

Students: K-12 Student Attendance

Attendance, Excused Absences, and Truancy

I. General Statement

The Stafford Board of Education recognizes that student attendance is a vital part of the educational process. Regular attendance is essential for an effective school experience. Time lost from class is irretrievable in terms of opportunity for student learning. Therefore, it is the policy of the Stafford Board of Education to monitor school attendance so as to identify students who are truant and to enlist the cooperation of parents/guardians and, when necessary, the juvenile justice system in order to address the problem when it arises.

Connecticut State Statute, Section 10-184 requires parents/guardians to have their children attend school regularly during the hours and terms that the Stafford schools are in session. A student should not be absent without the parents'/guardians' knowledge and appropriate written documentation. It is expected that students will attend school unless circumstances arise that will result in an excused absence as set forth in the corresponding regulations to this policy.

The parents/guardians of each child enrolled in the school district will be notified in writing annually at the beginning of the school year of their statutory obligation to insure that their child attends school. Parents/guardians of children enrolling during the school year will be similarly notified.

When parents/guardians are notified in accordance with the preceding paragraph, they will be asked to provide the Principal, or designee, of the school in which their child is enrolled with a telephone number or some other means of contacting them during the school day.

In addition, the Board of Education takes seriously the issue of chronic absenteeism. To assist parents and other persons in meeting student attendance responsibilities, and to address the issue of chronic absenteeism, the Board of Education, through its Superintendent, will adopt and maintain procedures to implement this policy.

Legal References:

Connecticut General Statutes §10-220

Connecticut General Statutes §10-184

Connecticut General Statutes §10-186

Connecticut General Statutes §10-198a

Connecticut General Statutes § 10-198b

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Legal References (Continued):

Connecticut General Statutes § 10-198c

Connecticut General Statutes § 10-198d

Public Act 16-147, “An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee”

Guidelines for Reporting Student Attendance in the Public School Information System (Connecticut State Department of Education, January 2008)

Connecticut State Department of Education Circular Letter C-2, *Utilizing Local Support Resources Prior to Referral of Students for Family with Service Needs* (August 4, 2009)

Connecticut State Board of Education Memorandum, *Definitions of Excused and Unexcused Absences* (June 27, 2012)

Connecticut State Department of Education, *Guidelines for Implementation of the Definitions of Excused and Unexcused Absences and Best Practices for Absence Prevention and Intervention* (April 2013)

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STAFFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Stafford Springs, Connecticut

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Attendance, Excused Absences, and Truancy

A. Definitions for Section II

1. “Absence” - any day during which a student is not considered “in attendance” at his/her assigned school, or on a school sponsored activity (e.g. field trip), for at least one half of the school day.
2. “Disciplinary absence” - Any absence as a result of school or district disciplinary action. Any student serving an out-of-school suspension or expulsion should be considered absent. Such absence is not considered excused or unexcused for attendance and truancy purposes.
3. “Educational evaluation” - for purposes of this policy, an educational evaluation is an assessment of a student’s educational development, which, based upon the student’s presenting characteristics, would assess (as appropriate) the following areas: health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status and motor abilities.
4. “Excused absence” - a student is considered excused from school if the school has received written documentation describing the reason for the absence within ten (10) school days of the student’s return to school, or if the child has been excluded from school in accordance with section 10-210 of the Connecticut General Statutes (regarding communicable diseases), and the following criteria are met:
 - a. Any absence before the student’s tenth (10th) absence is considered excused when the student’s parent/guardian approves such absence and submits appropriate written documentation in accordance with this regulation.
 - b. For the student’s tenth (10th) absence and all absences thereafter, a student’s absences from school are, with appropriate documentation in accordance with this regulation, considered excused only for the following reasons:

