

**ALEXANDRIA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
**Alexandria Virginia**

**Administrative Directives**  
**2018-2019 Series**  
**No: 13**  
**Date: August 24, 2018**

**TO:** School Based Administrative Staff Members

**FROM:** Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., Ed. D.  
Superintendent of Schools

**TOPIC:** ACPS Attendance Policy

**PURPOSES**

1. To outline the Alexandria City Public Schools' Attendance Policy
2. To outline the procedures by which the Alexandria City Public Schools division monitors and responds to chronic absenteeism and truant activity.
3. To outline consequences of truant behaviors

**BACKGROUND**

Research continues to suggest that student achievement is significantly correlated with consistent school attendance. National data concludes that students who attend school regularly are more likely to become proficient in areas of math and reading and they are more likely to develop valuable social skills and meaningful relationships with others. Consistent attendance also broadens the acquisition of positive work ethics and certain adaptive traits that are necessary for students to manage stressors throughout their life span. It is important to note that regular school attendance is not solely a best practice philosophy. It is a mandate derived by law, per Virginia Code 22.1-254. This code stipulates that every parent or guardian of a youth between 5 and 17 years of age must send their child to school every day. Alexandria City Public Schools works in partnership with parents to ensure that students attend school every day. If, however, any student becomes chronically absent from school without excuse, there are specific procedures that ACPS must enforce, in accordance with the ACPS Attendance Regulations JEA-R and the Commonwealth of Virginia legislation.

**PROCEDURES**

**Attendance Record Keeping**

Per Attendance Regulation JEA-R, principals shall arrange to have verified absences entered into the student information system no later than the first hour of the school day in elementary schools, and by the end of first period in middle and high schools. All assigned classroom teachers, school registrars, or designated attendance clerks shall code student attendance each class, each day. School Administrators

are responsible for monitoring this activity. Parents will be notified each morning, via phone and email where available, when students are absent from school without parent notification and reminded of the need to contact the school as soon as possible. Parents of secondary level students will be notified each evening if the student was absent from any classes without parent notification, and asked to contact the school.

### **Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) Attendance Documentation Regulations**

The VDOE is a primary agent responsible for monitoring ACPS student attendance data and interventions, particularly in cases of chronic absenteeism. Per VDOE, ACPS' method for calculating/defining all-day absences particularly at the secondary level will include instances where a student misses *all* periods within a given school day.

VDOE will collect information regarding unexcused absences at the following intervals:

- Fall semester  
October 1
- Spring semester  
March 31
- End of the school year  
June 30
- Summer semester  
August 30

VDOE accountability measures will include stringent monitoring of the divisions' electronic documentation of attendance interventions in three specific areas:

- Documentation of an Attendance Plan Code.  
This field must be completed at the 5th unexcused absence.
- Documentation of an Attendance Conference Code.  
This field must be completed at the 6th unexcused absence.
- Documentation of a Court Referral/Complaint Proceedings Code  
This field must be completed at the 7th unexcused absence.

### **Documenting Ten Day “No Show” Procedures in September**

The Administrative Codes (8VAC20-730-30) states:

Data collection shall begin on the first day students attend for the school year. Each school division shall provide student level attendance data for each student that includes the number of unexcused absences in a manner prescribed by the Virginia Department of Education. A student's attendance is cumulative and begins on the first official day of the school year or the first day the student is officially enrolled. All nonattendance days are cumulative and begin with the first absence. For purposes of this data collection, truancy shall start with the first unexcused absence and will be cumulative."(8VAC20-730-30)

All students who are officially registered and actively enrolled in district records should be counted as absent for nonattendance until acceptable verification stating otherwise is provided. Students who are

absent due to extended vacations, overseas travel, and matters that are otherwise defined as “unexcused” shall be marked accordingly.

