Regional Office of Education #11



Attendance & Truancy
Best Practices

Clark, Coles, Cumberland, Douglas,
Edgar, Moultrie, & Shelby Counties

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~ Truancy Office Goal and Philosophy ~

The primary goal of the Regional Office of Education #11 Attendance Improvement Matters program is not to refer students or parents to truancy court, but rather to support students in establishing or returning to a stable and consistent school routine.

We work collaboratively with families and schools to identify barriers to attendance and implement solutions. A referral to truancy court is considered only as a last resort, when all other interventions and supports have been exhausted without progress.

Regional Office of Education #11
Schools Served

Clark County

Casey-Westfield CUSD #C-4
Monroe Elementary School
Casey-Westfield Jr. Sr. High School

Marshall CUSD #C-2
North Elementary School
South Elementary School
Marshall Jr. High School
Marshall Sr. High School

Martinsville CUSD #C-3
Martinsville Elementary School
Martinsville Jr. Sr. High School

Coles County

Charleston CUSD #1
Ashmore Elementary
Carl Sandburg Elementary
Mark Twain Elementary
Jefferson Elementary
Charleston Middle School
Charleston High School

Mattoon CUSD #2
Arland D. Williams Elementary
Riddle Elementary
Hawthorne Elementary
Mattoon Middle School
Mattoon High School

Oakland CUSD #5
Oakland School K-12

Cumberland County

Cumberland CUSD #77
Cumberland Elementary School
Cumberland Middle School
Cumberland High School

Neoga CUSD CUSD #3
Neoga Elementary School
Neoga Jr. Sr. High School

Douglas County

Arcola CUSD #306
Arcola Elementary
Arcola Jr. Sr. High School

Arthur CUSD #305
Arthur Grade School
Atwood-Hammond Grade School
Lovington Grade School
ALAH High School

Tuscola CUSD #301
North Ward Elementary
East Prairie Jr. High School
Tuscola High School

Villa Grove CUSD #302
Villa Grove Elementary
Villa Grove Jr. Sr. High School

Edgar County

Edgar County CUSD #6
Chrisman Elementary School
Chrisman-Scotland Jr. High
Chrisman High School

Kansas CUSD #3
Kansas School K-12

Paris CUSD #4
Paris Crestwood

Paris Cooperative High School
Paris High School

Paris CUSD #95
Creative Center for Children PK
Carolyn Wenz Elementary
Memorial Elementary
Mayo Middle School

Shiloh CUSD #1
Shiloh School K-12

Moultrie County

Sullivan CUSD #300
Sullivan Elementary
Sullivan Middle School
Sullivan High School

Shelby County

Central A&M CUSD #21
Kemmerer Village
Bond Primary School
Gregory Intermediate School
Middle School
High School

Cowden-Herrick CUSD #3A
Cowden-Herrick Elementary School
Cowden-Herrick Jr. Sr. High School

Okaw Valley CUSD #302
Okaw Valley Elementary School
Okaw Valley Middle School
Okaw Valley High School

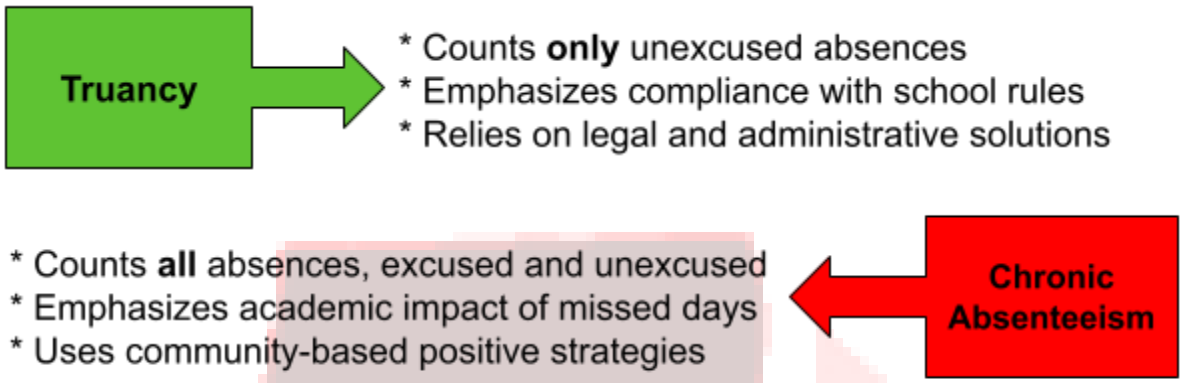
Shelbyville CUSD #4
Main Street Elementary
Moulton Middle School
Shelbyville High School

Stewardson-Strasburg CUSD #5A
Stewardson-Strasburg Elementary School
Stewardson-Strasburg High School

Windsor CUSD #1
Windsor Elementary
Windsor Jr. Sr. High School

Bridges Regional Safe School Program
Lerna Bridges
Paris Bridges
Shelbyville Bridges

Truancy Best Practices
Regional Office of Education #11



Truancy Investigation Process

At the Regional Office of Education #11, **each truancy case is handled individually**. Our interventions and approach are customized to the specific student, recognizing that no two cases are the same; even among siblings.

