

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Child and Family Services Agency



School Year 2020-21 Operating Procedures for Local Education Agencies (LEAs), DC Public Schools (DCPS), DC Public Charter Schools (DCPCS), DC private schools and DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) in Response to Student Attendance Concerns

August 28, 2020

This document outlines the processes DCPS, DCPCS, and CFSA will undertake in response to concerns about students ages 5 to 13 who miss 10 or more school days (whether in remote learning, in-person learning, or a combination of both) during SY 2020-2021.

PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING:

- **For children ages 0-4**, school attendance is not compulsory. Per D.C. Code §38-202, a child must be 5 years of age on or before September 30th of the current school year to be required by law to attend school. Children under that age threshold should not be reported to CFSA for attendance matters.
- **For children ages 14-17**, schools are not required by law to report attendance matters to CFSA. These matters are presumed to be the result of truancy and not educational neglect, and the school is required to make a report to Court Social Services and the Office of the Attorney General Juvenile Section. However, if a school suspects that a student 14 years of age through 17 years of age is not attending school as a direct result of a parent not allowing them access to school, then a report should be made through the CFSA Educational Neglect Reporting Form (click [HERE](#)).
- **For children of any age** for whom there are safety concerns outside of attendance, call CFSA's 24-hour Child Protection Services Hotline at 202-671-7233.
- **Definition of parent.** In this document, the word "parent" refers to the parent, guardian or legal custodian of a child, the person legally responsible for ensuring the child attends school.

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Child and Family Services Agency



Under all circumstances, CFSA’s Educational Neglect Reporting Form should only be used to report attendance concerns. Suspected child abuse or neglect must be called into CFSA’s 24-hour Child Protection Services Hotline at 202-671-7233.

Shared Operational Framework for LEAs (DCPS, DCPCS, and DC private schools) and CFSA

1. **Agencies’ Core Roles.** Schools are the entity likely to have the most direct and positive impact on a student’s attendance. By contrast, child welfare involvement can be an invasive and traumatic experience for families. Therefore, when it comes to engaging families in a child’s school participation, CFSA’s involvement should be considered a last resort and is only appropriate when a parent’s actions or inactions directly impact their child’s attendance.
2. **Current Law.** The public health emergency, and consequent adjustments to educational operations in the District of Columbia, *have not* resulted in changes to DC law regarding school attendance and unexcused absences from school. D.C. Code §38-208 requires students 5 years of age through 13 years of age who have 10 or more full school day unexcused absences within a school year to be referred to CFSA.
3. **Determination of Absences.** CFSA does not determine what constitutes an excused or unexcused absence, or how attendance is tracked. 5-A DCMR §2102 outlines what constitutes an excused absence. In addition, this regulation permits excused absences “to include an emergency, or other circumstances, approved by an educational institution.”
4. **Variable Learning Plans.** For SY 2020-21, LEAs’ operating procedures may vary (and/or change over time) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and the Public Charter School Board (PCSB) are requiring LEAs to submit Continuous Education and Recovery Plans to communicate these procedures. For example, an LEA may begin the year with 100% distance learning for all students and shift to a “hybrid” of distance and in-person learning for some or all students as the public health emergency evolves; some LEAs may begin or end the school year with 100% in-school learning for all students. These procedures are subject to change due to the District’s response to COVID-19. CFSA will rely on the submitted Continuous Education and Recovery Plans to inform its response to reports of 10 or more unexcused full school day absences within a school year.

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Child and Family Services Agency



5. **Challenges in Remote Learning.** Because remote learning presents new and ongoing challenges for many District families, LEAs have flexibility to determine what constitutes an excused absence, as outlined in 5-A DCMR §2102. Schools should use this flexibility to determine whether the absence is technology-related and can be excused.

In addition, there are a number of challenges that families may encounter with remote learning, for example, but not limited to the following:

- The child's parents may not be able to provide the support needed because they work outside the home, have cognitive or mental health limitations, or are supporting multiple students in the household.
- The child may lack access to needed resources such as stable housing.

LEAs should make decisions about whether these types of absences are excused or unexcused. Further, circumstances like these should be addressed by the school and its partner agencies as they are unlikely to constitute a child welfare concern, or one best addressed by CFSA.

6. **Role of CFSA's Educational Neglect Triage Unit.** All reports by schools of attendance concerns are processed through CFSA's Educational Neglect Triage Unit. The Unit assesses each report and makes a determination regarding CFSA's involvement.

- Although schools are required by law to report the accrual of 10 unexcused absences, these absences alone do not necessarily constitute educational neglect. Through its triage and investigative processes, CFSA will determine whether or not there is alleged educational neglect requiring a child welfare agency response.
- The reporter will be notified of the outcome of each report (see CFSA's Response section below).

