



STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Reporting Student Attendance and Determining Chronic Absenteeism Rates



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Purpose

This guidance clarifies policies and expectations for reporting student membership and attendance data in NJ SMART and sets forth the NJDOE's methodology for measuring chronic absenteeism.

Districts should review their locally developed attendance data collection system or work with their Student Information System (SIS) vendors to make sure they are in compliance with the attendance reporting requirements outlined in this guidance.

Background

For students to learn and achieve their full potential, it is critical they are engaged in the learning process. Research shows that absences impact a student's ability to succeed in school. In addition, research shows that chronic absenteeism, or having missed 10 percent or more of the school year, is a primary cause of low academic achievement and a powerful predictor of a student's risk of dropping out of school.¹

In its approved [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\) State Plan](#), the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) identified chronic absenteeism as the indicator of school quality for federal school accountability. Chronic absenteeism rates are factored into the summative rating used to identify schools in need of comprehensive or additional targeted support and improvement. Additionally, information on chronic absenteeism, including the number and percentage of students who were chronically absent schoolwide, across student groups and grade levels, is included in each school's annual School Performance Report, per ESSA Sec.1111.

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:38-25.1, 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. Please refer to *Data-Based Decision Making for Addressing Chronic Absenteeism*, on the NJDOE's [Student Attendance](#) website, to learn more about the required actions and steps that must be taken.

Accurate student attendance data allows schools and districts to better assess the root causes of chronic absenteeism and implement improvement strategies to address these issues. A list of various research-based strategies for reducing chronic absenteeism is available on the NJDOE's Student Attendance website.

¹ Balfanz, R. and Byrnes, V. (2012). [The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools](#). Baltimore: John Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools.

Key Attendance Terms

This section provides background on legal requirements of a school day and the attendance-related data fields used to calculate student-level absentee rates and school-level chronic absenteeism that appear in NJ SMART.

According to N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(a) and (b), a **school day in session** is a day in which the school is open, and students are under the guidance and direction of a teacher(s). A school day must be four hours or more to be considered a full day, or at least two and a half hours for kindergarten. In addition:

- School must be in session a minimum of 180 days to receive state aid payments per N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9;
- The number of school days in session does not include summer school;
- The extended school year is included in the calculation up to June 30 and only when it is required for all students; and
- As stated in N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.1(e), the number of possible days in session for a student on home instruction is the same as for other students in the program in which the student is enrolled.

Per N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.4(a), a student must be recorded as present, absent, or excused for a State-excused absence on every day the school is in session after the student enrolls until the date the student is transferred to another school or officially leaves the school district. A student can never be considered as present for half a day and absent for half of the same day. The only exception to this rule is recording attendance for students attending a shared-time vocational program.

A **day present** is defined in N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.4(c) as a day that a student participates in instruction or instruction-related activities for at least half a day in session, whether the student is physically on school grounds, at an approved off-grounds location, or in a virtual/remote instruction setting pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:32-13.

A **day absent** is a day that a student participates in instruction or instruction-related activities for less than half a day in session, per N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.4(d). Whether a student is absent due to illness, disciplinary action, or other reason, the student may not be considered present if they are not participating in instruction or instruction-related activities for at least half of the day in session. Home instruction, provided under the conditions set forth in N.J.A.C. 6A:16-10.1 and N.J.A.C. 6A:16-10.2, is considered instruction and instruction-related activities.

A **locally excused absence** is defined by a local district board of education policy. Local education agencies (LEAs) can use locally excused absences for local purposes, such as determining truancy, student conduct, promotion, retention, and the award of course credit.

Locally excused absences are considered as days absent and can never be considered as present for state accountability purposes.

State-excluded absences are state-defined excused absences that are not counted as either a day in membership or as an absence for the purpose of chronic absenteeism calculations. Per N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.4(e) and per P.L.2023, c.274, seven allowable reasons for a state-excused absence are:

- [Religious observance](#);
- College visit(s), up to 3 days per school year for students in grades 11 and 12;
- “Take Our Children to Work Day”;
- Participation in observance of Veterans Day;
- Participation in district board of election membership activities;
- Closure of a busing district that prevents a student from having transportation to the receiving school; and
- Participation in one “civic event” for students in grades 6-12 - can only be applied to an event sponsored by a government entity, a community-based organization, or a nonprofit. The civic event is required to incorporate an element of service learning and address a public issue or concern.