Students are only referred to our office **after their school has exhausted all internal interventions**. Even then, we value the school's input, as school staff know the student best.

Attendance and Documentation Guidelines

All students in ROE #11 are expected to attend school every day. According to the **Compulsory School Attendance Law**, 105 ILCS 5/26-1, any child between the ages of **6 and 17** must be enrolled in and attend a public or private day school regularly.

A "truant" is defined as a child who is subject to compulsory school attendance and who is absent without valid cause, as defined under this Section, from such attendance for more than 1% but less than 5% of the past 180 school days.

Guidelines to Improve Student Attendance

School District and Vermilion County Truancy Department Collaborative Approach

Improving a student's attendance requires a coordinated, consistent, and well-communicated approach. The most effective attendance improvement strategy follows a **4-step process**, with each step building upon the previous one. To achieve meaningful and lasting improvement, all four steps should be implemented in order.

1. Communication

Effective communication is the foundation of improving student attendance. This step involves ensuring that **students, parents/guardians, and staff are fully informed** of the attendance improvement plan and expectations.

- **Communication may include, but is not limited to:**
  - **Letters or emails to families**
  - **Staff training or awareness sessions**
  - **Attendance-focused assemblies**
  - **Posters, newsletters, or digital reminders**
  - **Any other school-developed attendance resources**

The goal is to create a shared understanding and partnership that positively influences student attendance behavior.

2. Prevention

Prevention focuses on early detection and accurate daily monitoring of attendance.

- **Key practices include:**
  - **Daily attendance recording (excused and unexcused)**
  - **Immediate notification to parents regarding absences**
  - **Data tracking to identify early patterns of concern**
  - **Proactive prevention, which allows schools to address potential issues before they escalate into chronic truancy**

3. Referral

Attendance Improvement Matters interventions are effective when supported by timely and complete information from the school.

- **Requirements include:**
  - **A fully completed referral form**
  - **A clear record of all school-based interventions**
  - **Updated attendance records**
  - **Letters mailed to parent(s)/guardian(s) regarding attendance**
  - **All communications with parent(s)/guardian(s)**

The primary goal of the Attendance Specialist is to assess the root causes of truancy and work collaboratively with families and schools to support the student. All interventions, including referrals to outside agencies, must be documented and maintained for reference.

4. Interventions

The Regional Office of Education #11 is committed to supporting schools and districts in addressing truancy through a structured and escalating intervention process.

- **The Attendance Improvement Matters (AIM) program:**
    - **Works with schools and families to intervene early**
    - **Gathers information during regular communication with student, family, and schools**
    - **May refer students and/or families to social services**
    - **Partners with the local State's Attorney Offices to file a truancy petition when necessary**

Higher-level interventions are reserved for continued or severe non-compliance and aim to enforce accountability while providing additional support.

Types of Absences

Excused Absence

Section 26-2a of the School Code defines "valid cause" for absence to include the following:

- Illness
- Mental or behavioral health of the student (up to 5 days) including verified medical/therapeutic appointments and absences related to being a parent/expectant parent or a victim of domestic or sexual violence
- Family emergency
- Observance of a religious holiday
- Death in the immediate family
- Attendance at a civic event (Grades 7-12, once per year)
- Other situations beyond the control of the student, as determined by the Board of Education in each district

Unexcused Absence

- Oversleeping/missing alarm
- Leaving school during the regular school day without the approval of a school official or other non-emergency situations
- Personal grooming appointments: hair, nails, tanning, etc.
- Employment/job interview
- Shopping/errands
- Skipping class/leaving campus without following proper procedure
- Family vacations that have not been pre-approved
- Needed at home/babysitting
- Vehicle trouble
- Missing the bus/ride
- Needing sleep or rest

Partial-Day Absence

- May be excused or unexcused
- When a student arrives late or leaves early during school hours:
    - Record the time of arrival/departure in the notes section of your attendance software system.
    - Include a brief explanation (e.g., doctor's appointment, family emergency).