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- i. student illness (verified by an appropriately licensed medical professional);
 - ii. religious holidays;
 - iii. mandated court appearances (documentation required);
 - iv. funeral or death in the family, or other emergency beyond the control of the student's family;
 - v. extraordinary educational opportunities pre-approved by the district administrators and in accordance with Connecticut State Department of Education guidance and this regulation;
 - vi. lack of transportation that is normally provided by a district other than the one the student attends.
- c. A student, age five (5) to eighteen (18), whose parent or legal guardian is an active duty member of the armed forces who has been called for duty, is on leave from or has immediately returned from deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting, shall be granted ten (10) days of excused absences in any school year, and, in the discretion of the administration, additional excused absences to visit such student's parent or legal guardian with respect to the parent's leave or deployment. In the case of such excused absences, the student and parent or legal guardian are responsible for obtaining assignments from the student's teacher prior to any period of excused absence, and for ensuring that such assignments are completed by the student prior to his or her return to school.
5. "In Attendance" - Any day during which a student is present at the student's assigned school, or an activity sponsored by the school for at least half of the regular school day.
6. "Student" - a student enrolled in the Stafford Public Schools.

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Definitions (Continued):

7. "Truant" - any student **five (5) to eighteen (18)** years of age, inclusive, who has **four (4)** unexcused absences from school in any one month or **ten (10)** unexcused absences from school in any school year.
8. "Unexcused absence" - any absence from a regularly scheduled school day for at least one half of the school day, which is not excused or considered a disciplinary absence.

The determination of whether an absence is excused will be made by the building principal or his/her designee. Parents or other persons having control of the child may appeal that decision to the Superintendent or his/her designee, whose decision shall be final.

B. Written Documentation Requirements for Absences

1. Written documentation must be submitted for each incidence of absence within ten (10) school days of the student's return to school. Consecutive days of absence are considered one incidence of absence.
2. The first nine (9) days of absence will be excused upon receipt of a signed note from the student's parent/guardian, a signed note from a school official that spoke in person with the parent/guardian regarding the absence, or a note confirming the absence by the school nurse or by a licensed medical professional, as appropriate.
3. For the tenth (10th) absence, and all absences thereafter, documentation of the absence must be submitted in accordance with paragraphs 1 and 2 above, and must also include the reason for the absence and the following additional information:
 - a. student illness:
 - (1) a signed note from a medical professional, who may be the school nurse, who has evaluated the student confirming the absence and giving an expected return date; or
 - (2) a signed note from school nurse who has spoken with the student's medical professional and

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- confirmed the absence, including the date and location of the consultation.
- b. religious holidays: none.
 - c. mandated court appearances:
 - (1) a police summons;
 - (2) a subpoena;
 - (3) a notice to appear;
 - (4) a signed note from a court official; or
 - (5) any other official, written documentation of the legal requirement to appear in court.
 - d. funeral or death in the family, or other emergency beyond the control of the student's family: a written document explaining the nature of the emergency.
 - e. extraordinary educational opportunity pre-approved by the district administrators and in accordance with Connecticut State Department of Education guidance and this policy: written pre-approval from the administration, in accordance with this regulation.
 - f. lack of transportation that is normally provided by a district other than the one the student attends: none.
4. Neither e-mail nor text message shall serve to satisfy the requirement of written documentation. In rare and extraordinary circumstances, a building administrator may, in his/her own discretion, accept the delivery of written documentation through a scanned copy sent by e-mail.
5. The Stafford Public Schools reserves the right to randomly audit written documentation received, through telephone and other methods of communication, to determine its authenticity.

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6. Any absence that is not documented in accordance with this regulation within ten (10) school days after the incidence of absence will be recorded as unexcused. If documentation is provided within ten (10) school days, but is incomplete, the building principal may, at his/her own discretion, grant up to a five (5) school day extension for provision of the completed documentation.

C. Extraordinary Educational Opportunities

1. To qualify as an extraordinary educational opportunity, the opportunity must:
 - a. be educational in nature and must have a learning objective related to the student's course work or plan of study;
 - b. be an opportunity not ordinarily available to the student;
 - c. be grade and developmentally appropriate; and
 - d. include content that is highly relevant to the student; while some opportunities will be relevant to all students, others will contain very specific content that would limit their relevance to a smaller group of students.
2. Family vacations do not qualify as extraordinary educational opportunities.
3. All requests for approval of extraordinary educational opportunities must:
 - a. be submitted to the building principal in writing prior to the opportunity, but no later than ten (10) school days prior to the opportunity except in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the building administrator;
 - b. contain the signatures of both the parent/guardian and the student;
 - c. include an outline of the learning objective of the opportunity and include detail as to how the objective is linked to the student's coursework or plan of study; and