The **cumulative days in membership** is equal to the sum of the number of days present, the number of days absent, and the number of state-excused absences. This represents the number of school days in session for which a student is enrolled during the annual reporting period from July 1 through June 30. The count commences on the first day in session a student is expected to start, even if they do not actually attend that day.

All students enrolled in a school for the entire school year should have a minimum of 180 cumulative days in membership since state law (N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9) mandates that all schools provide 180 days or more of instruction. Districts should work with their SIS vendor to ensure that, for each day a student is in membership with a district when a school is in session, that student is being recorded as either present, absent, or having a state-excused absence. The student should always have a status of one, and no more than one of these conditions on any given day in session.

A student is considered **chronically absent** if they miss 10 percent or more of the school days in session for which they were enrolled at particular school. State-excused absences are not included in this calculation as they are excluded from a student’s days in membership for chronic absenteeism calculations, per N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.6(a)1.

How Attendance is Reported in New Jersey

NJ SMART SID Management Attendance Fields

Attendance data is collected through NJ SMART SID Management. For a complete list of all data fields included in NJ SMART SID Management please see the [NJ SMART SID Management Student Data Handbook](#).

The key SID management fields used for attendance calculations are:

- **NumberOfDaysPresent:** The number of school days in session a student is recorded as present during the annual reporting period from July 1 through June 30.
 - Extended school year days should only be included in the NumberOfDaysPresent if it is required for all students.
- **NumberOfDaysAbsent:** The number of days a student is absent during the annual reporting period from July 1 through June 30. This includes locally excused absences but does not include state-excused absences.
- **NumberOfStateExcusedAbsences:** The number of days a student is absent for a state-excused reason during the annual reporting period from July 1 through June 30.
- **DaysOpen:** The number of days the program of instruction was in session for the entire year from July 1 through June 30.

To determine whether a student is considered present, absent, or on a state-excused absence for any given day, see the definitions provided in the Key Attendance Terms section of this document.

Attendance Tracking and Reporting Responsibility

The school a student attends is always responsible for properly documenting a student's daily attendance and following this guidance. It is the accountable school district's responsibility to submit the final student attendance data from the attending school into the end-of-year (EOY) SID Management submission. The [NJ SMART Reporting Responsibilities document](#) provides different enrollment scenarios and indicates which districts is the reporting or attending district in each scenario.

In about 95% of cases, a student's accountable school and attending school are identical, but there are cases where the accountable school may not be the attending school. For example, a student attending an approved private school for students with disabilities will have their attendance reported by the public school they would otherwise attend.

Districts should pay careful attention to entering the proper CDS (county, district, school) codes for a student's resident, receiving, and attending school in NJ SMART so that the student is assigned the proper accountable school.

It is important to consider that when districts view attendance data in NJ SMART, any chronic absenteeism/attendance rates shown in the system are based on the student's attending school. Therefore, these results will not match the ultimate chronic absenteeism rates used in the Student Performance Report or for ESSA accountability which are all determined based on the student's accountable school.

Reporting Attendance for the Full School Year

The EOY SID Management snapshot date is June 30 of each year. Districts must submit their final attendance data in SID Management by this deadline each year. This includes acquiring the attendance data for any out-of-district student who the district is responsible for reporting in NJ SMART from the district where the student attends.

Districts must submit attendance data fields in the EOY SID Management submission that includes attendance through the school's last day in session. Districts may not consider their attendance fields as final and the SID Management submission as complete if student attendance through the last school day is not part of the submission. For example, if a school is open for 180 days and the last day of school is on June 22, the attendance data fields cannot be considered complete until attendance for June 22 is logged and part of that EOY SID Management submission.

