

Merrillville Community School Corporation 2020-2021

MCSC Virtual Academy Student Attendance Guidelines



PURPOSE

Merrillville Community School Corporation shall establish and enforce attendance requirements during the virtual learning experience, in accordance with appropriate guidelines set forth by the school corporation administration staff.

Guidelines

I. Definitions

Truant - having incurred three (3) or more non-consecutive school days of unexcused absences during the current trimester by a child subject to attending MCSC Virtual Academy, school attendance.

Habitually truant – having incurred five (5) or more non-consecutive school days of unexcused absences during the current trimester by a child subject to attending MCSC Virtual Academy, school attendance.

Parent or Guardian - a custodial biological or adoptive parent, a noncustodial biological or adoptive parent, guardian of the person of a child, and/or person with whom a child lives and who is acting in a parental role of a child.

School attendance improvement conference - a conference where the child's absence and reasons for the absences are examined in an effort to improve attendance, which may or may not conclude with additional services. This meeting will be facilitated by school administration and/or counselor. When possible, the meeting will be held in a virtual format.

School-based attendance improvement program - a program designed to improve school attendance by seeking to identify and address the underlying reasons for a child's absences.

Learning Management System - the software application utilized by the school for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting, and delivery of educational courses (i.e. Seesaw [Kdg.] and Google Classroom [1st – 12th grade]).

II. General Guidelines

Building level principals are responsible for enforcing the Merrillville Community School Corporation Virtual School Guidelines for school attendance. Teachers shall record student attendance and properly maintain student records. All students must attend synchronous and/or asynchronous lessons. Unless alternative arrangements have been made and approved by the school principal.

III. Daily Attendance

Daily attendance at MCSC Virtual Academy is required. The parent or guardian must ensure that the attendance of the student(s) is recorded daily and that absences are communicated to school personnel within 48 hours of the absence. Three or more unexcused absences will result in the student being placed on an attendance improvement plan. Students are required to log into Google Classroom (1st – 12th grade) or Seesaw (Kdg.) daily for attendance and attend all synchronous and asynchronous virtual class(es) for which he or she may be scheduled.

Note: (Teachers have autonomy as to how long it takes them to take attendance per class period; however, daily student attendance must be taken and recorded in Skyward before the conclusion of each class period.)

A. Virtual Class Attendance

To be marked present in a class, students who are required to be in a virtual class session are required to attend for the entire class period. Students who accumulate unexcused class absences may be required to enter into an attendance improvement agreement. The attendance improvement agreement is intended to help students improve their class attendance. Note: (Due to potential technical difficulties, teachers are asked to be understanding with students who may occasionally log in 5-10 minutes late for class. If a student is tardy for class 3 or more times in a week, then a warning should be given to the student, and tardies will be counted for the remainder of the trimester. Frequent tardiness may result in an attendance improvement conference or attendance improvement program.)

B. Excused Absence

For purposes of this guideline, the following conditions or situations constitutes reasonable cause for absence from school:

1. Illness or health-related reasons.
2. Obtaining professional health care or therapy service rendered by a licensed practitioner. (Doctor's note required.)
3. Quarantine- based on the recommendation of a licensed practitioner.
4. Family emergency (as approved by administrator).
5. Recovery from an accident.
6. Death in the family or family funeral.
7. Non-school sponsored educational tours or trips, if the following conditions are met:
 - a. The parent/guardian submits a written request for excusal prior to the absence.
 - b. The student's participation has been approved by the school principal or designee.
8. Other urgent reasons. Urgent reasons shall be strictly construed and do not permit irregular attendance (as approved by administrator).

C. Parental Notice of Absence

Absences shall be treated as *unexcused* until the district receives a written excuse explaining the absence, which must be submitted within three (3) school days of the absence. A maximum of five (5) days of cumulative absences verified by parental notification shall be permitted during the first trimester. All absences beyond five (5) cumulative days shall require an excuse from a licensed medical practitioner.

D. Unexcused Absence

For purposes of this guideline, absences which do not meet the criteria indicated above shall be considered unexcused absences.

E. Notification from School to Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

School staff shall provide notice to the parent or guardian upon each incident of unexcused absence. Communication may be made by phone, email, text message, voice message, mailed letter, Class Dojo, or LMS.

Note: MCSC teachers will follow the student handbook guidelines regarding assignments due following excused/unexcused absences.

IV. Enforcement of Attendance Requirements

A. Truant Student

When a student has been absent for three (3) days during the current trimester without an excuse, school staff shall provide notice to the parent or guardian who resides in the same household as the student within five (5) school days of the student's third unexcused absence. The communication shall be sent via phone call, email, text message, voice message, mailed letter, Class Dojo or LMS. Message must include a description of the consequences if the student becomes habitually truant.

The notice may include the offer of a School Attendance Improvement Conference. If the student incurs additional unexcused absences after issuance of the notice and a School Attendance Improvement Conference was not previously held, school staff shall offer a School Attendance Improvement Conference.

B. School Attendance Improvement Conference

School staff shall notify the parent or guardian in writing and by telephone of the date and time of the School Attendance Improvement Conference. The purpose of the School Attendance Improvement Conference is to examine the student's absences and reasons for the absences in an effort to improve attendance with or without additional services.

The following individuals shall be invited to the School Attendance Improvement Conference:

1. The student.
2. The student's parent or guardian.
3. Other individuals identified by the parent or guardian who may be a resource.
4. Appropriate school personnel. (Principal /Asst. Principal, Guidance Counselor, and Teacher)
5. Meetings shall be held virtual when possible.
6. Meeting shall be recorded via Google Meet or Zoom; must first seek approval from parent or guardian.

Curriculum and Instruction Division

Neither the student nor the parent or guardian shall be required to participate, and the School Attendance Improvement Conference shall occur even if the parent or guardian declines to participate or fails to attend the scheduled conference.

The outcome of the School Attendance Improvement Conference shall be documented in a written School Attendance Improvement Plan. The Plan shall be retained in the student's file. A copy of the Plan shall be provided to the parent or guardian, the student and the student's school district of residence.

V. Discipline

The district shall not expel or impose out-of-school suspension, disciplinary reassignment, or transfer for truant behavior. However, student and parent or guardian **may be** referred to truancy court in accordance with school corporation practice. *Truancy Court – please refer to the student hand book for additional information. Note: MHS - Students may be reassigned to Merrillville Alternative Placement as a means of recovering academic credits and improving academic standard.*