



## Superintendent's Circular

School Year 2008-2009

NUMBER:  
ACA-18

DATE:  
September 1, 2008

### ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY POLICIES

This Circular reflects the School Committee's policies on attendance and punctuality. It contains broad guidelines on:

- Attendance Policy
- Punctuality Policy
- Waivers
- Exemptions
- Notification to Parents
- Safety Concerns Related to Attendance

For step-by-step procedures on record-keeping and attendance, please see Superintendent's Circular ACA-18A: <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/files/ACA-18A%20Attendance%20procedures.pdf>.

For step-by-step procedures on Attendance Supervisors' Cards, home tutoring, and court-involved students, please see Superintendent's Circular ACA-18B: <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/files/ACA-18B%20SOA.pdf>.

### BACKGROUND

Improving and maintaining consistently high, on-time student attendance is a major priority of the Boston Public Schools. Students cannot take full advantage of academic and extra-curricular opportunities unless they are in school on a regular basis. All Boston Public Schools and their School Site Councils are encouraged to put in place comprehensive incentives and consequences for improving student attendance in 2008-09.

The BPS student attendance policy was approved by the School Committee in 1998-1999. It was revised in May 2006 and June 2007 with the system-wide prohibition of using cutoff times to refuse students' entry into buildings, and with additional flexibility for schools to promote and enforce punctuality. In addition, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has placed an increased emphasis on accountability and standards with regard to student attendance. Under NCLB, schools can be designated as not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) if their attendance rate is too low. Massachusetts has established the following performance and/or improvement indicators with regard to attendance rates:

- K-8 attendance criteria (high schools are judged on graduation rates)  
Rate of 92 percent or above, or at least 1 percentage point improvement over prior years.

Consistent with the attendance policy is the need to maintain accurate, timely, and appropriate records, including information on the attendance of students and documentation of reasons for absence. Accordingly, all staff must keep accurate records, maintain documentation, and communicate with parents in a timely and effective manner to ensure sound school attendance practices.

## BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS ATTENDANCE POLICY

1. **Length of Time:** A student must attend school for at least a half-day to be marked "present." Check with the principal or headmaster to determine what constitutes a half-day. In most schools, it is:
  - a. 3 hours in elementary school
  - b. 3 hours and 5 minutes in middle school
  - c. 3 hours and 10 minutes in high school
  
2. **Credit Recovery/No Credit:** Any student with more than three unexcused absences in a marking term (four unexcused absences in schools with three marking terms) – or more than 12 unexcused absences for the school year – will receive a grade of "NC" (no credit) if the student otherwise earned a passing grade. The following guidelines apply:
  - a. If a student has earned a passing grade, he or she may change the "NC" to a letter grade by passing the final exam at the end of the year.
  - b. If a student has not earned a passing grade, he or she will receive an "F."
  - c. If a student receives an "NC" for one or more marking terms, but does not exceed 12 unexcused absences for the school year, the "NC" will be converted at the end of the school year to the grade the student would have otherwise received.

In all cases of absence, a student must be given the opportunity and responsibility to make up the work missed within a reasonable time period.

