

**Cambridge Public Schools
Administrative Guidelines and Procedures**

ATTENDANCE

The Cambridge Public Schools (“CPS”) prohibits truancy from school and strongly encourages parents/guardians/caregivers to ensure their children’s regular school attendance is in compliance with the law. Regular and punctual attendance contributes to the general welfare of the entire student body by reducing disruption to the learning environment. It is important for all to understand that patterns for successful school attendance and academic success are started in kindergarten and first grade. Early patterns of non-attendance tend to continue throughout a child’s school life and leave a child at risk for school failure and dropping out. Additionally, daily attendance and punctuality are essential to a child’s future school and job success. The expectation is that all students will maintain, at a minimum, ninety-five percent (95%) attendance in school and in each class during the school day.

Under Massachusetts law, all children must have begun school by the September in the year they turn six (6) years old and must continue to attend school until the age of sixteen (16). Mass. Gen. Laws, ch. 76, § 1; 603 C.M.R. § 8.00. In a six (6) month period, CPS may excuse absences from seven (7) full-day sessions or fourteen (14) half-day sessions.

Under Massachusetts law, parents/guardians/caregivers must be notified annually of a designated telephone number to call at a designated time to alert the school to a student’s absence and the reason for the absence. The notice must also require a parent/guardian/caregiver to provide the school with an emergency telephone number at which the school can contact the parent/guardian/caregiver during the day. Mass. Gen. Laws, ch. 76, § 1A.

Inducing a student’s absence, or attempting to induce a student’s absence, is prohibited by law. Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 76, § 4.

Absence Verification

When a student will be absent from school on a given day, their parents/guardians/caregivers should contact the school’s main office to explain and verify the absence prior to the time when attendance is taken. The parent/guardian/caregiver must call the school to give notification of the absence no later than the morning of the absence. If an absent student’s parent/guardian/caregiver has failed to contact the school to verify the student’s absence by such time, the school shall call the parent/guardian/caregiver to obtain such verification. The school may use an automated system to do so, if it so chooses.

If a parent/guardian/caregiver has not called prior the student's absence from school, the student, when they return to school, must bring a note from their parent/guardian/caregiver stating the reason for the absence. These notes should be kept on file for the school year by the homeroom teacher.

If a child will have an excused absence of five (5) or more days, the parent/guardian/caregiver must notify the school so that arrangements for home assignments can be offered, and if the student will have a prolonged absence of two (2) or more weeks due to illness or injury, the parent/guardian/caregiver must notify the school to make the necessary arrangements for homebound instruction.

When excused absences become suspect, and are developing a pattern, the school will take steps to ascertain the reason by requesting medical notes and conducting home visits.

The principal's office shall keep statistics and check frequent absence and tardiness for instances of chronic or irregular absences reportedly due to illness, the school's principal or school nurse may request a physician's statement certifying such absences to be justifiable. Additionally, the principal shall develop a school-based team that regularly monitors student attendance and works with parents/guardians/caregivers and students to help identify and rectify the underlying causes for frequent absence and tardiness and who will confer and collaborate with school-based student support teams for additional school level strategies and interventions. Recommended school-based intervention protocols based upon the number of days that a student is absent are as follows:

One to three days absent:

Four to Five days absent:

Six to Ten days absent:

Eleven or more days absent:

If a child does not attend school or a child aged 6 through 18 is habitually truant or repeatedly fails to obey school rules, the school district can file a Child Requiring Assistance (CRA) petition in the courts. The principal should contact the Office of Safety and Security with respect to filing such petitions and for other supports in connection with chronic or irregular absences or tardiness of a student.

Child Requiring Assistance (CRA)

The focus of the courts and school department with these offenders, regardless of age, is on early intervention. Massachusetts General Laws defines a habitual truant and a repeated school offender as a child that "persistently and willfully fails to attend school, is truant, or persistently violates the lawful and reasonable regulations of his or her school." Under M.G.L. c.76, §2, parents/guardians/caregivers are required to cause a child to attend school, and, if they fail to do so for more than seven day sessions or fourteen half-day sessions within any period of six months, the parent/guardian/caregiver shall on a complaint by the supervisor of attendance, be punished by a fine.

Additionally, schools may seek a CRA application for any child between the ages of 6 and up to 18 who is habitually truant because they have eight or more unexcused absences in a school quarter, or because the child has repeatedly failed to obey school rules.

When internal school intervention efforts fail to resolve a chronic absence or tardiness, habitual truancy or repeated violations of school rules, the school department may initiate a CRA action

with the court. Under the law, the Juvenile Court has access to all school information relative to these cases.

Attendance Violation Failure

Additionally, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School and the High School Extension Program will treat four (4) absences in any class as an Attendance Violation Failure (AVF) for the quarter.

After a fourth such absence, the school will notify the parent/guardian/caregiver.

Parents/guardians/caregivers may seek a medical waiver for any chronic condition, reoccurring illness, or for any illnesses that exceed four (4) days. Parents/guardians/caregivers will have the right to appeal any AVF to the Appeals Review Committee at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School or the High School Extension Program within ten (10) days of the denial, submit a written appeal to the Superintendent of Schools for review. The decision of the Superintendent of Schools will be final.

Students Who Leave School

The Cambridge Public Schools is committed to having students complete their elementary and secondary education. In the event that a student who is sixteen years of age or older seeks to leave school, CPS adheres to the requirements of M.G.L.c. 76, §18 and follows the procedures set forth below:

1. The principal or designee issues a letter to the parent/guardian/caregiver of the student within five (5) days of the student's tenth (10th) consecutive absence notifying the parent/guardian/caregiver that the student either (a) has expressed an intention of withdrawing from school without an intention of returning, or (b) has had ten (10) consecutive absences from school and indicating the student's last date of attendance at school.

In order for the school to determine whether the student is withdrawing from school without intending to return, the school schedules a meeting (offering at least two dates and times on which the meeting can be held) with the student and their parent/guardian/caregiver for the purpose of discussing the reasons why the student wants to leave school, to provide information about the detrimental effects of early withdrawal from school, to discuss the benefits of earning a high school diploma, and to explore alternative educational and other placements for the student prior to formally withdrawing from school. The parent/guardian/caregiver may request that the date and time of this meeting be changed provided that the extension of time shall be no longer than fourteen (14) days from the date of issuance of the letter by the principal or designee. The principal or designee may proceed with the meeting without the parent/guardian/caregiver if a good faith effort was made to include the parent/guardian/caregiver.

2. After the meeting has been held with the parent/guardian/caregiver and the student, the principal or designee issues a letter to the parent/guardian/caregiver of the student summarizing what was discussed and any decision that was reached at the meeting, including but not limited to, whether the student is returning to school, pursuing an alternative educational placement, pursuing other support services or permanently leaving school.

3. In accordance with the provisions of M.G.L.c. 76, §18, any determination that a student would be permanently leaving school shall not be construed as a permanent exclusion of the student if they wish to resume their education.

4. The principal or designee shall send by first class mail to the last known address of each applicable former student who attended high school within the Cambridge Public Schools within the prior two year period a written notice encouraging the former student's participation in furthering their education and providing information regarding the availability of publicly funded post-high school academic support programs.

Policy references: JE, JH, JH/JHA, JHB

Legal references: Mass. Gen. Laws, ch. 76, §§ 1, 1A, 2, 4, 19, 20; Mass. Gen. Laws, ch. 119, §§ 39E, 51A; 106 C.M.R. § 203.900; 603 C.M.R. § 8.00

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