

Q: Who is responsible for making sure that children attend school?

A: Each parent and guardian of a child within the compulsory attendance age is responsible for the child's attendance as required by law (Section 1003.24,F.S.) The only conditions under which the parent or guardian is not responsible are:

- The student missed school with permission of the principal.
- The student cannot attend due to the financial inability of the parent to provide necessary clothes for the child, and this inability is reported in writing to the Department of Student Services prior to the opening of school or as soon as the inability is determined. Not reporting the financial inability to the Department of Student Services does enable the school district to pursue all interventions, including filing truancy petition in the Circuit Court. The inability to provide clothes must be substantiated by the Department of Student Services.
- The student does not attend due to sickness, injury, or other insurmountable condition, which makes attendance inadvisable.

Q: Are students required by law to attend school?

A: Pursuant to Section 1003.21 F.S., all children who are either six years of age or who will be six years old by February 1, or who are older than six years of age but who have not attained the age of 18 years, must attend school regularly during the entire school term. A student between 16 and 18 years of age is not subject to compulsory attendance if the student completes a formal Declaration of Intent to Terminate School Enrollment with the district school board. The declaration must acknowledge that terminating school enrollment is likely to reduce the student's earning potential and that the disenrollment will be reported to the Department of Safety and Motor Vehicles. The declaration of intent to terminate school enrollment must be signed by the student and the student's parent or legal guardian. The school must notify the parent or legal guardian of receipt of the student's declaration of intent to terminate school enrollment. A student who attains the age of 18 years during the school year is not subject to compulsory school attendance beyond the date upon which he or she attains that age.

Q: Do I have to explain why my child has been absent from school?

A: Yes, the parent or guardian is required to send a written explanation of the specific reason for the student's absence to the school within three days of the student's return to school. The explanation must include the dates of the absences and the specific reason. Any supportive documentation that may exist as to the reason for the absence should be attached. The Department of Student Services can, after investigation, advise the school to excuse absence(s) after the 3 days have passed. Physician explanations for absences that are received after the 3-day period will also authorize the school to excuse the absence.

The physician's authorization must include the dates that are to be excused as well as the reason. The term "physician" means a person practicing as a physician licensed under Chapter 458 (medical practice), 459 (osteopathic medicine), 460 (chiropractic medicine), or 461 (podiatric medicine), F.S.

Q: Can the school require me to have a note from a doctor when my child has been absent from school?

A: Yes, if a student has accumulated a total of 10 excused or 5 unexcused absences within a semester, subsequent absences of more than 3 consecutive days may not be excused unless documentation is received of examination, treatment, or supervision for an illness or other adverse health documented chronic illness/condition, consideration will be given on a case by case basis. Consideration will also be given regarding certain communicable illnesses and chronic medical conditions that do not require physician treatment, such as chickenpox, in which the student is still contagious and cannot return to school. Consideration will also be given for insurmountable circumstances that directly involve the student's primary family, such as a family death that requires the student to accompany the parent or guardian out of town for a brief period of time. The physician's authorization must include the dates that are to be excused as well as the reason. The

term “physician” means a person practicing as a physician licensed under Chapter 458 (medical practice), 459 (osteopathic medicine), 460 (chiropractic medicine), or 461 (podiatric medicine), F.S.

Q: What is an excused absence?

A: Absences for the following reasons are excused when an explanation is provided by the parent or by the student’s physician, when the physician authorization policy threshold has been reached:

- Illness of the student
- Major illness in the immediate family of the student that requires the student to miss school
- Medical appointments of the student
- Death in the immediate family
- Required court appearance
- A religious holiday of the specific faith of the student or the student’s immediate family
- Subpoena or forced absence by any law enforcement agency to fulfill civic duties; a copy of the subpoena or court summons is required
- Major disaster that would justify the absence that has been approved by the principal
- Head lice, maximum of two excused days per incident with a maximum of two incidents per semester
- Missing the school bus when the bus is more than 5 minutes early or more than 15 minutes late or is not able to make the route
- Other planned absences approved in advance by the principal
- Vacation travel where the student has accumulated fewer than 10 excused absences or 5 unexcused absences in a semester. The principal can excuse vacation travel that exceeds this threshold after considering the student’s attendance history, academic performance, mastery of the curriculum, and reason for the travel.

Q: What is an unexcused absence?

