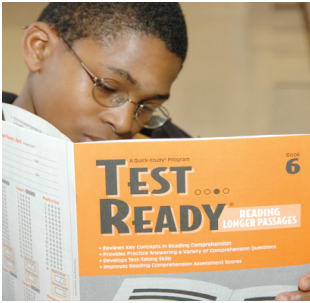


Be cool - go to school!

YES



Attendance Handbook

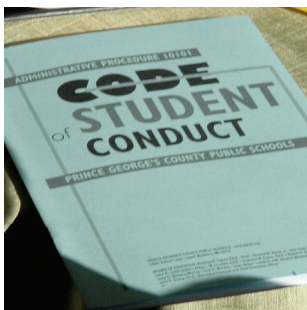


Prince George's County
Public Schools
14201 School Lane
Upper Marlboro
Maryland 20772

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DESIGNED BY THE
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLICITY & PUBLICATIONS



What you need to know
to meet PGCPS attendance
requirements ...

K through 12





Vision

All students graduate college-ready.

Mission

The Prince George’s County Board of Education will advance the achievement of its diverse student body through community engagement, sound policy governance, accountability, and fiscal responsibility.

Five Core Operating Beliefs

1. *Children ARE our business - and THEY come first;*
2. *Parents are our partners;*
3. *Victory is in the classroom;*
4. *Continuous improvement in teaching, leadership, and accountability is the key to our success; and*
5. *EVERY member of this community shares the responsibility for successful schools*



Contacts and Notes

Division of Student Services	301-952-6384
Court Liaison	301-749-4389
Professional School Counseling Services	301-567-8670
Family and Community Outreach	301-925-2531
Homeless Education	301-925-2482
International Guidance Office	301-445-8460
Student Records	301-749-4117
Safe and Drug Free Schools	301-749-4379
Health Services	301-749-4722
Special Education	301-817-3138
Home Instruction	301-749-4389
Psychological Services	301-431-5630
My School _____	
Principal _____	
Assistant Principal _____	

Counselor _____	
Teachers _____	

Health Services Staff _____	
School Psychologist _____	
Pupil Personnel Worker _____	
Parent Liaison _____	

Parents’ Responsibilities

Parents are the major influence in their children’s lives. In order to ensure school success, parents must:

- Encourage student attendance by taking a positive approach to school and school activities.
- Learn the school’s policies regarding student attendance.
- Contact the school when the student will be absent for the day.
- Write a note with the date of the absence, the reason for the absence, and parent contact information when the student is absent.
- Check frequently with school personnel as to your student’s progress.
- Share with the school the responsibility for promoting regular school attendance.
- Ask the school staff for help for your child when an attendance problem arises.
- Notify the school of changes in address and phone number immediately.
- Model and promote behavior appropriate for the school setting.
- Visit your child’s classroom at least twice per year during the school day.

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Student Attendance Is Critical

Everyone knows the important role attendance plays in getting an excellent education. However, students and parents alike may be surprised to hear that school attendance is mandated – and enforceable through fines – under Maryland State law for students ages five to sixteen. Under this law, parents and guardians are responsible for ensuring that their child attends school or is provided with regular, thorough, home instruction during the school year in the subjects taught by public schools.

Maryland law also provides the following list of reasons that students can be lawfully absent from school: death in the immediate family, illness of the student, court summons, hazardous weather conditions, work approved or sponsored by the school system, observance of a religious holiday, state emergency, suspension, and lack of authorized transportation (not including transportation denied for disciplinary reasons). At the discretion of school administrators, other reasons for a student's absence may be excused.

When a student is lawfully absent, schools must provide make-up work so that the student's learning will not be affected.

Attendance has become even more critical in response to more rigorous state assessments of student performance. These assessments measure student knowledge in key subjects; each day that a student is absent increases his or her chances of missing out on important material.

The start of the new school year is a good time to discuss the importance of attendance with your child. Make sure your child understands that not only is it critical for success in school, attendance is the law in our state.

Students' Responsibilities

While they have the right to help and guidance from their parents and the schools, students must take the major responsibility for their own education.

All students are expected to:

- Participate in school by being prepared for class, completing assignments, contributing to discussions, and other involvement deemed necessary by the teacher.
- Take responsibility for their actions and behavior.
- Attend school and classes regularly and on time.
- Complete community service hours.

