# North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

# Compulsory Attendance / Truancy

In 2009, the North Dakota legislature passed SB 2217, which lowered the penalty for truancy from a felony to an infraction for a first offense and a class B misdemeanor for a second or subsequent offense. Additionally, the legislature required the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to convene a workgroup to further study truancy definitions, reporting and prevention. As a result, the 2011 legislature passed SB 2226, which defines truancy/compulsory attendance, procedures and reporting. This fact sheet provides guidance for districts in meeting the requirements.

The National Center for School Engagement identifies three building blocks for school success as attendance, attachment and achievement. Students should want to come to school, and are more likely to become engaged when: 1) they have positive relationships with school personnel, 2) welcoming school climates exist, 3) school-based supports and resources are available, and 4) they feel safe because issues of bullying and harassment are effectively addressed. Attendance and attachment are essential prerequisites for achievement.

## What is compulsory attendance and truancy?

A common definition creates consistent reporting and data; secondly, a common definition allows all districts to effectively communicate the same attendance expectations to staff, students, parents/guardians and law enforcement/court system. In North Dakota, compulsory attendance is required until a student's 16th birthday.

Truancy is **any** unexcused absence by a student under the age of 16 to include:

- Three (3) consecutive unexcused days within a semester; or
- Six (6) one-half unexcused days within a semester (elementary school); or
- Twenty-one (21) class hours, as defined by each local education authority (LEA).

The truancy determination is then documented as unexcused by administration or its designee. Excused absence is defined as any student absent from class/school with a written/verbal excuse by the parent/guardian or administrator/school. Each LEA determines the number of truancies before notifying parents, determination of credit loss and disposition of student; and more importantly, each LEA can develop more stringent policies.

## Who is responsible to report truancy, when and to whom?

Consistency in reporting will allow both districts and the state to identify trends and respond to various reporting requests by the legislature and other parities. All school building personnel will submit annual truancy data to DPI by June each year via STARS. Data can be either imported or input directly throughout the year using the user interface. Additionally, DPI, EduTech and the North Dakota Information Technology Department (ITD) are working collaboratively as part of the SLDS (Statewide Longitudinal Data System) development team to create a uniform data collection process that automatically pulls data directly from PowerSchool.

It is recognized that schools use individual attendance codes; however, in order to produce statewide data, a method to compare "apples-to-apples" is needed. This comparison can best be done by mapping existing individual attendance codes to higher level attendance categories – the attendance categories can then be reported at a state level, while individual schools can report on attendance codes.

**Suggested Mapping of Attendance Categories to Attendance Codes**
(Lettered items are Attendance Categories. Bulleted items are Attendance Codes.)

A. Circumstantial/School Approved
- College Visit
- Family Emergency/Bereavement
- Legal/Judicial Requirement, Counseling
- Religious Observation
- Transportation Not Available

B. Disciplinary Action
- Expulsion
- In-School Suspension
- Out-of-School Suspension

C. Excused Absence
- Excused Absence
- Family Request/Activity

D. In Class/Tardy

E. Medical
- Injury, Illness, other health related

F. Non-Instructional Activity Recognized by the State or School
- Extracurricular Activity

G. Out of Class receiving instructional services
- Field Trip
- Homebound

H. Unexcused Absence (used for truancy)
- Situation Unknown
- Skipping School
- Unapproved Activity

I. Weather/Natural Disaster
- Natural Disaster
- Weather

### Considerations for Elementary vs. Secondary Schools

Truant behaviors and patterns often start in elementary grades and subsequent interventions and consequences may need to differ from middle/high school. Research reveals that most elementary truancies are linked to family and parental issues, where middle/high school truancy is more student initiated. Consider the unique circumstances and community/parental factors that influence and affect each individual school.

### Truancy Program Components

- Collaboration – Establish a multidisciplinary group to guide and implement truancy programming. Involve students and parents in planning programs to improve attendance and engagement.
- Family involvement – Target family participation in school attachment activities, engage families in all truancy prevention and intervention efforts, and address family-based needs to support attendance.
- Comprehensive approach – The reasons for nonattendance are varied; a community's response should be flexible and broad enough to take into consideration the specific issues experienced by students and families.
- Use of incentives and sanctions – A combination of motivating incentives and accountability-based sanctions works best with youth.
- Evaluation and assessment – Test the approach to see if the desired outcomes are produced and make midcourse corrections if necessary.

