

## 6.200 Regularity of Attendance

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### I. PURPOSE

To support student achievement by requiring and facilitating regular school attendance.

### II. SCOPE

This policy applies to all Memphis City Schools students. (Tennessee law requires that all children between the ages of six (6) and seventeen (17), both inclusive, attend school.)<sup>1</sup>

### III. POLICY STATEMENT

Regular and punctual school attendance is essential for deriving maximum success from the instructional program. Higher academic achievement and lower drop out rates occur when students attend classes regularly. It is the policy of the Memphis City Schools that all students attend school on all days that school is officially in operation and be on time for all classes. Unexcused absences are prohibited by law and policy.

When unexcused absences occur, Memphis City Schools will seek assistance and support from school-based and community-wide programs or agencies to restore the student's attendance. MCS will also use effective interventions with students and parents/guardians to restore and maintain a student's regular attendance. Referral to Juvenile Court or to the District Attorney General will be the final option.<sup>2</sup>

#### Excused Absences

Student absences shall be excused for the following reasons only:

1. Personal illness of the student.
2. Death or serious illness in the immediate family of the student.
3. Validated court appearances of the student.
4. Recognized religious holiday/event.<sup>3,4</sup>
5. Any other unusual cause acceptable to the principal. (These reasons will include approved school sponsored/sanctioned activities.)
6. One-day absence when the parent/guardian or custodian is deployed for military service and one-day absence when the parent/guardian or custodian returns from military service.<sup>5</sup>

A student who does not receive prior approval from the teacher or principal/designee for an excused absence must submit a note from a parent or guardian or other appropriate person describing the excused absence immediately upon the student's return to school, but, in any event, no later than three (3) school



days after the absence was taken. The principal may require a doctor's statement for the personal illness of a student that extends beyond three (3) consecutive school days or when a student is repeatedly absent for less than three (3) consecutive days. If no documentation justifying the absence as excusable is submitted within the three-day period, the absence will become an unexcused absence.

## **Appeals**

Disputes over whether an absence is excused or unexcused shall be decided by the principal (or designee). In a meeting with the principal the parent/guardian can explain that any or all of the absences were for an unusual cause or that an acceptable excuse was presented in a timely manner. If, after meeting with the parent/guardian, the principal determines that any or all of a student's absences are excusable, the principal will adjust the student's attendance record accordingly and will send the parent/guardian a letter confirming the adjustment. The principal's decision can be appealed to the school's academic director.

## **Tardies, Absences from Classes, and Early Releases**

Memphis City Schools also believes that students who arrive to school or classes after the regular starting time, students who consistently leave school early, and students who are at school but fail to attend classes are not receiving maximum educational opportunities. Therefore, a school shall use any necessary interventions to promote regular and timely attendance to school and classes. However, a student who has excessive tardies or early releases or a student who fails to attend a class may be subject to disciplinary action.

## **Make-Up Work**

Students shall be permitted the opportunity to make up all work and classroom tests (or their equivalent) missed as a result of an excused or unexcused absence.

## **IV. RESPONSIBILITY**

- A. The principal shall be responsible for complying with the provisions of this policy and all state laws pertaining to student attendance.
- B. Students and parents are responsible for ensuring that the student attends school/class for one hundred and eighty (180) days each school year and is on time.
- C. Questions concerning the interpretation and administration of this policy should be directed to the Office of the Chief Academic Officer.

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### Legal References:

1. TCA 49-6-3001
2. TCA 49-6-3007
3. TCA 49-6-2904 TCA
4. TRR/MS 0520-1-3-.03(15)
5. Public Acts, 2006, Public Chapter 552

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### Cross References:

1. Attendance Accounting Procedural Manual, Tennessee Dept. of Education
2. 6.201 Compulsory Attendance
3. 6.208 School Day For Pupils
4. 6.313 Student Behavior

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### Prevention Programming

Parents shall receive frequent communications on the importance of regular attendance at school. In addition, each school shall develop schoolwide programs and activities to promote and reward both regular and outstanding school attendance and improved attendance. Examples of such programs and activities include certificates of recognition for students who achieve perfect attendance or 95% attendance; a school awards ceremony to celebrate a schoolwide attendance goal of 95%; and bookstore gift certificates for students with the most improved attendance.

### Communicating Information to Students and Parents

At the beginning of each school year, schools shall send a letter to parents that emphasizes the importance of attendance and encourages their children's regular and punctual attendance at school. The letter should include the parent's legal requirements concerning attendance and the school's procedures for addressing attendance issues. Schools shall also hold a school-wide attendance meeting with their student body informing them of the school's attendance goals and expectations, the compulsory attendance laws, and the consequences for noncompliance. In addition, schools are encouraged to develop avenues for students to talk about attendance-related problems with persons at the school whom they trust when poor attendance and truancy are a result of another problem (e.g., family, social, economic). Schools should communicate these avenues to their students during the school-wide attendance meeting.

