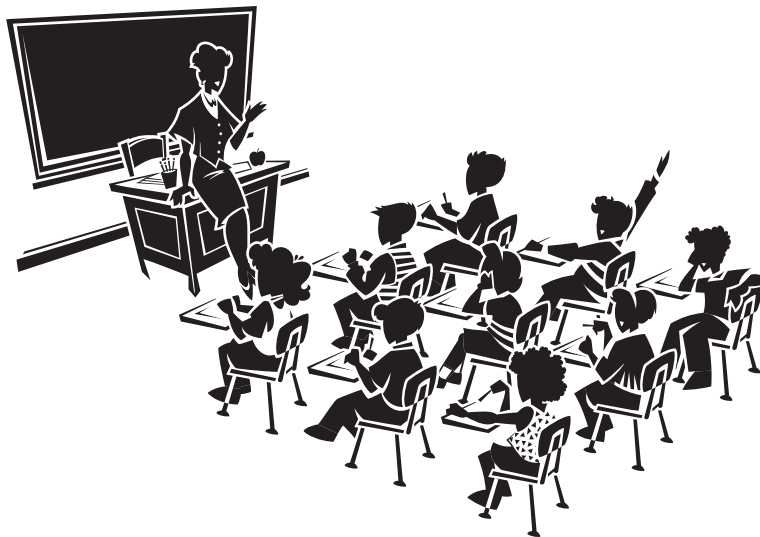


Targeting

GOOD STUDENT ATTENDANCE



*Handbook for
Students and Parents*

2005-2006 SCHOOL YEAR

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An Important Message on Attendance from President Michael Scott and CEO Arne Duncan

The Chicago Public Schools is very committed to providing a quality education for every child at every school in the city.



Good school attendance plays a critical role in the academic success, or failure, of every one of our students. Improved student attendance is a critical part of our overall program for improving the academic performance of CPS students. We realize that achievement is adversely affected when a student has a high number of absences. Students who are absent from school for reasons other than illness are a primary concern because such absences often result in missed opportunities and may lead to low academic achievement. This year, we have set a goal to reduce the number of students who are absent from school.



Our system is dependent upon the revenue received from the State of Illinois for the operation of our schools. Most of those dollars are received based upon the daily attendance of the number of students enrolled in our school system. When students are absent, we miss the opportunity to earn those dollars. Thus, in an era in which every dollar is important to support the academic success of our city's young people, we must do everything necessary to ensure that we reach our attendance improvement goals.

The purpose of this handbook is to explain CPS attendance policies. It also serves to remind parents, students and community members of the importance of ensuring that students are in school each day. Our commitment is to work closely with schools and parents, through the Office of Instruction and School Management, to get more students into school for a full day of learning on every day of school. Together, we can make it happen!

Tips for Maintaining Good School Attendance

1. Get a good night's sleep *EVERY NIGHT*.
2. Be ready for the day by having all the items that you will need for school on the next day: clothes, books, supplies, etc.
3. Prepare for each day by having a nourishing breakfast.
4. Don't be tardy. Be prompt in your arrival at school each day. Don't stop at stores or homes of friends.
5. Be absent for valid reasons only.
6. When returning to school after an absence, be sure to bring a note which explains the absence, *which covers each day of the absence*, and has been signed by the parent/guardian.
7. Parents/Guardians should communicate with teachers on a regular basis to stay informed about their child's progress.
8. Remember that every day of school is an important day.

Chicago Public Schools Attendance Policies

Under Section 5/26-2a of the Illinois School Code and the Chicago Board of Education Policy on Absence and Truancy, there are six valid reasons for a student's absence from school:

1. Student illness
2. Death in the immediate family
3. Observance of a religious holiday
4. Family emergency
5. Circumstances that cause reasonable concern to the parent or legal guardian for the safety of a child
6. Other situations beyond the control of the student as determined by the principal or principal's designee

Students are required to be in attendance on each day that school is in session. When a child is absent from school, he or she must be marked absent in the official attendance register maintained by the classroom or division teacher. Your child's school is required to contact you ***EVERY TIME*** that your child is absent.