### Establishing a Comprehensive Truancy Prevention Program

- Engagement and attachment activities for youth and parents should be continuous – from elementary school to the senior year of high school.
- Build relationships with local service providers who naturally serve at-risk families.
- Reach out to small businesses to encourage them not to serve school-age children during school hours.
- Provide one point of contact for parents involved in a truancy program – someone who can provide practical assistance, advocacy and information about involved referral systems/programs.

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network recommends the following building-level strategies as effective in reducing truancy:

- School-community collaboration
- Family engagement
- Mentoring/tutoring
- Service learning
- Safe learning environments
- Early childhood education
- Alternative schooling
- After-school opportunities

## Model Truancy Programs

**Communities In Schools**
**www.communitiesinschools.org**

Communities In Schools, Inc., founded in 1977, developed a model for reducing school dropout and increasing high school graduation. The model is based on the assumption that youth at risk of dropping out have both academic and nonacademic issues that must be addressed to improve their chances of school completion. Communities In Schools operates best in school settings where multiple community agencies, such as community health agencies, social service providers, government agencies, and local businesses are readily available to deliver needed services to youth and their families.

**Families and Schools Together (FAST)**
**www.familiesandschools.org**

The Families and Schools Together (FAST) model is based in elementary schools designed to improve family functioning and relationship to school. When implemented, FAST consists of one elementary school and two selected community-based partners – frequently public health and/or mental health agencies. At-risk youth and their families are invited to participate in eight weekly sessions with other at-risk children and their parents/guardians followed up by two years of monthly sessions. Goals of the FAST program are to build bonds, trust, and supportive networks for families and children; increase parent involvement with children both at school and at home; and increase resiliency, attention span, and readiness to learn.

**Check & Connect**
**www.checkandconnect.org**

Created by the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota, Check & Connect is an intervention model designed to promote student engagement with school, reduce dropout behavior, and increase school completion. Students who are truant or tardy on a regular basis and have a behavioral, emotional, or academic concern receive a monitor/mentor. This monitor/mentor serves as an advocate, mentor, and service coordinator for the referred student and his/her family for two years focusing entirely on preserving and enhancing the student's attachment to school. A regular check of engagement indices including attachment, achievement, and attendance targets the work of the monitor/mentor.

**Big Brothers Big Sisters**
**www.bbbs.org**

This well-known program pairs at-risk youth with volunteer adults from their community. Staff members orient and screen volunteers, assess youth, and match caring adults with youth. Group activities and supervision are provided by the agency. This one-to-one relationship has been demonstrated to have a significant impact on youth behavior and decision making. Mentoring may be used as an incentive for students to attend school and as a school attachment activity.

## Resources

- **ND Century Code 15.1-20-02.1 Attendance**
  www.legis.nd.gov/cencode/t15-1c20.pdf
- **Fargo, North Dakota District Policy on Truancy**
  www.fargo.k12.nd.us/education/page/download.php?fileinfo=YXA2MjIwLnBkZjo6Oi93d3cvc2Nob29scy9zYy9yZW1vdGUvaW1hZ2VzL2RvY21nci8yMDRmaWxlNjc3LnBkZg==
- **Toolkit for Creating Your Own Truancy Prevention Program**
  www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/pr/217271.pdf
- **National Center for School Engagement**
  www.schoolengagement.org/TruancypreventionRegistry/Admin/Resources/Resources/TruancyPreventioninActionBestPracticesandModelTruancyPrograms-ExecutiveSummary.pdf
- **WHAT WORKS – Wisconsin Fact Sheet**
  whatworks.uwex.edu/attachment/factsheet_5truancy.pdf
- **American Bar Association: Model Truancy Prevention Programs**
  www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publishing/criminal_justice_section_newsletter/crimjust_juvjus_truancypreventionprograms.authcheckdam.doc

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