

SUBJECT: COMPREHENSIVE STUDENT ATTENDANCE

Introduction

The Lowville Academy and Central School District recognizes the importance of regular attendance in the successful academic development of every student. The Comprehensive School Attendance Policy is designed to establish and reinforce not only the correlation between good attendance and success at school, but the value of attendance and responsible participation, both in and out of school.

We believe:

- a) That is important to instill in all children the necessity of being present all day, every day.
- b) That regular daily attendance enhances student performance and promotes positive school climate. It is a critical factor in meeting State learning standards and assuring school success.
- c) That the standardization of procedures and terms dealing with attendance is a desirable outcome of policy development.
- d) That review and analysis of attendance data provides valuable feedback for school improvement.
- e) That communication and consistent follow-through with students and the community will help to make students accountable for their attendance at school.

Statement of Overall Objectives

The 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. The District recognizes that consistent school attendance, academic success, and school completion have a positive correlation, and therefore has developed, and, if necessary, will revise a Comprehensive Student Attendance Policy to meet the following objectives:

- a) Increase school completion for all students;
- b) Raise student achievement and close gaps in student performance;
- c) Identify attendance patterns in order to design attendance improvement efforts;
- d) Know the whereabouts of every student for safety and other reasons;
- e) Verify that individual students are complying with education laws relating to compulsory attendance;

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- f) Determine the District's average daily attendance for state aid purposes,
- g) To improve the safety and security of students throughout the building,
- h) To teach responsibility by virtue of increased accountability for student presence during instruction, and
- i) To provide a standardized mechanism for accounting for the whereabouts of all children throughout the school day.

Description of Strategies to Meet Objectives

The 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) Maintain accurate recordkeeping to record attendance, absence, tardiness, or early departure of each student.
- c) Utilize data analysis systems for tracking individual student attendance and individual and group trends in student attendance problems.
- d) Develop early intervention strategies to improve school attendance for all students.

Determination of Excused and Unexcused Absences, Tardiness, and Early Departures

Based upon the District's education and community needs, values, and priorities, the 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, or early departure may be excused if due to personal illness verified by a parent, illness or death in the family, religious observance with advance notice, required court appearances, attendance at health clinics, approved college visits, approved cooperative work programs, military obligations, or other reasons as may be approved by the Board.
- b) **Unexcused:** An absence, tardiness, or early departure is considered unexcused if the reason for the lack of attendance does not fall into the above categories (e.g., family vacation, hunting, babysitting, haircut, obtaining learner's permit, road test, oversleeping).

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A written excuse, signed by a parent or person in parental relation should be presented by the student when returning to school following each absence.

Student Attendance Recordkeeping/Data Collection

The record of each student's presence, absence, tardiness, and early departure will 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.

Attendance will be taken and recorded in accordance with the following:

- a) For students in non-departmentalized kindergarten through grade 5 (i.e., self-contained classrooms and supervised group movement to other scheduled school activities such as physical education in the gym, assembly, etc.), the student's presence or absence will be recorded after the taking of attendance once per school day. For purposes of APPR and Teacher-Student Data Linkages (TSDL), classroom attendance for all students in grades K through 12 must be recorded on a subject by subject basis for Teacher of Record Determinations.
- b) For students in grades 6 through 12, each student's presence or absence will be recorded after the taking of attendance in each period of scheduled instruction.
- c) Any absence for a school day or portion thereof will 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 grades K through 12 arrives late for, or departs early from, scheduled instruction, the tardiness or early departure will be recorded as excused or unexcused in accordance with the standards articulated in this policy.

A record will 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 other cause as may be found satisfactory to the Commissioner of Education.

Attendance records will 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 will be compiled and provided to the designated school personnel who are responsible for attendance. The nature of the absence, tardiness, or early departure will be coded on a student's record in accordance with the established District or building procedures.

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Student Attendance and Course Credit

The District believes that classroom participation 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. For purposes of this policy, classroom participation means that a student is in class and prepared to work.

Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes. Consistent with the importance of classroom participation, unexcused student absences, tardiness, and early departures will affect a student's grade, including credit for classroom participation, for the marking period.

Impact on Course Credit

To promote regular attendance, Lowville Academy and Central School Board of Education has established the following guidelines for awarding course credit:

In the elementary school, parents are notified in writing when a student has missed a total of twenty (20) full days of school. At thirty (30) days, a second letter is sent to inform parents that the child is "in serious jeopardy for fulfilling requirements for the ____ school year." Should a child miss forty (40) or more days of school, parents are notified that their child will be retained in his/her assigned grade for a second year.

The policy for middle school and high school students is written as three (3) basic steps, with each step resulting in a contact with the parent/guardian by school officials. Absences from class that arise as a result of disciplinary action will be viewed independently.

Step I Ten (10) absences from class -- On the 10th absence, 5th for a semester course, the teacher will inform the student and file written notice with the Assistant Principal. The Assistant Principal will review the attendance notice for further action. Written notice is mailed to the parent/guardian with information regarding any concerns created by the absences, and the Assistant Principal and guidance counselor will be informed.

Step II Twenty (20) absences from class -- On the 20th absence, 10th for a semester course, a Step II notice from the Assistant Principal is mailed. The guidance counselor will meet with the student to discuss the potential problem. Illegal absences will be made up at the discretion of the administration. Make-up will consist of assigned time after school in the library from 3:15-5:30. The make-up program does not ensure passing grades, it is designed to meet minimum seat time requirements as well as to provide a structured place to study. The way in which make-up time is considered as part of the grading process is at the discretion of the teacher.

