



# Illinois State Board of Education

## **Daily School Attendance and Truancy**

Illinois Laws and Regulations

Last Updated: December 2023

Equity • Quality • Collaboration • Community

# Session Overview

- Absenteeism, Truancy, and Dropout Requirements and Recommendations
- Required Policy
- Chronic Absenteeism Report and Support
- Interventions/Prohibition on Punitive Action
- Compulsory Attendance
- General Definitions
- Reporting Requirements
- County and District Truant Officers
- Other Truancy Programs in School Code
- Additional Resources



# Absenteeism, Truancy, and Dropout Requirements and Recommendations

## Absent

If a student is absent without valid cause or notification, then the district must attempt to notify the parent or guardian within 2 hours after the first class in which the child is enrolled.

“Nudges” can be a cost-effective way to reduce absences.

School districts must adopt an absenteeism and truancy policy, provide truancy intervention services, and annually review and analyze truancy data.

Please see the ISBE FAQ for information on policy requirements.

A student is considered “chronically absent” if their absences total 10% or more of school days of the most recent academic school year, including absences with and without valid cause and out-of-school suspensions for an enrolled student.

A Multi-Tiered System of Support can help identify and target support to students who are increasingly missing more school.

Combining a CTB with other interventions can also prove effective.

## Truant

Each quarter, school districts must send a list to their ROE of students who are certified to be a chronically or habitually truant or who were previously so certified but have resumed regular school attendance. A chronic or habitual truant is any student who is absent without valid cause for 5% or more of the previous 180 attendance days.

The What Works Clearinghouse has research on effective truancy and dropout prevention.

Truancy officers can be hired at the county or district level. County truancy officers receive such compensation as may be fixed by the county board, together with their necessary traveling expenses, to be paid out of the county treasury.

Consider starting a Community Truancy Board (CTB) in your area to help students and families overcome attendance challenges.

## Dropout

Each quarter, school districts must send a list to their ROE of students who have been expelled or have withdrawn or who have left school and have been removed from the regular attendance rolls during that quarter. This list should exclude transferees.

Reengagement centers can be an effective strategy for encouraging out-of-school youth to return to school and supporting them once reengaged.

Be sure to include students exited with the following SIS codes:

1. Code 08 (Expulsion)
2. Code 09 (Dropped Out)
3. Code 10 (Transfer to GED program)
4. Code 11 (Moved, Not Known to be Continuing)

\* Students who report transfer to home school (Code 03) should be included on this list if there is any concern that a bona fide home school program is not being provided.

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# Required Policy ([5/22-92](#) and [5/26-13](#))

- All school districts, charter schools, alternative schools and programs, and private schools that receive public funds are required to adopt a policy on absenteeism and truancy that includes at least the following elements:
  - A definition of a valid cause that aligns with 105 ILCS 5/26-2a;
  - A description of diagnostic procedures to identify root causes (student, family, staff interviews);
  - The identification of supportive services (to include at least those services outlined in statute);
  - The provisions relating to chronic absenteeism from 105 ILCS 5/26-18.
- Policies must be updated every two years and filed with ISBE and the ROE. See [23. Ill. Admin Code 207](#).



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# Chronic Absenteeism Report and Support

## (105 ILCS 5/26-18)

- “Chronic absence” means absences that total 10% or more of school days of the most recent academic school year, including with and without valid cause and out-of-school suspensions.
- All school districts, charter schools, alternative schools and programs, and private schools that receive public funds are required to collect and review chronic absence data from each of their attendance centers and determine what systems of support and resources are needed to engage chronically absent students and their families.