Mental Health Days (MHD)

- Students are allowed five mental health days per school year.
- These absences are to be marked as excused.
- Be sure to code them specifically as mental health days in your attendance system.
- After 2 mental health days, the school may refer the student to the appropriate school support personnel.

Out-of-School Suspension (OSS)

- OSS days are excluded from truancy. A student may not be referred solely on suspensions.
- These should be clearly coded as out-of-school suspensions in your attendance system.

Hospitalization and Incarceration

- These days are also excluded from truancy. Please mark as excused.
- Be sure to mark them as "HOS" (hospitalized) or "JDC" (Juvenile Detention Center) in the attendance records.

Absence Notes

- Use the notes section of your attendance system to enter:
    - Excuses for absences (e.g., illness, family emergency, etc.)
    - Any supporting information, as necessary
    - Detailed notes are helpful

General Expectations

- Ensure all staff who have any attendance-related responsibilities are trained in the ROE #11 **Truancy Best Practices**.
- Attendance entries must be **clear, accurate, and up-to-date.**
- Please ensure all handwritten information is legible.
- **Referrals** will only be accepted if:
    - **The referral form is fully completed.**
    - **All required documents are attached.**
- Provide attendance updates to ROE #11 Attendance Specialists during their weekly visits.
- Assist ROE #11 Attendance Specialist with any information needed to complete state reports.
- Notify the ROE #11 Attendance Specialist of any guardian, contact, address, or phone updates immediately.

Truancy Referral Process

In accordance with Illinois Compulsory Attendance Law (ages 6-17), schools must follow their internal attendance policies before referring a student to the ROE for truancy.

Eligibility Requirement:
A referred student must be between the ages of 6 and 17. Due to the lengthy legal process, 16-year-olds will likely not be referred to court.

Required Actions Before Making a Referral

The following interventions **must be completed and documented** before a referral will be accepted:

Classroom Intervention/Teachers

- Document all attempts to address the attendance issue within the classroom.
- Include dates, times, and outcomes of interventions such as ClassDojo, TeacherEase, email, other printed correspondence and logged phone call(s) with parent/guardian.

School Administrator/Student Meeting

- Conduct a meeting with the building administrator and the student. Discuss attendance barriers and any issues causing the student to be absent from school.

Administration/Parent/Student Meeting

- Conduct a meeting with district staff, the student and their parent/guardian.
- Consider having the student and family complete an action plan/contract to improve attendance.

Home Visits

- Conduct at least one home visit for any student that has not had a meeting with the school administrator prior to referring.
- Conduct at least one home visit for any student whose parent is not communicating absences with the school.
- Document dates, times, individuals involved, and outcomes.
- Be sure to leave something at the home (door hanger, business card, sticky note on the door) if you do not make contact with the student/family.

Attendance Letters

- Prior to referring to ROE #11, schools should send a minimum of one attendance letter to the parent/guardian.
- Letters should include:
    - District's attendance policy
    - Name of the contact person to discuss attendance issues and phone number/email
    - Total amount of absences
    - Keep it brief and easy to read
    - Include "next steps" if attendance does not improve
    - Consider adding a list of local resources for families
    - Consider reminding families to call the school every time their child is absent and encourage parents/guardians to get medical notes from appointments.
- Each district should have an established procedure with regard to how often attendance letters are mailed. For example:
    - After five days of unexcused absences
    - After nine days of unexcused absences
    - Referral notification letter indicating the student is being referred to the ROE #11 AIM program

Exhaust All Interventions

- **The school must exhaust all available resources** before making a referral.
- Document efforts and support provided to address attendance concerns.

Referral Notification Letter

Provide a formal written notice to the parent(s)/guardian(s) that the student is being referred to the ROE #11 AIM program. **DO NOT** write that the student will be referred to the State's Attorney's Office or that they will be charged. Simply state the student will be referred to the Regional Office of Education #11's AIM program. You can include this information in your final attendance letter to the parent(s)/guardian(s) or send a separate letter.

Submitting the Referral

A student becomes eligible for referral after they have at least 1 unexcused absence and their overall attendance is less than 90%. Students being referred to the AIM program should show a pattern of unexcused absences.