## **EXCUSED ABSENCES**

Per the Virginia Administrative Code (8VAC20-730-10), student absences may be excused, pending verification from the guardian and/or another designated professional. Examples of excused absences may include, but are not limited to, the following conditions defined in the Alexandria City Public Schools Attendance Policy:

1. Medical Illnesses (Physical or Mental). A principal must request that documentation from a physician be provided after the student has accrued 3 consecutive absences or 10 or more absences within a given school year
2. Medical and dental examinations
3. Observance of a religious holiday
4. Student court hearings
5. Students who have been approved to participate in school sponsored activities (inside and outside of the school building)
6. Students who have been assigned in-school (ISS), Alternate Instructional Support (AIS) Center or out-of-school suspension (OSS)
7. Critical or isolated family emergencies (loss of a loved one, unexpected residence dislocation, critical injuries to family members, etc.). Parents are expected to plan extended travel and vacations days around ACPS scheduled breaks and approved holidays
8. ACPS transportation services related delays
9. Weather related conditions

## **Pre-arranged Absences**

*Pre-Arranged Absences Request Forms* may be submitted in specific situations. Examples of activities that may constitute a pre-arranged excuse absence include (with documentation):

1. Visitation with family members deployed in the US Military and Armed Forces
2. Visitation with incarcerated caregivers
3. Appointments with military recruiters
4. Appointments with college/university admissions departments
5. School students, ages 12 and under, who cannot be left at home alone/unsupervised, while a parent is on professional travel for employment related activities.

Pre-Arranged Absences Request Forms must be submitted at least 5 days prior to the scheduled absence and advance approval of each prearranged absence must be granted by the school administration. Documentation of student’s participation in the above noted activities must be provided no later than 3 days after the event is complete. .

An "unexcused absence" is an absence where (i) the student misses his scheduled instructional school day in its entirety and (ii) no indication has been received by school personnel within three days of the absence..., or the parent provides a reason for the absence that is unacceptable to the school administration. The school administration may change an unexcused absence to an excused absence when the parent has provided an acceptable justification, per Virginia attendance codes.

## **Tardiness**

Timeliness is also a core expectation of the ACPS student attendance policy. Although excessive tardiness to school is not specified in the Virginia Compulsory Attendance Codes, it is a critical factor that impacts the overall academic experience and success of students. Tardiness encompasses any variation of time that extends beyond the principal's documented start time for the school day or class period. Parents are expected to provide verbal and/or written notification to designated school personnel each time a child is late to school. Examples of excused tardies may include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Medical Illnesses (Physical or Mental). A principal may request that documentation from a physician be provided after the student has accrued 10 or more tardies within a given school year
2. Medical and dental examinations
3. Student court hearings
4. Students who have been approved to participate in school sponsored activities (inside and outside of the school building)
5. Critical or isolated family emergencies (death of a loved one, unexpected residency dislocation, critical injuries to family members, etc.). Parents are expected to plan extended travel and vacations days around ACPS scheduled breaks and approved holidays
6. ACPS transportation services related delays
7. Weather related conditions

Tardies to class during the school day will be excused at the discretion of the principal's directives to staff each year. When students have accrued an excessive number of unexcused or unverified tardies, the school social worker, along with the parent and other school support team members, must develop a plan to resolve the situation as soon as possible.

## **CONSEQUENCES OF TRUANT BEHAVIOR**

The Alexandria City Public School division strictly adheres to the Commonwealth of Virginia's Compulsory Attendance Law (22.1-258), and the Virginia Administrative Code (8VAC20-730-10), which requires school personnel to make reasonable efforts to contact a parent or guardian "whenever any pupil fails to report to school on a regularly scheduled school day and no indication has been received by school personnel that the pupil's parent is aware of and supports the pupil's absence." The code also requires that school personnel make reasonable efforts to contact a parent or guardian "whenever any pupil fails to report to school for a total of five scheduled school days for the school year and no indication has been received by school personnel that the pupil's parent is aware of and supports the pupil's absence". Virginia Code 16.1-228 and 22.1-262 suggests that failure to adhere to a school attendance support plan may result in very serious outcomes for students as well as parents. In this case, the school principal or his/her designee, the school social worker, the student, and the student's parent/guardian shall jointly develop a plan to resolve