When a student is absent from school, the parent/legal guardian must send a written note to the school upon the student's return from the absence, acknowledging each date of absence. *This note is required, even if the parent/legal guardian calls the school to inform the principal or teacher of the absence.*

The review of this note by the school will determine whether the absence is a valid (excused) absence according to the six criteria noted above, or whether the absence is unexcused and considered to be a truant absence. Chronic truants, students with 18 or more unexcused absences, are subject to referral to the Department of Chronic Truancy Adjudication for a truancy hearing.

Mandated Attendance Intervention Timeline

An automated phone call is sent to your home whenever your child is absent from school. The timeline below informs you of other procedures that take place after a specified number of unexcused student absences.

2nd Absence (Excused or Unexcused)

- Teacher calls home

3rd Absence (Excused or Unexcused)

- Teacher, attendance office call home; possible home visit by school

5th Unexcused Absence

- 5-Day Letter sent home; counselor calls home; student and parent/guardian sign attendance improvement contract

10th Unexcused Absence

- 10-Day Letter sent home; school schedules parent/guardian-student conference; Truancy Intervention Case Plan completed

18th Absence

- Principal begins Truancy Adjudication process

Truancy Adjudication

Maintaining good school attendance is necessary to ensure the successful academic achievement of your child. The Chicago Public Schools is committed to work with you and your child in your good attendance efforts. However, if there is a pattern of poor attendance, which includes unexcused or truant absences, you as the parent will be subject to appear at a truancy adjudication hearing. After your child has five (5) unexcused days of absence, the school will send you a reminder letter about the student's attendance. After your child has ten (10) unexcused days of absence, the school will send you a warning letter, reminding you of the need to improve the student's attendance. The school will work closely with both student and parent to improve the student's attendance.

However, after a child's eighteenth (18th) day of unexcused absence, the principal of your child's school is required to refer your child to the Department of Chronic Truancy Adjudication for a hearing to determine whether your child is a chronic truant as defined in Section 5/26-2a of the Illinois School Code, 105 ILCS 5/26-2a, and whether you have taken reasonable steps to ensure your child's school attendance. Section 5/26-2a defines a chronic truant as "a child subject to compulsory school attendance and who is absent from such attendance without valid cause for 10% or more of the previous 180 regular attendance days."

Targeting Good Student Attendance

If, after the hearing, your child is found to be a chronic truant, the hearing officer may impose any of the following sanctions against you, your child, or both:

- performance of reasonable school or community services for a period not to exceed 30 days;
- completion of a parenting education program;
- counseling or other supportive services;
- compliance with an individualized education plan or service plan provided by appropriate school officials.

Any parent determined to have taken reasonable steps to ensure the pupil's school attendance shall not be required to perform services.

Should your child be found to be a chronic truant and should you, your child, or both fail to comply with any sanctions imposed by the hearing officer, the Department of Chronic Truancy Adjudication may refer the matter to the Chicago Public Schools Law Department for further legal action under the provisions of section 3-33 of the Juvenile Court Act of 1987, 705 ILCS 405/3-33 ("Truant Minor in Need of Supervision") and Section 5/26-10 of the Illinois School Code ("Fine for Noncompliance").

How is Attendance Related to the Chicago Public Schools Promotion Policy for High School Students?

(from policy established January 28, 2004)

Students must attend their classes in order to learn and retain course subject matter. Consequently, students' success in earning credits towards promotion shall be determined by attendance in class as well as by performance on academic assignments. Therefore, high school students who have unexcused absences in **20%** or more of the classes in a particular course during the period for which a unit of credit is earned shall not pass the course and shall receive no credit towards promotion.

How is Attendance Related to the Chicago Public Schools Elementary School Promotion Policy?

