



Superintendent's Circular

School Year 2021-2022

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ACA-18

DATE:
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ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

This Circular reflects the School Committees' policies and procedures on attendance and punctuality, as approved by the Boston School Committee. It contains detailed guidelines on:

- Attendance Policy
- Punctuality Policy
- Notification to parents/caregivers
- Safety concerns related to attendance
- Recording and maintaining student attendance
- Recording and following up on DNRs (Did Not Reports)
- Student tardiness
- Notifying parents/caregivers of student absences
- Notifying parents/caregivers of a missing child
- Recording and approving leaves of absence
- Approving home tutoring
- Discharge protocols
- Procedures for referral to Supervisors of Attendance

BACKGROUND AND GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Improving and maintaining consistently high, on-time student attendance is an essential priority of the Boston Public Schools (BPS). Students cannot take full advantage of academic and extra-curricular opportunities unless they are in school on a consistent basis. All Boston Public Schools and their School Site Councils are expected to put in place comprehensive prevention and intervention strategies to improve student attendance each school year.

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 ensure consistently high, on-time attendance. It was further revised in 2018 to include cultural and religious holidays as an eligible excused absence category. In 2021, it was revised to discontinue the policies of converting tardies to absences and issuing grades of "No Credit (NC)" based on attendance, as well as elevating the importance of focusing on chronic absenteeism, where all absences and missed instructional time are considered to have a detrimental impact on student outcomes.

On December 10, 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law, reauthorizing the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). The law includes provisions to help ensure improved outcomes for all students receiving elementary and secondary education, including the following:

- States must establish high academic content standards, and schools must teach all students those standards to help prepare them for college and careers.

- States, districts, and schools must share information with families, students, and communities regarding annual statewide assessments that measure students' progress toward these high standards.
- States and districts must establish systems of support and accountability for all schools, and provide particular support to the lowest-performing schools, schools with low-performing subgroups, and schools with low graduation rates.

Under ESSA, each state must develop a consolidated state plan that documents a comprehensive approach to improving outcomes for all students. The Massachusetts Consolidated State Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act, approved in September 2017, indicates that the State has included chronic absenteeism as one of the accountability index indicators (core measures) to be adopted by all schools and school districts. Through this policy, each school is given a target goal to reduce chronic absenteeism each school year. The BPS Attendance Policy described in this document (ACA-18) has been updated to reflect changes to the core measures as it relates to attendance and chronic absenteeism.

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Recent research recognizes that addressing chronic absenteeism is one of the most important priorities in an equitable approach to attendance, as chronically absent students are less likely to be successful academically and are disproportionately represented among students of color. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year in any given period. All absences are included as it relates to chronic absenteeism, regardless of whether the absence is excused or unexcused. **For a full school year, a student who misses 18 school days, or about two days per month, will be considered chronically absent.** Students who do not show up to school regularly miss out on fundamental learning skills and the chance to build a habit of consistent attendance that will carry them into college, career and life.

Chronic absenteeism significantly increases the likelihood that a student will fall off-track academically and struggle to keep pace with their peers. Chronic absenteeism in the early grades can influence whether a student reads proficiently by the end of the third grade, and by the sixth grade, it becomes a leading indicator of whether a student will drop out of high school.

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/caregivers in a timely and effective manner to ensure sound school attendance practices. In addition, Boston Public Schools is committed to addressing chronic absenteeism through prevention and intervention strategies at the school and district levels that better support students and families to maintain consistently high, on-time attendance. Each school will prioritize prevention and intervention strategies that reduce student chronic absenteeism.

The following general principles apply:

- Schools have an obligation under the law to maintain an accurate record of student attendance. Schools at all levels are required to make a concerted effort to contact the parent or caregiver each time students are absent.
- School leaders bear the final responsibility for attendance in their schools, and for complying with attendance and punctuality policies and procedures.
- External agency support will be sought in those cases where school-based meetings do not achieve a positive continuum in parental attitude and/or student attendance patterns.

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance: Per the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) attendance policy, a student must be at school, at a school related activity, or receiving academic instruction for at least half of the school day to be counted as present. Students who are not physically present at school but who are receiving academic instruction from the district for at least half of the school day should be counted as present. Examples of academic instruction include tutoring, online learning, or distance learning provided by the district. Under this guidance, participation in Home & Hospital Instruction is one of the only instances within BPS where a student can be marked "constructively present." Additional attendance reporting guidance from DESE can be found [here](#).

Length of Time: A student must attend school for at least a half-day to be marked "present." Check with the school leader to determine what constitutes a half-day. In most schools, it is:

- 3 hours in elementary school
- 3 hours and 5 minutes in middle school
- 3 hours and 10 minutes in high school

Credit Recovery (No Credit Policy Discontinued): In order to facilitate competency-based grading across the district, the No Credit (NC) policy regarding students having three unexcused absences in a marking term (four unexcused absences in schools with three marking terms) has been discontinued. As a result, schools should no longer assign grades of "No Credit (NC)" to students. The following guidance has been provided regarding credit recovery for students:

- Passing grades should be competency based, which may be impacted by attendance due to missed assignments or school work, but should not be tied exclusively to attendance or participation.
- It is essential that schools outreach early and often for students at risk of a failing grade.
- As an alternative, schools may mark a student with an "incomplete" grade to enable equitable learning recovery.
- In all cases, a student not earning a passing grade must be given the opportunity and responsibility to equitably recover any learning loss or make up the work missed within a marking period to earn a passing grade.