3. **Excused/Unexcused Absences:** Students must bring in a note after each day they are absent.
  - a. The note must include the date absent, the reason for the absence, a phone number where a parent or guardian can be reached, and the parent or guardian's signature
  - b. The note must be received within seven school days after the absence.
  - c. Excused absences may include:
    - i. An illness or injury that prevents the student from attending school. If the illness or hospitalization results in absence of five or more consecutive days, a note from a health care provider documenting the health problem or hospitalization should be attached to the parents' note. Parents are not expected to have a note from a health care provider for an illness of fewer than five days.
    - ii. A death in the immediate family (parent, sibling, grandparent, aunt, uncle, cousin) or other significant personal or family crisis
    - iii. Suspension from school is not an absence and should be coded as a "Z" on the automated attendance reporting system. In cases of suspension, the school will provide an opportunity for the student to maintain academic standing in school by being provided a list of assignments and such other services which might enable the student to use the time out of school constructively.
    - iv. Students assigned to the Counseling and Intervention Center shall be assigned work by the school of assignment and shall be marked "constructively present."
    - v. Court appearances: Students should present evidence of the requirement of the court appearance.
    - vi. Medical or psychological tests during the school day: The parent must show evidence (such as a note from the health center) that the tests could not be scheduled after school.
    - vii. Religious holy days: In order to accommodate the religious beliefs of students, such absences will be marked "constructively present" upon submitting a valid note signed by a parent or guardian. Please see Superintendent's Circular LGL-6 for more guidance: [http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/files/LGL-06%20Religious%20Holy%20Days\\_0.pdf](http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/files/LGL-06%20Religious%20Holy%20Days_0.pdf).
    - viii. Visits to special education schools in some cases for students with disabilities.
    - ix. Other situations: From time to time, situations over which the school, parent, and student have little or no control may cause absences (for example, transportation that does not operate during inclement weather). These absences are excusable.

The principal/headmaster may determine that the students so impacted shall be marked "constructively present."

- x. Other extraordinary situations approved by the School Site Council.
- d. Unexcused absences may include:
- i. Family vacations: School vacations and holiday periods allow ample time for family vacations. Each day of absence for this reason is unexcused. School-based rules will regulate make-up work.
  - ii. Babysitting
  - iii. Cutting class
  - iv. Other situations: From time to time, situations such as "illness of members of an extended family," or "conflicts with parents' work schedule" may develop. These should be viewed as unacceptable excuses for absences.
  - v. Other extraordinary situations approved by the School Site Council.
4. **Record-keeping:** Principals and headmasters bear final responsibility for improving attendance in their schools and for ensuring that performance evaluations reflect staff members' efforts in complying with this policy and in achieving the goal of improved attendance. Please see Superintendent's Circular ACA-18A, <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/files/ACA-18A%20Attendance%20procedures.pdf>, for detailed procedures on attendance record-keeping.
5. **School-based governance:** The School Site Council, after public discussion, may expand the list of unexcused absences. Students with three or more unexcused absences will be referred by a teacher or the principal/headmaster to the school's Student Support Team (SST). The SST will review the case and work with the family to develop a plan to help the student improve attendance. School-based rules should be amended to include these guidelines and other attendance-related guidelines established by the School Site Council.

### BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS PUNCTUALITY POLICY

Students who arrive after the beginning of the school day are tardy. They must follow established tardy procedures in order to be considered present for the day.

All students are expected to report to school on time every day. It is the policy of the Boston School Committee (approved May 24, 2006) that tardy students should be permitted into the school building and not excluded. Headmasters and principals are directed to a) review their current school tardy policies, in conjunction with School Site Councils, b) develop reasonable, non-exclusionary practices to deal with student tardies and positive incentives to encourage punctuality, and c) closely monitor compliance with these policies.

It is important to remember that the requirement that tardy students be admitted to school does not equal a relaxation of the rules covering attendance or tardies. Schools must make every effort to encourage punctuality and discourage tardies. Schools are also encouraged to distinguish between first-time offenders and repeated tardies.

According to School Committee policy (approved June 6, 2007), all high schools are directed to work with their School Site Councils and student representatives to establish fair and reasonable procedures to decrease student tardiness. These procedures must adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Student tardies may be linked to unexcused absences, unless the tardies are excused due to a student's disability, long-term illness or medical condition, or exercise of religious expression which has been approved by the Boston Public Schools. No fewer than three tardies and no more than eight tardies can equal one unexcused absence per marking term.

- a. Families must be notified by telephone call or in writing of their student's tardies no later than the first unexcused absence created by student tardies, and at additional points that the high school's tardy procedures deem appropriate. Schools may follow the same guidelines for parental and family notification that already exist with excused/unexcused absences.
2. High schools' tardy procedures should explicitly detail how they plan to further involve families in working with students who exhibit excessive student tardies.

