



# Lawrence Public Schools

## Policy

### Section J: Students

JEC

### Subject: Attendance, High School

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## Policy Statement

The Lawrence Public Schools recognizes that regular attendance in class, participation in class activities, and interaction between students and teachers are essential and integral parts of the learning process. Classroom participation is vital to the instructional process and must be considered in evaluating the performance and content mastery of students. To that end, and in keeping with MA Ch. 76 S.1 regulations that mandate that school-age children attend school, the Lawrence Public Schools strives for students to attain a 95% or better attendance rate and, in line with the state definition, considers attendance at 90% or less to be chronic absenteeism. Such absenteeism contributes to proficiency gaps and can impact student success, including loss of course credits and/or risk of retention, which may impact a student's ability to graduate on time.

The following rules and regulations, which function in accordance with the state truancy and compulsory attendance laws, are also made available to parents and students in the Student/Parent Handbook of each of the high school academies and programs.

The purpose of the Lawrence High School Attendance Policy is to support students as learners:

- Regular and punctual school attendance provides students with an essential foundation for achieving academic success and aids them in developing habits necessary for college, career and professional life.
- Consistent attendance enables students to benefit from shared experiences that are critical to the learning process and cannot be replicated outside of the classroom.
- Parents or guardians share in the responsibility for helping students develop and maintain daily attendance.

## Student Academic Requirements

It is the expectation of the Lawrence Public Schools that all students are to attend all classes. While the district strives for 95% attendance, there are consequences for students whose attendance in their courses falls to 90% or less - including credit loss and/or retention.

To earn credit in any course, a student is obligated to:

1. Fulfill the course requirements as defined by the content and performance standards for the course;
2. Maintain above a 90% attendance rate in all courses, no more than eight (8) absences per semester and no more than sixteen (16) absences for the year.
  - a. While credit is only earned at the end of a semester or year-long course, to earn a grade for the quarter, no more than four (4) absences are permitted. (See Consequences, below.)



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### Student Attendance Rules and Regulations

#### A. General Attendance Reporting

1. The student's parent/guardian (or the student if 18 years of age or older) is required to call or email the student's High School Office before school begins on the day of absence with notification that the student will be absent. In the absence of timely notification, a call to the student's home will be made. This call will help to ensure that a parent/guardian knows that his/her student is absent.
2. If a student attends school for less than three full hours, she/he will be marked absent for the day.
3. If a student is participating in a school field trip, a school sanctioned conference, or documented college visit, he/she will be regarded as present on that date.

#### B. Absence types and ability to make up work/recover credit

##### Level 1 Absence

A Level 1 absence requires notification by a parent/guardian (or a student age 18 or older) and is an absence for one of the following reasons. Notification should be made as outlined by the high school and should take place before the start of school and no later than one hour into the school day. Students are allowed and encouraged to make up work for these Level 1 absences:

- Illnesses that include fever, vomiting or quarantine (more than three consecutive days will also require medical documentation)
- Chronic illness documented by a medical provider and shared with the school nurse; documentation to include to the fullest extent possible a start date, treatment schedule including end date (if appropriate), and/or other reasonable expectations of absences
- For the duration of a medical appointment, including associated travel time, with documentation from the provider produced upon return to school
- Bereavement, with up to five days for immediate family member, or three days for extended family, with appropriate documentation, such as a copy of the obituary or memorial service handout, death certificate or similar
  - Immediate family is considered a parent, sibling, grandparent or other relative who lives in the home
- For observance of major religious holidays
- Student hospitalization lasting up to 14 days, with appropriate medical documentation (for stays that are 14 days or longer, see extended illnesses below)
- Hospitalization of an immediate family member (parent or caregiver in the home, or sibling) with documentation, up to five days



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- For other exceptional, unforeseen emergencies, with approval of the school's administration (not to include extended family trips)

Circumstances or days beyond the limits posted above will be counted as Level 2 absences.

#### Level 2 Absences

- Absences that fall outside of those listed above or for which appropriate notification by a parent or guardian was not received (see below). Schools may, but are not obligated to, provide make-up work.
- Students who are absent without notification (see above) are considered truant, (see Tardiness and Truancy below), in violation of Massachusetts state regulations, Ch 76, Section 1.
  - Absences resulting from class cuts and school truancy do not qualify for make-up work. These absences will also be addressed in accordance with the provisions of the Lawrence Public Schools Discipline Code.