While not required, districts are strongly encouraged to load attendance data in SID Management on multiple occasions throughout the school year, especially in the final months leading up to the SID Management EOY snapshot. The NJDOE monitors attendance data in SID Management and will notify districts if they find any issues with attendance data. Districts are encouraged to view their attendance data in NJ SMART to make sure all records are up to date by June 30 of each year. Two checks are strongly recommended:

- ❖ All student attendance data should be updated through the last day of the school year. Most importantly, all students enrolled from the first through last day of the school year should have 180 or more days in membership. In other words, the sum of their *number of days present*, *number of days absent*, and *number of days state excused absences* should be 180 or more. If few or no students in the district have 180 or more days in membership, then it will be clear that the district is not reporting attendance through the last day of the school year and attendance data must be updated.
- ❖ Attendance data should be submitted for all students who were enrolled in your district at any point from the first day of school to the last day of school, regardless of their number of days in membership. Districts should review their *SchoolStatus* variable and

review the number of inactive and active records included in the NJSMART data submission. The number and percentage of “inactive” students submitted to SID Management can vary considerably from district to district. Districts are encouraged to review the number of inactive student records and ensure that all students who attended a district school at any point during the school year are included in the attendance data submission.

NJ SMART’s SID Management Page includes an “Attendance Report” under Monitoring Links. This report makes it possible for districts to export all their relevant attendance data variables and easily review the two checks above to quickly ascertain whether their attendance data is up to date.

Districts must verify that data related to **attendance** and **student group information** fields in the final NJ SMART SID Management submission are accurate as these are the source variables used for all chronic absenteeism calculations. Districts should be aware that NJQSAC, Operations Indicator 1, designates that school districts must certify and provide complete data to NJ SMART on schedule and with a low error rate.

Reporting Attendance in Special Circumstances

Home Instruction

A student receiving home instruction is considered present and in membership under the following circumstances:

- A student with *a temporary or chronic health condition* receives home instruction by a certified teacher for the number of days and length of time sufficient to continue the student’s academic progress. A student with a disability must receive home instruction consistent with the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-10.1).
- A general education student, *for reasons other than a temporary or chronic health condition*, receives 10 or more hours of home instruction per week by a certified teacher on at least three separate days and no fewer than 10 hours per week additional guided-learning experiences (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-10.2).
- A student, *when placed on home instruction through an IEP*, receives 10 or more hours of instruction per week on at least three separate days by an appropriately certified teacher or teachers (N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.8).

Note: When instruction is provided for less than the minimum number of hours and/or days required per week, the student must not be recorded as present for more than four days when school was in session for a full five-day week. Districts may develop their

own policy for determining the exact number of days to record the student present based on these circumstances.

In-school Suspensions

Students temporarily removed from their regular classroom to in-school suspension are considered present and in membership, provided they are afforded the opportunity to continue to:

- Appropriately participate in the general curriculum; and
- For students with disabilities, receive the services specified in their IEPs, and participate with nondisabled children to the extent they would have in their current placement.

Out-of-school Suspensions

Students on an out-of-school suspension must be recorded as having a day absent unless they receive home instruction as defined above.

Extended Non-illness Absences

School districts should develop their own local policies that determine when to record students who are not in school for an extended period of time for reasons other than illness (e.g., travel with family) as a dropout. A student may be considered a transfer during the extended leave when the student is re-enrolled in and attending another school (in the U.S. or abroad).

Per N.J.A.C. 6A:8-5.1(a), for a state-endorsed diploma, district boards of education must develop, adopt, and implement local graduation requirements that include local student attendance requirements. The NJDOE recommends that each district board of education, regardless of whether they graduate students, develops and implements policies and procedures regarding attendance that include the number of days a student must attend in order to be considered for promotion to the next grade or for graduation.

Note Administrators should consider the potential implications of dis-enrolling a student for the purpose of reporting student attendance data with regard to its potential impact on other accountability measures and any possible financial consequences.

Recording Attendance for Transfer Students throughout the School Year

In NJ SMART's EOY SID Management submission, attendance fields should be reported for all students who attended school in a district during the school year from the student's first day of school in the school year through their last day of school. This is regardless of whether that student is enrolled with the district at the end of the school year (active student) or whether

the student has transferred, dropped-out, or is otherwise not a member of the district at the end of the school year (inactive student).

NJDOE encourages all districts to work with their SIS vendors to ensure that attendance data is being submitted for all students who were enrolled in a district during the current school year, even if a student is not a member of the district by the end of the school year and regardless of whether the district entered the student as inactive in the Fall Snapshot submission.