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Extraordinary Educational Opportunities (Continued):

- d. include additional documentation, where available, about the opportunity.
4. The building principal shall provide a response in writing and include the following:
 - a. either approval or denial of the request;
 - b. brief reason for any denial;
 - c. any requirements placed upon the student as a condition of approval;
 - d. the specific days approved as excused absences for the opportunity;
 - e. the understanding that the building administrator may withdraw its approval if the opportunity is canceled or the student fails to meet the agreed-upon requirements of the approval.
5. All decisions of the building principal relating to extraordinary educational opportunities shall be final.
6. Students who are granted excusal from school to participate in extraordinary educational opportunities are expected to share their experiences with other students and/or school staff when they return.
7. Approval for an extraordinary educational opportunity is determined on a case-by-case basis and the analysis of individualized factors. An opportunity approved for one student may not be approved for another.

D. Truancy Exceptions:

1. A student **five (5) or six (6) years of age** shall not be considered truant if the parent or person having control over such student has appeared personally at the school district office and exercised the option of not sending the child to school at five (5) or six (6) years of age.
2. A student **seventeen (17) years of age** shall not be considered truant if the parent or person having control over such student consents to such

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student's withdrawal from school. Such parent or person shall personally appear at the school district office and sign a withdrawal form indicating such consent. Such withdrawal form must include an attestation from a guidance counselor or school administrator from the school that the district provided the parent (or person having control of the child) with information on the educational options available in the school system and community.

3. If a parent or guardian of an expelled student chooses not to enroll the student in an alternative program, the student shall not be considered to be "truant."

E. Readmission to School Following Voluntary Withdrawal

1. Except as noted in paragraph 2 below, if a student voluntarily withdraws from school (in accordance with Section D.2, above) and subsequently seeks readmission, the Board may deny school accommodations to the student for up to ninety (90) school days from the date of the student's withdrawal from school.
2. If a student who has voluntarily withdrawn from school (in accordance with Section D.2, above) seeks readmission within ten (10) school days of his/her withdrawal, the Board shall provide school accommodations to the student not later than three (3) school days after the student requests readmission.

F. Determinations of Whether a Student is "In Attendance":

1. A student serving an out of school suspension or expulsion shall be reported as absent unless he or she receives an alternative educational program for at least one half of the regular school day. In any event, the absence is considered a disciplinary absence, and will not be designated as excused or unexcused.
2. On early dismissal days and days shortened due to inclement weather, the regular school day for attendance purposes is considered to be the amount of instructional time offered to students on that day. For example, if school is open for four hours on a shortened day scheduled, a student must be present for a minimum of two hours in order to be considered "in attendance."

Students: K-12 Student Attendance**Attendance, Excused Absences, and Truancy****Determinations of Whether a Student is “In Attendance” (Continued):**

3. Students placed on homebound instruction due to illness or injury in accordance with applicable regulations and requirements are counted as being “in attendance” for every day that they receive instruction from an appropriately certified teacher for an amount of time deemed adequate in accordance with applicable law.

G. Procedures for Students in Grades K-12

1. Notification

- a. Annually at the beginning of the school year and upon the enrollment of any child during the school year, the administration shall notify the parent or other person having control of the student enrolled in grades K - 12 in writing of the obligations pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-184 to ensure that such a student attends school regularly or to show that the child is elsewhere receiving equivalent instruction in the studies taught in the Stafford Public Schools.
- b. Annually at the beginning of the school year and upon the enrollment of any child during the school year, the administration shall obtain from the parent or other person having control of the student in grades K - 12 a telephone number or other means of contacting such parent or other person during the school day.

2. Monitoring

Each school shall implement a system of monitoring individual unexcused absences of students in grades K - 12. Whenever such a student fails to report to school on a regularly scheduled school day, school personnel under the direction of the building principal or his/her designee shall make a reasonable effort to notify the parent or other person having control of such student by telephone and by mail of the student's absence, unless school personnel have received an indication that the parent or other person is aware of the student's absence. Reasonable efforts shall include two (2) attempts to reach the parent or other person at the telephone number provided by the parent or other person. Such attempts shall be recorded on a form provided by the Superintendent. Mailed notice of the student's absence shall include a warning that two unexcused absences from school in a month or five unexcused absences in a school year may result in a complaint filed with the Superior Court pursuant to section 46b-

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149 of the Connecticut General Statutes alleging the belief that the acts or omissions of the child are such that the child's family is a family with service needs. Any person who, in good faith, gives or fails to give such notice shall be immune from liability, civil or criminal, which might otherwise be incurred or imposed and shall have the same immunity with respect to any judicial proceeding which results from such notice or failure to give notice.

