

St. Mary's Elementary School

Comprehensive Student Attendance Policy

Statement of Overall Objectives:

School attendance is important to the academic success of each student. Since regular attendance is necessary and essential for student success, and since curriculum is taught sequentially, attendance must be a priority for all parties. St. Mary's, along with parents and students, realizes its importance and shares in the responsibility of maintaining consistent school attendance for all students. St. Mary's School is aligned with New York State Law regarding the matter of attendance. The objectives of this Comprehensive Student Attendance Policy are as follows:

1. To increase school completion for all students.
2. To validate students' compliance of education laws relating to compulsory attendance.
3. To be knowledgeable of the location of every student to ensure personal safety.
4. To identify patterns in student attendance to assist in the development of improvement plans.
5. To raise student achievement and close gaps in student performance.

Strategies to Accomplish Objectives:

St. Mary's School will:

1. Create and maintain a positive school environment among teachers, staff, parents and students thereby fostering a nurturing school community, establishing positive feelings between the school and students, thereby encouraging increased attendance.
2. Maintain accurate record keeping via eSchool attendance register, tracking individual student attendance and trends to identify possible attendance problems.
3. Develop and implement intervention strategies for individual students to increase school attendance.

Determination of Excused and Unexcused Absences, Tardiness and Early Departures:

1. Excused: An absence, tardiness or early dismissal may be excused if due to personal illness, illness or death in the family, impassable roads due to inclement weather, religious observance, doctor/dentist/orthodontist, required court appearances, attendance at health clinics, approved high school shadow days, "Take your Child to Work Day", unavailability of transportation due to school districts being closed, or other reasons approved by the Diocese.
2. Unexcused: An absence, tardiness or early dismissal is considered unexcused if the reason for the lack of attendance does not fall into the above categories (i.e. family vacations, oversleeping, death of pet). Please note that vacations are considered illegal absences from school. Parents should notify the school and teacher as soon as possible

regarding a planned vacation. The school calendar provides extended weekends throughout the school year. Parents are encouraged to schedule trips or family outings during these times so as to eliminate the need to interrupt a child's learning process.

3. Excused absences, tardiness or early dismissals must have proper written documentation from the parent or guardian or other designated officials (i.e. physician, court... etc.) and must be presented to school office personnel within three school days upon the child's return to school. Without the written excuse the absence will be recorded as unexcused (illegal). In addition, a physician's note is required for absences three days or longer. A notation should be made in the records as to the excused reason.
4. A student is considered tardy if not in the classroom at the time the session begins. Teachers must exercise discretion and should always inquire privately into the reason for the tardiness.

The Coding System for Identification of Reasons for Student Absence:

Attendance reports are recorded daily using eSchool Data. The Coding System for Identification of reasons for student absence is provided through the eSchool Data service. Recordable reasons are as follows: attending a funeral, band lesson, bus drill, car trouble, court, death in family, dentist, doctor appointment, family business, field trip, high school visit, home district closed, home tutoring, hospital, illness, illness - no note, impassable roads, in school suspension, injury, late bus, misc. illegal, missed bus, no bus, no note - no reason, no reason given, occupational therapy, orthodontist, out-of-school suspension, out of town, overslept, running late, shadow DP, shadowing, special services, speech, student testing, surgery, take to work day, tardy - no note, traffic, unknown, vacation, weather, weather related daily present, will be late, will not be in, and music lesson.

School Attendance Recordkeeping/Data Collection Policy:

According to the Administrative Handbook for Elementary Schools in the Diocese of Buffalo, under Section E: School Management, the following law is required:

The Education Law of New York State requires minors between the ages of six and sixteen years to be in attendance at an approved school for full day instruction. Home-tutoring for medical reasons is counted toward the days a child is actually in school. The law also requires that schools be in session not fewer than 180 days each year. It is the duty of the principal and of the teachers to insist on regular attendance (New York State Education Law, Sections 3205, 3602, Sub.3)

The law only applies to Public Schools so our school may be in session for less than 180 days.

Pupil attendance shall be recorded daily online via eSchool Data.

The record for each student's presence, absence, or tardiness shall be recorded into the eSchool attendance system each day. Each absence or tardiness will be marked as "excused" or "unexcused" according to the eSchool Data code for the reason.

Attendance is taken and recorded in accordance with the following:

1. For students in non-departmentalized kindergarten through three (i.e. supervised group movement to other scheduled school activities such as physical education, technology, art etc.) such students' presence or absence shall be recorded after the taking of attendance once per school day.
2. For students in departmentalized grades four through eight (i.e. students pass individually or in specific groupings to different classes throughout the day), each student's presence or absence shall be recorded after the taking of attendance in each period of scheduled instruction.
3. Any absence for any portion of a school day will be recorded as "excused" or "unexcused" in accordance with the standards written in this policy.
4. In the event that a student in grades Kindergarten through grade eight is tardy or leaves early from a school day, such tardiness or early dismissal will be recorded as "excused" or "unexcused" in accordance with the standards written in this policy.

A record shall be kept of each scheduled school day during which the school is closed for all or part of the day because of extraordinary circumstances including adverse weather conditions, impairment of heating facilities, insufficiency of water supply, shortage of fuel, destruction of or damage to a school building, or such other cause as may be found satisfactory to the Diocese of Buffalo Department of Schools.