Referral Form

- The referral form must be completed in full.
- Attach all supporting documentation, including:
    - Attendance records showing excused/unexcused absences, reason for each absence, days present and total days enrolled
    - Attendance Letters sent to parent/guardian
    - Documentation of each home visit (staff present, person(s) contacted and outcome)
    - Any other relevant information, such as all communication with the parent via email/TeacherEase/ClassDojo, doctor's notes, as well as classroom interventions
    - 504 Plan or IEP accommodations

After Referral Submission and Acceptance

- Once a referral is received:
    - Truancy outreach efforts begin. Needs will be assessed, and support services will be offered.
    - The school is expected to continue support efforts. All additional assistance must be documented.

Procedures of the Truancy Office

This outline details the escalating steps involved in addressing student truancy in ROE #11 once the referral has been accepted.

Truancy Intervention: The Attendance Specialist will begin monitoring the student and working with family to rectify the truancy issue. If this process is unsuccessful, we will proceed with issuing a Letter 1.

Letter 1: Letter 1 is sent by the Attendance Specialist to the student's parent/guardian. Letter 1 is an official notice of absences and mandates that the student must be in attendance at school immediately. This is the final intervention before legal action.

Legal Action: If the student's attendance still fails to improve, a formal petition request may be filed with the local State's Attorney Office. This is a last resort.

Court Involvement:

- Once a student has been referred to the local State's Attorney's Office, the Attendance Specialist will continue to monitor the student's attendance.
- The school is expected to continue efforts to support student attendance.
- Updates will be given to the State's Attorney by the Attendance Specialist.
- Schools may be asked to provide updated information for the court and the court may choose to summon anyone involved with the attendance process for a specific student.
- The Regional Office of Education #11 has no say in court proceedings. All decisions rely solely with the court.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Parents must notify the school of any absences and provide documentation.
- Schools must continue parental contact regarding absences.
- Communication between all parties is paramount.

Duration of Program:
Once referred, the student stays in the AIM program for at least 180 school days. They may be removed after 180 school days if they show significant attendance improvement. The goal of the AIM program is 90% attendance.

Resources

Our department offers a wide range of resources to support our students and their families. If a school staff member identifies a student or family who is in need of assistance, please do not hesitate to reach out to us. We're here to help connect them with the appropriate support and services.

Additional Information

If a student has an IEP or a 504 Plan can they still be referred to Truancy?

Yes. Having an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan does not exempt a student from compulsory school attendance.

According to 105 ILCS 5/26-1, the only exemption from school attendance due to medical reasons must be supported by signed medical documentation explicitly allowing the student to remain out of school.

While an IEP is designed to support a student's academic progress through individualized goals and services, chronic truancy significantly undermines these objectives. Regular attendance is essential for the student to fully benefit from their IEP services.

Similarly, a student with a 504 Plan has specific accommodations in place to support their access to education. With trained staff and proper resources available at school, the school remains the safest and most supportive environment for these students to thrive.

The Attendance Specialists work in collaboration with schools to ensure that students with IEPs or 504 Plans receive the support they need while also meeting their legal obligation to attend school.

Attendance Concerns for Students Under Age 6

Under Illinois law (105 ILCS 5/26-1), compulsory school attendance applies to children ages 6 through 17. Therefore, students under the age of 6 are not legally classified as truant. As a result, any interventions or consequences for excessive absences in this age group must be handled at the school level.

The following recommendations apply only to students under age 6 enrolled in full-day attendance.

Suggested School-Level Interventions for Students Under Age 6

- Send parent notification letters at three, six, and nine unexcused absences.
- Hold a parent conference to discuss concerns and potential solutions.
- Explore schedule modifications, if appropriate and feasible.

If the child is approaching age 6 within the current school year, the school may consult their Attendance Specialist for guidance and support.

Attendance Concerns for Students 17+

At age 17, a student's attendance concerns and consequences are managed at the school level. Options may include:

- Send parent notification letters at regular intervals, such as three, six, and nine unexcused absences.
- Discuss concerns and potential solutions with the parent/guardian.
- If deemed appropriate, you may consider:
    - Modified schedule
    - Detention
    - Drop a student for non-attendance after missing 15 consecutive days with no contact from parent/guardian. If the student has an IEP, school must keep the student enrolled per Illinois School Code.
- Alternative Education
    - Bridges Alternative Education Program (Lerna, Paris, Shelbyville)
        - Discuss with Attendance Specialist or Bridges Administrator
    - GED Courses
        - With permission from their parent/guardian and the school board, a 16-year-old may enroll in GED prep courses, but they cannot start testing until age 17.
    - Homeschool

Resources

Attendance Works

attendanceworks.org is a great resource for attendance-related information and resources. Please keep in mind that their focus is chronic absenteeism (all absences), rather than truancy (only unexcused absences).

ROE #11 Truancy Information and Resources



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