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# Interventions/Prohibition on Punitive Action

## District Prohibitions ([105 ILCS 5/26-12](#))

-  No punitive action against truant minors without first providing supportive services
-  No removal of truant minor from enrollment roster unless they have accrued 15 consecutive days of absence without valid cause and the student:
  - **will not return and the district has exhausted all available supportive services, or**
  - **cannot be located.**
-  No referral of a truant, chronic truant, or truant minor to any other local public entity (e.g., local law enforcement) for that entity to issue a fine or fee as a punishment for truancy

# Interventions/Prohibition on Punitive Action

The School Code outlines how a parent/guardian must be notified of noncompliance with compulsory attendance requirements ([5/26-7](#)); how compliance with the notice is verified and when a truancy hearing is conducted ([5/26-8](#)); requirements for community service and the options to refer for court action or a graduation incentives program under [Section 26-16](#) of the School Code ([5/26-8](#), [5/26-8a](#), and [5/26-8b](#)); and potential criminal penalties ([5/26-10](#) and [5/26-11](#)).



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# Compulsory Attendance ([105 ILCS 5/26-1](#) & [26-2](#))

- The compulsory school age has been 6-17 since school year 2014-15. A child is no longer considered of compulsory school attendance age upon turning 17.
- Exemptions to compulsory attendance are listed in [Section 5/26-1](#). The latest additions include:
  - Up to five mental health days. See [Public Act 102-0321](#) and [ISBE Guidance](#).
  - Additional accommodations for students missing school for religious reasons. See [Public Act 102-0406](#). See also [Section 5/26-2b](#) regarding missed school for observance of religious holidays.
  - One day for a civic event. See [Public Act 102-0981](#).



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# General Definitions (105 ILCS 5/26-2a)

- **Truant** – Absent without “valid cause” for more than 1% but less than 5% of the past 180 school days.
- **Valid Cause** – Defined in statute and subject to district policy. Now includes mental/behavioral health (five excused mental health days), and effective July 1, 2025, verified medical/therapeutic appointments and absences related to being a parent/expectant parent or a victim of domestic or sexual violence.
- **Chronic or Habitual Truant** – Absent without “valid cause” for 5% or more of the past 180 regular attendance days.
- **Truant Minor** – Chronic truant who has been offered resources and services but persists in truancy or who refused services.
- **Dropout** – A child enrolled in Grades 9 – 12 whose name has been removed from the roster (unless an enumerated exception applies).



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# Reporting Requirements

Citation	Reporting Structure	Data Elements	Frequency
<a href="#">5/26-3</a> (no district truancy officer)	Clerk/Secretary of School Board ↓ District Superintendent ↓ Regional Superintendent	Reports on students not regularly attending school for truancy interventions	Beginning of school year and as required by ROE
<a href="#">5/26-6</a> (district truancy officer)	Clerk/Secretary of School Board ↓ District Superintendent ↓ Appropriate District Truancy Officers	Reports on students not regularly attending school for truancy interventions	Census reporting at beginning of school year; report by superintendent “from time to time”
<a href="#">5/26-3a</a>	Clerk/Secretary of School Board ↓ Reg. Superintendent & Secretary of State ↓ County or District Truant Officer	Students leaving school/removed from enrollment roster (except due to transfer) and students certified as chronic/habitual truant	Quarterly (first school day in October, January, April, July)
<a href="#">5/26-3b</a>	School Employee or Other School Agent ↓ Parent/Guardian	K – 8 student absence without record of valid cause or notification by parent/guardian	Within two hours after first class in which the child is enrolled
<a href="#">5/26-3d</a>	All Regional and District Superintendents, and all Special Ed Cooperative Directors ↓ ISBE	Data concerning truants, chronic truants, and truant minor pupils	On or before Aug. 15 of each year



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# County and District Truant Officers

- Two types of truant officers:
  - County truant officers appointed by a regional superintendent and paid out of the country treasury. See [105 ILCS 5/3-13](#).
  - District truant officers appointed by local school boards and paid by the district.
- Truant officers investigate all cases of truancy or non-attendance and proceed as dictated by Article 26 of the School Code. See [105 ILCS 5/26-5](#).
- School personnel are to provide information and assistance to aid truant officers in the performance of their duties. See [105 ILCS 5/26-9](#).



