

MPS Health & Wellness Newsletter

Building a Stronger Community

The Importance of School Attendance

There is a growing movement in education to address chronic absenteeism and help students stay on track. Not only do public schools have to follow [Chapter 76 of Massachusetts General Law](#), but educators understand that supporting school attendance strengthens a student's chance for positive outcomes. Students must be present at school and engaged in learning starting in the elementary years and continuing into high school in order to give them optimal opportunity for success.

Research has shown that missing school days translates to:

- Delayed literacy skills as students travel through the elementary grades;
- Lower grades in middle school years;
- Higher dropout rates in high school;
- Lower scores on state assessment exams.

When a student misses 10% or more of school days - roughly one absence every ten school days - that student is considered chronically absent. A student must miss more than half the school day to be deemed absent.

Habitual tardiness, or repetitive late arrival, is another component of absenteeism. Tardiness can cause disruption for both the late student and other students in the classroom. Additionally, studies have shown that chronic tardiness can result in reduced acceptance of personal responsibility. A school tardy is defined as a student entering the building or arriving to class after the official start of the school day. School hours are as follows:

Robinson Elementary School: 9:00am to 3:10pm

Jordan/Jackson Elementary School: 8:15am to 2:25pm

Qualters Middle School: 7:25am to 1:50pm

Mansfield High School: 7:25am to 1:50pm

Expectations for school attendance and disciplinary policies are available in each school's handbook, as well as communicated via other vehicles throughout the year. Handbooks can be found through the following links and on each school's website under the Student tab:

[Robinson Elementary School](#)

[Jordan/Jackson Elementary School](#)

[Qualters Middle School](#)

[Mansfield High School](#)

Increase in tardiness or absenteeism without medical documentation is typically an early indicator a student may be experiencing stress or other difficulties in their life. Dialogue between home and school is critical in reducing miscommunication, and helping families access available supports. Tracking and reporting this data, per state regulations, has lead our school district to engage in numerous promising practices to combat these issues.

Efforts to increase communication between teachers, administration and office staff has highlighted areas where support from our schools may assist families.

- Transportation issues encountered by families may easily be solved once administration is aware of problems.
- Morning and after school care for students and or younger siblings may also be areas of concern within families. We are fortunate to have many social supports in Mansfield, and school administration can help families access these community supports.
- Nurses and guidance counselors often advocate for simple supports to be put in place for students, such as a daily check-in, in an effort to create stability in the school day for students and curb absenteeism and tardiness.

Another key strategy in reducing student absences is to engage families in what is happening in our schools.

- School newsletters promote engagement in school events and can encourage conversation about school days among families.
- Individual teacher communication is also encouraged in our schools with many teachers embracing multi-media vehicles that reach our student population and encourage dialogue about subjects and assignments.

Families are a critical component in setting the tone concerning school attendance. Students need to know that attending school daily is valued in their home, and need to know there is interest in their education and in their achievements. Following daily routines can help increase school attendance.

Ensuring your student has a restful night sleep and a nutritious breakfast helps to start the day in a positive way.

- Proper sleep routine can decrease irritability and inattentiveness and will help students be more successful during the school day.
- Students who eat breakfast are also less likely to be absent, and make fewer trips to the school nurse with stomach complaints.
- Breakfast is available on a daily basis at our schools. Please see our [Food Services](#) link on the District home page for breakfast and lunch options plus forms for free and reduced lunch, if applicable.

Setting a homework routine early in elementary school helps develop responsibility, organizational skills and reinforce classroom learning.

- Checklists and calendars help students learn how to prioritize, complete, and return assignments on time.
- Dry erase markers and "to-do" lists in pocket protectors or laminated sleeves are a very effective tool for younger children.
- Calendar alerts and reminders on cell phones are effective tools for older students.

Using visual aids to highlight school attendance can also often help.

- Marking "X" on calendars to highlight school attendance and work towards weekends is a common strategy used with younger students.
- Using a different color "X" to mark absent days is an simple way to show the amount of days a student has missed from their friends and their routine. This can be a striking visual cue for students and adults.

Familial involvement in the school community helps to increase rate of school attendance.

- Attending back-to-school night and parent-teacher conferences helps parents/guardians familiarize themselves with classroom expectations and provides an opportunity to advocate for particular learning styles, or voice any growing concerns.
- Reading individual school newsletters and periodic visits to the school's website will also keep your family connected with our school system.

Simple hygiene practices can help curb the most common cause of absenteeism - common illnesses.

- Hand washing reminders cannot be underestimated in preventing illness. When hand washing is not available, alcohol-based sanitizers are recommended.
- Flu shot is recommended by the CDC for all persons older than six months with some exceptions. The flu shot cannot guarantee you will not get sick but will, at the very least, lessen the course of illness.
- Communication with your school nurse is helpful in connecting information for your student. You may receive helpful information in assessing health care routines, such as asthma treatment plans, or next steps to be taken for medical care.

The Mansfield Public School District strives to provide valuable educational opportunities where learners are engaged and families are supported. We know that every day a student misses school there is a lost opportunity for learning. We also know that support from families is the most important factor in prioritizing attendance. We hope you will join us in our mission to support the importance of regular school attendance and prepare our students for successful academic futures.

ATTEND TODAY, ACHIEVE TOMORROW

GOOD SCHOOL ATTENDANCE MEANS...



ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

read well by the end of third grade



MIDDLE SCHOOLERS

pass important courses



HIGH SCHOOLERS

stay on track for graduation



COLLEGE STUDENTS

earn their degrees



WORKERS

succeed in their jobs

Too many absences—excused or unexcused—can keep students from succeeding in school and in life. How many are too many? 10% of the school year—that's 18 missed days or 2 days a month—can knock students off track.





HOW CAN I HELP MY STUDENT?

- *Let your student know that you think school is important.*
- *Make sure your student goes to school regularly and on time.*
- *Take an interest in your student's school work.*
- *Provide regular times and a quiet, clean area for doing homework.*
- *Set a regular bedtime schedule. Age should not be a factor.*
- *Provide your student with plenty of time to get ready for school.*
- *If your student starts to miss school, speak to the school*
- *If your student is ill, contact the school and explain the reason for the absence.*
- *Include regular exercise and a balanced diet in your student's daily activities.*
- *Post the school calendar and notes on the refrigerator, or another prominent location.*
- *Balance school time with extracurricular activities.*
- *Keep open communication lines with your student and their teachers.*



DON'T FORGET TO WASH



"The best six doctors anywhere and no one can deny it are sunshine, water, rest, air, exercise and diet." ~ Wayne Fields



Mansfield Health & Wellness Council

The Health And Wellness Advisory Council (HWAC) is comprised of school administrators, nurses, guidance counselors, teachers, parents, community leaders and student delegates. Our mission is to provide and develop educational Health & Wellness resources, and to promote and support the physical and social/emotional health of our school community. The council serves as a common ground for all grade levels to share ideas and look for support in areas of need.

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