Excused/Unexcused Absences: Certain absences may be excused, meaning they will not be considered as it relates to a referral to truancy court by a Supervisor of Attendance under Massachusetts General Law (M.G.L. c.119). However, it is important to understand that all missed instructional time has the potential to negatively impact student outcomes. In addition, all absences are included as they relate to chronic absenteeism, regardless of whether the absence is excused or unexcused. For an absence to be excused, students must bring in a note after each day they are absent.

- The note must include the date absent, the reason for the absence, a phone number where a parent or caregiver can be reached, and the parent or caregiver's signature
- The note must be provided upon return to school, no later than **seven** school days after the absence.
- Excused absences may include:
 - **An illness or injury that prevents the student from attending school. If the illness or hospitalization results in absence for three or more consecutive days, a note from a health care provider documenting the health problem or hospitalization should be attached to the parent/caregiver note. Parents/caregivers are not expected to have a note from a health care provider for an illness of fewer than three days. The requirement to have a note from a health care provider will not supersede specific public health determinations or guidance. The school nurse can be consulted regarding any questions or changes to this policy based on specific circumstances.**
 - A death in the immediate family (parent/caregiver, sibling, grandparent, aunt, uncle, cousin) or other significant personal or family crisis

- Suspension: Students should be marked as suspended. 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 productively.
- Students assigned to Succeed Boston shall be assigned work by the school of assignment and shall be marked as suspended.
- Court appearances: Students should present evidence of the requirement of the court appearance.
- Medical or psychological tests during the school day: The parent/caregiver must show evidence (such as a note from the health center) that the tests could not be scheduled after school.
- Visits to special education schools in some cases for students with disabilities.
- Other situations: From time to time, situations over which the school, parent/caregiver, 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 school leader may determine that the students impacted shall be marked with an excused absence.
- Other extraordinary situations, such as a family emergency, as approved by the School Site Council.
- Cultural holidays and religious holy days: To accommodate students' cultural and religious observances on days when schools are in session, such absences will be marked excused, with the reason code "Religious Holiday" upon submitting a valid note signed by a parent or guardian. Please see Superintendent's Circular LGL-6 for more guidance, or contact your designated Supervisor of Attendance. The following holidays are eligible to be excused for one day: Diwali, Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, Good Friday, Kwanzaa, Lunar New Year, Nowruz, and Yom Kippur. The following holidays are celebrated over multiple days and are eligible to be excused for two days: Hanukkah, Passover, Rosh Hashanah, Shavuot, and Sukkot. Schools should provide opportunities for students to submit missed assignments or other make up work from their absence.
- Please contact the Office of Equity (617) 635-9650 or bpsequity@bostonpublicschools.org regarding a related student absence that is more than two consecutive days or is not included on this list. This can include participation in a cultural ceremony, **bereavement or funeral**, pilgrimage, trip, etc. that requires students to be absent for more than two days. In these instances, a student may be required to meet the following criteria to be eligible to be given an excused absence of more than two days for an observance of a cultural or religious holiday or **for bereavement to attend a funeral for more than two days**:
 - The student is not chronically absent, meaning the student attended more than 90% of the school days to date.
 - The student is earning a passing grade in all courses.
- Absences that do not meet the above criteria will be considered unexcused. In all instances of student absence, students must be given the opportunity to equitably recover any missed work or learning loss during a marking period.

Record-keeping and attendance improvement: School leaders bear final responsibility for improving attendance in their schools, for balancing between accountability and positive engagement in their approach, and for ensuring that performance evaluations reflect staff members' efforts in complying with this policy and in achieving the goal of improved attendance.

School-based governance: Each school's Student Success Team (SST) serves a critical role in prevention and intervention steps for students with high absenteeism. In addition to the SST, it is a best practice for schools to convene an attendance committee or attendance team, with a primary focus on

attendance prevention and intervention strategies within the school, which works in conjunction with the SST. It is also a best practice for schools to initiate prevention steps with students in the early stages of the school year or marking period. Schools should review students' past attendance history to initiate prevention steps for students with a history of high absenteeism and refer students to the school's SST. Students with three or more unexcused absences will be referred by a teacher or the school leader to the school's SST on an ongoing basis. The SST will review the case and work with the family to develop a success plan to help the student improve attendance. School-based rules should be amended to include attendance-related guidelines established by the School Site Council.

Truancy Prevention Program: A school's Truancy Prevention Plan provides a roadmap of the critical prevention and intervention activities a school will conduct throughout the school year to ensure consistently high, on-time attendance for all students in the school. Each school is required to submit its Truancy Prevention Program Plan to its designated Supervisor of Attendance using the electronic form no later than October 1 of the school year.

TRUANCY PREVENTION/INTERVENTION PROGRAM

All schools are responsible for creating and implementing a truancy prevention program that addresses truancy issues. This program should start with a warm and welcoming school climate, and should include phone calls home, student meetings, parent/caregiver meetings, development of an attendance plan/contract, attendance coaching, referral to Student Success Team Meetings and/or Attendance Meetings. Consistent follow-up and outreach to students and families who are struggling with chronic absenteeism is a fundamental best practice. Schools are expected to use the Panorama Student Success Platform to monitor student attendance progress, as well as to document interventions and success plans. Schools should also connect with community based programs or organizations that can support truancy issues. Each school is required to submit its Truancy Prevention Program Plan to its designated Supervisor of Attendance using the electronic form no later than October 1 of the school year.