(from policy revised October 26, 2005)

Promotion at the benchmark grades (3rd, 6th & 8th grades) in the Chicago Public Schools is based on the following requirements:

1. Meeting the minimum percentile score in reading and mathematics on the District-Wide Assessment (DWA);
2. Having a passing classroom grade in reading for the school year; and
3. No more than **9** unexcused absences. (In the 2005-2006 school year, only unexcused absences occurring after November 9, 2005 will be counted in the promotion evaluation).

Promotion decisions for students in grades 3, 6, and 8 will be made in June of each year. The promotion status and whether summer school attendance is required will be determined by their District-Wide Assessment scores in reading and math, followed by a review of academic performance, attendance and conduct, where applicable.

For more detailed information regarding the promotion of elementary school students, see the publication *Parent Guide to the 2005-2006 Elementary School Promotion Policy, Benchmark Grades 3, 6, & 8 (Board Policy 05-1026-PO1)*.

Principal Responsibilities for Good Student Attendance

- ✓ Establish attendance goals and a School Attendance Planning Team. Include your counseling department to identify attendance intervention strategies.
- ✓ Monitor daily student attendance and ensure accurate attendance data collection.
- ✓ Promote attendance incentives.
- ✓ Recognize parents and community partners.
- ✓ Refer chronic truants for adjudication.
- ✓ Implement a successful school attendance program.

Classroom/Division Teacher Responsibilities for Good Student Attendance

- ✓ Discuss importance of attendance with students.
- ✓ Maintain a good rapport with parents/guardians.
- ✓ Ensure accurate attendance data collection.
- ✓ Support good student attendance and report these changes to the student's counselor.
- ✓ Promote attendance incentives.
- ✓ Collaborate with other school personnel to ensure success of the attendance program.

Parent Responsibilities for Good Student Attendance

*Make school attendance a high priority
in your home!*

*Every day is important...from the first day of school
to the last day of school!*

✓ **At home:**

- Discuss the importance of daily attendance and academic achievement with your children.
- Get your child to school on time.
- Arrange for transportation or child care as needed.
- Ensure that your child has school supplies, uniforms (if required), etc.

✓ **Maintain good communication with the school
and teacher(s)**

- Provide updated and accurate emergency contact information.
- Make sure your child's medical/immunization records are up to date.
- Monitor your child's daily school attendance.
- Meet with your child's teacher on a regular basis
- Sign and return all contracts and letters from the school in a timely manner.
- Attend parent/teacher/student conferences as needed.

✓ **Handle absences responsibly**

- Know the *Illinois School Code's* legitimate reasons for absence (illness, family emergency, death in the immediate family, observance of religious holiday, certain circumstances of concern to the parents, other situations beyond the control of the student).
- Call the school within 30 minutes of start time if your child is going to be absent.
- Send a note that briefly explains the absence, when your child returns to school.

✓ **Understand and follow the CPS attendance policy and procedures**

- Attend truancy hearings if no other remediation efforts have been successful.
- Assist your child in his/her compliance with the hearing recommendation.

✓ **Play an active role in the education of your child**

- Know what is going on in your child's life at school and elsewhere.
- Alert school personnel if you become aware of problems in the school or problems that are otherwise out of your immediate control.

Legend: ■ Days of non-attendance for students ♦ End of Quarter # Professional Development Days

() Student early dismissal/half-day staff development days for School Improvement Planning

e Emergency Day - school in session if student days fall below 174

⊖ Full-day Parent-Teacher Conferences - Elementary Schools. The elementary school dates are non-attendance days for students in elementary schools.

⊖ Full-day Parent-Teacher Conferences - High Schools. The high school dates are non-attendance days for students in high schools.

***Holidays**

September 5, 2005 Labor Day

October 10, 2005 Columbus Day

November 11, 2005 Veterans Day

November 24 & 25, 2005 Thanksgiving Holiday

January 16, 2006 M.L. King's Birthday

February 13, 2006 Lincoln's Birthday

February 20, 2006 Presidents Day

March 6, 2006 C. Pulaski's Birthday

May 29, 2006 Memorial Day

July 4, 2006 Independence Day

Winter Vacation: Schools close at the end of the school day, Friday, December 23, 2005, and reopen on Monday, January 9, 2006.