Outreach Prior to Making a Report to CFSA

When an individual school determines that a student is not meeting the LEA's attendance standards for its current learning plan, the school will work diligently to engage the student and family. To maximize the possibility of effective engagement and resolution of attendance concerns, LEAs will follow all applicable laws in this regard and take as many of the following action steps as possible:

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Child and Family Services Agency



- Contacting individuals on the student’s emergency contact list
- Conducting school-based support team meetings and follow-up student interventions.
- Calling, emailing, and texting both parents and the individuals on the student’s emergency contact list to explore and document barriers to attendance.
- When instruction is in person, talking to families at drop-off and pick-up times.
- Involving the student in outreach efforts to their parent to address attendance issues.
- Robocalling the student and family members.
- Mailing postcards/letters to the home with messaging from the school.
- Scheduling attendance meetings with the parents (in person or remotely).
- Making home visits, following DC Health guidelines for such activities.
- Requesting MPD welfare checks if there has been no contact with the student for a period of 10 school days.

In making these outreach efforts, schools should be actively collaborating with — or otherwise drawing resources from — all partners within and outside the school community who may have contact or relationships with the child and family, including the school’s behavioral health team, as well as any Department of Behavioral Health clinicians and/or community-based organizations that provide mental health and other services in and outside of schools. This collaboration also includes regular cross-checking between teachers and with siblings’ schools and teachers regarding contact with the student, especially for those who have neither initiated nor maintained contact via distance learning.

While LEAs each have individual engagement protocols, as a point of reference, DCPS’ protocol is included here. **Note:** For all LEAs, any report submitted to CFSA that does not document multiple efforts to engage the family in overcoming attendance challenges will be returned to the reporter for further follow-up and resubmission.

DCPS Engagement Protocol

One day of unexcused absence:

- Contact parent on the same day and each time a student has the equivalent of one day of unexcused absence, with daily follow-ups as necessary.
- Robo-calls starting the second day of registration.

3 days of absences (excused or unexcused):

- Phone call home after three absences to complete a wellness check. The wellness check shall include two components:
 1. Discussion of the student’s attendance, including the identification of any barriers related to logging-in to record their attendance.

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Child and Family Services Agency



2. Discussion of any other challenges and potential resources needed to support student success and ensure appropriate linkages to additional resources are made.

5 days of unexcused cumulative absences:

- Send 5-Day Unexcused Absence Letter to parent and refer student to Student Support Team (SST) for an attendance intervention conference to be held within five days of the referral.
- The SST will develop an action plan in partnership with the student and the student's parent(s).

7 days of unexcused cumulative absences:

- Send Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) warning letter to parent.

10 days of unexcused cumulative absences:

- Student is considered chronically truant. Contact the District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) for students ages 5-13.

For questions related to the above DCPS protocols, please contact DCPS.

CFSA's Response

Following a review of submitted reports, CFSA will pursue one of these four response tracks:

1. **DENIED/RETURNED TO REPORTER to complete required outreach efforts.** A report will be denied when the reporting school has not demonstrated exhaustive efforts to make contact with a student and family to resolve attendance matters, and/or the report is missing critical information.
 - Reporters are notified of denied reports via email.
 - Denials are sent back to the reporter for follow-up and resubmission.
 - Reporters can contact the Triage Unit Supervisor, Joseph Osiecki (at joseph.osiecki@dc.gov), for further discussion, if needed.
2. **SCREENED-OUT.** A report will be screened-out if it contains all required information (including documentation of exhaustive efforts to engage the student and family) but does not require Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement. Such instances might include, for example, a report submitted by the school due to statutory reporting requirements only, in which there are no

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Child and Family Services Agency



concerns among school personnel of the student falling behind; or a report submitted in the third or fourth quarter of the school year with ten unexcused absences.

If the CFSA triage worker (in consultation with the supervisor) determines that the report does not rise to the level of a child welfare response:

- Reporters are notified of the decision via email.
 - Reporters should continue to work with the identified student and family to improve attendance and re-report if needed.
3. **ACCEPTED FOR SERVICE PROVISION (“I&R”)**: When a report contains all required information (including documentation of exhaustive efforts to engage the student and family), it may be accepted in order to provide services. This would happen if, during the triage of the report, there is an identified need for further support that CFSA is either positioned to provide or for which a referral can be made.
- Reporters are notified of the acceptance decision via email, and the school will collaborate with CFSA in service planning.
 - The Triage Unit will make efforts to help the family resolve the identified barriers and/or link the family to a community service provider.
4. **ACCEPTED FOR AN INVESTIGATION OF EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT (“Screen In”)**: A report will be accepted for a CPS Investigation when it contains all required information (including documentation of exhaustive efforts to engage the student and family), and contains sufficient information to support an allegation of educational neglect. An allegation of educational neglect is identified when a student has missed an excessive amount of school as a direct result of action or inaction by the parent or caregiver.
- Reporters are notified of the screening decision via email.
 - Reporters will be contacted by the assigned Educational Neglect Social Worker to obtain additional information, and to support school collaboration with CFSA in intervention planning with the family.

Questions for CFSA?

Questions regarding screening decisions should be directed to the Educational Neglect Triage Unit Supervisor, Joseph Osiecki, at joseph.osiecki@dc.gov

Questions regarding service provision and investigations should be directed to Educational Neglect Social Work Unit Supervisor, Shaneena Robertson, at Shaneena.robertson@dc.gov