A: Unexcused absences are all failures to attend school other than those specifically excused by the principal or designees and include the following:

- Truancy or out-of-school suspensions
- Vacation travel where the student has accumulated more than 10 excused or 5 unexcused absences within a semester and the travel has not been approved in advance by the principal with the principal considering the student’s attendance history, academic performance, mastery of the curriculum, and reason for the travel
- Failure to provide an explanation of the absence to the school. The Department of Student Services can, after investigation, advise the school to excuse absence(s) after the 3 days have passed. Physician explanations for absences that are received after the 3-day period will also authorize the school to excuse the absence
- Missing the school bus unless the bus is more than 5 minutes early or more than 15 minutes late or is not able to make the route
- Non-attendance for immunization non-compliance
- Non-attendance due to head lice that exceeds two days per incident and/or exceeds two incidents per semester

Q: Will my child be allowed to make up missed work for excused absences?

A: Make-up work will be allowed for absences. The student will be allowed a period of two days make-up time for each day absent, not to exceed ten (10) school days for make-up work.

- On sufficient advance notice, the teacher will inform the student/parent of work to be covered during the student’s absence and student’s assignment. The teacher will be as specific as existing plans will allow, but is not expected to develop any special series of plans or assignments for individual students as make-up work.
- After the student returns to school, and upon the secondary student’s request, the teacher will inform the student of the work or assignments the class covered during student’s absence and student’s make-up assignment(s).

- To develop self-advocacy skills. elementary students should be encouraged to request make-up work, but the provision of that work is the responsibility of the teacher.
- The teacher may require the student to be fully responsible for all work that the student has missed and may require that the student take tests and examinations that shall be graded on the same basis as the rest of the class.
- Parents may be asked to submit legal or medical evidence to support any claim to excused absences.
- All make-up work must be turned in 10-days after the student's return to school.

Q: How could absences, excused or unexcused, impact my student's grades?

A: It is very challenging to keep up with class work and make-up missed work at the same time. Students have 2 days for each day missed to make-up work. However, ALL MAKE-UP WORK MUST BE TURNED IN WITHIN 10-DAYS OF RETURNING TO SCHOOL. In addition, students that miss school also miss instruction. The teacher is not required to teach lessons again to students who missed school.

Q: Can my high school aged child be withdrawn from school for non-attendance?

A: Yes. Parents should respond immediately to calls and/or written notifications from the school that their child is accumulating unexcused absences. Schools will make efforts to work with parents so that the student attends school regularly. The failure to respond to the school's notification on attendance issues and/or the student's continued non-attendance can result in a number of consequences, one of which is withdrawal from school. Students who are withdrawn for non-attendance are classified as "dropouts" and will lose their driving or pending driving privileges.

Q: Are absences for head lice excused?

A: Students with school verified cases of head lice will have 2 excused absences per incident up to a maximum of two incidents per semester. Students who return to school, after being sent home with lice, and are still infected will not be allowed to go to class and will not be counted as in attendance. In addition, their absence will be unexcused. Parents are advised to follow the instructions of the school health staff and directions on commercial head lice products to kill head lice and all nits. Parents should also accompany their child to school to have their head checked by the health paraprofessional or nurse when returning from a head lice absence.

Q: What can happen if my child has an accumulation of unexcused absences?

A: The first thing that could happen is that your child would be referred to the school's Problem Solving Team (1003.26, F.S.) as well as the school social worker. If a student has had at least five unexcused absences, or absences for which the reasons are unknown, within a calendar month or 10 unexcused absences, or absences for which the reasons are unknown, within a 90-calendar-day period, the student's teacher shall report the case to the school's Problem Solving Team or attendance committee. The school social worker shall participate in the meeting. The team or committee will determine if early patterns of truancy are developing. If a pattern of nonattendance is developing, whether the absences are excused or not, a meeting with the parent must be scheduled to identify remedies. The meeting with the parent can take place at the school or by a school representative who meets with the parent at a mutually agreed upon location. The team or committee shall implement any interventions that best address the problem. The interventions may include, but are not limited to: (1) frequent communication between school and the family (2) mentoring (3) counseling (4) evaluation for alternative education programs (5) attendance contracts (6) referral to other agencies for services (7) other interventions, including but not limited to a truancy petition pursuant to s.984.151. If a child subject to compulsory school attendance will not comply with attempts to enforce school attendance, the parent, the guardian, or the superintendent or his or her designee may refer the case to the case staffing committee pursuant to s. 984.12., and the superintendent or his or her designee may file a truancy petition pursuant to s. 984.151.

Q: When can a Truancy Petition be filed in Circuit Court?