SchoolStatus is the NJ SMART field that captures the student record's status in the school as either active or inactive. **SchoolEntryDate** and **SchoolExitDate** capture the student's entry and exit timelines.

Note: Students who exit the district prior to the start of the school year should not be included in the EOY SID Management submission with an active SchoolStatus as those students were never enrolled in school for the current school year.

Whenever a district records an exit date for a student in NJ SMART, the district must also:

- (a) indicate an exit withdrawal code, school entry date, school exit date, school status and district status – in NJ SMART, these are captured in **SchoolExitWithdrawalCode**, **schoolentrydate**, and **schoolexitdate**; and
- (b) report the student's attendance data fields (*Number of Days Present*, *Number of Days Absent* and *Days State-excused*) for the period coinciding with the exit date.

This is true regardless of whether the student is transferring within the district to a different school, returning back to the same school, or transferring into another district. Consequently, every student enrollment during the course of the school year should be captured as a separate record in the district's NJSMART submission.

Student transferring between districts

If a student is enrolled in District A from September to November before transferring to District B for the rest of the school year, District A must report this student in the EOY SID Management submission even though the student is no longer active in the district. District A would submit the student record in the EOY SID Management submission along with the attendance data fields corresponding to their time in the district from September to November. Similarly, District B would report this student's record in EOY SID Management submission along with their attendance data fields corresponding to their time in the district from December to June.

Student transferring between schools within a district

Likewise, if a student is enrolled in District A, School 1 from September to November and then transfers to School 2 for the rest of year, District A must report this student in EOY SID Management submission with two instances – the first with their time in School 1 (Sept to November) and a second instance with their time in School 2 (November to the end of the

year). Their attendance date should reference ONLY the time period for each school instance and should **not** be combined.

Student attending the same school within a district in different time periods

If a student is enrolled in District A, School 1 from September to November, and then leaves school only to return at a later time, for example in January, then this student should be reported with multiple records in EOY SID Management submission. The first record would include the first time period with a SchoolExitDate for November and a second record would have an SchoolEntryDate in January and either have no exit date if they stayed to the end of the school year or have an exit date if they left again. The attendance fields related to days present, absent, and state excused should be UNIQUE to each school attendance period.

Attendance data for active and inactive students will be collected in SID Management. While the inclusion of attendance data for inactive students is required under ESSA, reporting these data can be a challenge. The NJDOE encourages all districts to work with their SIS vendors to ensure that attendance data is being submitted for **all students** who enroll in a district school during the current school year, even if a student is not a member of the district by the year's end and even if the student had transferred out of the district by October 1st (i.e., the student was reported as inactive in the Fall Snapshot).

Reporting Attendance for Shared-Time Vocational Students

For shared-time vocational students, a day in membership is divided equally between the academic high school and the vocational school, meaning that each day is counted as a ½ day in membership at the academic high school and a ½ day in membership at the vocational school.

Therefore, shared-time students are counted each day as either ½ day present or ½ day absent at each school. A shared-time student must attend at least half of the scheduled day in session school to be recorded as present. When both schools have 180 days in session for the school year, a shared-time student would have 90 days in membership at their academic high school and 90 days in membership at the vocational school.

Both schools are responsible for submitting shared-time student attendance data in the SID Management submission based on half day attendance at their school. In NJ SMART, **EnrollmentType** must be reported as S for Shared-time students. For shared-time students, an N is used in **ReportedSharedVoc** by the academic high school and a Y is reported by the vocational school.

Other Attendance-Related Data Fields in NJ SMART

Student Learning Environment

For this field, the district must explain, for each student, what the student's learning environment has been during his period of enrollment during the annual reporting period. For the fall submission, the response for each student should reflect their learning environment from the start of the school year, or first day in membership, to October 15th. There are four options for student learning environment:

- 1) Fulltime on school premises;
- 2) Hybrid, meaning partially on school premises and partially remote;
- 3) Fulltime remote due to the district offering only remote option; and
- 4) Fulltime remote due to parental/guardian choice

This field must be entered for each student during the Fall Snapshot and again in the EOY submission. The NJDOE anticipates that this field will change for students from the first submission to the EOY submission. For example, students may begin the year full-time remote (for either reason), move to hybrid in the middle of the year and end the year full-time, in-person on school premises. In these cases, the EOY submission would be Hybrid, because the student spent some of the year in a remote learning environment and some of the year on school premises.