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# Other Truancy Programs in School Code

- Alternative Learning Opportunities Programs (ALOPs) can be specifically designed to prevent truancy, supplement instruction for students with attendance problems, intervene to decrease chronic truancy, and provide alternatives to high school completion. See [105 ILCS 5/Art. 13B](#) and the [ISBE ALOP webpage](#).
- Truants' Alternative and Optional Education Programs (TAOEPs) are for students with attendance problems and/or dropouts up to and including those who are 21 years of age. See [105 ILCS 5/2-3.66](#) and the [ISBE TAOEP webpage](#).
- Starting in FY 2023, ROEs/ISCs now receive an additional \$12 million through the ROE/ISC Services formula grant specifically to assist districts with addressing truancy and chronic absenteeism as Illinois recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Districts must have truancy programs for dropouts ages 17 and older. See [105 ILCS 5/26-14](#).



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# Additional Resources

- SEL Hubs – Staff at six Regional Offices of Education and Chicago Public Schools are dedicated to helping school districts implement trauma-informed practices via the REACH model, assembling a team, conducting a needs assessment, and developing and implementing an action plan. Reach out to your SEL Hub on the [ISBE Social-Emotional Learning Hubs](#) webpage.
- REACH – The Center for Childhood Resilience at Lurie Children’s Hospital also offers an online virtual learning community on trauma-informed practices for all Illinois educators. Find information on how to join on the [Center for Childhood Resilience](#) website.
- Student Care Department – ISBE’s Student Care Department is available to offer support to school districts on school discipline. Email [studentcare@isbe.net](mailto:studentcare@isbe.net).

# Contact Information

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**ROE/ISC Department**  
ROEISC@isbe.net





# Q&A



# Question 1

## How should districts handle situations where a family goes on extended vacation or travel in excess of 15 days?

A district that is concerned about the impact of absences in these circumstances should engage their families and communities on the importance and impacts of attendance or to explore other solutions that may meet the needs of their communities.

A school board could adopt a remote educational program policy for individual students to participate in with the consent of their parent/guardian, per [105 ILCS 5/10-29](#). Please note that statute requires that the criteria for determining that a remote educational program will best serve the student's individual learning needs must consider, at minimum, the student's prior attendance, disciplinary record, and academic history. Statute also requires that the remote instruction must be aligned to state learning standards, must be consistent with the instruction and educational experiences given to students at the same grade level in the district, and must be delivered by licensed teachers.

We have been asked repeatedly if a district can drop a student from its enrollment roster in this circumstance. The answer generally is "No." Under law, districts can only remove a student from the roster after 15 consecutive days of absence without valid cause if either the student *cannot be located* **or** the student can be located but has been provided *all available supportive services* and still *refuses to return to school*. This means that districts cannot remove a student because their family has taken an extended trip, for example, to visit relatives in another country. The district's knowledge that the student is on a trip and plans to return means they do not meet the statutory qualifications to be removed.



## Question 2

**Can a student who will be absent for an extended period (such as vacation or an illness) be provided online learning and counted as present for days they utilize online learning?**

There are [three options](#) for remote learning available in Illinois: 10-29 Remote Educational Program, Home/Hospital Instruction, and E-Learning.

A Remote Education Program is only allowable if a district has adopted a policy, the student meets eligibility criteria, and the parent/guardian and district both agree it would be in the child's best interest. See also Q&A 1.

[Home/Hospital](#) is only an option for a student when a properly licensed medical professional determines that the student will be absent or is anticipated to be absent from school for a minimum of 10 days during the school year due to a medical condition.

An E-Learning day must be schoolwide or districtwide; therefore, it is not an option for an individual student.

# Question 3

## What is considered a valid cause for being absent?

[Section 26-2a](#) of the School Code defines "valid cause" for absence to include the following:

- a. Illness, including the mental or behavioral health of the student; attendance at a verified medical or therapeutic appointment; appointment with a victim services provider;
- b. Observance of a religious holiday;
- c. Death in the immediate family or family emergency;
- d. Attendance at a civic event;
- e. Other situations beyond the control of the student, as determined by the Board of Education in each district;
- f. Such other circumstances that cause reasonable concern to the parent for the mental, emotional, or physical health or safety of the student; and
- g. [Additional situations](#) related to a student's status as an expectant parent, parent, or victim of domestic or sexual violence.