Differentiating the Use of Aspen SIS and Panorama Student Success Platform: The Aspen Student Information System (SIS) remains the system of record as it relates to capturing critical information for student records and maintaining compliance with regulatory requirements. As it relates to attendance, schools will take attendance in Aspen. However, schools are expecting to use the Panorama Student Success Platform for documenting all attendance prevention and intervention activities, using both the Support Notes feature and Tier 2 and 3 Attendance Success Plans. Student attendance data entered into Aspen is transmitted nightly to Panorama for attendance monitoring and student success planning purposes. The table below shows how staff can continue to use both Aspen and Panorama.

<i>Aspen</i>	<i>Panorama Student Success</i>
<p>Aspen will be used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → input daily student attendance → house master student schedules and courses → enter course grades → house individual teacher schedules → record teacher attendance → record confidential student journal entries → recommend to Suffolk County Juvenile Court 	<p>Panorama Student Success will be used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → display student data → house Attendance Success Plans (tier-2 and tier-3) → assign team members for communication and collaboration → record support notes related to student interventions

and record documentation for an Attendance Intervention Plan (AIP)	→ help track information in one place, including assessments from Illuminate
Note: SOA is responsible for copying ASP documentation from Panorama if the case is recommended to court, and in other cases as necessary for compliance.	

All Attendance Success Plans should be recorded as tier-2 or tier-3 plans in Panorama. Panorama allows the planning and recording of interventions, along with notes, to monitor the effectiveness of these interventions in setting improvement goals in the student success planning process. Student Success Teams (SSTs) at the school level will be required to create Student Success Plans in Panorama for all students who are chronically absent, or approaching chronic absenteeism. At a minimum, every chronically absent student should have an Attendance Success Plan in Panorama. It is a best practice for schools to coordinate and communicate student success planning with families. It is also a best practice for schools to establish an attendance success plan at the beginning of the school year for students who were chronically absent in the previous school year.


How to Create Attendance Success Plans in Panorama

Who should have an Attendance Success Plan?

Staff create ASPs based on data in Panorama Student Success:

- Tier 2 plans: Students whose attendance is 90% or below will display as chronically absent in Panorama (yellow)
- Tier 3 plans: Students whose attendance is 80% or less will appear as attendance-critical (red)

An additional quality check:

- Identify students with AIP tag in Aspen:  (this tag does not yet appear in Panorama)
- These students should have an Attendance Success Plan created in Panorama if they don't already have one.*

What are the Essential Steps, when Creating an Attendance Success Plan?

Create Attendance Success Plan in Panorama, and remember these two key details:

- 1) Log as Tier 2 or Tier 3
- 2) Log as Attendance

Intervention type

Attendance
 ▼

Tier

Tier 2

Tier 3

- ★ Panorama's support notes feature will replace many common uses of the Aspen journal (Tier 1 Family Communication)
- ★ Panorama will house student success plans (Tier 2 and Tier 3) - academic, attendance, behavior
- ★ Please see the Panorama Help Site linked here: [Panorama Student Success Help Site](#)
- ★ Questions: mtssdata@bostonpublicschools.org

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. School leaders 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 instances and repeated tardiness.

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. Families must be notified by telephone call, in writing, or email of a student's tardies. Schools should follow the same prevention/intervention steps conducted for student absences.
2. High schools' tardy procedures should explicitly detail how they plan to further involve families in working with students who exhibit excessive tardiness. As a rule of thumb, excessive tardiness can be defined as being tardy for 10% or more of school days.
3. High schools' tardy procedures should be included in their Quality School Improvement Plan (QSIP), the development of which is the responsibility of the School Site Council.
4. As a best practice, all schools should establish attendance success plans in Panorama for students exhibiting excessive tardiness.

All high schools, including pilot and Horace Mann Charter Schools, are required to complete their tardy procedures with the above guidelines (and other incentives/supports as deemed necessary by the School Site Council) no later than October 1 of the school year. Each school must maintain a copy of their tardy procedures on file.

1. Attendance must be taken by the teacher at the beginning of every class period in middle and high schools. After comparison of period attendance with the school's daily attendance, student cuts should be noted and addressed following the appropriate prevention/intervention steps.
2. Middle and high school students who are tardy should be marked absent for any class(es) they miss.
3. A student must be in attendance at least half of the school day in order to be considered present. Notations of early dismissal must be recorded with the time of dismissal and documentation indicating the reason should be kept on file in accordance with school protocol.

ATTENDANCE RECORDS

The accounting and reporting of the attendance or absence of each student assigned to a school is one of the school leader's most critical responsibilities. Attendance record-keeping must be achieved with precision to ensure accurate accounting of each student and timely reporting of student attendance daily in the Aspen SIS. Every school leader is required to account for the attendance and/or absence of

students and is required to investigate and take appropriate action for each absence.

