



STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION GUIDANCE FOR REPORTING STUDENT ABSENCES AND CALCULATING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM



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In order for students to learn and achieve their fullest potential, it is critical that they are in school and engaged in the learning process. Research shows that student absences impact a child's ability to succeed in school. In addition, research shows that chronic absenteeism from school is a primary cause of low academic achievement and a powerful predictor of a student's risk of dropping out of school.¹

With the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*, the latest reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* on December 10, 2015, the New Jersey Department of Education has identified chronic absenteeism as its indicator of school quality and success for accountability ([see proposed ESSA State Plan](#)). Chronic absenteeism will be factored into the summative rating used to identify schools in need of comprehensive and targeted support and improvement. Additionally, school-level chronic absenteeism will be included in each district's annual School Performance Reports for kindergarten through grade 12 as of 2016-17, per *ESSA Sec.1111*.

This guidance clarifies policies and expectations for reporting student membership and attendance data in NJ SMART and the methodology for measuring chronic absenteeism.

DEFINITIONS

“Chronic absenteeism” is defined in New Jersey's *ESSA State Plan* as the percentage of a school's students who are not present for 10 percent or more of the days that that they were “in membership” at a school.

“Cumulative Days in Membership” is an element in NJ SMART defined as the number of *school days in session* in which a student is enrolled/registered during the annual reporting period from July 1 through June 30. The count will commence the first day the student is expected to start, even if they do not actually attend that day.

- ❖ **School Day in Session** is a day on which the school is open and students are under the guidance and direction of a teacher(s); and the day must be 4 hours or more to be considered a full day (or at least 2½ hours for kindergarten) (*N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(a) and (b)*).
 - The number of possible days in session for a student on *home instruction* is the same as for other students in the program in which the student is enrolled (*N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.1(f)*).
 - Schools must be in session a minimum of 180 days.
 - The number of school days in session does not include summer school.

¹ Balfanz, R. and Byrnes, V. (2012). *The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools.

- The extended school year is included in the calculation up to June 30 and only when it is **required** for **all** students.
- ❖ A school may have a *day in session* that would not be counted as a *day in membership* for a particular student for the following reasons (*New Jersey School Register*, Ch.3):
 - [Religious observance](#) (*N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(h)*);
 - A college visit (up to 3 days per school year, only for students in grades 11 and 12);
 - “Take Our Children to Work Day” (pursuant to the [memo](#) issued by the Commissioner to all districts on April 25, 2017) or other rule issued by the Commissioner;
 - Participation in observance of Veterans Day (*N.J.S.A. 18A: 36-13.2*) or district board of election membership activities (*N.J.S.A. 18A: 36-33*); or
 - The closure of a busing district that prevents a student from having transportation to the receiving school.

“Cumulative Days Present” is an element in NJ SMART defined as the number of school days a student is present (not absent) when the school is in session during the annual reporting period (July 1 through June 30) and the student is recorded under the guidance and direction of a teacher in the teaching process (*N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3*). Whether a student absence is due to illness, disciplinary action, or other reason, the student may not be considered present at school unless home instruction is received.

- ❖ **Time present:** For a school in session during morning and afternoon, the student must be *present for at least one hour in the morning and at least one hour in the afternoon* to be considered as present for a full day; for a school in session during either morning or afternoon, the student must be present at least two hours to be recorded as present for the full day (*N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(k)*). For a half day preschool or kindergarten session, the student must be present for at least one hour to be considered present for a full day.
- ❖ **Home instruction:** A student receiving home instruction is considered present and in membership under the following circumstances :
 - A student with *a temporary or chronic health condition* receives home instruction by a certified teacher for the number of days and length of time sufficient to continue the student’s academic progress. A student with a disability must receive home instruction consistent with the student’s individualized education program (*N.J.A.C. 6A:16-10.1*).
 - A general education student, *for reasons other than a temporary or chronic health condition*, receives 10 or more hours of home instruction per week by a certified teacher on at least three separate days and no fewer than 10 hours per week additional guided-learning experiences (*N.J.A.C. 6A:16-10.2*).
 - A student, *when placed on home instruction through an IEP*, receives 10 or more hours of instruction per week on at least three separate days by an appropriately certified teacher or teachers (*N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.8*).
- ❖ **School-sponsored education programs:** A student participating in a school-sponsored educational program under the guidance and direction of a teacher, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3*, even if not located in the school, is considered present and in membership (e.g., field trip, structured learning experience, community-based instruction).
- ❖ **In-school suspensions:** A student assigned to an in-school suspension is considered present and in membership, provided the student is afforded the opportunity to continue to:
 - Appropriately participate in the general curriculum; and

- For students with disabilities, receive the services specified on the child’s IEP, and participate with nondisabled children to the extent they would have in their current placement.
- ❖ **Extended non-illness absences:** School districts should develop a policy that determines when to record a student who is not in school for an extended period of time for reasons other than illness (e.g., travel with family) as a dropout. A student may be considered a transfer during the extended leave when the student is re-enrolled in and attending another school (in the U.S. or abroad).
- It is recommended that “each school should have a policy that a student must attend a specified number of days out of the 180 required days in order to be considered for promotion to the next grade or for graduation” ([New Jersey School Register](#), Section 2.7.3).

HOW IS CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM MEASURED IN NEW JERSEY?

Student-level absentee rate: Each student’s absentee rate is calculated based on the fields of *Cumulative Days Present* and *Cumulative Days in Membership* collected in NJ SMART. *Cumulative Days Present* (P) is subtracted from the *Cumulative Days in Membership* (M), and this number is divided by the *Cumulative Days in Membership* (M).

$$\frac{M - P}{M}$$

If the student-level absentee rate is equal to or greater than 10%, the student is chronically absent.