Spring Vacation: Schools close at the end of the school day, Thursday April 6, 2006, and reopen on Monday, April 17, 2006.

Important Dates:

CLASSES BEGIN - Tuesday, September 6, 2005. Students are scheduled for a full day of classes.

REPORT CARD PICK-UP PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE DAYS - Elementary schools on Wednesday, November 9, 2005

and Wednesday, April 19, 2006. High schools on Tuesday, November 8, 2005, and Thursday, April 20, 2006. **Non-attendance days for students.**

REPORT CARD DISTRIBUTION DAYS - February 1, 2006, for second marking period. June 16, 2006, for fourth marking period.

KINDERGARTEN PREREGISTRATION - Suggested dates are April 17, 2006, through April 21, 2006.

GRADES 3-6-8 SUMMER SCHOOL PROGRAM - Six and/or seven weeks beginning Wednesday, July 5, 2006, ending Thursday, August 17, 2006.

HIGH SCHOOL SUMMER PROGRAM - Seven weeks beginning Wednesday, July 5, 2006, ending Thursday, August 17, 2006.

Student Responsibilities for Good Attendance

Ensure that good attendance is a priority!

✓ **Attend school daily**

- Be on time.
- Attend all classes
- Come prepared for school (uniform, supplies, etc.).

✓ **Understand state law regarding CPS attendance policy**

- Bring a note for absences

Excused absences include:

- illness
- observance of a religious holiday
- death in the immediate family
- circumstances that cause reasonable concern to the parent/legal guardian for the safety or health of the student
- other situations beyond the control of the student as determined by the principal or designee

✓ **Achieve academic excellence**

- Complete all assigned homework.
- Complete all in-school assignments.

- ✓ **Follow established school attendance procedures**
 - Understand attendance plan goals.
 - Understand consequences for tardies and absences.
 - Adjust time schedules according to changes in school schedule.

- ✓ **Seek parental and school staff assistance to resolve issues that may affect attendance**

- ✓ **Form relationships with teachers, administrators, counselors and social workers at the school by being an active participant in school activities**
 - Clubs/Volunteering/Tutoring
 - Junior Achievement/Student Council/Athletic Teams

Community Responsibilities for Good Student Attendance

***Support your neighborhood school's
attendance plan!***

- ✓ **Collaborate with neighborhood school(s) in the identification of truants or “at-risk” students**
 - Note school’s time schedule.
 - Utilize the Truancy Hotline to report students not at school during school hours (773-553-4000).
 - Use community organization representatives to assist in contacting and working with truant students.
 - Attend LSC meetings when possible.
 - Volunteer at schools and support school activities.

- ✓ **Collaborate with schools to provide an after-school attendance incentive program and a Service Learning program for students**

Tips for Parents: Potential Warning Signs of Poor Attendance

Students are considered to be truant if they are absent from school without a valid reason. Attendance and truancy problems do not usually occur without warning signs. You, as parents/guardians, should be aware of signs that children often exhibit when they are truant. If one or more of the following circumstances is an observation or concern of yours, truancy may be a contributing factor and should be examined as a possible cause. If the student is --

- *unable to share any details about his or her daily school activities;*
- *not bringing home any communication in writing or by telephone from the school;*
- *not motivated to be successful in school;*
- *having learning difficulties and may be unable to keep up with the rest of the class;*
- *failing multiple classes;*
- *tardy to school, fails to arrive at school, or leaves school without permission;*
- *cutting classes;*
- *arriving home from school earlier or later than the expected time;*
- *staying out late at night without permission,*
- *refusing to get up for school or is engaging in prolonged dawdling;*

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- *hanging out with others who are known to skip school;*
- *showing signs of depression;*
- *afraid of being bullied, harassed, or fears physical harm;*
- *having language or cultural difficulties at school;*
- *involved in the use of drugs or alcohol;*
- *complaining of illnesses but has no outward signs of illness;*
- *involved in frequent disputes with teachers or classmates;*
- *frequently referred for poor behavior or has multiple suspensions;*
- *without homework and may often have an empty book bag; or*

-- then you, should first discuss the problem(s) with your child and, if necessary, seek assistance from the appropriate staff members at his/her school. Also, many community and social service agencies throughout Chicago are ready and willing to provide assistance to you and your family.