High school students with unexcused absences may not receive credit for classes.

School and Teacher Responsibilities

Teachers and other school personnel are responsible for the education and safety of children while at school. To ensure that students attend regularly and on time, school personnel have the responsibilities listed below.

- Teachers will report a student's tardiness or absence from school or class to the school office and pupil personnel worker daily.
- A student's unlawful absence from an individual class will be recorded by the teacher and reported to the school office and pupil personnel worker as it occurs.
- Teachers will refer students who exhibit inappropriate behaviors to appropriate school personnel or school team.
- If the school has not received the required notification from the parent(s) or guardian(s) when the child is absent, school personnel will immediately contact the parent or guardian by telephone, e-mail, fax, or automated communication system.
- If the school is unable to contact the parent or guardian by telephone immediately after three days of absence or after one instance of suspected truancy, a certified letter, home visit, or other approved method will be used to contact the parent or guardian.
- Make-up work should be given to students.

What About Students Who Are Sixteen Years Old Or Older?

If they have not earned a diploma or certificate, all students have the right and privilege to attend school through the school year during which they turn 21. School attendance is required by law for students between the ages of five and sixteen. Students aged 16 years and older who are poor attenders may be withdrawn from school. However, no student may be withdrawn because of poor attendance until the school has made a reasonable effort to contact the home. Students sixteen years and older who do not regularly attend school may be withdrawn from school after an exit conference for one of the following reasons:

- Lack of academic success including low grades and/or grade retention.
- Continual disciplinary problems as documented by multiple office referrals and/or suspensions.
- Lack of personal motivation or interest to continue enrollment.

Attendance Committee

Each school has an Attendance Committee, chaired by the pupil personnel worker, to help students and families understand the importance of regular attendance and develop plans for students who need help with attendance.

The Attendance Committee:

- Meets with identified parents and incoming students who have exhibited problem attendance during the previous school year.
- Meets regularly to discuss student attendance.
- Meets with students and/or parents of students referred for attendance concerns.
- Develops individual attendance contracts with students and families to help them improve attendance.
- Monitors whole-school attendance patterns.

What Does Maryland State Law Say About School Absence?

The Compulsory Attendance Law (State Annotated Code — Education Article 7-301)

The compulsory attendance law of Maryland requires regular school attendance of children between five and sixteen years of age. This law also sets forth the penalties for violations of the law including a fine not to exceed \$100.00 PER DAY OF UNLAWFUL ABSENCE or IMPRISONMENT FOR UP TO 30 DAYS, OR BOTH. The fine applies to parents, guardians, or custodians of the children.

Who must attend — Each child who resides in this State and is five years old or older and under sixteen shall attend a public school regularly during the entire school year unless the child is otherwise receiving regular, thorough instruction during the school year in the studies usually taught in the public schools to children of the same age.

Excused absences — A county superintendent, school principal, or an individual authorized by the Superintendent or principal may excuse a student for a lawful absence.

Duty of parent or guardian — Each person who has under his control a child who is five years old or older and under sixteen shall see that the child attends school or receives instruction as required by this section.

Penalties — (1) Any person who induces or attempts to induce a child to absent himself unlawfully from school or employs or harbors any child who is absent unlawfully from school while school is in session is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to a fine not to exceed \$500 or imprisonment not to exceed 30 days, or both.

(2) Any person who has control over a child who is 5 years old or older and under 16 who fails to see that the child attends school or receives instruction under this section is guilty of a misdemeanor, and, on conviction, is subject to a fine not to exceed \$50 per day of unlawful absence or imprisonment, not to exceed 10 days, or both for the first conviction and a fine not to exceed \$100 per day of unlawful absence or imprisonment, not to exceed 30 days for the second and subsequent conviction.

What Are Considered Lawful Absences?

