

School Attendance, Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy

Objective

The intent of Iowa Code Chapter 299 is to increase individual student attendance to the point at which students are no longer considered “chronically absent”. Decreasing the number of Iowa students missing a substantial portion of scheduled school days will increase student achievement and prepare students for postsecondary success.

It is the goal of ___ Community School District and the ___ County Attorney’s Office that all students regularly attend school to increase student achievement and postsecondary success. Although school attendance is desired for all students, these requirements apply only to those of compulsory age (i.e., reached the age of six and under sixteen by September 15). Students enrolled in Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs (SWVPP) are also considered of compulsory age.

Definitions

“Chronic Absenteeism” is when a student misses 10% or more of the days or hours in the grading period.

Note: While the definition is the same, Iowa Code Chapter 299 and the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) each calculate and use that number differently. For the purpose of this policy the calculation uses only non-exempt absences in the individual student calculation while the ESSA calculation uses all student absences in the overall school chronic absenteeism calculator. Although related, the chronic absenteeism calculations under Iowa Code Chapter 299 and the Every Student Successes Act are calculated and interpreted separately.

“Exempt Absence” is a student absence for which school personnel have determined one or more of the exemptions listed in Iowa Code section 299.1(4)(b) apply. It will be the responsibility of the school official to objectively and consistently apply the exemption criteria to individual student scenarios.

“School Engagement Meeting” (SEM) is a meeting with the student, a parent or guardian, and at least one school official, and any other necessary party where barriers to attendance are identified and interventions enacted by all parties are identified.

“Absenteeism Prevention Plan” is a specific agreement between school, student, and the parent/guardian describing the responsibilities of all involved aimed at increasing student attendance.

School Responsibilities

Establish Attendance Policy. Local boards set policy that includes:

- The number of days or hours of required attendance.
- A chronic absenteeism policy which, may, exceed (i.e., be more restrictive) the requirements in state code.
- Rules relating to students who are chronically absent. Specifically, it must explain:
 - How a student is deemed chronically absent,
 - Interventions that may be used when a student is chronically absent, and
 - Actions associated with a student being chronically absent.

Monitor Attendance. For the purpose of this policy an exemption is allowed if school personnel determine a student's absence on a specific date meets one of the following exemptions and thus does not count towards a student's total absenteeism calculation. These include a student:

- Who has completed the requirements for graduation in a public school district or has obtained a high school equivalency diploma.
- Who is excused for sufficient reason by any court of record or judge.
- While attending religious services or receiving religious instructions.
- Who is unable to attend school due to legitimate medical reasons.
- Who has an individualized education program that affects the student's attendance.
- Who has a plan under section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act that affects the student's attendance.
- Who is a military applicant undergoing military entrance processing.
- Who is engaged in military service.
- Who is traveling to attend a funeral.
- Who is traveling to attend a wedding.

As for the seventh and eighth exemptions above (military-related), it should be noted that these will generally not apply to students of compulsory school age (student is one who has reached the age of six and is under sixteen years of age by September 15).

The accuracy and appropriateness of each of these exemptions is a determination made by school personnel with the available information. Fair and judicious use of allowable exemptions is important.

Initiate Parent Communication. When an individual student becomes chronically absent (i.e., having 10% or more non-exempt absences) it is the school's responsibility to notify the parents or guardians. A similar notification is provided to the county attorney's office for the county in which the district's central administrative office is located. Although no additional actions are required at this level of student absence, it is anticipated that school staff will work with the family to increase attendance.

Convene School Engagement Meeting and Draft Plan. If an individual student has non-exempt absences greater than 15% of scheduled school days or hours **and** evidence exists that these absences are negatively affecting academic progress a School Engagement Meeting (SEM) is held. The SEM is attended by, at a minimum:

- The student;
- Parent or guardian; and
- At least one school official

The SEM may also be attended by any other party deemed necessary (School Resource Officers, contracting agencies, County Attorney representation, etc.).

"Academic progress" can be broadly defined as it may entail multiple variables including behavioral referrals, social skills, grades, test scores, school engagement, etc. An SEM **may** be held even if grades are satisfactory yet school staff feel overall school performance is impacted and a meeting is warranted.

During this meeting, an absenteeism prevention plan available at the following url:

<https://educate.iowa.gov/pk-12/student-supports/prevention/attendance-chronic-absenteeism> is developed and signed by the team. Key components to an absenteeism prevention plan are,

- Identification of barriers to attendance (i.e. causes of absences);
- Identification of intervention(s) to overcome barriers;
- Development of method to monitor plan implementation and outcome; and

- Reaching team agreement on the plan to reduce and eliminate unexcused absences, evidenced by student, parent/guardian, and school signatures.

To increase the likelihood of success, students, parents/guardians and school officials should collaboratively develop the plan, agree to the plan, and have an active role in plan implementation.

School and County Attorney Collaboration

The school will monitor the absenteeism prevention plan and continue, as appropriate, to communicate with the county attorney's office. Should a student or parent/guardian fail to attend the SEM or any member (i.e., student, parent/guardian) not participate in their identified portions of the plan, or the student exceeds 20% non-exempt absences (i.e., "truant"), the ___ County Attorney's Office may initiate proceedings under Iowa Code section 299.6.

County Attorney Responsibilities

Pursuant to Iowa Code section 299.12(3)(e), the County Attorney's Office may initiate a proceeding under Iowa Code section 299.6 when any of the following occur:

- Participants in a school engagement meeting fail to enter into an absenteeism prevention plan;
- Parents, guardian or legal or actual custodian violate a term of the absenteeism prevention plan; or
- The student's parents, guardian or legal or actual custodian fails to participate in the school engagement meeting.

In the alternative, the County Attorney may pursue a civil action under Iowa Code section 299.6A.

In determining which course of action to take, the County Attorney's Office will apply reasoned discretion based on the standards set forth at the following url: <https://iowa-icaa.com/ICAA%20Standards%202010.pdf>.

Policy Review and Authority

First Reading:

Second Reading:

Effective Date:

Iowa Code chapter 299, as amended by 2024 Iowa Acts, House File 2435, and by 2025 Iowa Acts, - 2024 Code of Iowa as amended July 1, 2025