

**Newton Community School District**  
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## **New Iowa Law on Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism** **Newton Community School District**

The Newton Community School District (NCSD) is sending this communication to notify you about a significant change in Iowa law that directly affects students and families. The new law, Senate File 2435, deals with attendance and chronic absenteeism. The district is revising the current attendance codes in Infinite Campus to ensure compliance with the new law changes. The district goal is to streamline our student attendance procedures and create consistency between the grade levels and buildings.

### **Attendance Law Overview:**

To help you better understand the new law, here are key definitions in SF 2435:

- **Chronically Absent** means any absence from school for more than ten percent of the days or hours in the grading period established by a public school.
- **Truant** is defined as any child of compulsory attendance age who does not qualify for the specified exemptions listed in Senate File 2435, fails to follow the school board's attendance policy, lacks a reasonable excuse for their absence, and has been absent from school for at least 20% of the days or hours in the grading period.
- **Grading Period** is determined by the school district. Newton has determined the grading periods are SEMESTERS.

### **Attendance Steps for NCSD:**

- When a student reaches 4 absences, a notification letter will be sent via ParentSquare
- When a student reaches 7 absences, a phone call will be made to the family.
- When a student reaches 9 absences (10% of grading period), the student is considered chronically absent, the school district **MUST NOTIFY** the **county attorney** AND send a **notice to parents** on their child's absences and the policies associated with more absences. This notice will be sent by **certified mail** to the child's parent/guardian when a child becomes chronically absent (absent from school for more than 10% of days or hours in the grading period),
- When a student reaches 13 absences (15% of grading period), a school engagement meeting is required. The purpose of the school engagement meeting is to "identify

the child's barriers to attendance and the interventions that may be used to improve the child's attendance."

- The meeting will
  1. Include the student, parent, and a school official and is held in-person or via phone call.
  2. Identify barriers to attendance and interventions to improve attendance.
  3. Result in an absenteeism prevention plan that will lay out the responsibilities of the involved parties to improve attendance.
- **The school must monitor compliance & contact participants at least once a week.**
- SF2435 states: "The school official shall contact the participants at least once each week during the **remainder of the school calendar** to monitor the performance of the participants under the plan." To ensure effective implementation of the Absenteeism Prevention Plan, meaningful, weekly, two-way communication with parents/guardians is considered best practice.
- When a student reaches 18 absences (20% of grading period), the student is considered truant. Truancy proceedings are initiated with the Jasper County Attorney. SF2435 states "If the participants in the school engagement meeting fail to enter into an absenteeism prevention plan, or if the child or the child's parent, guardian, or legal or actual custodian violates a term of the absenteeism prevention plan or fails to participate in the school engagement meeting, the county attorney may initiate a proceeding under section 299.6."

NCSD Grading Period:		10%	15%	20%
Semester 1	88 days	9 days	13 days	18 days
Semester 2	87 days	9 days	13 days	18 days

**Potential Exemptions:**

- Senate File 2435 establishes strict guidelines for chronic absenteeism and truancy, certain exemptions do exist. These exemptions ensure that legitimate circumstances impacting student attendance are accounted for. The following situations are not included in the calculation of chronic absenteeism or truancy for students who:
  - Have completed the requirements for graduation
  - Are excused for sufficient reason by any court of record or judge
  - Are attending religious services or receiving religious instruction
  - Are unable to attend school due to legitimate medical reasons - see District FAQs for further information in this area

- Has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that affects the student's attendance
- Has a plan under Section 504 that affects the student's attendance

### **Impact of Attendance on Student Achievement:**

Regular attendance is crucial for student success. Research shows that:

- Students who attend school regularly are more likely to read at grade level and meet academic standards.
- Consistent attendance allows for continuous learning and the building of skills.
- Chronic absenteeism in early grades can leave students unable to read proficiently by third grade, a key predictor of high school dropout rates.
- Students with high attendance rates are more likely to graduate from high school and have better chances of college and career success.
- Consistent attendance in PK-12 is linked to better life outcomes overall.

### **Our Commitment:**

Our goal is to support every student and help them to grow and succeed in the school setting. Part of a student's success is their attendance at school. The District needs parent partnership in this effort and here is how you can help:

- Ensure your student attends school every day unless they are truly sick. Keep track of how many days your student has missed and try to keep absences at a minimum.
- Schedule appointments and travel during non-school hours when possible.
- Talk to your child about the importance of attending school.
- Establish routines for your student. Consistent routines for bedtime, wake-up and getting ready for school can help your student arrive on time and be ready to learn.
- Communicate with school staff. Reach out to your school if you are facing difficulties getting your child to school. We are here to help and can offer support or resources to address challenges!

By working together, we can ensure that every student has an opportunity to be successful in their education.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your child's school or the district office.