Reasons for Lawful absences as prescribed in COMAR 13A.08.03 (effective July 1, 1990) are as follows:

- A. Death in the immediate family.** Immediate family means a parent or guardian, brother, sister, grandparent, or anyone who has lived regularly in the household of the student.
- B. Illness of the student.** The principal shall require a physician's certificate from the parent or guardian of a student reported continuously absent for illness.
- C. Court Summons.**
- D. Hazardous weather conditions.** Hazardous weather conditions shall be interpreted to mean weather conditions that would endanger the health or safety of the student when in transit to and from school.
- E. Work approved or sponsored** by the school, the local school system, or the State Department of Education, accepted by the local superintendent of schools or the school principal, or their designees as reason for excusing the students.
- F. Observance of a religious holiday.**
- G. State emergency.**
- H. Suspension.**
- I. Lack of authorized transportation.** This shall not include students denied authorized transportation for disciplinary reasons.
- J. Other emergency or set of circumstances** which, in the judgment of the superintendent or designee, constitutes a good and sufficient cause for absence from school.

Lawful or legitimate absences require a written explanation from the parent, guardian, or custodian of the student and should be submitted to the designated school authority upon return to school. This written note should include the date of the absence as well as the reason.

In cases where students have been **absent for lawful reasons (A through J above)**, the school shall make provisions for the availability of make-up work. Where make-up assignments have been successfully completed, the student's grade shall reflect the completion of such work.

Exceptions to Maryland Law for 5 year olds:

1. A child is enrolled full-time in a licensed family day care.
2. A child is enrolled full-time in a licensed child care center.
3. A child is enrolled part-time in a Headstart program.
4. Immaturity waiver (for explanation contact your child's school)

Please note kindergarten or a similar program is necessary prior to first grade.

What Are Possible Consequences For Poor Attendance?

There are consequences for both students and schools for poor attendance.

For students, consequences for poor attendance include:

- Behavioral probation.
- Written contract.
- Before and/or after school detention.
- Saturday School Program.
- Removal of school privileges.
- Reduction in grades or loss of credit.
- Restriction of extracurricular activities.
- Placement in an alternative educational program.
- Referral to Pupil Personnel Services for possible outside referral to court for violation of the compulsory attendance law (parental sanctions) or to Juvenile Services for intake services (student sanctions).
- Withdrawal from the regular school program.
- Personal stigma from lack of education.
- Low test scores on MSA/HSA.

For schools, poor attendance may result in:

- Not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress for attendance.
- Large number of suspensions reported.
- State takeover or reconstitution.

What Are Possible Actions Against Parents?

There may be consequences for parents of children who are frequently absent from school. These consequences include:

- Referral to school SIT/SST/MDT.
- Referral to Pupil Personnel Worker.
- Referral to Court Liaison Office.
- Referral to Interagency Attendance Council.
- Referral for Judge's Chamber Conference.
- Referral to Department of Juvenile Services.
- Filing of a truancy petition with the Circuit Court of Maryland.

Parent's Rights

Parents have rights regarding the attendance records of their children. Parents have the right to be informed when their children are absent and to confer with the school about possible inaccuracies in their children's attendance records. Parents may appeal attendance violation decisions and/or question school records regarding attendance. Appeals should be made in writing to the school principal.

What If My Child Frequently Misses or Refuses to Go to School?

When your child refuses to go to school or when fearfulness and feelings of distress or stress appear, he may have a problem. Provided is a list of suggestions you may follow:

Health Reasons: Contact the doctor, dentist, or health department, if your child has asthma, a fever, a cold that is on-going, needs immunizations, or has any other health concern.

School Reasons: Talk with your child's teacher, counselor or principal if your child has social or academic concerns.

Economic Reasons: Call your child's counselor when you are in need of clothing or food, or if eviction is possible.

Family Reasons: Call the school when you are moving or changing your phone number or when a crisis is occurring; show your support for education by not allowing your child to stay home to babysit or to sleep.

Community Reasons: Ask an older child or an adult to walk to school with your child if there are safety concerns.

Personal Reasons: Talk with your child's counselor or teacher if your child feels insecure or seems to have a low self esteem.

Cultural Reasons: Talk with the counselor, principal, or teacher if your child has feelings that teasing, fighting, bullying, etc., are occurring because of ethnic heritage, background, or otherwise.

What Are Considered Unlawful Absences?

Unlawful absence or truancy is defined as the act of a student being absent from school for a day or any portion of a day or from an individual class or portion of a class for any reason other than those defined as a lawful absence from school.

What are the consequences for unlawful absences?