and improve student's non-attendance. If the student is absent an additional day after the plan is made and the school social worker has received no indication that the student's parent/guardian is aware of and supports the student's absence, the school social worker should schedule an Attendance Conference with the student, his/her parent/guardian, and school personnel. The conference may include other community service providers to assist in resolving issues related to the student's non-attendance. Upon the next absence by such student, without indication that the parent is aware of and supports the student's absence, the school social worker will initiate a referral to Alexandria's Attendance Review Panel, which is facilitated by Alexandria Court Services Unit.

Any student who is absent from school for 15 consecutive days, without excuse, will be officially withdrawn from school, per the compulsory attendance expectations noted in the Virginia Code 22.1-254. In such cases, the school principal, or stated designee, must alert parents in writing at such time that a student is withdrawn from school records. Students who have been withdrawn from school due to 15 consecutive absences are still required, per Virginia Code 22.1-254, to attend school every day and will be subject to the stated measures for violation of such laws. When students have been withdrawn from school due to accrual of 15 or more consecutive, unexcused absences, the school support staff must make every effort to ensure that the following interventions have occurred:

1. School support staff must re-engage the student and parent to confirm the whereabouts of the youth.
2. School support staff must confirm the educational plan for the student.
3. School support staff must collaborate with the Alexandria court services staff regarding interventions and sanctions.

In an effort to prevent the above stated scenarios, it is imperative that parents provide verbal and/or written notification to school personnel each time their child is absent from school.

Chronic truant behaviors can yield devastating consequences which significantly impact both students and parents.

#### Student Consequences

1. Students will lose critical instructional time
2. Students can experience low academic achievement
3. Students can experience feelings of Isolation and disengagement
4. Students can be officially withdraw from school (after 15 consecutive days)
5. Students can be referral to the Alexandria Court's Attendance Review Panel
6. School Social Workers can file a CHINS (Child In Need Of Supervision) Petition with the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court as defined in Virginia Code § 16.1-228 and authorized by § 16.1-241.2
7. Students can be sanctioned to participate in juvenile probation monitoring and supervision
8. Students can be sanctioned by the court to participate in community service projects
9. Students can be sanctioned by the court to participate in mental health treatment
10. The court can order placement in Alexandria Shelter Care Program of Northern Virginia or the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center
11. The Court can suspend or revoke a student's driver's license

### Parent Consequences

1. Referral to the Alexandria Court's Attendance Review Panel
2. School Social Workers may file a complaint to the Alexandria Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court against a parent/guardian, pursuant to Virginia Code 22.1-262
3. Parent can be sanctioned to participate in mental health treatment
4. Parent may be sanctioned to pay excessive fines
5. Parents can be sentenced to jail (when court orders are violated)
6. Children can be removed from the parents' residence and placed in Alexandria Shelter Care Program of Northern Virginia or the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center
7. Missed time from work/lost wages

Alexandria City Public Schools is committed to working with students and families to help prevent the above noted consequences from occurring. School staff diligently works in concert with our community partners to address the underlying factors that may be contributing to student absenteeism. The school district contends that the collaborative efforts of home, schools and our community can produce the most effective outcomes in reducing absenteeism and its precipitating factors.

To learn more about ACPS school attendance policies and procedures, please contact your school social worker or the ACPS Truancy Outreach Specialist, Tara Newton at 703-619-8358. You can also refer to the ACPS Code of Conduct and the ACPS Website for more information on ACPS attendance directives.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

*To access the JEA-R Attendance Regulations in their entirety, please click on the link below:*

<https://www.acps.k12.va.us/cms/lib/VA01918616/Centricity/Shared/documents/school-board-policies/JEA-R.pdf>. For more information on Virginia School Accreditation, please visit <http://www.doe.virginia.gov>.

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT:** Dr. Julie Crawford, Chief Student Services Officer  
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