Section 26-1 of the School Code outlines some additional exemptions to compulsory attendance, including, but not limited to, confirmation classes, sounding taps at a military honors funeral held in Illinois for a deceased veteran, and absences connected with the parent or legal guardian being an active duty member of the uniformed services.

Consult your [absenteeism and truancy policy](#) for any additional situations that may qualify as a valid cause for absence.



## Question 4

**Do absences with valid cause (i.e., excused absences) count towards chronic truancy?**

No. A student is considered chronically truant if they are absent **without valid cause** for more than 5% of the past 180 school days.



# Question 5

**How does an excused absence (with valid cause) compare to an unexcused absence (without valid cause) in terms of reporting to ISBE?**

There are three attendance metrics that are displayed on a district's Report Card:

- i. **Chronic Absenteeism**: Number of students with 10% or more total absences **whether excused or unexcused**. This is the only metric of the three that is part of a district's [summative designation](#).
- ii. **Truancy Rate**: Number of students that are **absent without valid cause (unexcused)** for more than 1% but less than 5% of the past 180 school days.
- iii. **Chronic Truancy Rate**: Number of students that are **absent without valid cause (unexcused)** for 5% or more of the past 180 regular attendance days.

## Question 6

**How does coding attendance work for ALOPs? Additionally, does low attendance at an ALOP count toward the district's attendance rate?**

Attendance at an ALOP is not treated any differently. If a student is enrolled in an ALOP operated by an ROE or ISC, then the ROE or ISC will report the attendance back to the home school of the student. If the student is enrolled in an ALOP operated by a district, then the district already has the attendance data available.

In either case, student attendance at an ALOP is factored in as part of the district's attendance metrics. (See next question.)

# Question 7

## Should an out-of-school suspension or expulsion be coded as an excused or unexcused absence?

This depends on if the district continues to provide educational services during the period of suspension or expulsion **and** whether the student participates in those services. If the district is offering services and the student participates, they can be marked present. If services are offered and the student does not participate, the student should be marked absent -- but whether the absence is considered excused or unexcused depends on the reason for the absence. The district should consult its absenteeism and truancy policy to determine if the absence is excused or unexcused.

See the chart below for further detail.

Disciplinary Code	Description	Attendance Recording Options ( <a href="#">see here for all</a> )	Rates Affected
01	Expulsion (received educational services)	Present Absent - Excused or Unexcused	Chronic absenteeism Truancy Chronic truancy
02	Expulsion (did not receive educational services)	Student is exited from SIS. No attendance is recorded.	N/A
03	In-school suspension	Present Absent - Excused or Unexcused	Chronic absenteeism Truancy Chronic truancy
04	Out-of-school suspension (no services provided)	Absent – Unexcused	
	Out-of-school suspension (services provided)	Present Absent - Excused or Unexcused	



## Question 8

### **Do mental health days or the civic engagement day count against attendance?**

Both are considered an excused absence. They count toward a district's chronic absenteeism rate since that metric is calculated using both excused and unexcused absences, but they do not count toward truancy or chronic truancy rates.

## Question 9

### **Are mental health days included in the calculation for chronic absenteeism?**

Yes. "Chronic absence" means absences that total 10% or more of school days of the most recent academic school year, including absences with and without valid cause ... (See – 105 ILCS 5/26-18.)

Therefore, whether a mental health day is excused or unexcused, it will be included in the calculation for chronic absenteeism.

# Question 10

**Can a student choose to utilize one of the five allowable mental health days and go home after they have arrived at school?**

No. A child missing part of a day for mental health reasons would not count as one of the student's five allowable mental or behavioral health days under [Public Act 102-0266](#) because these are contemplated as full-day absences from school.

Students cannot be required to provide a doctor's note and must be given the opportunity to make up any schoolwork missed when using one of the five allotted mental health days. Allowing this time to be used incrementally can create scenarios where students arrive late to school or depart early or repeatedly skip the same class under the protections granted to mental health days. This would impose a burden on districts to track students' mental health time used, may delay referral of students to appropriate school personnel for mental health supports, and raises questions as to when a student's makeup work would be expected to be completed.