Attendance records will also indicate when a student is dropped from the enrollment due to change of schools for any reason.

Student Attendance/Course Credit:

Students in grades Kindergarten through eighth who are absent 18 days or more (both "excused" and "unexcused" absences) and whose parents have not periodically met with the principal regarding the absences are in jeopardy of being denied promotion to the next grade level.

Students are considered in attendance if:

1. The student is physically present in the classroom or working under the direction of the classroom teacher during the class scheduled meeting time.
2. The student is receiving approved alternative instruction (i.e. at-home tutoring due to medical issue.)

Students who are absent from class due to their participation in a school sponsored activity (i.e. track team event) are to arrange, with their teachers, to make up any missed assignments in a manner and timeline determined by the student's teacher.

Missed assignments due to excused absences may be sent home with a sibling or picked up at a pre-designated time by the parent at the teacher's discretion. It is the responsibility of the student to consult with the teacher(s) regarding completing missed assignments and/or tests in accordance with specifications designated by the teacher.

According to St. Mary's School's Student Handbook, page 20: *"Teachers are not required to give make-up tests or assignments for absences due to vacations or other unexcused absences. No assignment will be given in anticipation of the vacation or unexcused absence. There will be no exceptions to this policy. Please do not ask the teacher to make an exception or offer payment for homework given in advance of an unexcused absence."*

Parent Notification of Minimum Attendance Standard:

Parents and/or legal guardians and students are informed of St. Mary's policy regarding minimum attendance and course credit on page 17 of the school student handbook. The following guidelines will be followed:

1. Overall main points of St. Mary's School's Comprehensive Student Attendance Policy will be stated in the Student handbook distributed to all families at the beginning of the school year.
2. A copy of the policy will be available on the school website: www.smeschool.com.
3. Reminders regarding the components of the comprehensive student attendance policy will be published in school newsletters corresponding with the end of the first and second trimesters. It will also be stated that the policy will be on file in the office for parents/guardians to review at an appointed time agreed upon by their parent/guardian and the administration of the school.
4. A designated staff member will notify the parent/guardian by phone regarding a student's unexcused absence(s) and explain the correlation between the student's attendance and the possibility of denial of promotion. If the parent/guardian cannot be reached by telephone, a letter or e-mail shall be sent to the parent detailing the information. (i.e. date of absence, reason and importance for an excuse and if necessary, the amount of times the particular student has had an unexcused absence, etc.)

Intervention:

1. If deemed necessary by school administration, or if requested by the parent/guardian, a conference will be scheduled between the parent/guardian and appropriate school staff members to address the student's attendance issue and possibly develop appropriate intervention strategies that best meet the needs of the individual student.
2. Regarding intervention of non-compliance with the Comprehensive Student Attendance Policy, a designated staff member will review St. Mary's School's Attendance Policy with the parents/guardians of students who have excessive and/or unexcused absences, tardiness or early departures. Referral to Lancaster Public School District student support services and/or community support services and agencies will be implemented prior to the denial of promotion of the student due to non-compliance with the attendance policy.

Incentives:

The following incentives will be implemented to encourage student attendance. The strategies will include, but are not limited to:

1. Classroom acknowledgement of the importance of good attendance (i.e. certificates, recognition ... etc.)
2. Perfect attendance certificates to be distributed at the end of each trimester or school year.

Disciplinary Consequences:

The following is stated in St. Mary's School's Student Handbook, pg. 16:

"All students must be in his/her homeroom by 8:10 am. Students arriving later will be marked as tardy. Any student who is tardy must be signed in by his/her parent. No student may participate in any extracurricular activity (including sports) on a day that he/she is absent."

Process to Develop Specific Intervention Strategies:

Once a case of excessive unexcused absences, tardiness or early departures has been identified, the following steps will take place:

1. Specific patterns in the non-compliance of the attendance policy will be identified (i.e. type of unexcused absences, tardiness or early departures, time frame, etc.)
2. The student's parent/guardian will be contacted by phone. If attempts to establish contact by phone prove futile, the second attempt will be by e-mail, followed by mailing a letter, if need be.
3. A conference will be called between the principal, any involved staff and the parent/guardian to develop individual intervention strategies to meet the needs of the specific student.
4. Once a set of strategies is agreed upon, implementation will take place.
5. Utilize appropriate Lancaster Central School District services and/or community resources to assist in the intervention process.
6. Monitor and report the short and long term effects of the implementation of the intervention.

Review Process:

1. Administration or staff member (teacher, school nurse, etc.) may ask for a review of a student's attendance record. If a significant number of unexcused absences, tardiness or early dismissals are found, parents can be notified and the intervention process can be implemented.
2. A parent/guardian may ask for a review of a student's attendance record.

Overall Review of Attendance Records:

At the end of the school year, the principal, the school nurse, and other staff members deemed appropriate by the principal will review the overall attendance in the school building. If the attendance record shows a decline from the previous year's attendance record, a plan will be devolved to revise the comprehensive student attendance policy and take steps to improved student attendance.

Community Awareness:

Community awareness of St. Mary's School's Comprehensive Student Attendance Policy will be promoted by:

1. Providing a plain language summary of the policy to parents/guardians at the beginning of each school year and promoting the understanding of such a policy to students and their parent guardian.
2. Providing each teacher, at the beginning of the school year or upon employment, with a copy of the policy.
3. Providing copies of the policy to any other member of the community upon request.