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Step III Twenty-six (26) absences from class -- (High School) -- The Principal will review the student's eligibility to continue in the course. Absences beyond twenty-six (26) may result in the denial of course credit and removal from the class. This notice will be sent at thirteen (13) absences for a semester length course. At twenty-six (26) and thirteen (13) absences respectively the student will have to appeal in writing to the Principal for consideration of a "make up" opportunity. Only the Principal may grant such an opportunity and no decision has influence on another. "Make ups" are given only when legitimate circumstances warrant and are not automatic.

Attendance, as part of class participation, can be figured into the grading policies of individual teachers. Students will not be seated for a final examination if they have surpassed the number of allowed absences in the course. Students who exhibit a poor attendance record, may also face progressive disciplinary consequences designed to curb the problem before credit is lost.

Notice of Minimum Attendance Standard/Intervention Strategies Prior to the Denial of Course Credit

In order to ensure that parents or 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 will be followed:

- a) Copies of the District's Comprehensive Student Attendance Policy will be available to parents or 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 or student handbooks or posted on the District website.
- c) At periodic intervals, a designated staff member(s) will notify, by telephone, the parent or person in parental relation of the student's absence, tardiness, or early departure and explain the relationship of the student's attendance to his or her ability to receive course credit. If the parent or person in parental relation cannot be reached by telephone, a letter will be sent detailing this information.
- d) A designated staff member will review the District's Attendance Policy with students who have excessive and/or unexcused absences, tardiness, or early departures. Further, appropriate student support services within the District, as well as the possible collaboration or referral to community support services and agencies, will be implemented prior to the denial of course credit for insufficient attendance by the student.

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SUBJECT: COMPREHENSIVE STUDENT ATTENDANCE POLICY (Cont'd.)**Notice of Students who are Absent, Tardy, or Depart Early Without Proper Excuse**

The District will notify by telephone the parent or person in parental relation to a student who is absent, tardy, or departs early without proper excuse.

If deemed necessary by appropriate school officials, or if requested by the parent or person in parental relation, a school conference will be scheduled between the parent or 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.

Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing at least 10% of enrolled school days in a year for any reason, excused or unexcused. Chronic absenteeism differs from truancy because it emphasizes missed instructional time rather than unexcused absences. Missed instructional time can increase a student's risk for disengagement, low achievement, and dropping out, among other things.

Students who miss at least 5% of enrolled school days in a year are at risk of becoming chronically absent. In light of this, the District will implement intervention strategies for students who miss 5% or more of the enrolled school days in a year.

Attendance Incentives

At the elementary level, "Excellence in Attendance" certificates recognize good attendance habits without putting the emphasis on a zero-tolerance standard. Although perfect attendance can still be tracked, any student who has no more than three (3) excused absences will be recognized with a certificate. This eliminates the stress that some students/parents feel to be present every day, regardless of how sick the child is. Certain absences (i.e., bereavement) will not be included when determining the number of absences a child has had.

"Excellence in Attendance" is recognized at the middle school and high school levels. In addition, the high school faculty's Rewards and Incentives Committee recognizes excellence in attendance quarterly, using letters, certificates and (on occasion) food coupons to encourage regular attendance. Cash prizes at graduation are a logical outgrowth of this recognition.

Note: Students who are absent as a result of a school-related function (a college visit, military physical, sports or musical event in which he/she is participating, etc.) will not forfeit consideration for excellence in attendance on this basis. However, students with a significant number of tardies may, at the discretion of the Building Principal, be excluded from consideration.

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Disciplinary Consequences

Unexcused absences, tardiness, and early departures will result in disciplinary sanctions as described in the District's *Code of Conduct*. Negative consequences will not be imposed, however, where the absence, tardiness, or early departure is related to homelessness. Consequences may include, but are not limited to, in-school suspension, detention, and denial of participation in interscholastic and extracurricular activities. Parents or persons in parental relation will be notified by designated District personnel at periodic intervals to discuss their child's absences, tardiness, or early departures and the importance of class attendance and appropriate interventions. Individual buildings and grade levels will address procedures to implement the notification process to the parent or person in parental relation.

Intervention Strategy Process

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

- a) Identify specific element(s) of the pattern (e.g., grade level, building, time frame, type of excused absences, unexcused absences, tardiness, or early departures);
- b) Where the pattern involves an individual student, the student and parent or person in parental relation will be contacted;
- c) Discuss strategies to directly intervene with specific element;
- d) Utilize appropriate District and/or community resources to address and help remediate student unexcused absences, tardiness, or early departures;
- e) Monitor and report short and long term effects of intervention.

Appeal Process

A parent or person in parental relation may request a building level review of his or her child's attendance record.

Building Review of Attendance Records

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 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.

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Students

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Annual Review by the Board

The Board will annually review the building level student attendance records and if those records show a decline in student attendance, the Board will make any revisions to the Policy and plan deemed necessary to improve student attendance.

Community Awareness

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

- a) Providing a plain language summary of the policy to parents or persons in parental relation to students at the beginning of each school year and promoting the understanding of this policy to students and their parents or persons in parental relation;
- b) Providing each teacher, at the beginning of the school year or upon employment, with a copy of the policy; and
- c) Providing copies of the policy to any other member of the community upon request.

Education Law §§ 3024, 3025, 3202, 3205, 3206, 3210, 3211, and 3213
8 NYCRR §§ 104.1, 109.2, and 175.6

NOTE: Refer also to Policy #7131 -- Education of Students in Temporary Housing

Adopted: 2/13/2012
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