#### **School Communications:**

To ensure that families are aware of their students' absence from school, schools will send an automated call to families of students who are recorded as absent during the homeroom or first period. Unless the parent or guardian has called the school proactively, the school may also individually contact the student's home when s/he is absent to further understand the nature of the absence, ensure that the family knows about the absence, and to remind parents or guardians to email the school or send in a note documenting the reason for the absence. The school nurse will be assigned to case manage students who have illness-related absences in excess of a total of five (5) days. Case management may include acquiring information relative to a student's illnesses via communication with a student's pediatrician. The parent liaison, or another designee, will be assigned to case manage absences of five or more days for reasons outside of illness. The school shall make reasonable efforts to locate the student and determine the reason for not attending. These efforts must be documented in writing. Attempts should be made to contact the parents/guardians by phone, email, home visit, and/or certified mail. In addition, a family meeting or home visit will be encouraged.

If documented attempts to contact the student's family are unsuccessful and the school is unable to confirm the student's whereabouts, the school should contact the district's Attendance Office for assistance. The Attendance Officer will confirm results and, as appropriate, advise the school to report the student as a dropout.



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### Documentation of students who do not report at the beginning of the school year

An enrolled student who does not report to school at beginning of the school year shall be recorded as absent. If the district has documented unsuccessful efforts to locate the student (see School Communications above), on the eleventh day the high school student shall be recorded as a dropout.

### Disciplinary Actions

Disciplinary actions that result in out-of-school suspensions are coded in the student information system as either Suspension or Tutoring (see below), signaling that the student is not physically present. The days away from the school building are not counted as absences, as opportunities to make academic progress are provided the student during his/her time out of school. Consequences for disciplinary infractions are outlined in the LPS Discipline Code and do not include accumulation of absences.)

- For short-term, out-of-school suspensions, make-up work provisions are provided, allowing two days beyond the return date for completion and submission.
- For suspensions of ten or more days, the student is provided a tutor or online course work.

### Tardiness

1. Tardiness is defined as being late to school or class. Students who arrive to school after the bell will be recorded as tardy for the day. Only tardies resulting from one of the following reasons - and accompanied by satisfactory proof to substantiate the cause - will be excused (and the student will be marked as present for the day):
  - a. Late arrival of a district school bus
  - b. Fulfillment of a religious obligation as permitted by law
  - c. An extraordinary circumstance determined by the Administration and upon presentation of satisfactory proof as to the cause and necessity for the tardiness.
2. Students who arrive to class after the bell, (excluding those with appropriate documentation from a staff member for either a meeting or for one of the reasons above), shall be marked as tardy for that class. If a student is tardy for a class, s/he will be invited to participate in any program offered by his/her school to make up missed work, following the rules as outlined by the school. However, a school is not required to offer a program, nor is the student required to participate.
3. Three incidents of tardiness to school or a class shall warrant a school-based intervention or consequence (such as a parent conference, loss of certain privileges, reparations or detention).

### Early Dismissal

1. All early dismissals shall be regarded as absences for each class that is missed.



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2. If a student desires early dismissal from school, he/she must present to his/her school office at the start of the school day, a written request from a parent/guardian (or the student if age 18 or older) indicating the time and the reason for early dismissal. If under age 18, the student's parent/guardian must come to the School Office to dismiss the student. If age 18 or older, the student must provide documentation substantiating the necessity to leave school early. No student may be dismissed via a telephone call during the school day.

### Illness During the School Day

Illness during the school day will be regarded as a Level 1 absence from the classes not attended.

### Consequences

If a student accumulates more than four (4) absences per quarter in any course, s/he will receive a grade of "N" on the report card, indicating that s/he is "Not on Track for Credit" due to poor attendance. If a student receives an "N" for one quarter, s/he can still receive a passing grade for the semester or year if the student maintains a passing grade average and is not absent more than four (4) times in the remaining quarters. It is important to remember that "N" represents a notice to both students and parents that they need to monitor their school attendance more closely and set a goal to improve attendance. One "N" does not represent that a student is failing the course from a lack of achievement. (If a student is failing the course for lack of achievement, the report card would reflect the failing grade, not an "N.") If a student receives one or more "N" grades, they will also be ineligible for Honor Roll.