GENERAL ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS

- a. Attendance procedures must be reviewed with school staff by school leaders during the teacher professional development and training program before the start of each school year. Teachers must each sign a document, maintained at the school, verifying that they received these procedures and training.
- b. During the first week of school, homeroom teachers at all levels should make personal calls to the parents/caregivers of their students introducing themselves and inviting the parents/ caregivers to either visit the school or to call at any time to check on the attendance and progress of their children. The message should reinforce the need for consistent attendance and the procedures a parent/caregiver should follow if their child is absent. In the event any student has not reported at the start of the school year, the teacher should inquire about the student's failure to attend. Teachers should document all communications by entering support notes in Panorama, including if a student will not be returning to school.

Please note that students are expected to report within eight (8) days of the first day of school or after initial assignment. On the eighth (8th) day, the student will automatically become a DNR (Did Not Report) and be discharged from the school. Parents/caregivers should be made aware of this procedure when called if their children have not reported.

DNR PROCEDURE

For all students who do not report to school (DNR), the following procedures are in effect:

- i. A student will hold an NAS (Newly Assigned Student) code for a maximum of five (5) days after the first day of school or after initial assignment. On the sixth day, a student will automatically become a DNR (Did Not Report).
 - ii. A student will hold a DNR code for a maximum of three (3) days. At the end of the third day, a DNR student will automatically lose his/her seat at the assigned school. This will occur at the close of business on the eighth (8th) day of school.
 - iii. On the third day of DNR status (or on the eighth day since the first day of school or of initial assignment), a student's seat will be eliminated, allowing the Office of Welcome Services to assign another student to that seat.
 - iv. The student will still remain on the DNR list of the school. The school leader of the school still has the responsibility of investigating the situation and, if necessary, ultimately discharging the student to remove him/her from the DNR list. *The discharge cannot happen until an exit interview has occurred. For students with an IEP, the Special Education Department must also conduct an exit interview to inform the student and caregivers of their rights.*
- c. Student Success Teams ("SST") at all levels are hereby directed to monitor student attendance using the Panorama Student Success Platform and, in cases that so require, make referrals to the appropriate health or human/social service agencies. If outreach by the individual homeroom teacher is not successful in changing the attendance pattern of a student, the case should be referred to the SST.

One of the initial responsibilities of the SST shall be to address the issues of (1) DNR students, and (2) students who were chronically absent in the previous school year.

The status for each student who did not report (DNR) at the start of the school year must also be investigated and determined by the SST prior to discharging the student.

In addition to the SST, it is a best practice for schools to convene an attendance committee or attendance team, with a primary focus on attendance prevention and intervention strategies within the school, which works in conjunction with the SST. The SST and/or school attendance team should establish a three tiered attendance system with defined prevention and intervention practices that promote consistent attendance among all students. The [BPS Tiered Attendance System \(TAS\)](#) is available to all schools as a framework to help establish and improve their attendance practices across tiers.

- d. Students with patterns of chronic absenteeism should be referred to Supervisors of Attendance only after SST referral and all prevention/intervention steps have been tried and documented.

WITHDRAWING STUDENTS

Once the school year has begun, the withdrawal of students that are no longer enrolled at your school can be done at the school level, not by Central Office staff. It is essential that school staff verify where the student is enrolling prior to withdrawing a student. Please remember to keep documentation as to where the student is enrolling. Written or emailed documentation is preferred. If the family texts you, we suggest sending a screenshot to your email to make sure it is saved. Also, please make sure to use the appropriate discharge code when you withdraw the student from BPS. A copy of the discharge codes can be found [here](#).

GENERAL ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY PROCEDURES

1. **School leaders must designate a member of their staff who will have responsibility for coordinating and monitoring the school's attendance plan.** This person shall report directly to the building administrator concerning this effort. The plan should take a whole-school approach and fully engage the staff in implementing a tiered attendance system. School leaders should also ensure that staff are assigned to monitor attendance data and trends on an ongoing basis, which may require additional training from the Office of Instructional and Information Technology or Department of Opportunity Youth.
2. Each student is marked Absent in the Student Information System (SIS) on the first day of school and must be marked Present to begin official enrollment. Enter a P on the first day of attendance. Students who appear after the first day of school should be entered on the date of appearance with a P.
3. Official attendance will be taken and reported on the SIS system by teachers. An automated Connect-Ed attendance system call will be made by the Central Office to all students coded as Absent by 11:00 am every day.
4. Students who arrive after the beginning of the day are tardy. They must follow established tardy procedures in order to be considered present for the day.

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS TARDINESS AND ABSENTEEISM

In developing their Truancy Prevention Plan (TPP) schools should focus on a positive approach to attendance, using consistent prevention/intervention steps and implementing specific strategies to address tardiness and absenteeism. The district has developed a [Tiered Attendance System \(TAS\)](#) to support schools in ensuring the consistency and effectiveness of their attendance practices across the school, while the Panorama Student Success Platform provides a framework to track and monitor individual student attendance, interventions, and success planning. The following offers examples of **strategies to address tardiness and absenteeism:**

- Examples of tiered intervention and prevention programs
 - Tier 1: Reliable attendance reporting from every classroom; positive school climate initiatives such as maintaining positive relationships among school staff, students and families; consistent intervention and prevention activities with documentation in Panorama; School Attendance Committee; School Attendance Culture
 - Tier 2: Targeted attendance letters; attendance contracts; student/family conferences; attendance success plans; attendance coaching; mentorship programming
 - Tier 3: Intensive case management or mentorship; specialized programming; assigning staff to intentional student check-ins; connections with and/or referrals to specific support services or community resources
- Use of restorative justice practices
- Parent/caregiver and/or student-centered conferences
- Contracting with the student and/or parent/caregiver
- Learning Recovery/Attendance Buy-Back Time (for repeated tardiness or unexcused absences)
- **Note:** Schools are prohibited from excluding students from physical activity during the school day, such as recess or physical education, as a disciplinary consequence. However, a student may be prohibited from participating in athletics or extracurricular activities on a school day when an unexcused absence causes a student to miss more than 50% of the school day.

