Policy JBA: Compulsory School Attendance/School Age

Status: ADOPTED

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COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

The term "minor" when used in any statute, shall include any person, male or female, under twenty-one years of age. Ms Code 1-3-27

DeSoto County School District shall comply with the requirements of the "Mississippi Compulsory School Attendance Law" (Ms Code 37-13-91). Appropriate reports as required by law shall be provided to the Mississippi Department of Education's Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement.

COMPULSORY- SCHOOL-AGE CHILD

"Compulsory-school-age child" means a child who has attained or will attain the age of six (6) years on or before September 1 of the calendar year and who has not attained the age of seventeen (17) years on or before September 1 of the calendar year; and shall include any child who has attained or will attain the age of five (5) years on or before September 1 and has enrolled in a full-day public school kindergarten program. A child, five (5) years of age, who enrolls in public kindergarten, will have to abide by the same guidelines as outlined in Ms Code 37-13-91.

Compulsory-school-age children must be enrolled in school unless the child is:

1. Physically, mentally or emotionally incapable of attending school as determined by the appropriate school official based upon sufficient medical documentation;
2. Enrolled in and pursuing a course of special education, remedial education or education for handicapped or physically or mentally disadvantaged children; or
3. Being educated in a legitimate home instruction program. Ms Code 37-13-91 (3)

REPORTS

If a compulsory-school-age child has not been enrolled in school within fifteen (15) calendar days after the first day of the school year or if a child has accumulated five (5) unlawful absences during the school year, the superintendent or his/her designee, shall report, on the form provided by the State Department of Education, by the close of business the next business day, the absences to the school attendance officer. The superintendent, or his/her designee, shall report any student suspensions or student expulsions to the school attendance officer when they occur. Ms Code 37-13-91 (6)

School districts shall maintain accurate records documenting enrollment and attendance in a manner that allows the State Department of Education to make an assessment of changes in enrollment and attendance, including dropout rates.

The State Department of Education shall compile annually a statewide report on school district effectiveness in reducing absentee problems, dropout rates, and other attendance-related problems during the previous school year, incorporate the information into the annual Mississippi Report Card required by Section 37-3-53, Mississippi Code of 1972, on school district performance and offer technical assistance and coordination services to assist districts in improving performance.

UNLAWFUL ABSENCES / VALID EXCUSES

An "unlawful absence" is an absence during a school day by a compulsory-school-age child, which absence is not due to a valid excuse for temporary nonattendance. Days missed from school due to disciplinary suspension shall not be

considered an "excused" absence under this section. Each of the following shall constitute a valid excuse for temporary nonattendance, provided satisfactory evidence of the excuse is provided to the principal or his/her designee:

a. Attendance at an authorized school activity with the prior approval of the principal of the school district or his/her designee. These activities may include field trips, athletic contests, student conventions, musical festivals, and any similar activity. A student's participation in an authorized school activity must be verified by either the student's schedule, class roster, or activity roster per the Mississippi Department of Education's Rule 30.2.

b. Illness or injury which prevents the student from being physically able to attend school, and any absence after the third, must be documented by a written excuse by a medical provider per semester.

c. When isolation is ordered by the county health officer, by the State Board of Health or appropriate school official.

d. Death or serious illness of a member of the immediate family, which includes children, spouse, grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters, stepbrothers and stepsisters.

e. A medical or dental appointment with a documented excuse from the medical provider.

f. Attendance at the proceedings of a court or an administrative tribunal if the student is a party to the action or under subpoena as a witness.

g. Observance of a religious event, with the prior approval of the principal or his/her designee. (Approval should not be withheld unless, in the professional judgment of the principal or his/her designee, the extent of the absence would adversely affect the student's education.)

h. Participation in a valid educational opportunity, such as travel including vacations or other family travel, with the prior approval of the principal or his/her designee. (Approval shall be based on the professional judgment of the principal or his/her designee.)

i. Other conditions sufficient to warrant nonattendance. However, no absences shall be excused when any student suspensions or expulsions circumvent the intent and spirit of the compulsory attendance law. Ms Code 37-13-91 (4)

j. An absence is excused when it results from the attendance of a compulsory-school-age child participating in official organized events sponsored by the 4-H or Future Farmers of America (FFA). The excuse for the 4-H or FFA event must be provided in writing to the appropriate school superintendent by the Extension Agent or High School Agricultural Instructor/FFA Advisor.

k. An absence is excused when it results from the compulsory-school-age child officially being employed to serve as a page at the State Capitol for the Mississippi House of Representatives or Senate.

