

New State Required Attendance Law Goes Into Effect for the 2018-2019 School Year

Tennessee House Bill No. 2376, which is relative to education, was introduced on February 1, 2018. It passed the House on March 29, 2018 and the Senate on April 24, 2018. It was signed into law by Governor Bill Haslam on May 15, 2018. This newly passed law provides revisions and updates regrading school attendance, truancy, and discipline.

All school systems are required by law to notify parents/guardians when their child has accumulated three unexcused absences and again at five unexcused absences. New notices are to be sent after each successive accumulation of five unexcused absences. Tennessee Code Annotated 49-6-3007 states that any child attending public school who has five unexcused absences during a school year is considered truant and in violation of the said law. An unexcused absence occurs when the absence does not fall into one of the excused categories as described in the Johnson County Board of Education Attendance Policy. Each absence will be considered unexcused until a professional excuse is turned in. Therefore, it is extremely important that all excuses be turned in within 10 days, as stated in the attendance policy. This policy is located in the system handbook. It can also be found online at www.jocoed.net.

The new law states that the local board of education shall adopt a progressive truancy intervention plan for students and parents/guardians who violate attendance requirements prior to the filing of a truancy petition or a criminal prosecution for educational neglect. The intervention plan is to begin once a student accumulates five unexcused absences at any time during the school year. The following intervention plan has been approved by the Johnson County Board of Education, and follows all of the requirements set forth in the law:

Tier 1 – (School Level)

- Violation - 5 unexcused absences
 - 10 days to turn in excuses from the day of the last unexcused absence – Tier 1 must be triggered if excuses are not turned within the ten day period
- Required conference with parent and student
- Plan/Contract created
- Child will remain in Tier 1 for the rest of the school year if all guidelines found in plan/contract are met.
- Child will be advanced to Tier 2 if guidelines found in plan/contract are not met

Tier 2 – (School Level)

- Violation – further unexcused absences
 - This tier will be triggered at the 7th unexcused absence
- Required conference with parent and student
- New plan/contract formed with additional steps put in place
- Child will remain in Tier 2 for the rest of the school year if all guidelines found in plan/contract are met.
- Child will be advanced to Tier 3 if guidelines found in plan/contract are not met

Tier 3 – (Attendance Supervisor)

- Violation – further unexcused absences
 - This tier will be triggered at the 9th unexcused absence

- Required to appear before Attendance Review Committee. The committee members will include the Johnson County School System Attendance Supervisor, Johnson County Youth Services Officer/Probation Officer, Department of Children Service Representative, and various school administrators.
- Community resources offered to family
- Child will remain in Tier 3 for the rest of the school year if all guidelines found in plan/contract are met.
- Additional unexcused absences or nonadherence to the plan will result in a petition to the juvenile court.
 - A petition will be filed with the juvenile court on the 10th unexcused absence.

It is the belief of the Johnson County Board of Education, as well as the Tennessee Department of Education that all children can learn and do learn. However, children cannot learn if they are not in school. Therefore, the new laws have been put into place to ensure that students are in school on a regular basis. While in school, they are learning the curriculum and standards set forth to increase their knowledge and skill level needed to compete in a local and global economy. They are being taught the necessary skills needed for a successful future. Any absence represents lost opportunities to learn in the classroom. Teachers are using numerous teaching strategies and activities in the classroom to engage students and enhance student learning. When a child misses school, he/she is missing out on these opportunities.