Remote Days Present and Remote Days Absent

These two fields are designed to capture each student's attendance during the school days in session spent in a remote learning environment. These variables represent the number of school days in session from July 1 to June 30 that the student was present or absent when they received instruction from a remote learning environment. Districts are required to complete these fields for the Fall Snapshot and the EOY SID Management submission.

The *Remote Days Present* and *Remote Days Absent* fields are separate from the existing attendance fields, *Number of Days Present* and *Number of Days Absent*, and should have no impact on the numbers reported in these latter fields.

Note: N.J.A.C. 6A:32-13.1 outlines the specific circumstances when remote or virtual instruction is permissible.

If a district utilizes remote instruction at any point, for any length of time, over the course of the school year, the student learning environment, remote days in membership, and remote days present fields must reflect that usage. For example, whenever a student is educated remotely for more than half a day in session, their attendance needs to be marked in the

remote attendance categories in addition to the Number of Days Present and Number of Days Absent fields. A state-excused absence may not be considered a remote day present or absent.

How Chronic Absenteeism is Measured in New Jersey

Student Absentee Rate

Each student's absentee rate is calculated based on two variables: *Number of Days Present* and *Number of Days Absent*. *Number of Days Absent* is divided by the sum of *Number of Days Present* and *Number of Days Absent*.

$$\text{Student Absentee Rate} = \frac{\text{Number of Days Absent}}{\text{Number of Days Present} + \text{Number of Days Absent}}$$

If a student's absentee rate is equal to or greater than 10 percent, the student is considered chronically absent.

School Chronic Absenteeism Rate

A school's **chronic absenteeism rate**, as defined in New Jersey's ESSA State Plan, is the percentage of a school's students that were chronically absent.

A school's chronic absenteeism rate is calculated by dividing the total number of chronically absent students during the school year by the total number of students enrolled in the school during the school year.

$$\text{School Chronic Absenteeism Rate} = \frac{\text{Number of chronically absent students}}{\text{Number of students enrolled}}$$

Example 1

David is in 11th grade and his school has 181 days in session during the school year. He was absent three days due to college visits and two days due to illness; arrived at school 30 minutes late in the morning two times; and left an hour early for a soccer game on five occasions.

Attendance Data in NJ SMART: This student would be marked as having two days absent; three days of state-excused absences and 176 days present. The denominator is calculated only by adding days present and days absent while the three state-excused absences for college visits are excluded in the calculation. The student would have zero remote days present and remote

days absent and 181 for Days Open. The days that he was tardy or left school early would count as days present as he attended school for 50% or more of the school day. His college visits are marked as state-excused days and would not be considered in the equation.

$$\text{David's absentee rate: } \frac{\text{Days Absent (2)}}{\text{Days Present (176) + Days Absent (2)}} \text{ or } \frac{2}{178} = 1.1\%$$

David has two days absent and 178 days present and absent (176 days present plus two days absent). The resulting absentee rate is 1.1%. **He would not be considered chronically absent.**

What if, *in addition to the days missed above*, David's family takes him on a two-week vacation during the school year?

$$\text{David's absentee rate: } \frac{\text{Days Absent (12)}}{\text{Days Present (166) + Days Absent (12)}} \text{ or } \frac{12}{178} = 6.7\%$$

David's *days absent* are now 12 (two days sick, even if locally excused, and 10 vacation days) and *days present* are 166. The resulting absentee rate is 6.7%. **He would not be considered chronically absent.**

What if, in addition to the days missed above, David skips school for four days and the next month receives a two-day out-of-school suspension for repeatedly using a cell phone in class against school policy? When suspended, David was not present in school or able to participate in the general curriculum for that day.

$$\text{David's absentee rate: } \frac{\text{Days Absent (18)}}{\text{Days Present (160) + Days Absent (18)}} \text{ or } \frac{18}{178} = 10.1\%$$

David's *number of days present* is now 160 and days absent are 18 -- two days sick (even if locally excused), 10 vacation days, four days skipped, and two days suspended). **David would be considered chronically absent with a rate of 10.1%.**

Example 2

Sarah is in 12th grade and her school has 181 days in session during the school year. Sarah is the nighttime assistant manager at a fast-food restaurant to help support her family and the restaurant scheduled her to cover a day shift 10 times, so she misses 10 days in the school year. The school starts the year with remote learning and Sarah is present for all nine of the 10 days.