Students may also convert an "N" acquired for a course to a letter grade by pursuing credit recovery options available at his/her school or programs. Options may include enrollment in extended day classes, Saturday programs, Acceleration Academies, or online course work as appropriate/available. These options should be discussed directly with the student's classroom educator.

If a student earns two "N's" in a semester course, s/he will receive No Credit for the course and likewise, if the student receives four "N's" in a full year course, s/he will receive No Credit for the course. The absences would meet the threshold for chronic absenteeism and the student should set up a meeting with his or her guidance counselor to make arrangements to repeat the course or its equivalent in summer programs or future terms. For students who have otherwise achieved or exceeded the course standards, an alternative opportunity may be created.

The number of absences permitted for courses that meet only a few days a week are pro-rated according to the number of credits assigned to the course. The number of permitted absences will also be prorated for students who begin at one of the Lawrence high schools or programs after the official opening of



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school or the start of a new semester. For courses that meet two periods a day, one absence or one tardy will be recorded if a student misses any class time in either period.

### Parent Notification of Cumulative Absences

- **Attendance Warning Notice**  
Classroom teachers will submit an Attendance Warning Notice to a student's Assistant Principal or another designee when they reach their third (3rd) absence or tardy in any class. The Assistant Principal or another designee will communicate with the student and their parent/guardian about the attendance concern.
- **Attendance Tracking**  
Parents will be able to stay updated about total absences from a class by way of the parent portal of the Student Information System, progress reports and report cards. Additionally, upon the third absence in a semester or course, the student and his/her parents or guardians will receive a notification from the school to discuss the impact of further absences and collaborate on solutions.

### Documentation for Level 1 Absences

Upon return to school, a student will have a maximum of two (2) days, including the date of return, to present to the school office the documentation required for Level 1 absences. The high school office will make any necessary changes to the student information system. Students are then responsible for informing classroom teachers of their eligibility to make up work, which can be verified in the system. Students are encouraged to save a copy of the documentation, should a question arise at a later date.

### Make-up Work Provision

For each Level 1 absence, a student is required to make up missed work within two days of his/her return to school, including the date of return. However, if a student is absent as a result of truancy or unauthorized cuts, he/she shall not be granted make-up work provisions.

### Contacting the School about Extended Illness

If a student is absent for up to five (5) days or is expected to be out more than five (5) school days because of illness or an accident, the student's High School Principal or Assistant Principal should be contacted so s/he can ask teachers to prepare work that can be performed at home in order to allow the



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student to stay up to date with course work. If an absence is expected to be more than fourteen (14) school days, the student's physician must complete an LPS Physician's Statement (available in all schools or from the district's Tutoring Manager) and submit it to the student's Guidance Counselor in order for arrangements to be made for a tutor to provide home instruction in as many subjects as possible.

### School Functions

A student may not participate in a school function unless s/he is in attendance during the regular school day.

### Appeals

In the event of loss of credit due to absenteeism, an appeal process is available to students and parents /guardians. An Attendance Review Panel composed of faculty and administrators from the student's high school shall hear any appeal to discuss the circumstances that may have lead to the excessive absenteeism. The decision of the Attendance Review Panel will be submitted to the High School Principal for final action. If a student requests an Attendance Review Panel Hearing, s/he may obtain an appeal form from the High School Principal or Assistant Principal. This appeal form should be submitted to the High School Office as soon as possible following any notice of loss of credit.

A student is encouraged to appeal in person before the Attendance Review Panel so that issues requiring clarification or questions needing answers may be handled without delay. Parents are invited to join the student at this meeting.

The Attendance Review Panel can excuse only specific dates. A student should specify those dates on the appeal form. The student should provide appropriate verification of absences such as doctor's notes, court documents, etc. and be prepared to provide clear evidence of extenuating circumstances.

The High School Office will confirm the Hearing's time and place when the student submits his/her appeal form.

In computing daily membership, it should be noted that a student's name shall be removed from a school's record only when it is known that s/he has officially withdrawn and is not returning to school. A withdrawal form, accompanied by proof of the child's new address or new enrollment must be sent to the Enrollment office.



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*Legal references Massachusetts General Laws: 71:55; 71:55A; 71:56; 72:2; 72:8; 76:1; 76:1A; 76:1B  
76:2;76:4; 76:19; 76:20*

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