Frequently Asked Questions About Student Attendance

1. What is the difference between an *unexcused* and an *excused* absence?

For the purpose of determining whether a student is truant:

- An *excused* absence is an absence which the school has reviewed and has determined does meet the following valid requirements for an excused absence:
 - *Student illness*
 - *Death in the immediate family*
 - *Family emergency*
 - *Observation of a religious holiday*
 - *Circumstances causing reasonable concern to the parent for the student's health or safety*
 - *Other situations beyond the control of the student, as determined by the principal*
 - an *unexcused* absence is an absence that the school has reviewed and has determined **does not meet** the valid requirements for an excused absence; it is considered to be a **truant absence**.
2. Must I send a note to the school explaining my child's absence, even if I called the school?
 - Chicago Public Schools policy requires that a parent send a note which explains the student's absence after **every** absence.

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3. My child was ill, had a doctor's appointment and did not get to school until about 11:00. I sent a note explaining this to the teacher, but on the report card, the teacher said my child had a ½ day of absence. Should this absence show on the report card?
 - YES! Every absence, whether excused or unexcused, **must** be recorded as an absence. Any time that a child is not in school, other than for an approved field trip, would be recorded as an absence.
4. I received a warning letter from the school stating that because my 6th grade son has 15 unexcused absences, he may have to attend summer school. Is this true?
 - Yes. According to the CPS promotion policy for elementary schools (adopted October 26, 2005), if a student in grades 3, 6 or 8 accumulates *9 or more days of unexcused absences, **the student must attend summer school.***
5. My child was absent for a week with the flu, and I contacted the school. Every day, I received a computerized phone message from the school, telling me that my daughter was absent on that day. Can't they stop sending that very annoying phone call?
 - No. Your child's school is required by law to contact your home every date that your child is absent from school.
6. On my job, I usually have an off-summer vacation, during November or December. Is it permissible for my children to miss school at that time to go on vacation with me?

- No. The law requires that your children be in attendance at school whenever your child's school is open for instruction. The only approved vacation periods for Chicago Public Schools occur during the late December-early January **winter vacation**, spring vacation and summer vacation.
7. Are there special schools, like a "boot camp" available to send a child who is truant?
- No. Schools and parents must work together to create attendance improvement plans for these students. If a truant student has accumulated 18 or more days of unexcused absences, the student must be referred for a truancy adjudication hearing. The hearing officer may recommend additional interventions or sanctions aimed at improving the student's attendance.
8. My child arrived tardy to school, was not admitted into the school and was told to go back home. Shouldn't he have been allowed to come to school?
- Yes. CPS policy states that tardy students must be admitted to school and allowed to attend their classes. Under the Uniform Discipline Code, students may be subject to disciplinary action (*but not Out-of-School suspensions*) for persistent tardiness to school or class.
9. My daughter was absent due to strept throat for 4 days. Because these days are unexcused absences, will she still get a perfect attendance award at the end of the school year?
- No. While the illness does indicate that the absences will be noted as excused absences, legally, the absences must be recorded by the

school. To be recognized for perfect attendance, a student cannot have either excused or unexcused absences recorded in the attendance records.

10. Recently, my principal told me that I am required to have a working phone number on file with the school. Is this true?

- Yes. In fact, for the purposes of making parent contacts for attendance, and in the event of an emergency regarding your child, the Illinois School Code requires that you supply the school with **TWO** (2) working phone numbers at which you may be reached.

11. My 16 year-old son has been very dissatisfied with attending school, and has told me that he is planning to drop out of high school. I do not want him to drop out. Can he drop out without my permission?

