



Dear Parent/Guardian,

The school your child attends has notified the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) that your child accumulated 10 or more unexcused absences in the 2025-26 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 “chronically truant” in the District of Columbia.

WHAT IS TRUANCY?

Truancy occurs when a student is absent from school without a valid excuse. If a student accumulates 10 or more unexcused absences within a single school year, this is known as chronic truancy (5A DCMR § 2199)

HOW CAN I ADDRESS ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY?

Parent involvement can reduce truancy and promote attendance and participation in learning. See OSSE’s Attendance and Truancy Resource Guide (bit.ly/OSSE-ResourceGuide) for more information on how to prevent truancy and increase attendance for your child.

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.



Monitor health and wellness: Recognize the symptoms of common illness, such as the flu or coronavirus (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 regarding next steps.

DEFINING ABSENCES

What is an excused absence?

All schools are required to publish the categories of absences they will accept as excused (5A DCMR § 2102.3). These categories must 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 at the end of this document. In addition to the listed categories, your school may have other categories of excused absences.

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 below, 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)).

What is chronic absenteeism?

Chronic absenteeism occurs when a student misses more than 10 percent of instructional days, including both excused and unexcused absences (5A DCMR § 2199).

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)).

For every unexcused absence: Schools must contact the parent on the same day that the unexcused absence occurs (5A DCMR § 2103.2(c)(1)).

After five full day unexcused absences in one marking period (e.g., quarter or trimester): Schools must refer the student to a school-based student support team (SST). A school must do this within two school days (5A DCMR § 2103.2(c)(3)).

The SST 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 10 full day unexcused absences:

The SST assigned to the student must notify the school administrator within two school days 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 the Metropolitan Police Department (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 full-day 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 absences¹:

Students Ages 5-13:

Within two school days of your child's **10th** 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)).

Students Ages 14-17:

Within two school days of your child's **15th** 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(s) or guardian(s) by letter that they may be subject to prosecution for violating the attendance requirements (DC Code § 38-208(c)(2)).

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 of valuable resources on attendance and truancy, child care, health, enrollment, family and parenting support, housing, and transportation, please visit attendance.dc.gov.

Additional Resources for Families:



Attendance and Truancy Resource Guide:
bit.ly/OSSE-ResourceGuide



DC Attendance and Truancy Resources:
bit.ly/EveryDayCountsDME



DC Attendance Laws:
bit.ly/DC-AttendanceLaws

REQUIRED CATEGORIES OF EXCUSED ABSENCES

(5A DCMR § 2102.3)

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

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