### Unexcused Absence Procedures

1. If a student is absent without an excuse, the school must use school-based procedures as well as appropriate interventions to encourage regular school attendance. The following attendance procedures shall be used:
  - a. First Two Unexcused Absences-Documented phone calls to parents/guardians each of the first two times of an unexcused absence.
  - b. Third Unexcused Absence-Warning letter to parents/guardians informing them of the truancy laws and the consequences of noncompliance and requesting a parent/teacher conference.
2. After the student's fifth unexcused absence the first official letter from the District Attorney's Office will be automatically generated by the district and sent to the parents/guardians informing them of their noncompliance with compulsory attendance laws, the consequences for failing to comply, and that their presence is requested at a meeting of the Student Attendance Review Team (SART). This team is designed to identify the cause(s) of the unexcused absences in order to bring the parent/guardian and student in compliance with attendance laws. The SART team should consist of the family specialist, guidance counselor, principal (or designee), parent/guardian, an advocate representing the student such as a teacher of the student's choosing, and the student. It is preferable that all members attend the meeting. However,



the SART meeting may proceed with the student and at least two other members of the SART team. Designated staff may also continue to call the parents/guardians to request their presence at a SART meeting.

Each school shall establish a standard time for holding SART team meetings (e.g. SART meetings are held Thursdays at 3:00 p.m.). The SART meeting time should be communicated to parents with the attendance letter sent to parents at the beginning of the school year. Schools should inform students of the SART meeting time during the school-wide attendance meeting.

3. The SART team must develop a Parent/ Student Action Plan (PSAP) to address the cause(s) of the unexcused absences and identify interventions that eliminate the underlying problem and enable the student to attend school on a regular basis. The Plan must be signed by all members of the team and shall be monitored on a regular basis. If the parent/guardian does not cooperate, the plan can be implemented with the student's signature, but the Plan must document attempts to contact the parents/guardians.

4. After a student has accumulated ten or more unexcused absences, the final letter from the District Attorney's Office will be automatically generated by the district and sent to the parents/guardians requiring them bring their child to a mandatory meeting of the communitywide Student Attendance Review Board (SARB). The purpose of this Board is to determine if the student's case should be moved to Juvenile Court or if the parent/guardian should be given one more opportunity to comply with the attendance laws. The Board consists of representatives from Juvenile Court, the Memphis and Shelby County Community Services Agency, Memphis City Schools, the Council of Missing and Exploited Children, and the Department of Children's Services. (Membership may vary.)

5. The SARB Board shall review the student's file, including attempts by the school to obtain parent support in enforcing the compulsory attendance laws. The Board can decide to refer the case to the Attorney General and Juvenile Court or give the parents the chance to follow the plan that has already been set forth. The Board may also modify the plan to place additional requirements on students and parents (e.g., requiring the student to attend an intervention program or the parent/guardian to attend a parenting class). The Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) shall inform the principal of the outcome of the SARB meeting.

6. Principals shall notify the Office of Student Engagement when they withdraw a student who has at least ten (10) consecutive days of absence. This notification shall include documentation of the school's attempt to implement the Unexcused Absence Procedures outlined in these regulations.

### **Documentation**

Schools shall provide documentation of parent/guardian conferences and contacts including phone calls and letters as well as of the student and/or family interventions that occurred. This documentation shall be made available to appropriate school, district, community agency and law enforcement officials.

### **Interventions**

It is expected that discussions with parents/guardians and students will focus on the reasons for the student's unexcused absences and ways the school can intervene to support regular attendance. Interventions can include the following:

- a. A school-based individual intervention modification program
- b. Securing school uniforms
- c. Referring a student for a special education needs assessment
- d. Adjusting the student's schedule
- e. Assigning a mentor to the student
- f. Providing the student with a tutor
- g. Parent counseling
- h. Parenting classes
- i. Referring the family to an appropriate social service agency
- j. Other interventions as appropriate

### **Law Enforcement**

Any student who accumulates 15 or more days of unexcused absences within a school year may be referred to Juvenile Court and the District Attorney General's Office for appropriate legal action. However, every attempt shall be made to intervene to support students prior to referral to these agencies.

### **Tardies, Absences from Classes and Early Releases**

If a student is tardy to school three times and/or has three early releases during the school year, the principal or designee shall have a conference with the student's parent/guardian. The school will use any necessary interventions to promote timely school attendance. A student who arrives late at school or leaves school early without a medically documented excuse more than nine times within a school year may be subject to more stringent disciplinary action.

If a student is tardy to class or fails to attend a class in one course or in separate courses three times during the school year, the principal or designee shall have a parent conference with the student's parent/guardian. The school will use any necessary interventions to promote regular class attendance. A student who skips a class one or more times during the school year may be subject to disciplinary action.

### **Make-Up Work**

Students shall be permitted the opportunity to make up all work and classroom tests (or their equivalent) missed as a result of an excused or unexcused absence. All work and tests for both excused and unexcused absences should be made up as soon as possible, but no later than a week after the student returns to school. The principal can grant exceptions due to special circumstances such as extreme or long-term illness or any other unusual cause acceptable to the principal. If a student fails to make up the work and tests, the



deficiencies shall be averaged with the other grades. Makeup work for state administered tests shall be determined by state policies and procedures.

Each make-up work assignment for unexcused absences shall be marked down one letter grade.