community resources to improve the student’s attendance including referral to a community-based organization when available; and
  - Develop and implement an action plan in consultation with the student and student’s parent or guardian.
- **After the 10<sup>th</sup> unexcused absence:** The SST assigned to the student shall notify the school administrator within two school days after the 10th unexcused absence with a plan for immediate intervention, including delivery of community-based programs and any other assistance or services to identify and address the student’s needs on an emergency basis. (5A DCMR §2103.2(c)(4)) The school will also:
  - Report the student to OSSE. (DC Code § 38-208(b)).
  - Send a letter to parents with information from MPD regarding the attendance requirements and criminal penalties. (DC Code § 38-207(c)).

### WHEN ARE OTHER AGENCIES NOTIFIED?

Schools are required to notify OSSE within two school days after the 10th unexcused absence for any child ages 5-17. Depending on the student’s age, referrals to other DC agencies are required within two school days after 10 or 15 full-day unexcused absences<sup>2</sup>:

#### **Students Ages 5-13:**

Within two school days of your child’s **10<sup>th</sup> full-day** unexcused absence within a school year, the school **must** submit a referral to the **DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA)**. (DC Code § 38-208(c)(1)(A)).

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<sup>2</sup> If a student accrues the 10<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> unexcused absence within the final 10 school days of a school year, schools may use their discretion with regard to these referral requirements. D.C. Code § 38-208(c)(1)(C).

### *What happens next?*

- After CFSA receives a referral for educational neglect, it evaluates whether the school has been in contact with the student and/or family. It also evaluates whether there is suspected abuse or neglect, or if other interventions are needed to encourage engagement with education.
- If CFSA receives a referral for a child over the age of 13 and there are no concerns of abuse or neglect, the agency denies the referral and sends back to the reporter and request the reporter send the referral to Child Social Services Division (CSSD) as it handles truancy matters.
- If CFSA receives a referral for a child over the age of 13 and there is suspected abuse or neglect, it will accept and process through the triage unit.

### **Students Ages 14-17:**

Within two school days of your child's **15<sup>th</sup> full-day** unexcused absence, the school **must** submit a referral to the **Court Social Services Division (CSSD)** of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia and the Juvenile Division of the **Office of the Attorney General (OAG)**. Within three business days of OAG receiving notice that a student has accrued 15 full-day unexcused absences, OAG will notify the parent by letter that he or she may be subject to prosecution for violating the attendance requirements. (DC Code § 38-208(c)(2)).

### *What happens next?*

- Students may be referred to the director of CSSD for prosecution, diversion and community-based interventions.
- Parents and students may be assigned community service and placed under court supervision/probation.
- Truancy charges may be filed against the student alleging that the student is a "Person in Need of Supervision."
- Parents may be referred to mediation for services or may face criminal prosecution resulting in community service, fines and/or incarceration.

## **RESOURCES**

[Every Day Counts!](#) is a citywide effort initiated by Mayor Bowser to ensure every student attends school every day. The initiative brings together the entire community to support students and families in reducing truancy and chronic absenteeism in the District. To learn more about the Mayor's initiative, including a list valuable resources on attendance and truancy, child care, health, enrollment, family and parenting support, housing, and transportation, please visit [attendance.dc.gov](http://attendance.dc.gov).

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