H. Procedures Applicable to Students Ages Five (5) to Eighteen (18)

1. Intervention

- a. When a student is truant, the building principal or his/her designee shall schedule a meeting with the parent (or other person having control of such student) and appropriate school personnel to review and evaluate the reasons for the student's truancy. This meeting shall be held no later than **ten (10) days** after the student becomes truant. The district shall document the meeting, and if parent or other person declines to attend the meeting, or is otherwise is non responsive, that fact shall also be documented and the meeting shall proceed with school personnel in attendance.
- b. When a student is truant, the Superintendent or his/her designee shall coordinate services with and referrals of students to community agencies providing child and family services, as appropriate. The district shall document efforts to contact and include families and to provide early intervention in truancy matters.
- c. If the parent or other person having control of a student who is truant fails to attend the meeting held pursuant to subsection H.1.a., above, or otherwise fails to cooperate with the school in attempting to solve the truancy problem, the Superintendent shall file, within fifteen (15) calendar days of such failure to attend the meeting or other failure to cooperate with the school in attempting to solve the truancy problem, for such truant a written complaint with the Superior Court pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. § 46b-149 alleging the belief that the acts or omissions of the truant are such that his/her family is a family with service needs.

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Procedures Applicable to Students Ages Five (5) to Eighteen (18) (Continued):

- d. In addition to the procedures specified in subsections (a) through (c) above, a regular education student who is experiencing attendance problems should be referred to the building Student Assistance Team to consider the need for additional interventions and/or assistance. The Team will also consider whether the student should be referred to a planning and placement team (“PPT”) meeting to review the student's need and eligibility for special education. A special education student who is experiencing attendance problems should be referred to a PPT meeting for program review.
- e. If a family with service needs petition is filed and the court orders an educational evaluation of the student, the district shall conduct an appropriate educational evaluation if no such evaluation has been performed within the preceding year.
 - i. For a regular education student, the educational evaluation will be conducted or arranged for by appropriate school personnel and coordinated through the Student Assistance Team. Upon completion of the evaluation of a regular education student, the Student Assistance Team shall review the evaluations and make appropriate recommendations for alternative procedures, programs or interventions. Such recommendations may include a referral of the student for further evaluation and/or consideration for special education eligibility.
 - ii. In the case of a student who requires or may require special education and related services, the district shall convene a PPT to determine what evaluations may be appropriate to assess any specific areas of concern. The PPT shall reconvene to review the evaluations and make appropriate recommendations regarding the student’s need for special education services and the need, if any, to write and/or revise the student’s individualized education program (“IEP”).

I. Attendance Records

All attendance records developed by the Board shall include the individual student’s state-assigned student identifier (SASID).

Students: K-12 Student Attendance**Attendance, Excused Absences, and Truancy****Academic and Curricular Implications from Absences and Tardiness****II. Academic and Curricular Implications from Absences and Tardiness****A. Attendance at School/Class**

Students generally will be responsible for all work missed while absent from class. Exceptions may be made for extenuating circumstances with approval of the principal or his/her designee. Students will be allowed a reasonable amount of time to make up work missed while absent.