Attendance Data in NJ SMART: This student would be marked as having 11 days absent (10 in-person days and one remote day); zero days of state-excused absences and 170 days present. The denominator is calculated by adding days present (170) and days absent (11) while state-excused absences are excluded from the calculation. The student would have nine for remote days present and one for remote days absent and 181 for Days Open.

$$\text{Sarah's absentee rate: } \frac{\text{Days Absent (11)}}{\text{Days Present (170) + Days Absent (11)}} \text{ or } \frac{11}{181} = 6.1\%$$

Sarah would not be considered chronically absent.

What if, in addition to the days missed above, Sarah is absent for an additional two weeks due to illness, but receives home instruction during the second week, by a certified teacher, sufficient to continue academic progress based upon her ability to participate? Hence, Sarah is considered absent for only five of those 10 days since she received home instruction in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:16-10.1 during one of the two weeks.

$$\text{Sarah's absentee rate: } \frac{\text{Days Absent (16)}}{\text{Days Present (165) + Days Absent (16)}} \text{ or } \frac{16}{181} = 8.8\%$$

Sarah would not be considered chronically absent.

How Chronic Absenteeism Rates are Used

School and student-group chronic absenteeism rates for students in grades Kindergarten through 12 are included in New Jersey's ESSA Accountability system as an indicator of school quality. District and student-group chronic absenteeism rates are also used for Indicator 7 (School Quality) in the New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC).

The chronic absenteeism rates used for both ESSA Accountability and NJQSAC are calculated using student records submitted by the NJ SMART SID Management end-of-year snapshot.

Districts will not have an opportunity to change their data after the SID Management snapshot. Questions regarding management of student records may be directed to NJSMART@pcgus.com.

Chronic absenteeism rates are reported at the district, school, and student-group level in the annual School Performance Reports. The School Performance Reports also report chronic absenteeism rates by grade level and data on the percentage of days students are absent during the school year.

The NJDOE is also required to report attendance data to the United States Department of Education (USED) through *EDFacts*.

Frequently Asked Questions

Excused Absences

If a district excuses an absence for a reason that is not one of the seven allowable state-excused reasons defined above, does that absence count in the calculation of the school's chronic absenteeism rate?

A student who is absent for a full day with an excused absence pursuant to the school district's definition of "excused" must be recorded as having a day absent for that day. An "excused" absence that is not one of the seven allowable state reasons above, does count as an absence in the determination of whether the student was chronically absent for the year.

Can districts continue to record "excused" absences for local purposes?

It is important to note that school districts can 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. School districts can take any and all action authorized by their policies and procedures when categorizing these absences.

However, districts must report student attendance to the NJDOE in accordance with the guidelines in this document. For State reporting purposes, a student can only be recorded as present, absent, or having a state-excused absence. Therefore, a student with an "excused" absence per local decision must be marked absent when reported to NJDOE. The only exception is that a school may have a day in session where a student is recorded as having a state-excused absence based on the seven allowable reasons defined above that would not be counted as a day in membership.

Extended Non-Illness Absences

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 her when she returns?

Schools should review "[extended non-illness absences](#)" above. 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.

Making Up Attendance Time

Can a district have a policy that allows students to “make up” attendance time in various after-school or Saturday sessions?

While districts can create such policies, they can **only** be used for local district purposes and not for the purpose of reporting chronic absenteeism (or for reporting to the School Register). The only valid membership days for chronic absenteeism are the days in which the school is in session for all students and student attendance must be tracked on those days. So, while districts can create policies that permit students to make up attendance time for local purposes —i.e., graduation, promotion, etc., these alternatives cannot change what is reported in NJ SMART (or the School Register) for student attendance on a valid school day in session.