School-level chronic absenteeism: The school-level chronic absenteeism rate is calculated by dividing the number of chronically absent students during the school year by the total number of students enrolled in the school.

- ❖ For the Federal EDData reporting requirements, starting with School Year 2016-17, only students who were in membership at school for 10 or more days will be considered in the school’s absentee rate calculation.
- ❖ For the New Jersey School Performance Reports and Title I accountability under the ESSA indicator of school quality or student success, only students who were in membership at school for 45 or more days will be considered in the school chronic-absenteeism rate calculation for accountability purposes.

HOW DOES THIS WORK IN PRACTICE?

EXAMPLE 1: David is in 11th grade and his school has 181 days in session during the 2016-17 school year. He was absent 3 days due to college visits and 2 days due to illness; arrives to school 30 minutes late in the morning 2 times; and leaves an hour early for a soccer game on 5 occasions. Notes: The days that he was tardy or left school early would not be factored into the equation, as he attended school for at least one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon on those days; and his college visits would not be considered days in membership because he is in grade 11.

$$\text{David's absentee rate: } \frac{178 - 176}{178} = 1\%$$

David has 178 cumulative days in membership (181 school days in session minus 3 days for his college visits) and 176 cumulative days present (181 school days in session minus 5 days absent, including 2 days sick and 3 days college visit). **He would not be considered chronically absent.**

- ❖ What if, *in addition to the days missed above*, David's family takes him on a two-week vacation during the school year?

$$\text{David's absentee rate: } \frac{178 - 166}{178} = 7\%$$

David's cumulative days present are now 166 (181 school days in session minus 15 days absent, including 2 days sick, 3 days college visit and 10 vacation days). **He would not be considered chronically absent.**

- ❖ What if, *in addition to the days missed above*, David skips school for 4 days and the next month receives a 2-day out-of-school suspension for repeatedly using a cell phone in class against school policy? Note, when suspended, David was *not* present in school or able to participate in the general curriculum for that day.

$$\text{David's absentee rate: } \frac{178 - 160}{178} = 10\%$$

David's cumulative days present are now 160 (181 school days in session – 21 days absent, including 2 days sick, 3 days college visit, 10 vacation days, 4 days skipped, and 2 days suspended). **David would be considered chronically absent with a rate of 10%.**

EXAMPLE 2: Sarah is in 12th grade and her school has 181 days in session during the 2016-17 school year. Sarah is the nighttime assistant manager at a fast-food restaurant to help support her family and the restaurant scheduled her to cover a day shift 11 times.

$$\text{Sarah's absentee rate: } \frac{181 - 170}{181} = 6\%$$

Sarah would not be considered chronically absent.

- ❖ What if, *in addition to the days missed above*, Sarah is absent for two weeks due to illness, but receives home instruction during the *second* week, by a certified teacher, sufficient to continue academic progress based upon her ability to participate? Note: Sarah is considered absent for only 5 of those 10 days since she received home instruction in accordance with N.J.A.C 6A:16-10.1 during one of the two weeks.

$$\text{Sarah's absentee rate: } \frac{181 - 165}{181} = 9\%$$

Sarah would not be considered chronically absent.

WHAT ABOUT TRUANCY?

Truancy is defined as 10 or more cumulative unexcused absences (*N.J.A.C. 6A:16-1.3*). All school districts are required to have a policy and procedure that includes a definition of unexcused absences that count toward truancy; thus, how “excused” and “unexcused” absences are defined for purposes of expectations and consequences regarding truancy, student conduct, promotion, retention and award of credit is a local decision (*N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.6(a)3*). The NJ SMART *Cumulative Days Towards Truancy* field is not considered in the calculation of chronic absenteeism.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW WHEN IMPLEMENTING THIS GUIDANCE?

For the 2016-17 School Year, school-level chronic absenteeism rates will be calculated using **active** student records as submitted by June 30, 2017. A record change process for attendance data will *not* be available after NJ SMART’s current submission ending on June 30, 2017. School districts must verify that attendance data is entered accurately, according to this guidance, prior to the June 30 snapshot. Questions regarding management of student records may be directed to NJSMART@pcgus.com.

For the 2017-18 School Year, there will be a change in the NJ SMART submissions for calculating the school-level chronic absentee rate. **Active and inactive** student records for *all* students enrolled/registered in a school during the annual reporting period from July 1 through June 30 will be included in the calculation of chronic absenteeism.

WHAT FUNDS CAN BE USED TO SUPPORT STUDENT ATTENDANCE INITIATIVES?

Under *ESSA*, when chronic absenteeism is identified and documented as an issue through a comprehensive needs assessment, funding for initiatives to improve student attendance may come from Title I, Part A and Title IV, Part A. Likewise, local education agencies (LEAs) may use Title II funds to provide training for school personnel to address issues related to school conditions for student learning, including chronic absenteeism. Additionally, if the attendance issue relates to English language learners, Title III funds may be used. (Schoolwide programs may use funds from any Title.)

RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTING GUIDANCE AND USING DATA TO IMPROVE ATTENDANCE

- ❖ Review [New Jersey School Register \(note Chapter 3, The Attendance Record\)](#).
- ❖ Review [N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7](#) and [N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8](#).
- ❖ Review [NJ SMART State Submission Student Data Handbook](#)
- ❖ Contact the Office of Student Support Services at attendance@doe.state.nj.us
- ❖ Review resources to improve student attendance on the New Jersey Department of Education [Attendance, Truancy & Chronic Absenteeism](#) website.