- No. Under a new law, the State of Illinois now requires that students be in attendance up to the age of SEVENTEEN (17) years of age. In addition, under the rules of the Chicago Public Schools, no student may withdraw from school without the signed consent of his or her parent/guardian. In addition, the school is required:
 - a) to counsel** the parent and the student about the consequences of making the decision to withdraw from school, AND
 - b) to advise** the student of the options and alternatives available to continue his/her education, should the student withdraw from school.

PARENTS: You Must Be Aware of the Long-term Consequences of Truancy, As It Affects Your Home and Our Community

***According to the Colorado Foundation for Families & Children:**

Truancy as a Predictor of Other Problems:

- Truancy has been clearly identified as an early warning sign that students are headed for potential delinquent activity, social isolation, or educational failure via suspension, expulsion, or dropping out.
- Truancy is connected to both lack of commitment to school and low achievement rates, which are clear risk factors for substance abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and school dropout.
- High rates of truancy are linked to high rates of daytime burglary and vandalism.

The Financial Impact of Truancy:

- Children who are habitually truant are often placed in the custody of juvenile justice or other agencies, which is traumatic for children and their families and expensive for taxpayers.
- Schools lose state education funding due to high rates of truancy and dropout since such funding is typically dependent on actual attendance rates. (In the Chicago Public Schools, this loss is at least \$18-20 Million each year.)
- The financial impact of truancy is passed on to taxpayers through the cost of court time and personnel fees paid to attorneys identified to represent the school in truancy proceedings. There are also additional costs associated with arrest, prosecution, and incarceration when truant students engage in delinquent acts.
- Businesses must pay to train uneducated workers. Additionally, businesses and shopping centers in close proximity to schools experience a loss in business due to the number of youth "hanging out."
- Many students who are habitually truant end up dropping out of school, and the consequences of dropping out are well documented. For example, school dropouts: Are more likely to be involved in problem behaviors such as delinquency, substance abuse, and early childbearing; Have significantly fewer job prospects; Make lower salaries; Are more often unemployed; Are more likely to be welfare-dependent; Experience unstable marriages more frequently; Are more likely to engage in criminal behavior.

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Chicago Public Schools Attendance Incentives Program

During the 2005-2006 school year, the Chicago Public Schools has established an attendance incentives program, through which students having at least 95% monthly attendance rate will have an opportunity to win some great prizes. Many Chicago area companies are partnering with CPS and are providing these prizes for our students. Students with **at least 95% monthly attendance rates** will have an opportunity to win prizes such as back packs, hats, or certificates. Students having **perfect attendance** will have the opportunity to win additional prizes, such as movie passes.

In addition, the parents of students having **perfect attendance** will have the opportunity to win raffles for prizes such as gift certificates for groceries, or to win a rent or mortgage payment.

Also, schools which meet or exceed their CPS attendance goal at the end of the 2005-2006 school year will earn \$750 to \$7,500 to be used at the school.

More information about the CPS Attendance Incentives Program will be available at each local school during the year.



Important Attendance-Related Phone Numbers

CITYWIDE TRUANCY HOTLINE (24 hours a day)	(773) 553-4000
Office of Instruction and School Management Attendance Improvement/Truancy Intervention	(773) 553-2180
Area Attendance Administrators	
Cluster 1 (Elem. Areas 1, 2, and H.S. Area 19)	(773) 534-1100
Cluster 2 (Elem. Areas 3, 4, 6)	(773) 535-5820
Cluster 3 (Elem. Areas 7, 8, 9, and H.S. Area 21)	(773) 534-0700
Cluster 4 (Elem. Areas 10, 11 13, and H.S. Area 22)	(773) 535-8080
Cluster 5 (Elem. Areas 12, 14, 15, and H.S. Area 23)...	(773) 535-8207
Cluster 6 (Elem. Areas 16, 17, 18, and H.S. Area 24)...	(773) 535-2600
CPS Office of High School Programs	(773) 553-3540
CPS Department of Homeless Education	(773) 553-2242
CPS Evening High School Programs	(773) 553-1430
City of Chicago Department of Public Health...	(312) 747-9817
City of Chicago Department of Human Services	(312) 746-8545



CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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