With this said, a child missing part of a day for mental health reasons will, in many cases, qualify as an excused absence. The definition of "valid cause" for absence in Section 26-2a includes "illness, including the mental or behavior health of the student," "attendance at a verified medical or therapeutic appointment," and "such other circumstances which cause reasonable concern to the parent for the mental, emotional, or physical health or safety of the student." See 105 ILCS 5/26-2a. A student's request to miss a single class on an as-needed basis for mental health reasons could potentially qualify under any of these categories for valid cause for absence, subject to the district's application of its own absenteeism and truancy policy.

Districts should also keep in mind that students cannot be forced or coached into leaving school early – especially in cases of student misbehavior. The choice to utilize a mental health day or leave school early for mental health reasons must be one made by the student. Please review ISBE's [Position Statement on Informal Removal of Students](#).



# Question 11

**Is there any documentation required when a student uses a mental health day?**

No. A student cannot be required to provide a medical note or any other documentation when using one of the five allowed mental health days. Beyond five days, a doctor's note can be required subject to the district's absenteeism and truancy policy.



## Question 12

**If a district's absenteeism and truancy policy already allows for students to be absent for 10 days without a doctor's note, must the policy allow for an additional five mental health days (for a total of 15) without a doctor's note?**

As long as the district policy allows for a temporary absence for cause to include up to five mental health days without the need for a doctor's note, then its policy complies with Public Act 102-0321. The board's absenteeism and truancy policy can be referenced as to whether or not those five days are in addition to other "call off days" (where no doctor's note is required) or included within them.



## Question 13

**Is there a minimum number of excused absences that must be provided by a district without the requirement for a medical note?**

A district can determine via its absenteeism and truancy policy when a medical note is required with one limitation. A district's policy must provide a minimum of five excused absence days for the mental or behavioral health of the child for which the child need not provide a medical note.

Please refer to [105 ILCS 5/26-2a](#) and your district's absenteeism and truancy policy to determine when a doctor's note is properly required.



# Question 14

**What options are available to a district when it receives a medical note from a doctor that provides a blanket medical excuse for missing school? For example, a student has been diagnosed with anxiety and the doctor's note excuses all future absences going forward.**

It is not advised under any circumstances that a district refuse to honor a medical note excusing a student from attendance that is issued by a physician licensed to practice medicine in all its branches, an advanced practice registered nurse, or a physician assistant.

With that said, if a medical professional has determined that the student will be absent from school for a minimum of 10 days during the school year due to a medical condition, then the student is eligible for [Home/Hospital Instruction](#). This would allow the student to receive instruction while absent from school and also allow the district to count the student present if the student participates in the homebound instruction.

## Question 15

### **What does it look like for districts to provide truancy programs to dropouts?**

The minimum services that must be included in a district's absenteeism and truancy policy are listed in [105 ILCS 5/22-92](#). Those services include parent conferences, student counseling, family counseling, and information about existing community services that are available to truant and chronically truant students and relevant to their needs.

For additional ideas on providing truancy support, please see Question 11.



# Question 16

## What suggestions or advice can ISBE offer for students with significant absences either excused or unexcused?

Students are absent for several different reasons, so it's impossible to provide a blanket solution to reducing absenteeism and truancy. A student could be absent due to bullying, low academic performance, disengagement, or physical constraints such as reliable transportation. In each case, a different intervention strategy is needed. Therefore, the first step must be to speak with the student and family to determine the cause of the absences, and then research and employ interventions targeted specifically at those problems.

We have gathered some interventions on [this page](#) as a starting point. Clicking on the green callout boxes will take you to additional information and strategies to consider. Other great resources include the [National Student Attendance, Engagement, and Success Center](#) and the [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#)

Don't forget that districts with banked time can utilize [Half Day School Improvement Days](#) to implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support that allows the school time to discuss and analyze ongoing efforts to reduce truancy on a regular basis.

