

## Truancy FAQs

### **What is wrong with our current truancy laws?**

Michigan has no standard definition for chronic absenteeism or truancy for schools. As a result, rules vary from district to district, there is insufficient accounting of missed seat time, and students are often suspended or expelled without ever addressing what causes them to miss school in the first place.

### **Why should the truancy law be changed?**

Punishing students who fail to come to school by sending them home is counterproductive and contributes to lower graduation and higher delinquency rates.

Elementary school students who miss school are more likely to struggle academically and eventually to drop out of school altogether. The decision to drop out is a dangerous one for the student. Dropouts are much more likely than their peers who graduate to be unemployed, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, in prison, unhealthy, divorced, and single parents with children who drop out from high school themselves.

Our communities and nation also suffer from the dropout epidemic due to the loss of productive workers and the higher costs associated with increased incarceration, health care and social services.

### **What will the changes mean for schools?**

The proposed legislation would define “chronic absenteeism” and “truancy,” which are now categorized differently and treated differently from district to district. Schools would have consistent definitions and guidelines for dealing with truant students with preventative and corrective measures so that the response to skipping school is not just sending students home, where they miss even more class time.

### **What are the benefits to changing these laws?**

When people think of truancy they think of kids making a decision to run with the wrong crowd. Instead, most truancy is the result of circumstances the kid can't control such as they are babysitting younger siblings, they don't have a car, or they are being bullied.

Please see the attached Attendance Matters article provided by our Dickinson County team listing the top ten reasons kids miss school. The proposed changes to the law are meant to address what actually causes the children to miss school in the first place so that we can enable them for long-term success.

### **Are truancy issues problems in my community?**

An estimated 250,000 Michigan youth are not enrolled in school, are not working, and do not have a GED or high school diploma. Michigan ranks 37<sup>th</sup> in the nation for graduation rates and is continuing to trend downwards. Of the 8,800 people sentenced to prison in Michigan in 2012, 49% did not have a GED or high school diploma. 72% of Michigan inmates read at less than a 3rd grade level.

### **Will these changes save my district money?**

Every student a district loses is worth roughly \$7,200 in annual per pupil funding. Every prisoner Michigan gains each year costs about \$37,500. An average prisoner spends 4 years in prison costing a total of \$150,000 each. Michigan currently houses more than 400 juveniles less than eighteen years old.



# ATTENDANCE MATTERS – TOP TEN REASONS FOR MISSING SCHOOL

Dickinson County School Attendance Partnership

School staff have heard many reasons why children miss school. The Dickinson County School Attendance Partnership leaders came up with the top ten reasons told by students or parents as excuses for missing school. *See solution ideas written below each reason.*

## **1. I missed the bus.**

Every effort should be made to get up early enough to insure a child is ready for the bus. A back up plan needs to be designed in the event a child misses the bus; i.e., alternative transportation arrangements. Call the school to inquire about transportation assistance. Don't worry if the arrangements make your child late; it is better for your child to arrive late than not attend at all.

## **2. It was too cold to go to school.**

Schools have policies determining safe temperatures for school attendance. If school is in session, the child should be there. Make sure that the child has adequate outer wear for school. If money is an issue, local agencies, such as St. Vincent De Paul and Salvation Army, Clothes Closets, and other sources will assist families in finding adequate coats, snow pants, hats, boots, and mittens as needed. Also, most elementary schools have a surplus of gently-used warm winter outer wear for all children.

## **3. We took a quick vacation.**

Family experts and teachers warn that missing school can place unhealthy stress on a child; for some students trying to catch up on work, while their peers are moving ahead, can be difficult, particularly as students grow older and the workload becomes heavier and more complex. If considering taking your child out of school, teachers and family experts offer the follow guidelines: (1) Know the school policy; (2) Make sure there are no other options; consider– student's age, academic standing and ability to make up work, the length of absence, and the timing of the trip (missing tests, team sign-ups, important events, etc), and try to add some educational benefit to their time away from school. Every effort should be made to schedule family trips, vacations, appointments, etc. when school is not in session.

## **4. I had a doctor's appointment.**

If your child has to go to the doctor for an unexpected reason, by all means take any appointment that is available. If your child is scheduling an appointment,

make the appointment after the end of the school day. Most doctor and dentist offices are open until 5:00 PM.

## **5. I was too tired, I didn't sleep enough.**

Bedtime routines are critical in school aged children. Adequate sleep may involve established "quiet time" throughout the house, removal of distractions; such as, television and electronics, cell phones, and any other activities that interfere with sleep. Exercise, eating healthy foods and going to bed early are important.

## **6. My brother didn't go, so I had to stay home to help take care of him.**

Parents must avoid asking other school aged children to care for siblings at home. Other responsible adults should be sought to oversee children staying home. Babysitting is not your child's job during the school day. School is their job! If you need information on day care resources, check with your school.

## **7. Our car wasn't working and I couldn't get to school.**

Busing is most often available to students outside of walking distance. The schedule and arrangements for busing should be sought on days a car is not available. A back up plan involving asking another driver to take students to school should be developed. Most other adults and parents are happy to assist.

## **8. I had a stomach ache.**

Make sure there isn't any underlying reasons for your child saying they have a stomach ache. Are they really sick, or is something else bothering them? If a child is throwing up or experiencing diarrhea, it would be best to keep them home. Should stomach aches become frequent, the underlying reason may be linked to anxiety or other psychosomatic causes. Medical attention should be sought.

## **9. I had a high temperature and was throwing up.**

This is a very acceptable excuse for missing school. You should not send your child to school if they are truly sick.

## **10. I thought it was Saturday.**

This is right up there with my dog ate my homework! Most families benefit from a family schedule or calendar posted within the home. It is very helpful when families discuss nightly their schedules for the following day.

**Remember – Attendance Matters!**