1. Absences may be excused for certain reasons as set forth above. Excused absences, however, **WILL COUNT towards the total number of absences when determining course credit, in grades 9 through 12 and possible retention in grades 6 through 8.**
3. Students who deliberately cut school or class may be subjected to office detentions and possible suspension from school.
4. Students who are participating in school sponsored activities will be considered present for attendance purposes.
5. Family vacations are discouraged during the school year. Provisions for extraordinary educational opportunities are set forth above. Parents/guardians and students should be aware that any absence incurred as a result of vacations **WILL BE COUNTED** in the total number of absences when determining course credit in grades 9-12 and possible retention in grades 6-8.
6. In grades 9-12, a warning letter will be mailed home on the seventh (7) absence in a semester course, and on the twelfth (12) and eighteenth (18) absence for a full year course regarding the possibility of loss of credit due to absences. In grades 6-8, a warning letter will be mailed home on the twelfth (12) and eighteenth (18) absence from school in one school year regarding the possibility of the student's consideration for retention.
7. In grades 9-12, students who exceed eleven (11) absences in a semester course, or twenty-three (23) absences in a full year course may **LOSE FULL COURSE CREDIT for that course.** In grades 6-8 students who exceed twenty-three (23) absences in one school year **WILL BE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED FOR RETENTION.** All retention decisions will be made in accordance with Policy 5123.

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8. Decisions regarding the loss of credit will be made by an appeals committee, which is detailed in Section E below. The warning letters referenced above will inform parents or students that they may submit information about extenuating circumstances they wish the appeals committee to consider before it makes its ultimate decision about loss of credit. The appeals committee may consider extenuating circumstances in arriving at its decision regarding the loss of credit. This policy shall not be construed to limit the decisions of planning and placement teams and Section 504 teams to make educational decisions in accordance with applicable laws.
9. In-School or Out of School suspensions will **NOT BE COUNTED** in the total number of absences when determining course credit in grades 9-12 or retention in grades 6-8.

REMINDER - Students who are absent from school will not be allowed to participate in any after school activities on the day of the absence. (Students who are absent on Friday will not participate in weekend events.) In extenuating circumstances the Principal may override this provision.

B. Tardiness to Class/School

1. Students who arrive late to class in grades 9-12 or school in grades 6-8 are expected to obtain a pass from another teacher or the office.
2. In grades 9-12 students who arrive to class without a pass after the midpoint of the period will be marked absent from that class.
3. In grades 6-8, tardiness records may be considered in retention determination.
4. In the event that students in grades K-5 are habitually tardy, the Principal/designee will make every effort to meet with parents/guardians in order to assist the family with ensuring the child's timely arrival to school. If after a meeting, a student continues to be habitually tardy, a follow up letter will be sent home, a copy of which will be placed in the student's file. If the habitual tardiness continues after these attempts, a second letter will be sent home, notifying parents/guardians that the school may file a report with a State agency (e.g., Family With Service Needs, for students under the age of 16; Youth In Crisis for students 16 and older, or the Department of Children and Families, as appropriate).

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1. The only acceptable reasons for leaving school early are those stated in the section dealing with excused absences. Classes that are missed as a result of early dismissals **WILL COUNT** towards the total number of course absences.
2. Dismissals from class due to such activities as field trips, band, sports, and other school sponsored activities **WILL NOT COUNT** towards the total number of course absences.
3. In grades 6-8, dismissal records may be considered in retention determination.

D. Credit Loss/Restoration in Grades 9-12

1. Students who lose credit due to attendance will remain in the course. Eligibility for summer school will be contingent on completion of the course and earning a minimum grade of 50 for the course or the final exam.
2. Credit loss may be restored by:
 - a. repeating the course during the school year
 - b. attending Summer School (provided requirements are satisfied)

Should a senior fail to meet graduation requirements due to the SHS attendance policy, he/she will, with administrative approval, be allowed to attend a certified high school summer program, or a summer or fall semester college level program, and transfer back to the high school such credits as are necessary. Intentions to do this must be submitted to the Principal prior to enrollment.

E. Appeal Procedure

1. With the exception of students with disabilities for which the PPT or Section 504 Team will convene, as appropriate, any student in grades 9-12, who has lost course credit as a result of the attendance policy may request in writing from his or her guidance counselor a hearing for the purpose of restoring credit. This written request must be made within five school days from the notification from the school. In grades 6-8, any student under consideration for retention as a result of this attendance policy may request in writing from the guidance counselor a hearing for the purpose of appeal. These written requests must be made within 5 days of notification from the school.