Suggested positive incentives for punctuality:

- Systematic, regular, and personal recognition of perfect attendance or of students who improve attendance
- Prizes for homerooms that improve their attendance or achieve perfect attendance as a group
- Prizes: T-shirts, movie passes
- Free prom tickets
- Field trips
- Awards or certificates
- Any other award that the School Site Council deems appropriate

Suggested other steps:

- Make MBTA schedules available at schools
- Post rules on tardiness and punctuality in visible locations
- Hold a conference with student and family for repeated tardiness
- Make phone calls to families of students who are tardy
- Work with SST and/or Attendance Team to investigate root causes for student tardiness
- Student Planning Centers

Please see the BPS Code of Conduct for additional guidance regarding suggested strategies.

NOTIFICATION TO PARENTS/CAREGIVERS WHEN STUDENTS ARE ABSENT

School leaders should inform all students and parents/caregivers by means of a written bulletin, or newsletter, or SchoolMessenger at the beginning of each school year of the Attendance Policy and the basic school attendance procedures adopted by the School Site Council. This information should be sent in the language of the home.

Parents/caregivers should be advised that a signed note of explanation shall be required each time a student is absent. The note should state the date(s) of absence, the reason, the parent/caregiver contact information and the parent/caregiver signature. The note should be sent in on the day the student returns to school. The note must be received within **seven** school days following the absence. A sample form letter for parents/caregivers can be found [here](#). Schools are expected to use Panorama to document and monitor attendance intervention activities, including documentation of each step described below.

1. FIRST ABSENCE

The building administrator is responsible for ensuring that school staff notify parents/caregivers by telephone of all student absences. This is best accomplished by the homeroom teacher. In these conversations, parents/caregivers should be reminded of (1) the need to submit a note of explanation to document the reason each time a student is absent, (2) the importance of consistent, on-time attendance for a student to be successful in school and (3) that unexcused absences could result in the student falling behind academically.

2. SECOND AND THIRD ABSENCE

Parents/caregivers must be notified in writing no later than the student's third absence (even if the absences were "excused") and on a regular basis thereafter. This notification should include the attendance requirement, the number of days missed compared to the number of school days in the marking period and the impact of continued absence on the student's success. **Note:** These absences do not need to be consecutive. This letter must be written in the language of the home. Linked [here](#) is a sample letter, which can be placed on the school's letterhead.

3. THIRD UNEXCUSED ABSENCE

After the third unexcused absence, the student must be referred to the SST by the homeroom teacher. The team will review the case and meet to develop recommendations to assist the student in improving attendance. The team may invite the parent/caregiver to the meeting and, at the secondary level, the student; however, if the parent/caregiver does not attend the meeting, an effort must be made by the school to contact and discuss the case with the parent/caregiver. It is recommended that the SST develop an attendance success plan in Panorama at this step.

4. FOURTH UNEXCUSED ABSENCE

At the fourth unexcused absence in any term, a meeting shall be convened by the school leader, to which the parent/caregiver shall be invited. If the school is unable to contact the parent/caregiver, a home visit should be conducted. The implications of student absence from school, as well as the current academic status of the student, will be discussed at this meeting. The success plan developed by the SST after the third unexcused absence should be reviewed.

5. FIFTH THROUGH SEVENTH UNEXCUSED ABSENCE

At the fifth unexcused absence, the student and the family should be referred to the Family Resource Center or assigned Supervisor of Attendance.

6. EIGHTH UNEXCUSED ABSENCE

After the eighth unexcused absence, for a student younger than 16 years of age, the school's

designated attendance representative shall coordinate with the assigned Supervisor of Attendance to determine if it is necessary and appropriate to file a truancy case with the Suffolk County Juvenile Court. Attachment #5 describes the necessary steps to recommend a case for court. In addition, the school should coordinate with the school social worker for additional support.

This [resource](#) condenses the process described above. It serves as a reference document for staff.

Absence, tardy and early dismissal notations must be recorded in the Aspen SIS daily as the official system of record. School-wide attendance monitoring using the Panorama Student Success Platform should be conducted by the school leader or his/her designee on a regular basis, but no less frequently than monthly.

EXCUSED ABSENCES

The student attendance record must be updated to reflect the excused absence. An excused absence is defined as an absence caused by sickness, injury, hospitalization, court appearances, religious holy days, or the death of an immediate family member.