A: The superintendent may file a truancy petition pursuant to procedures in s.984.151., when (1) a student has 5 unexcused absences in a calendar month or 10 unexcused absences within a 90-calendar-day-period. (2) the Problem Solving Team or attendance committee has met and efforts to correct the attendance have been unsuccessful (3) the parent has been notified as to the unexcused absences or absences for which reasons are unknown. The school will work with the Department of Student Services to prepare the truancy petition for the Superintendent's review and approval. The school will provide the Department of Student Services representative with all verifications of notification to and conferences with the parent to inform and discuss attendance. The school will also provide the Department of Student Services with copies of all parent and physician excuses for the absences as well as any phone logs noting that the parent called to explain the absences. The school will further verify that the attendance recorded for official purposes is true and correct according to School Board policy. Truancy petitions will be filed in the Circuit Court in the 19th Judicial Circuit. All supportive documentation provided by the school to support the filing of the petition will become part of the official court file. Parents will receive a copy of the petition and all documents filed with the petition by one of the following means (1) hand delivery by a school district representative with the parent's signature that the copy was received (2) sheriff's service arranged by the Clerk of the Circuit Court.

Q: When is a student considered to be a habitual truant?

A: A student who has 15 or more unexcused absences within 90 calendar days with or without the knowledge or consent of the student's parent or guardian, and is subject to compulsory school attendance, shall be classified as a habitual truant. The Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles; Department of Children and Families; Department of Juvenile Justice; State Attorney's Office; Circuit Court will be notified of cases of habitual truancy as prescribed by law.

Q: Can school attendance affect my child getting a driver's license or Temporary Cash Assistance?

A: Yes. The 1997 Florida Legislature enacted requirements that schools report to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV) the name, birthdate, sex, and social security number of any minor who attains the age of 14 and accumulates 15 unexcused absences in a period of 90 calendar days. The legislation further provides that those minors who thus fail to satisfy attendance requirements will be ineligible for the driving privilege. It is important for students and parents to know that suspension of the student's current or pending license can result in increased automobile insurance premiums.

Q: What happens to a parent whose child is 16 years old or older when the parent refuses to cooperate with the interventions to improve school attendance?

A: The Superintendent can seek criminal prosecution of any parent who still refuses to cooperate with the interventions.

Q: Does the school district report school attendance information to other agencies?

A: Habitual truants will be reported to the Department of Safety and Motor Vehicles; Department of Children and Families; Department of Juvenile Justice and their contracted providers for truants; State Attorney's Office; Circuit Court. Truancy cases will also be reported to agencies contracted by the School Board to provide truancy services pre and post the student meeting the habitual truant definition.

Q: What staff are involved with attendance enforcement?

A: The school social workers, attendance assistant, and law enforcement specialist in the Department of Student Services work with the school, parents, students, and appropriate agencies to improve student attendance.

Q: What is the policy on Take Your Child to Work Day?

A: Parents should read the School Board's policy governing Take Your Child to Work Day on the Student Progression Plan (SPP). The SPP can be found on the district website at www.stlucieschools.org

Q. My child has a serious chronic disease that results in a lot of missed school. Do I have to send a written note each time my child is absent?

A. Students who have documented chronic/serious medical conditions can be expected to have multiple absences during the school year. These absences, when related to their condition, may be considered excused upon verbal contact with the parent for verification of reason for the absence.

Examples of such conditions include:

- cerebral palsy
- cancer
- conditions that require tracheostomy
- conditions that require oxygen
- conditions that require gastric tubes
- conditions that require shunts
- insulin dependent diabetes
- seizure disorders with recent seizure activity
- severe asthma with recent asthmatic episodes
- sickle cell disease
- chronic conditions that cause severe pain
- juvenile rheumatoid arthritis with limited mobility
- students deemed "medically fragile" or "medically complex"

Q. Is it okay if my child is tardy and/or leaves school early?

A. Tardies and leaving school early are either excused or unexcused. The conditions that would be excused or unexcused are the same as those for an absence. Parents are also required to submit a written explanation as to why their child is tardy or has to leave school early. All students who are tardy **MUST** go first to the office and sign-in. Elementary and middle school students must be accompanied by a parent to do this. **DO NOT DROP THE STUDENT OFF IN FRONT OF THE SCHOOL.** We know that parents want to develop good habits in their children that can help them be successful in school and in life. Being on time is an important habit to develop. High School students must also sign-in at the office or they could be counted as absent for the day.