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Appeal Procedure (Continued):

2. An appeals committee will be convened consisting of certified staff and an administrator.
 3. The students and parents/guardians will have the opportunity to present information in support of the appeal. A designated staff member will be available to advise the student's parents/guardians regarding the appeal process.
 4. An appeals committee will render a decision within two (2) school days after the conclusion of the hearing and so notify the parents/guardians of the decision in writing.
 5. If the students' parents/guardians don't agree with the finding of the appeals committee, they must submit a written request for a hearing with the Principal within one calendar week after having received the committee's decision. The Principal must conduct a hearing and render a written decision within one calendar week of his/her receipt of the student's parents/guardians written request.
 6. If the students/parents/guardians do not agree with the Principal's review, they must submit the request for a hearing with the Superintendent within two calendar weeks after having received the Principal's decision. The Superintendent must conduct a hearing and render a written decision within two calendar weeks of his/her receipt of the student's/parent's/guardian's written request. The Superintendent's decision will be final.
- F. Nothing in Section III of these regulations shall be construed to limit the decisions of planning and placement teams and Section 504 teams to make educational decisions in accordance with applicable laws.

IV. Chronic Absenteeism

A. Definitions for Section IV

1. "Chronically absent child" - a child who is enrolled in a school under the jurisdiction of the Stafford Board of Education and whose total number of absences at any time during a school year is equal to or greater than ten percent (10%) of the total number of days that such student has been enrolled at such school during such school year;
2. "Absence" - (a) an excused absence, unexcused absence or disciplinary absence, as those terms are defined by the State Board of Education pursuant to section 10-198b of the general statutes and these administrative regulations, or (b) an in-school suspension, as defined in

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section 10-233a of the general statutes, that is greater than or equal to one-half of a school day;

3. "District chronic absenteeism rate" - the total number of chronically absent children under the jurisdiction of the Stafford Board of Education in the previous school year divided by the total number of children under the jurisdiction of the Board of Education for such school year; and
4. "School chronic absenteeism rate" - the total number of chronically absent children for a school in the previous school year divided by the total number of children enrolled in such school for such school year.

B. Establishment of Attendance Review Teams

If the Stafford Board of Education has a district chronic absenteeism rate of ten percent (10%) or higher, it shall establish an attendance review team for the school district.

If a school under the jurisdiction of the Stafford Board of Education has a school chronic absenteeism rate of fifteen percent (15%) or higher, it shall establish an attendance review team for that school.

If the Stafford Board of Education has more than one school with a school chronic absenteeism rate of fifteen percent (15%) or higher, it shall establish an attendance review team for the school district or at each such school.

If the Stafford Board of Education has a district chronic absenteeism rate of ten percent (10%) or higher and one or more schools with a school chronic absenteeism rate of fifteen percent (15%) or higher, it shall establish an attendance review team for the school district or at each such school.

C. Composition and Role of Attendance Review Teams

Any attendance review team established under these regulations may include school administrators, guidance counselors, school social workers, teachers, representatives from community-based programs who address issues related to student attendance by providing programs and services to truants, and chronically absent children and their parents or guardians.

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Each attendance review team shall be responsible for reviewing the cases of truants and chronically absent children, discussing school interventions and community referrals for such truants and chronically absent children and making any additional recommendations for such truants and chronically absent children and their parents or guardians. Each attendance review team shall meet at least monthly.

D. State Chronic Absenteeism Prevention and Intervention Plan

The Stafford Board of Education and its attendance review teams, if any, will consider any chronic absenteeism prevention and intervention plan developed by the State Department of Education.

V. Reports to the State Regarding Truancy Data

Annually, each local and regional board of education shall include information regarding the number of truants and chronically absent children in the strategic school profile report for each school under its jurisdiction and for the school district as a whole submitted to the Commissioner of Education. Measures of truancy include the type of data that is required to be collected by the Department of Education regarding attendance and unexcused absences in order for the department to comply with federal reporting requirements and the actions taken by the board of education to reduce truancy in the school district.

Legal Reference:

Connecticut General Statutes §10-220

Connecticut General Statutes §10-184

Connecticut General Statutes §10-186

Connecticut General Statutes §10-198a

Connecticut General Statutes § 10-198b

Connecticut General Statutes § 10-198c

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Public Act 16-147, "An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee"

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Connecticut State Board of Education Memorandum, *Definitions of Excused and Unexcused Absences* (June 27, 2012)

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