The school may accept other reasons for an excused absence as agreed to by the School Site Council; however, if a note of explanation is not received, the absence shall be deemed "unexcused." It is important to remember, however, that all absences are included as it relates to chronic absenteeism, regardless of whether the absence is excused or unexcused. Prevention and intervention steps should be conducted by the school to minimize missed instructional time, regardless of whether absences are excused or unexcused. In addition, parents/caregivers should be informed of the definition of chronic absenteeism and the impact it has on student outcomes:

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year in any given period. All absences are included as it relates to chronic absenteeism, regardless of whether the absence is excused or unexcused. ***For a full school year, a student who misses 18 school days, or about two days per month, will be considered chronically absent. Students who do not show up to school regularly miss out on fundamental learning skills and the chance to build a habit of good attendance that will carry them into college, career and life.***

Chronic absenteeism significantly increases the likelihood that a student will fall off-track academically and struggle to keep pace with their peers. Chronic absenteeism in the early grades can influence whether a student reads proficiently by the end of the third grade, and by the sixth grade, it becomes a leading indicator of whether a student will drop out of high school.

Parents/caregivers should be informed, as part of the School-Based Rules, those reasons that are accepted as "excused" and those that are not acceptable to excuse an absence.

NOTIFICATION TO PARENTS/CAREGIVERS SHOULD A CHILD LEAVE SCHOOL

1. All students must be supervised by a responsible adult at all times during the school day.
2. Should a child be noted as missing, the school leader should be notified immediately.
3. After an initial search of the school and immediate neighborhood, the parent/caregiver should be notified by telephone as promptly as possible, and the appropriate departments should be notified. (See Superintendent's Circular SAF-9, Lost Children Procedures)

SAFETY CONCERNS RELATED TO ATTENDANCE

In order to maximize protection and safety of all students, schools should take the following measures:

1. Emphasize to the parent/caregiver 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 parent/caregiver that they should notify the school by telephone each day that their child will be absent due to illness, etc.
3. Inform parent/caregiver as soon as possible, including through the SchoolMessenger system, of their children's absence.
4. Ensure that the parent/caregiver supplies 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.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Schools may grant a leave of absence to students who request approval to participate in an alternative off-site educational program, the duration of which exceeds one week but is no longer than one academic year. Such leaves of absence should comply with the following guidelines:

1. The parent/caregiver, the student, and the school's representative must meet before the leave begins. All-school based guidelines that ensure program quality should be explained and agreed upon by the parent/caregiver and student.
2. The student shall be expected to meet the academic requirements set by the school or program attended during the leave of absence. The student must complete either an agreed-upon educational product or an examination upon return to school.
3. These guidelines must be explained to the parent/caregiver and student prior to the leave of absence.
4. The off-site school or program must document the attendance of the student and submit a report to the home school at the end of the leave period.
5. While the seat at the school should be held for students on an approved leave of absence and a notation should be made in the student's permanent record, students cannot be marked "constructively present" (CP) during a leave of absence per state guidelines.

It is suggested that a leave of absence contract outlining these guidelines and any other school-based requirements be developed and signed by all parties – the student, the parent/caregiver, and the school representative – before the leave. A copy of the contract should be given to the parent/caregiver and the student, and another copy should be kept on file as part of the student's record.

HOME & HOSPITAL TUTORING

When a physician determines that a student is physically unable to attend school for more than 14 consecutive days, or who can be anticipated to accumulate more than 14 absences in a school year, the student should be offered tutoring at home or in the hospital. The referral should be made to the Home & Hospital Instruction program when a Physician Statement is received by the school nurse. The attendance for students participating in the Home & Hospital Instruction Program should be marked "constructively present" (CP). The school must document in writing all offers of home tutoring and

acceptances or rejections by the parent or caregiver. If a parent/caregiver rejects home tutoring or other appropriate academic services for a child who will be absent for an extended period, a record of that rejection must be retained in the student's file and a 51A should be filed with the Department of Children and Families (DCF). When it is deemed by the student's attending physician or pediatrician that he or she will be confined to a home or hospital setting for more than 60 days, the student will then be evaluated by the Special Education Department under state regulation 603 CMR 28.04(4).

DISCHARGE – AGE-SPECIFIC PROCEDURES

STUDENTS 16 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER ON OCTOBER 1ST OF THE SCHOOL YEAR – Per MGL Ch. 76 Sec. 18.

- a. By the first week of October, the school leader shall receive a printout listing each student with the designation NAS or DNR.
- b. Within 5 days of the tenth consecutive absence, the school leader must contact in writing (in the primary language spoken in the home) the parent/caregiver of the student 16 years of age or older to inform him/her of the requirements of M.G.L. c.766, Section 207, and to request a meeting to discuss the educational implications for the student if he/she does not return to school, the benefits of earning a diploma, the student's reason(s) for wanting to leave school, and to consider alternative education or other placements. The notice shall offer at least two dates and times for an exit interview, that the parties will agree to a date, and that the meeting will take place within 10 days after the sending of the notice. The school leader must reproduce and use the sample form letter linked [here](#) and submit a copy to the Director of the BPS Re-Engagement Center within one week. For students who have an IEP, the Special Education Department must also conduct an exit interview to inform the student and caregivers of their rights.
- c. The school leader must conduct the meeting at the convenience of the parent/caregiver, but within 10 days of the sending of the notice. Upon parent/caregiver request, an extension not to exceed 14 days may be granted.
- d. If the student reports to school after the exit interview with the parent/caregiver, the school leader must ensure that the student is marked "P" on the attendance record.
- e. If the student does not or shall not return to school after the exit interview with the parent/caregiver, the school leader must request a statement of the parent/caregiver on the sample form letter linked [here](#). Submit a copy of this letter to the Director of Educational Options and Operational Leader, and discharge the student by means of Form 625, the form for a student whose assignment within the Boston Public Schools is to be terminated, i.e., the student going to private or public school outside the City of Boston, or the unknown student whose absences have been investigated thoroughly, or the student who has "dropped out" of school. Form 625 requires:
 1. retention of one copy at the school in which the form is initiated, (for the student who is "dropping out," retention of the white and yellow copies, also).
 2. issuance of one copy to the parent/caregiver of the student going to a private school or other public school system.
 3. issuance of one copy to the superintendent of the new school system. If the student has transferred to either a private school or to a charter school, this copy is sent to the principal of the new school.