# Question 17

## Do truancy laws apply to pre-K and kindergarten?

Truancy laws only apply to students who are subject to compulsory school (e.g., students who are between the ages of 6 [on or before Sept. 1] and 17). A student who does not fall within this age range cannot be considered "truant," and thus is not subject to truancy laws, regardless of their enrollment status in pre-K, kindergarten, or any other grade level. However, a student not within compulsory school age who chooses to enroll in their public school district is expected to attend school for the entire duration of the academic year. [See Section 26-2.](#)

In terms of impact on the Illinois Report Card, the Student Attendance Rate and Chronic Absenteeism Rate **do** include students in Grades K-12. However, only students in Grades 1 and above count toward Truancy and Chronic Truancy Rates.

Therefore, for multiple reasons, districts should utilize absenteeism and truancy intervention strategies to ensure that students under the compulsory school age are attending school to the greatest extent possible.

## Question 18

**Is there funding targeted specifically for K-3 attendance and truancy interventions?**

No, there is no funding targeted specifically for K-3 interventions.

However, other funding sources can be used to address issues of attendance and truancy in Grades K-3 and beyond. These funding sources include [TAOEP](#); [School Improvement Funds](#); and Title I, II and IV funds.

## Question 19

**Will the additional funding provided to ROEs for truancy intervention continue since COVID-19 funding is expiring?**

The additional funds provided to ROEs for truancy intervention came from state funds. It was not funded with ESSER dollars.

ISBE has recommended maintaining the funding in our FY 2025 budget proposal. However, continued funding is subject to appropriation by the General Assembly. Please contact your elected representative if you wish to advocate for the continuation of this funding.

## Question 20

**Is the homeschool SIS exit code (Code 03) considered a withdrawal or dropout?**

Withdrawal. Students withdrawing to homeschool do not count as a dropout. See ISBE's [Exit Enrollment document](#).



## Question 21

**Are school districts required to follow up with students who withdraw to homeschool and verify that the child is being educated?**

There is no requirement that districts follow up with students who have been reported by their family as withdrawn for homeschool. However, if there is a concern that a student who has been reported as homeschooled is not receiving educational services, follow-up is appropriate. Students that withdraw to homeschool should only be included on the quarterly report to ROEs under 105 ILCS 5/26-3a if the district suspects that the homeschool student is not receiving a bona fide education. Districts need not report every student who withdraws to homeschool.



# Question 22

## Can an ROE have access to SIS to monitor student withdrawals?

No. The Illinois School Students Records Act (ISSRA) restricts the release of student information with limited exceptions as outlined in the statute. One such exception is the release of records “to a governmental agency, or social service agency contracted by a governmental agency, in furtherance of an investigation of a student's school attendance pursuant to the compulsory student attendance laws of this State, provided that the records are released to the employee or agent designated by the agency.” See 105 ILCS 10/6(a)(9).

Therefore, ROEs are only permitted to access student records to the extent necessary to investigate a student's school attendance pursuant to Illinois' compulsory attendance laws. Beyond that function, they are restricted by ISSRA and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act from accessing student records.



# Question 23

## What is the best practice for collecting and submitting the required truancy reports to the Regional Offices of Education?

Districts should discuss with their Regional Office of Education the best method for collecting the required reports. Remember that the goal of the report is to identify, locate, and provide interventions to students, so that should be at the forefront of the submission and collection process

Additionally, the quarterly report is the **minimum** required. We encourage districts to be in constant communication with their ROE on truancy intervention.

As districts and ROEs work together on the process, here are some topics to consider:

1. Who will send (district) and receive (ROE) the reports each quarter?
2. Can the list be encrypted to provide further protection of the data?
3. Can the list be generated as a spreadsheet to allow for filtering and sorting?
4. Is it possible to create a shared document with “live” information? Consider No. 2 above if attempting this.
5. Is there a way for all districts to input their data into a uniform report without disclosing student information to all participating districts?
6. Although the law only requires reports between October and July, would it be helpful to have some form of report created prior to the start of the school year to help ensure students are registering for school?

