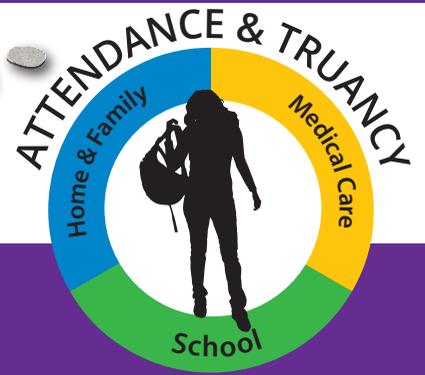


# Stepping Stones



**Parent Education & Advocacy Leadership Center**

*Promoting inclusion and access  
in education and healthcare*

*Empowering families and  
young adults across PA*

## Truancy & Students With Chronic Health Conditions

*Students with chronic conditions often have excessive absences due to their health, surgeries, appointments, etc.*



*While there is no limit to medically excused absences, **unexcused absences** are limited.*



*Pennsylvania truancy law defines **truancy** as **three unexcused absences**, and **habitual truancy** as **six unexcused absences**.*

## Truancy: Understanding Your Rights

Families who have children with chronic conditions need to be familiar with School District attendance policies. Districts usually require a medical excuse after a certain number of absences. If a family does not provide a medical excuse after the specified number of absences, this results in an “unexcused” absence.

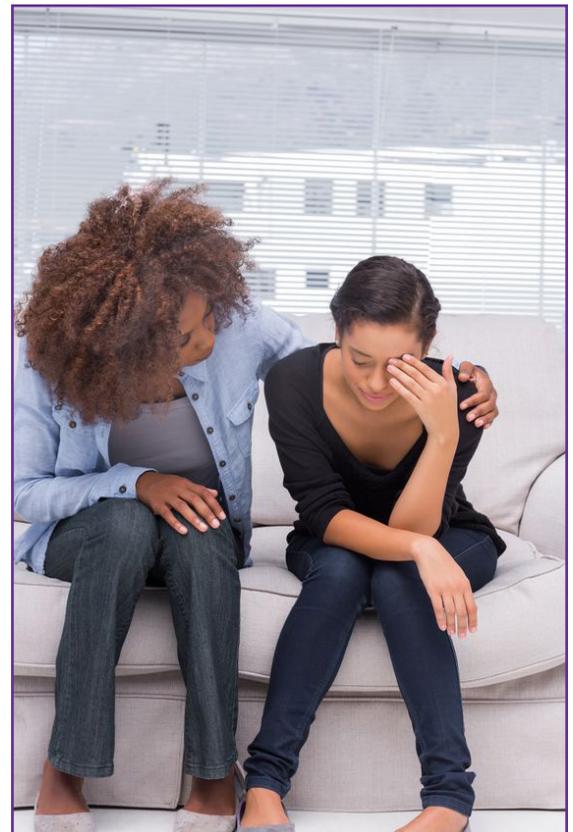
Written excuses are sometimes lost or not received by the school. Suggested steps for families:

- **Devise a system to record your child’s absences**
- **Keep a copy of all excuses**
- **Ask your child if they turned in their excuse**

If you receive a truancy letter, ask for a copy of the student’s attendance record for the year and compare it to your records. While there are district policies about the time limit for submitting excuses, if one is missing, send it in and ask that it be accepted.

PA Act 138 went into effect beginning in the 2017-2018 school year to **prevent inappropriate or harsh truancy responses by schools**. The legislation was passed to improve school attendance and reduce truancy “to consistently identify and address attendance issues **as early as possible** . . . ” and use evidence-based practices to:

- ☑ Preserve the unity of the family whenever possible by addressing underlying issues of truancy.
- ☑ Avoid entry of children into foster care, the loss of housing, and other unintended consequences that disrupt an intact family unit.
- ☑ Eliminate or reduce the amount of time a parent or guardian is detained for truancy-related offenses. Detaining a parent/guardian should only be used as a last resort.



## Student Attendance Improvement Conference (SAIC)

Before sending a family to a magistrate for truancy issues, the school is required to hold a Student Attendance Improvement Conference (SAIC) to discuss the reasons for the child's absences and develop a written plan to improve attendance. The plan may include connecting the student and/or the family with additional services. When a student has a 504 plan or IEP, the SAIC should consider if the absences are related to the student's health/condition. Schools should make every attempt to have the person in parental relationship present at the SAIC, including rescheduling to accommodate the parent's schedule. ***It is important to attend an SAIC for your child and to get a written copy of the plan that is developed.***



### ***All of the following individuals must be invited to the conference:***

1. The child
2. The child's person in parental relation
3. Other individuals identified by the person in parental relation who may be a resource
4. Appropriate school personnel
5. Recommended service providers

An ***Alternate Attendance Plan*** for a student whose disability impacts attendance can be documented in the IEP or 504 plan to:

- allow the parent to write an excuse versus having to get a medical excuse,
- excuse tardiness, and/or
- avoid disciplinary and truancy consequences.

After a Plan is put into place, medical documentation may be required periodically to verify that the student's condition continues to warrant an Alternate Attendance Plan.

Remember that when your child is absent from school they are missing valuable instruction. When a child is absent due to illness, they may fall behind and this can create stress. Depending upon your child's health circumstances, work with the teacher to maintain a reasonable balance by adjusting expectations, providing extended time, and/or reducing schoolwork to the essentials.

Most importantly, keep lines of communication open with the district and address problems so your child can attend as much as possible.

### ***Resources***

Basic Education Circular (BEC) - ***Compulsory School Attendance, Unlawful Absences, and School Attendance Improvement Conferences:***

<https://bit.ly/2BTIDxA>

Education Law Center Fact Sheet - ***Truancy and School Attendance in Pennsylvania:***

<https://bit.ly/3hdwPq7>

***School Attendance Improvement Plan Form:***

<https://bit.ly/2zkAqS2>

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