- g. The school leader must discharge the student in this age group whose parent/caregiver refuses to meet with the school leader or whose whereabouts cannot be determined after every attempt has been made and documented to locate the student as set forth in M.G.L. C.766, Section 207. Only after a good faith effort to include the parent/caregiver can the exit interview with the student take place without the presence of the parent/caregiver.
- h. The school leader must maintain detailed and readily accessible records for each student justifying the activation of discharge, Form 615.

STUDENTS UNDER 6 YEARS OF AGE ON OCTOBER 1ST OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

- a. Within a week after the receipt of the NAS/DNR printout, the school leader must contact in writing the parent/caregiver of the student to inform him/her that a place for the student has been reserved in the educational program of the school; the parent/caregiver is encouraged to insure the student's attendance; AND the student must report within one week or the student shall be discharged. Please use the form letter attached [here](#).
- b. If the student does not report within one week, the school leader must discharge the student according to the procedures for Form 625 detailed above. No additional communication with the parent/caregiver is required.

SCHOOL LEADERS SHALL NOT DISCHARGE A STUDENT BETWEEN THE AGES OF SIX AND SIXTEEN YEARS UNTIL ALL OF THE PROCEDURES NOTED ABOVE ARE COMPLETED AND UNTIL WRITTEN NOTICE IS RECEIVED FROM THE SUPERVISORS OF ATTENDANCE.

DISCHARGE CODES

It is important to use the appropriate discharge code when withdrawing the student from BPS. **A copy of the discharge codes can be found [here](#).**

PROCEDURES FOR REFERRAL TO SUPERVISORS OF ATTENDANCE

This iteration of the attendance policy calls on schools to take ownership of attendance and supportive interventions and to use referrals to Supervisors of Attendance as only a measure of last resort. In that context, this Circular reflects the Boston Public Schools' procedures for referring students to the Supervisors of Attendance (SOA). Under M.G.L. c.119, Section 21, Section 39E, Section 39F, and Section 39G, Boston Juvenile Court may hear petitions to determine if a child is in need of services. **In Boston Public Schools, only the SOA may file a Child Requiring Assistance (CRA) petition on behalf of the district for attendance or behavior-related matters.**

It contains guidelines on:

- Procedures for referrals and Attendance Intervention Plan (AIP)
- Child Requiring Assistance (CRA) filings
- Adult Failure to Cause (ADF)

BACKGROUND

M.G.L. c. 119 Part 1 Title XII Chapter 69 Section 10 states that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education shall adopt regulations establishing a truancy prevention program certification process, consistent with the behavioral health and public schools framework developed pursuant to

section 19 of chapter 321 of the acts of 2008, and shall require that the truancy prevention program evaluate the level of out-of-school support for students and families and address conditions that make students more likely to become truant including, but not limited to, previously unidentified or inadequately addressed special needs, bullying and harassment. Any truancy prevention program established under this section by a school district shall meet the requirements for certification adopted by the department.

Supervisors of Attendance, working in collaboration with school staff and external agencies, may file a court referral based on investigative findings, prior attendance patterns, and present problematic attendance. **The filing of a CRA is the last resort if other interventions by school, external agencies, and/or attendance staff fail to bring about improvement.**

The SOA may file the following CRA petitions with the mandatory parent/caregiver date of birth:

Habitually Truant

Civil charge filed on students who miss school for 8 days in a quarter.

Student Who Repeatedly Fails to Obey Regulations of the School

Civil charge filed on students who repeatedly fail to obey the lawful and reasonable regulations of the student's school.

Adult Failure to Cause

Petition filed when a student's absence is beyond his/her control but due to a caretaker's action or inaction, e.g., child is too young to get to school on his/her own.

ATTENDANCE INTERVENTION PLAN (AIP)

While all attendance intervention activities should now be documented in the Panorama Student Success Platform, the Attendance Intervention Plan (AIP) is available for each student having four or more unexcused absences in the Aspen SIS. The AIP in Aspen SIS serves the following purposes:

- To identify students who are eligible for a court referral due to eight or more unexcused absences in a marking period.
- For school leaders to recommend a case to court as a last resort when all attendance prevention/intervention strategies have been exhausted.
- To document any compliance-related attendance intervention activities, particularly for cases that are recommended to court. Supervisors of Attendance (SOAs) will ensure that any compliance-related documentation from Panorama is also entered to Aspen (that is: if a case moves toward court, the SOA is responsible for copying the intervention plan from Panorama into Aspen).
- For a quality check, wherein school attendance staff can verify that all students who have an AIP generated in Aspen SIS (as a result of four or more unexcused absences in a marking period) also have an Attendance Success Plan created in Panorama. As a best practice, all chronically absent students should have an Attendance Success Plan in Panorama.

