

Guidance on School Attendance for Young Children Preschool through 3rd Grade

Regular school attendance is an important factor in children's social and cognitive development. Regular school attendance can provide children with various enriching opportunities and experiences that are beneficial to their social development and relationships with peers and adults. Excessive absenteeism whether sporadic or consistent can have long term effects on a child's educational path starting in the preschool. Chronic absenteeism sets the stage for poor attendance and inability to successfully do grade-level work in later grades (Attendance Works, 2013). Districts should be proactive in educating families, staff and the community on the benefits of regularly attending school and the disadvantages associated with absenteeism.

The Division of Early Childhood Education recommends that all school districts have written policies that includes the preschool and kindergarten years. The policy should be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure relevance. A copy of the policy should be included in the district handbook, given to families and staff, and discussed with all school, home and community stakeholders.

Listed below are a few steps that districts can take when dealing with excessive absenteeism:

- If an enrolled child is absent without excuse for more than 3 consecutive days, the district should make every effort to contact the family to find out why the child has been absent and to find out what assistance is needed in getting the child to school.
- After 3 consecutive unexcused days and failed attempts to contact the family, the assigned family services professional(s) (family worker, social worker, community parent involvement specialist, guidance counselor should contact a district-wide truancy officer or other designated administrator to inform them of the matter.
- The family services professional should accompany a truancy officer or administrator to the home for a visit. If the family services professional is unable to accompany the truancy officer, a separate home visit should be planned. During the home visit, the family services professional should assess if the family is in crisis or has a need for social services support (i.e. food, clothing, rental assistance, medical etc.).
- Follow-up home visits and/or face to face contact with the family should be on-going throughout the remainder of the school year and involved the coordinated efforts of the

classroom teacher, family services professional, and building principal

- If attempts to reach the family and child are unsuccessful after 3 days, the district should continue with efforts to contact the family. If a child's welfare is in question, the Department Children and Families and/or law enforcement should be contacted.

For resources and general information on attendance and truancy, please visit the following websites:

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/students/safety/behavior/attendance/>

www.attendanceworks.org

www.schoolengagement.org