For any absences that occur under letters b through e above, the following documentation standards will be used: Acceptable verification and parent/guardian note limit (before third-party documentation is required): Senate Bill 2103 requires looking at all the reasons in totality that are based on each individual student as they are combined regarding the limit of five (5) per semester. Therefore, a broad but at times tiered strategy must be used while following the law based on the exact individual situation, number of previously excused days and for which reason, which reason is being requested now and what the documentation shows. Senate Bill 2103 only allows three (3) parent notes for reason b above. Absences four (4) and five (5) require outside medical documentation to be excused if the limit of five (5) has not been reached for other reasons allowed in the law. Any of the five (5) allowed excused days that are for letter e above require medical provider documentation. Once the limit of five (5) has been reached due to any combination of the above reasons, the “limitation on excused absences” section applies.

Submission timelines: Any documentation being given for excuse of absence(s) must be submitted to the principal or his/her designee within two (2) school days of returning to school, unless granted an exception by the principal for extenuating circumstances. (Note must include student's legal name, date(s) of absence, amount of minutes (if applicable), reason for absence, parent/guardian/professional signature, and date note was written.)

Student privacy protections: Refer to school district policies JR and JRA for student privacy guidelines.

LIMITATION ON EXCUSED ABSENCES

Unless an exception applies, no student shall be granted more than five (5) excused absences per semester. Any additional excused absences beyond this limit must be specifically approved by the superintendent, or his or her designee, upon a showing of extenuating circumstances. Extenuating circumstances may include, but are not limited to:

1. Prolonged illness or injury supported by medical documentation,

2. Extended religious observance,

3. Participation in education opportunities of substantial merit, including out-of-state educational travel.

Any absence in excess of this limit, and not approved by the superintendent, shall be considered unexcused.

School-sanctioned events, such as athletics, band, choir, or other events sponsored by the Mississippi High School Activities Association, shall not be counted as absences. School-sanctioned academic or club events shall not be counted as absences.

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

A compulsory-school-age child shall be considered chronically absent if the child is absent from school for ten percent (10%) or more of the student's school days in a school year, regardless of whether such absences are excused or unexcused.

This school district will actively monitor chronic absenteeism rates by school, grade level, and subgroup of students. The district will include chronic absenteeism data in their annual accountability reporting and in their district and school level improvement plans.

The district has developed and will implement tiered intervention strategies for students identified as being at risk of chronic absenteeism. These strategies include:

- Timely parent or guardian notification when a student has accumulated three (3) or more absences that place the student at risk of chronic absenteeism.
- Opportunities for parent or guardian conferences to identify barriers to regular attendance.
- Referral to school or community-based support services as appropriate, including health, counseling, and transportation resources.
- Assignment of an individual attendance success plan, which may include mentoring, case management by a school attendance officer, or other evidence-based supports.

This school district has adopted strategies for proactive family engagement to prevent and reduce chronic absenteeism, including but not limited to:

- Regular communication with families in a language and manner understandable to them about the importance of daily attendance and the consequences of absenteeism.
- Partnering with community organizations, faith-based institutions, or local businesses to support families in overcoming barriers to school attendance.
- Providing training for school staff on culturally responsive family engagement practices related to attendance.

When a school's chronic absenteeism rate exceeds ten percent (10%) for any subgroup or grade level, the district shall

be required to adopt a written chronic absenteeism reduction plan, which will be submitted to the school board and made publicly available on the district website. The plan will describe:

- Specific evidence-based practices the district will employ to reduce chronic absenteeism.
- The timeline for implementation.
- Family and community engagement strategies.
- Metrics for measuring progress

Locally tailored attendance policies will be posted on the district website, reviewed at least every three (3) years, and reported annually to the school board using disaggregated attendance data.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PROTOCOLS

The district has established family engagement protocols aligned with state law, including:
Timely notice when a student is at risk of chronic absenteeism: Parents/guardians are notified of every absence in DeSoto County on the day of the absence. Parent/guardians are notified with specific correspondence beginning at three (3) absences (excused and/or unexcused) and any absence thereafter.

A parent/guardian conference, referral to available local supports, and attendance success plan: Parents/guardians are offered a conference beginning at three (3) absences (excused and/or unexcused) in most cases and any absence thereafter. Schools investigate each student by absence five (5) (excused and/or unexcused) to see whether third-party resources might be needed. These resources are offered if the school determines they may be needed. Schools investigate each student by absence eight (8) (excused and/or unexcused) to see whether an individual attendance success plan might be needed. The plan is initiated if the school determines the plan is needed. The plan is evaluated and/or adjusted with any added absence(s) throughout the year.

Multichannel/translated communications: Parents/guardians were notified of how to select their preferred language in our messaging system before initial proactive communication was sent. After this, information was sent to all parents/guardians with details regarding Senate Bill 2103 so they could receive it in their preferred language. We also sent out the English and Spanish versions of this correspondence. We have created versions in many different languages. Each school has access and/or an interpreter as needed for all communications. Schools are also using open house, parent nights, etc. to explain Senate Bill 2103 to parents/guardians as proactive communication.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE OFFICER

The superintendent and principals shall cooperate with the school attendance officer employed by the State Department of Education, pursuant to Ms Code 37-13-85.

The Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards for this policy are standards 10 and 11.