Once a student has eight unexcused absences in a marking period, the school leader may recommend the AIP for court in the SIS. Supervisors of Attendance (SOAs) will ensure that any compliance-related documentation are also entered into Aspen, including the attendance success plan, with attendance intervention steps that were conducted with the student, as documented using Panorama. **The parent/caregiver date of birth (DOB) is required in the judicial process.** The AIP will require the submission of the parent/caregiver date of birth and documentation of intervention steps as an Attendance Success Plan in Panorama. Without this information, the AIP cannot be recommended for

court. The SOA will investigate and report his/her recommendation in the SOA comment section. The comments can be viewed by the senders and the school leaders. **Instructions for processing of the AIP plan are outlined [here](#).**

SCHOOL STEPS IN THE CRA PROCESS

CRA: Truancy

1. Upon the 4th unexcused absence, the school leader or designated staff and homeroom teacher will receive an email notification from SIS informing them that an Attendance Intervention Plan (AIP) has been initiated during the term for a student.
2. Upon the 8th unexcused absence during the term, the school leader or designated staff or homeroom teacher can recommend that a student AIP be sent to court due to excessive absences and non-compliance with the student's Attendance Success Plan, as documented in Panorama. The AIP cannot be recommended for court if the student does not have an Attendance Success Plan documented in Panorama. At this time, the appropriate SOA will investigate the case, referring to the action already taken by the school to date and to the results that they have reported. The investigation may include phone calls, home/parent/caregiver work-site visits, school visits and telephone calls, letters to parents/caregivers where necessary and, in some cases, contact with and referral to involved agencies.
3. The SOA will report the results of the investigation to the school through the SIS system. **The supervisor will also ask that schools keep them informed of further attendance problems.**
3. **If attendance does not improve, schools must send additional AIP's to the Attendance Office only if the open CRA has been closed, alerting the SOA to follow up once more. Additional interventions should be documented in Panorama to update the SOA on the school's subsequent actions and results.**
4. Subsequent investigation and follow-up will occur through response in the SIS system, email, or attendance meeting.
5. Supervisors of Attendance, working with school staff, make decisions on future action based on investigative findings, prior attendance patterns, and correspondence with parents/caregivers and the school. **One option is court referral. The decision to file a CRA is made by the SOA based on the finding and results of Steps 1-4 and only after exhausting all other possible courses of action. The CRA will only be filed if the student has accumulated 8 or more unexcused absences in a single quarter and the school has documented intervention steps using the Attendance Success Plan feature in Panorama.**
6. When the AIP is recommended for court, the SOA will notify the school of this action using the Attendance Supervisor's Information Form or will make personal or telephone contact. A Probation Officer will be assigned to the child by the court if a CRA is filed.
7. **If attendance does not improve following a CRA filing, communication with the assigned Probation Officer and/or the SOA is required.**

CRA for Student Who Repeatedly Fails to Obey Regulations of the School

Decisions to file a Child Requiring Assistance (CRA) for a student who repeatedly fails to obey regulations of the school with the Suffolk County Juvenile Court should follow the prevention/intervention steps and best practices of the BPS Code of Conduct, including the Philosophy and Guiding Principles. **Note:** A CRA for a student who repeatedly fails to obey the regulations of the school can only be filed for students in sixth grade and above.

1. After the **third serious violation** of school rules, the school will request a CRA (repeatedly fails to obey school regulations) in the SIS system to the Attendance Office for follow-up and investigation. After filling out the request, the following documents should be accompanied via fax: copies of a letter signed by a school official on letterhead with the prevention/intervention steps taken to improve the student's behavior. The school should also provide documentation of the three serious violations.
2. The SOA will investigate the case and **determine whether a filing is warranted**. He/she will report the decision to the school.
3. When the **CRA** petition is filed, the SOA will notify the school of this action using the Attendance Supervisor's SIS card or will make personal or telephone contact. A Probation Officer will be assigned to the child by the court.
4. **If the student's behavior does not improve following a CRA filing, communication with the assigned Probation Officer and/or the SOA is required, and the school should continue to proceed with appropriate action under the Code of Conduct.**

CRA: ADULT-FAILURE-TO-CAUSE PROCESS (ADF)

These cases are criminal complaints filed against parents/caregivers who willfully prevent their children from attending school. This is a serious charge, requiring the sworn testimony of the SOA on the school's behalf. Courts can fine parents/caregivers and, in extreme cases, further consequences can result for non-compliance.

The steps are the same as described for CRA cases, except that it is filed against the parent/caregiver if the investigation conducted by the SOA finds evidence to justify the filing, and information about the parent/caregiver is required which, in some cases, can only be obtained by school staff. For example, **the complaint cannot be filed without the parent/caregiver's date of birth and physical description, as well as documented evidence of attendance interventions using the Attendance Success Plan feature in Panorama.** Therefore, it is important that school staff capture this information in advance of recommending a case for court.

For more information about this circular, contact:

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