Penalties — (1) Any person who induces or attempts to induce a child to absent himself unlawfully from school or employs or harbors any child who is absent unlawfully from school while school is in session is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to a fine not to exceed \$500 or imprisonment not to exceed 30 days, or both.

(2) Any person who has control over a child who is 5 years old or older and under 16 who fails to see that the child attends school or receives instruction under this section is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to a fine not to exceed \$100 per day of unlawful absence or imprisonment not to exceed 30 days, or both.

What about students who are late for school?

It is critical that students be on time each morning because this is when staff sets the educational tone and creates the community of learners. When the tardy bell rings, students and teachers are to be in class ready to learn. Being punctual to school is also important for students since the school takes the official attendance at the beginning of the school day.

Students coming late to school are required to obtain a late pass before being admitted to any classroom. Schools are required to admit students to school regardless of the time. (Students can be marked absent for a half day as appropriate.) This late pass must be brought to the attention of the homeroom teacher in secondary schools. If the student does not obtain a late pass and show it to the teacher, the student will be marked absent on the official roll. Students are required to bring a note from the parent or guardian explaining the reason for the lateness.

Is Pregnancy a Reason for Not Attending School?

Pregnant students have the right to a free public education and to participate in classes and extra curricular activities. If there is a question as to whether the activity is medically safe, the student may be required to present a doctor's certificate. Pregnant students have a responsibility — both to themselves and to their babies — to take advantage of all available health services, both at school and at nearby clinics and hospitals.

A pregnant student should continue in her regular school program unless a joint decision is made to modify the program. The joint decision is determined in consultation with the student, her parents, guardians, or husband, and appropriate educational and medical personnel. The Home and Hospital Program is one possible instructional modification. Pregnant students and their parents, guardians, or husbands should contact the local school for appropriate procedures for application.

Why Should Students Attend School Regularly?

The opportunity to attend school daily and on time is both a right and a privilege granted to all students in the Prince George's County Public Schools. Regular attendance encourages and creates the habits of mind necessary for success in school and in life.

Students with regular, punctual daily attendance gain benefits throughout life. On the other hand, students who are frequently absent may create serious academic and life problems for themselves. For instance, workers earn higher average salaries for every additional level of education.

Average salaries in 2006 for all people 18 years and older were:

College graduate	\$56,788
High School graduate	\$31,071
High School dropout	\$20,812

As you can see, education pays.

Source for salary information: U. S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2007 Annual Social and Economic Supplement. (http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032007/perinc/new04_001.htm)

Overall, benefits of good attendance include:

- Greater learning and higher grades.
- Eligibility for clubs and activities.
- Less delinquency and drug use.
- Increased self respect.
- Parent pride.
- Greater school and parent cooperation.
- More funds for schools.
- Graduation.
- More college and postsecondary options.
- Greater earning potential through increased education.
- The continual opportunity to learn and practice the work and study habits necessary for success throughout life.

Good attendance creates the skills and habits necessary for a brighter future.

How Can I Help My Child Have Better Attendance?

Parents teach and model behavior, create expectations, and enforce rules to set the stage for their children's success in school and in life. For better attendance and school achievement, parents may find the following actions helpful.

- **Let** your child know that you think school is important.
- **Set** a regular bedtime appropriate for your child's age.
- **Provide** your child with plenty of time to get ready for school.
- **Provide** an alternate plan of transportation for getting your child to school on time.
- **Schedule** doctor's, dentist's, and other appointments before and after school hours.
- **Plan** for scheduled appointments around the school day. If appointments must be during the school day, plan them so that your child does not miss the same class every time.
- **If your child** must be out of school for part of the day, allow him/her to miss only that time necessary for the appointment.
- **View** tardiness as unacceptable behavior.
- **Refuse** to write an excuse for anything other than a legitimate absence.
- **Discourage** your child from checking out of school before the end of the school day.
- **Be sure** make-up work is completed promptly.
- **Notify** the school as soon as possible in cases of prolonged absences due to hospitalization, etc.
- **Use** good judgement. Don't send a sick child to school.
- **Plan** family vacations in accordance with the school calendar.
- **Talk** to your child about responsibility and the need to develop good work habits and positive attitudes.
- **If your child** drives to school, stress his/her responsibility for attendance and being on time.
- **Monitor** TV, internet, and electronic games.