

FOCUS ON ATTENDANCE

Pen Argyl Area School District 2017-18

PA Act 138 was approved on November 3, 2016, to amend the Public School Code of 1949

Purpose:

To improve school attendance and deter truancy “through a comprehensive approach to consistently identify and address attendance issues as early as possible with credible intervention techniques” in order to:

- Preserve the family unit whenever possible as the underlying issues of truancy are addressed.
- Avoid possible entry of children into foster care, or loss of housing and other unintended consequences of disruption of an intact family unit.
- Confine a parent or guardian for truancy-related offense only as a last resort.

AS ALWAYS...

Only parents/guardians must supply an excuse for all absences from school **within 3 days** in one of the following ways:

- Send a written excuse to the office **OR**
- Enter a Skyward excuse electronically
- Send a doctor's excuse whenever possible (cannot be submitted through Skyward)
- **Email** is **NOT** an **ACCEPTABLE** form of excuse
- Doctor's notes become a requirement **after 10** days of absence with a parent note



A new attendance law (PA Act 138) was passed by the PA General Assembly on 11-3-16 effective for the 2017-18 school year



UNLAWFUL ABSENCES

- ▶ Failure to supply a valid excuse for an absence will result in an Unlawful Absence.
- ▶ Skyward records ALL absences as unexcused until the school receives an official excuse. Then, it will be recorded as lawful.

OTHER REASONS FOR UNLAWFUL ABSENCE:

- Missing the bus, no transportation, or car trouble
- Staying home during inclement weather
- Taking an unauthorized vacation
- Taking more than 5 days of vacation per year
- Take Your Child to Work Day



What is “Truant”?

Pennsylvania identifies a student as “Truant” once they have **3 Unlawful Absences** in one school year.

- ▶ The school is required to serve a written notice to parents/guardians.
- ▶ A referral to a Truancy Intervention Specialist will be made.

WHO AND WHY?

The **Truancy Intervention Specialist** is a representative from the Colonial Intermediate Unit 20.

Being referred to them is not simply a punitive measure.

Their job is to :

- Mediate between the school and the family
- Explain the attendance rules and state laws
- Offer resources for assistance where possible

What happens next?

A fourth Unlawful Absence, according to law, requires a **Student Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP)** meeting to be held. This meeting:

- Includes parents/guardians and appropriate school personnel.
- Is held to identify the reason for attendance problems
- Is to come up with solutions and a plan for improvement



“HABITUALLY TRUANT”

A student having **6 or more Unlawful Absences** is classified by the state as “**Habitually Truant**”.

At this time, the school **MUST** make a referral to one of the following:

- A community or school based attendance improvement program
- Northampton County Children and Youth Agency

FINAL MEASURES:

The goal of the new law is to prevent these final legal measures from having to be taken:

CITATION through the **DISTRICT MAGISTRATE**, which may result in the following penalties:

- \$300 fine for a first offense
- \$500 fine for a second offense
- \$750 fine for a third offense
- 3 days in jail
- Student loss of driver's license for 6 months
- Credit denial