Preschool Students

Are preschool students included in the calculations for chronic absenteeism?

This guidance should be followed in the recording of attendance for all preschool students enrolled in New Jersey public schools. However, preschool students are not included in the calculation of school and district chronic absenteeism rates used for accountability purposes. Preschool chronic absenteeism rates will be reported in the school performance reports Chronic Absenteeism by grade table.

Schedule Modification

Can a student’s schedule be modified? If a schedule is modified, how should attendance be reported?

For students with disabilities, pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.1(c), the length of the school day and the academic year of programs must be at least as long as that established for nondisabled students. However, the IEP team may, in its discretion, in rare cases, alter the length of the school day based on the needs of the student. The IEP team may also make a decision, based on the individual needs of the student, that the student is unable to attend school and should receive special education and related services in a different setting or manner, such as through home instruction, all or part of the time. If the IEP team makes this decision, and the information is included in the student’s IEP, then for attendance purposes, the student should be marked as “present” in your SIS when they are educated in the educational placement(s) set forth in their IEP.

For general education students, apart from those circumstances described above, a student’s schedule may not be modified.

Students Who Exit After a Short Time (<45 Days)

Are schools accountable for a student's attendance if the student exits the school in a short time?

The current New Jersey ESSA State Plan indicates that a student must have attended a school for at least 45 days for that student's attendance data to be factored into the chronic absenteeism calculations. Hence, students with fewer than 45 days in membership at a school have not been included as part of any accountability calculations nor are they factored into any attendance items in the New Jersey School Performance Report. The NJDOE submitted a proposed amendment to the ESSA State Plan to change this to 90 days to align with federal requirements. If this change is approved by the USED by fall 2025, the change will go into effect for attendance calculations for the 2024-2025 school year.

The NJDOE is required to report attendance data to USED through *EDFacts* reporting which does include students with 10 or more days in membership. Please note, however, that all students who have been in membership with the district for any amount of time during the current school year should have their attendance reported in NJ SMART, regardless of how many days the student was in membership or attended.

Students Who Registered but Never Attended

If a student registered with my school at the beginning of the year but never attended, will that impact the school's chronic absenteeism rate?

No. As of the 10th consecutive day of non-attendance, assuming district/school investigations have been performed (pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.6(a)) and the results are conclusive, the appropriate withdrawal code can be recorded. As per NJ SMART rules, the School Exit date is to be recorded as: "The year, month, and day of the first day after the date of a student's last attendance in a school." For students who were enrolled at the beginning of a school year but never attended the school during the year, the exit date is the first day of the school year, regardless of the actual date the district determines the student is no longer in the district. Consequently, the days the student was not at school before being dropped should not be considered days in membership and students who were enrolled but never attended should be recorded as having 0 days in membership and 0 days present.

Funds to Support Student Attendance Initiatives

Under ESSA, when chronic absenteeism is identified and documented as an issue through a comprehensive needs assessment, funding for initiatives to improve student attendance may come from Title I, Part A as well as Title IV, Part A, B and E. Likewise, LEAs may use Title II funds to provide training for school personnel to address issues related to school conditions for student learning, including chronic absenteeism. Additionally, if the attendance issue relates to English language learners, Title III funds may be used. Schoolwide programs may use funds from any Title.

Resources for Implementing Guidance and Using Data to Improve Attendance

- Review [*New Jersey School Register*](#)
- Review [N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7](#) and [N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8](#)
- Review the NJ SMART SID Management Student Handbook and FAQ on the [NJ SMART Resources & Trainings webpage](#).
- Review a list of various resources to improve student attendance on the Department's [Student Attendance](#) website, such as:
 - Data-Based Decision Making for Addressing Chronic Absenteeism and Promoting Regular School Attendance (PDF)
 - Appendix A: Sample School Corrective Action Plan Template for Addressing Chronic Absenteeism (PDF and Word)
- Questions and general concerns about attendance can be directed to attendance@doe.nj.gov
- Questions about NJ SMART can be directed to the NJ SMART Help Desk by calling (800) 254-0295 or e-mailing NJSMART@pcgus.com.
- Questions about how attendance data is used in the ESSA accountability system and the School Performance Reports can be directed to performancemanagement@doe.nj.gov.