All high schools, including pilot and Horace Mann Charter Schools, are required to submit their tardy procedures with the above guidelines (and other incentives/consequences as deemed necessary by the School Site Council) to the Superintendent's Office no later than October 1 of the school year.

Please see Circular ACA-18A, <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/files/ACA-18A%20Attendance%20procedures.pdf>, for specific guidelines on record-keeping for student tardies.

### **WAIVERS**

Only the principal/headmaster has the authority to grant a waiver from the attendance requirement. A waiver for attendance may be granted for the following reasons:

1. Extended documented personal illness or injury
2. Modifications to a student's IEP
3. Any other documented circumstance approved by the principal/headmaster

Upon the request of a student, a principal/headmaster must review the merits of a student's case for the granting of a waiver. Requests for waivers may also be made by teachers on behalf of students.

Waivers are granted **ONLY** at the end of each marking period and at the end of the school year. All requests for waivers and documented evidence of the action taken must be kept on file at the school.

### **EXEMPTIONS**

Absences due to suspensions for or verified transportation problems may not be counted as an absence and/or tardy for the purpose of the attendance requirement for students. When recording attendance in student records, a distinction must be made between absences that are considered exemptions to the Attendance and Punctuality policies and those that are not.

The School Committee has directed that middle and high schools implement "no-cost" procedural alternatives to the Attendance Policy for students experiencing difficulty in meeting the attendance standard. An example of current allowable practices includes "buy-back" plans. School Site Councils interested in adopting buy-back plans must follow the procedures listed below:

1. A concept paper describing the proposal must be developed and endorsed by the School Site Council.
2. The proposal must be forwarded to the appropriate Academic Superintendent for review.

The buy-back plan allows students to have absences waived. Its application to targeted students should be determined at the discretion of the principal/headmaster.

### NOTIFICATION TO PARENTS WHEN STUDENTS ARE ABSENT

Principals and headmasters should inform all students and parents by means of a written bulletin or newsletter at the beginning of each school year on the Attendance and Punctuality Policies, as well as the school attendance procedures adopted by the School Site Council.

For detailed guidance on notification after the first, second, third, and future absences, please see Circular ACA-18A, <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/files/ACA-18A%20Attendance%20procedures.pdf>. For detailed guidance on a notification of a child leaving school, please see Circular ACA-18B: <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/files/ACA-18B%20SOA.pdf>.

### SAFETY CONCERNS RELATED TO ATTENDANCE

There are times when a parent has wrongly assumed a child has reached school, such as when a student misses a bus and returns home unsupervised. Given this situation, strangers, child-abuse offenders, and motor vehicles present a potential danger, particularly for our young students. Parents/guardians who send their children to school have no way of knowing that their son/daughter is not in school unless the school notifies them.

In order to maximize protection and safety under the circumstances noted above, schools should take the following measures:

1. Emphasize to the parents/guardians that they should make arrangements to be sure that their children reach the bus stop on time every morning and that they actually board the bus. This should be stressed in newsletters sent home at the start of each school year.
2. Inform parents/guardians that they should notify the school by telephone each day that their children will be absent due to illness, etc.
3. Inform parents/guardians as soon as possible, including through the Connect-Ed system, of their children's absence.
4. Ensure that the parents/guardians supply the school with accurate and up-to-date home and emergency telephone numbers and indicate the place their children should go if they miss the bus, i.e., the home of a relative, friend, neighbor, etc. These emergency numbers should be updated as necessary.

For more information about this circular, contact:

<b>Name:</b>	Philip Jackson, Ed.D.
<b>Department:</b>	Alternative Education/Office of the Academic Superintendent for High Schools
<b>Mailing Address:</b>	515 Hyde Park Avenue, Roslindale, MA 02131
<b>Phone:</b>	617-635-8035
<b>Fax:</b>	617-635-6821
<b>E-mail:</b>	<a href="mailto:pjackson@boston.k12.ma.us">pjackson@boston.k12.ma.us</a>

Carol R. Johnson, Superintendent