

# Chronic Absenteeism: Frequently Asked Questions and Compliance Guidance

## Introduction

Chronic absenteeism is a critical issue that affects student learning, engagement, and overall school performance. In accordance with New Jersey state law, schools with a chronic absenteeism rate of 10% or higher are required to develop a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) to identify and address barriers to student attendance. This document provides answers to frequently asked questions about chronic absenteeism, the CAP requirement, and the responsibilities of schools and districts in ensuring compliance with state regulations. It also highlights available resources to support schools in their efforts to improve attendance and promote student success.

### Chronic Absenteeism Definition

Chronic absence is defined as having missed 10 percent or more days of school for any reason—this includes locally excused and unexcused absences.

Source: [New Jersey Administrative Code \(N.J.A.C.\) 6A:32-8.6](#)

### New Jersey Statute 18A:38-25.1 “Chronically absent” students, corrective action plan.

In the event that 10 percent or more of the students enrolled in a public school are chronically absent, the school shall develop a corrective action plan to improve absenteeism rates. The corrective action plan shall include, but need not be limited to, the following:

- 1) identifying problems and barriers to school attendance;
- 2) developing recommendations to address the problems and barriers to school attendance that have been identified;
- 3) outlining communication strategies to educate and inform parents on the importance of school attendance;
- 4) establishing protocols on informing and engaging parents when a child begins to show a pattern of absences; and
- 5) reviewing school policies to ensure that they support improved school attendance.

In developing the corrective action plan, the school shall solicit input from parents of students currently attending the school. The solicitation shall include, at a minimum, a parental survey that includes questions related to parents' beliefs regarding the reasons why students are chronically absent and recommendations on the best ways to improve attendance. In developing the corrective action plan, the school shall engage the school's parent organization, if one exists, in identifying the causes of the school's high absenteeism rate and possible solutions. If there is no parent organization at the school, the school shall hold a public meeting to provide parents with an opportunity to provide input during the development of the corrective action plan.

The school shall present the corrective action plan to the board of education. The school shall annually review and revise the corrective action plan, and present the revisions to the board, until the percentage of students who are chronically absent is less than 10 percent.

N.J.S.A. 18A:38-25.1.

Source: [New Jersey Statutes Annotated \(N.J.S.A.\) Title 18A:38-25.1](#)

## Frequently Asked Questions

Below are the most frequently asked questions related to the implementation of N.J.S.A. 18A:38-25.1 and chronic absenteeism in general.

### Corrective Action Plan for Reducing Absenteeism

#### **1. The Corrective Action Plan (CAP) has been required since 2018. Why are schools being notified now in 2024?**

The requirement for schools to develop a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) when chronic absenteeism reaches 10% or higher has been in place since 2018. However, recent updates to New Jersey's Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC) indicators have increased oversight of district compliance with this law. The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) is committed to ensuring that districts are fully informed of all related requirements before holding them accountable for compliance. While local legal counsel and/or compliance officers are responsible for monitoring applicable laws and regulations and advising schools accordingly, the NJDOE is taking additional measures to ensure districts are provided clear guidance and support to meet the law's requirements.

#### **2. Is the district or the individual school required to create a Corrective Action Plan (CAP)?**

The district is not required to create a CAP. Each **school** is required to create a CAP if that school has 10% or more of their students considered chronically absent. However, through QSAC, districts are required to ensure that schools required to develop a CAP are compliant and adhere to the provisions outlined in the law.

#### **3. Where do schools send their Corrective Action Plans (CAPs)?**

The CAPs are maintained locally and presented to the board of education. The CAPs may be requested to demonstrate compliance during QSAC monitoring or otherwise.

#### **4. Do schools need to include Pre-Kindergarten (PK) students when calculating school chronic absence rates for the purposes of the CAP ?**

No, schools do not need to include PK students.

#### **5. If the school Chronic Absenteeism rate is below 10%, but some student groups have rates above 10%, is a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) required?**

The CAP required by N.J.S.A. 18A:38-25.1 is only required if the **schoolwide rate** is at 10% or above. If a school is identified as needing targeted or comprehensive support, it may be required to

implement specific corrective actions to address chronic absenteeism amongst student groups that are chronically absent at a rate above the state average.

**6. Does the NJDOE have specific parent surveys that schools can use when developing a Corrective Action Plan (CAP)? Does the NJDOE have a template for parent survey?**

The NJDOE hosts sample Survey Items on the [Conditions for Learning](#) webpage.

Schools and districts can consider Attendance Works' [Scan of Environment and Attendance Tool](#) (SEAT) when planning to develop parent surveys. The SEAT is designed for leaders to engage school staff, students, parents and community members to identify strengths and opportunities to promote positive school culture and strong attendance. Attendance Works has resources regarding [Chronic Absence](#) which may help schools as they plan how to conduct their parent surveys.

**7. Does the NJDOE require schools use a specific template for the Corrective Action Plan (CAP)?**

No, the NJDOE does not require schools use a specific template. However, the NJDOE offers a [sample template](#) that schools can consider when developing their corrective action plans.

**8. When are the Corrective Action Plans (CAPs) due?**

Corrective Action Plans (CAPs) must be presented to or reviewed by the local Board of Education annually until the school's chronic absenteeism rate falls below 10%, as required by *N.J.S.A. 18A:38-25.1*.

The certified School Performance Reports, published each spring by the NJDOE, include chronic absenteeism rates and may serve as a prompt to initiate the CAP development process. However, schools are not required to wait for this release. If a school already knows that 10% or more of its students were chronically absent in the previous school year, it may begin developing its CAP earlier.

For example, receipt of the ESSA Accountability Profiles, typically released in the Fall, can be used as an earlier trigger. This approach is considered best practice, as it allows schools to implement targeted interventions sooner and potentially reduce absenteeism within the current school year.

## General Questions related to Chronic Absence

### **1. What can schools do if specific student groups have 10% or more of students considered chronically absent?**

Examining disparities among student groups is essential to ensuring that all students have equitable access to the resources and support needed to attend school consistently. Schools can use student group data to inform decisions within their schoolwide CAP (Comprehensive Attendance Plan).

By analyzing attendance trends for specific student groups, schools can identify targeted strategies to improve attendance. For example, if data show that students from households where English is not the primary language have higher absenteeism rates, this may indicate a need for translated attendance related communications to better engage families and support regular attendance.

### **2. If a school is advised by a family that a student is going to be taking a lengthy time off for vacation, should the school dis-enroll the student and then re-enroll the student when the student returns?**

Schools should review “extended non-illness absences” in [Guidance for Reporting Student Absences and Calculating Chronic Absenteeism](#). Given that one student’s absence should not significantly impact your chronic absence rate, schools should consider the possible implications of dis-enrolling a student for the purposes of reporting student attendance data with regard to its potential impact on other accountability measures as well as any possible financial consequences.

### **3. How do we use federal funds to support and/or address “attendance issues”?**

The [Maximizing Federal Funds website](#) provides school and school district leaders, grant administrators, educators, and other stakeholders with information about how different Federal funds may be used to meet their specific, identified needs.

This website is designed as an extension to the 2017 New Jersey Department of Education resource entitled “[Unlocking Your Federal Funds](#),” which provides information on Federal funding flexibilities under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA).

### **Where do I submit additional questions related to attendance or chronic absenteeism?**

attendance@doe.nj.gov