



# Lawrence Public Schools

## Policy

### Section J: Students

JEA

### Subject: Attendance, Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 8

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### Policy Statement

(Replaces J-6, J-6A, J-6D and J-6E)

Regular school attendance is essential for success in school. Like all states in the U.S., Massachusetts has “compulsory education” laws, (see MA Ch 76, S.1), which support this fundamental by requiring all school-age children to attend public or private school. Lawrence Public Schools further believes that classroom participation is vital to the instructional process, and the interaction among students, and between students and teachers, plays an integral role in the learning experience. To that end, 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 significant proficiency gaps and can impact student success, including risk of retention (see LPS Promotion Policy).

#### Level 1 Absences

Level 1 absences are those absences for which a parent or guardian provides appropriate notification (see below) of a student’s intent to be out of school, either through a phone call, email or a handwritten, signed note. Notification informs schools that a student is absent with the permission of a parent/guardian, is safe, and is not truant.

Within the Level 1 Absence category, the following absences will be eligible for make-up work:

- Illnesses that include fever, vomiting or quarantine (more than three consecutive days will also require medical documentation)
- For the duration of a medical appointment, including associated travel time, with documentation from the provider produced upon return to school
- 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
- 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
- For observation of major religious holidays
- Student hospitalization lasting up to 14 days, with appropriate medical documentation (see extended illnesses below for stays longer than 14 days)
- Hospitalization of an immediate family member (parent or caregiver in the home, or sibling) with documentation, up to five days
- 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.



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### Level 2 Absences

Level 2 absences are absences that fall outside of those listed above or for which appropriate notification by a parent or guardian was not received (see below). Schools are not obligated to provide make-up schoolwork for Level 2 absences.

Further, students who are absent without notification by a parent are considered truant, (see Tardiness and Truancy below), in violation of Massachusetts state regulations, Ch 76, Section 1.

### Notification

Acceptable notification from a parent or guardian is required for all Level 1 absences, late drop-offs, and early dismissals, and includes either a same day phone call or email, or signed, written note returned with the student, up to two (2) school days from last date of absence (or upon signing out a student for early dismissal). This includes the day of return and the day immediately following the day of his/her return. All notifications must bear the date(s) of absence, state the reason for the absence (from the list above), and, in the case of a written note, be signed by the parent or guardian.

### Ability to make up schoolwork

Students are provided one day for each school day they have *an eligible Level 1 absence* to make up schoolwork.

### 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 period. Unless the parent or guardian has called the school proactively, the school may also individually contact the child's home when a child 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 children who have illness-related absences in excess of a total of five (5) days. Case management may include acquiring information relative to a child'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



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assistance. The Attendance Officer will confirm results and, as appropriate, advise the school to report the student as a dropout for Grades 6-8 or, for Grades PK-5, report as location unknown.

#### **Tardiness and truancy:**

Students in grades K-8 who are absent from school for more than three hours, excluding doctors' appointments for which students have appropriate medical documentation, are considered absent for the full day. For PK students in full day programs, this same rule applies. For PK students in half day programs, missing one (1) hour or more of a school day will be counted as an absence. This includes late arrivals and early dismissals that lead to being in school less than three hours. Students who are not present but who are receiving academic instruction from the District for at least half the school day are counted as present. Homeroom teachers, classroom teachers, or other school support staff as needed, will report irregular attendance or excessive tardiness to parents/guardians. Excessive tardiness or truancy may result in disciplinary action as defined in the LPS Discipline Code of Conduct.

The Lawrence Public Schools will investigate any patterns of irregular attendance through letters, email, phone calls, meetings or visits to the home. When necessary, the district shall use legal remedies to enforce Massachusetts mandatory attendance regulations and/or laws.

#### **Extended illness**

If an absence for serious illness will be more than 14 days (consecutive, or in the case of a treatment plan, intermittent), the student's physician must complete an LPS Physician's Statement and submit it to the student's educator or principal in order for arrangements to be made for a tutor to provide home instruction. With the Physician's Statement completed, elementary and middle school students are provided five (5) hours of tutoring per week starting on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of absence.

#### **Student does not show up at the beginning of the school year**

An enrolled student who does not report to school at the beginning of the school year shall be recorded as absent. If the District is unable to locate the student (see School Communications above) by the eleventh day, the student in Grades One through Five shall be recorded as location unknown, and for Grades Six through Eight, as a dropout.

#### **Exclusions and exemptions:**

In accordance with the appropriate regulations and/or guidelines of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the Board of Health of the City of Lawrence, or the Lawrence Alliance for Education, student attendance may be restricted by a school for the following reasons:

1. When students are suffering from communicable diseases
2. When students are in close contact with persons suffering from communicable diseases



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3. When other conditions exist that are deemed detrimental to the mental or physical health of the student or others in his/her school community others or themselves

When a student is prohibited from attending school for any of the above reasons, the student will be provided opportunities to make up work, and the aggrieved party will be granted 48 hours to appeal the decision; however, some critical conditions or communicable diseases may require immediate exclusion.

### **Preschool and Kindergarten Attendance**

Under Massachusetts General Law there is no legal requirement for enrollment in a preschool or kindergarten program. However, the benefits of full participation in such programs are well-documented. In an effort to maximize these benefits for our youngest learners, parents and guardians who pursue enrollment in preschool and kindergarten programs must adhere to the district's attendance policies as outlined above. For preschool students, where demand exceeds capacity, consequences for chronic absenteeism (in excess of ten percent of the total days enrolled), provided the days of enrollment total at least 30, *may* include removal from the program to make space for a waitlisted student.

*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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