



STATE OF NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: May 27, 2020
To: Chief School Administrators, Charter School and Renaissance School Project Leads
Route To: District Data Coordinators, School Nurses, School Counselors, Attendance Officers
From: Peggy McDonald, Assistant Commissioner
Division of Student Services
Deadline: June 30, 2020

Guidance for Reporting Student Absences and Calculating Chronic Absenteeism 2020 Update/COVID-19 Attendance Issues

Chronic absenteeism has been shown to negatively impact learning across grade levels. In recognition of the importance of attendance, chronic absenteeism was identified as New Jersey's indicator of school quality or student success in the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) [State plan](#) for accountability. In an effort to assist schools in addressing chronic absenteeism, guidance from the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) has been updated. The guidance addresses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on both reporting and the calculation chronic absenteeism for the 2019-20 school year.

Schools and districts must submit attendance data according to the NJDOE's guidelines for all students and subgroups in NJ SMART SID Management by **June 30, 2020**. Districts are reminded to review any attendance data nonfictions provided by the NJDOE's NJ SMART contractor in preparation for submitting data for the 2019-20 school year to better capture accurate data.

The NJDOE's *Guidance for Reporting Student Absences and Calculating Chronic Absenteeism* was first released in May 2017. Annually, the NJDOE reviews questions that it has received from the field and revises the guidance accordingly .

The revised [Guidance for Reporting Student Absences and Calculating Chronic Absenteeism](#) responds to new questions from the field to attendance policies put in place as a result of Governor Murphy's Executive Order regarding in-person instruction. It also includes new information to further support accurate reporting and analysis of data by school and district leadership teams and other stakeholders. It is important to note the following:

- Schools can still determine how "excused" and "unexcused" absences are defined for the purposes of expectations and consequences regarding truancy, student conduct, promotion, retention, and the award of course credit, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.6*, as this remains unchanged. However, a school must report student attendance to the NJDOE in accordance with the guidance document.
- Attendance data should be reported for all students accountable to a district during any point during the 2019-20 school year – from July 1 to June 30 – even if that student transferred, dropped out or was otherwise not a member of the district at the end of the school year.
- Before a district makes its final submission to NJ SMART SID Management, the district should ensure that attendance has been recorded for all students through the last day of the school year.

Accurate data enables schools and districts to intervene early when they identify students who may be at risk of chronic absenteeism.

Chronic absenteeism can be turned around by engaging families, leveraging staff mentors for student support, utilizing data early and often, and providing a school culture and climate that encourages students to come to school every day. When a concern is identified, there are many actions that schools can take to reverse the trend. To assist districts in improving student attendance, a companion document, [Strategies for Addressing Chronic Absenteeism](#), is available on the NJDOE's Attendance, Truancy, and Chronic Absenteeism [webpage](#).

COVID-19 Update:

The NJDOE recognizes the complexity of tracking attendance during school closures due to COVID-19.

Districts should note the following:

- In a March 13, 2020 [NJDOE memo](#), Guidance Regarding Requirements for Public Health-Related School Closure, NJDOE indicated to districts that “[a]ny day on which all students impacted by a public health-related closure have access to home instruction services provided consistent with the guidance in this memo will count as a day on which the board of education has provided public school facilities toward its compliance with the 180-day requirement in accordance with *N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9*.”
- On April 14, 2020, [Public Law 2020, Chapter 27](#) was enacted. This new law allows districts to apply one or more days of virtual or remote instruction provided to students towards the 180-day requirement so long as the district virtual or remote instruction program meets criteria established by the Commissioner of Education.
- Since these “virtual” days or home instruction service days during any COVID-19 school closure period will count as days in membership for students, students need to be marked as present or absent during such days. All students can be recorded as present for applicable days unless the district knowingly determines a student was not participating in any such instruction, in which case they must be recorded as absent.
- *ESSA* Accountability and School Performance Reports: Chronic absenteeism is NJDOE’s indicator of school quality and student success in the state’s *ESSA* accountability plan and is reported annually in the School Performance Reports. In March 2020, New Jersey received a federal waiver that waived the requirement to report chronic absenteeism data and use it as a measure for school accountability for the 2019-20 school year. While chronic absenteeism rates will not be reported in the School Performance reports for 2019-20, attendance data must still be submitted under the guidelines of this document to NJ SMART SID Management.
- New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC): Currently, the Division of Field Services is reviewing any necessary changes to the NJQSAC District Performance Review (DPR). Updates on the use of chronic absenteeism data in the DPR will be provided at a later date.
- School Register Summary (SRS): Data collection will proceed on the same timeline as collection in prior years and the definitions for days in membership and days present will follow the same principles outlined in this chronic absenteeism guidance document. While it is expected that the SRS deadline will remain in early August as in prior years, districts should monitor the NJDOE Broadcast page for further information on SRS data collection timelines.

Questions may be directed to Attendance@doe.nj.gov.

c: Members, State Board of Education
Lamont O. Repollet, Ed.D., Commissioner
NJDOE Staff
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
Garden State Coalition of Schools
NJ LEE Group