



Student Attendance Policy

Purpose:

Regular attendance is required for students to progress in their educational and treatment goals at school. Each scheduled day is important for both staff and students. Every effort should be made for children to attend school on a regular basis, as after 45 consecutive absences, students will be dis-enrolled from IBHS services provided at The Vista School.

Authority:

Regular attendance shall be required of all students when school is in session, except that authorized school staff may excuse a student for a temporary absence upon receipt of satisfactory evidence of rationale approved for excusal.

Definitions:

- **Compulsory attendance age:** period of a child's life from the time the parent elects to have the child enter school until the child is 17 years of age. The Vista School continues to hold the child/young adult to all attendance regulations of compulsory age through the age of 21 so long as they continue to attend The Vista School.
- **Truant:** three or more school days of unexcused absences during the regular school year
- **Habitually Truant:** six or more school days of **unexcused** absences during the regular school year
- **Chronic Absenteeism:** More than 10 days **excused** absences during the regular school year
- **Parent/Guardian:** custodial biological or adoptive parent, noncustodial biological or adoptive parent, guardian of the child

The Executive Director of Educational Services or designee shall annually notify students, parents/guardians, staff and other relevant stakeholders about the school's attendance policy through a variety of mediums.

The Executive Director of Educational Services or designee shall be responsible for the implementation and enforcement of this policy.

The Executive Director of Educational Services or designee shall develop administrative protocols for attendance which:

1. Governs maintenance of attendance records in accordance with law
2. Details the process for submission of requests and excuses for student absences
3. Details the process for written notices, School Attendance Improvement Conferences, School Attendance Improvement Plans, and referrals to school-based or community-based attendance improvement program, the local children and youth agency, or appropriate judge

Guidelines

Compulsory School Attendance Requirements:

All students who attend The Vista School shall be subject to the compulsory school attendance requirements.

Attendance need not always be within a school building. A student shall be considered in attendance if present at any place where school is in session via their Individualized Education Plan.

Excused/Lawful Absences:

The following conditions will be deemed "Excused/Lawful Absence" or "Medically Excused" under the following conditions with the appropriate documentation:

- (1) Student illness/doctor's appointments, including when dismissed by designated school staff during school hours for health related reasons
 - a. doctors appointment and dismissal from school staff due to health related reasons is in the "medically excused" category
- (2) Quarantine by doctor's order
 - a. quarantine is a "medically excused" category given documentation from health provider
- (3) Student injury/recovery from accident or surgery
 - a. any time absent that has medical excuse will be in "medically excused" category
- (4) Death in the student's immediate family. For the purposes of this policy, "immediate family" means the student's mother, father, brother, sister, step-mother, step-father, step-brother, step-sister, grandmother, grandfather, or custodial guardian.
- (5) Inclement weather-related school cancellations in the student's home school district.
 - a. this absence will not be counted in absences that lead to 'chronic absenteeism'
- (6) Observance of a religious holiday observed by bona fide religious group, upon prior written parental request
- (7) Legal proceedings/event in which student attendance is mandated
- (8) Student newly enrolled has a trip or event that was secured prior to known acceptance/enrollment to The Vista School and deadline for withdrawal from trip/event without financial burden has passed.
 - a. this absence will not be counted in absences that lead to 'chronic absenteeism'

Students absent from school are not permitted to attend school sponsored events or receive EIBS home hours the day(s) of the absence(s).

Unexcused/Unlawful Absences:

Absences for any other reasons than those listed above, or when no reason is given, are judged unexcused/unlawful.

Should a student attend a vacation or trip during school in-session days that does not meet the above guidelines the absences will be unexcused ***unless the parent/guardian obtains permission from the sending District.*** Please ensure that you have contacted the home district, filled out required form(s) and submit the approved documentation to attendance@vistaautismservices.org prior to any planned vacations or trips.

Parental Notice of Absence:

Absences shall be treated as unexcused/unlawful until the school receives written excuse explaining the absence. ALL ABSENCES (medical or otherwise, full or partial day) REQUIRE WRITTEN EXPLANATION TO THE SCHOOL SECRETARY by visiting vistaautismservices.org under the attendance tab or via email (attendance@vistaautismservices.org), US mail, or fax (717-566-7296). WITHIN THREE DAYS FROM THE **last consecutive** DAY OF ABSENCE. Absences of three (3) consecutive school days or more, in order to be a *lawful* excuse, the written explanation must be accompanied by a note from a licensed health practitioner.

A maximum of ten (10) days of cumulative lawfully excused absences for illness shall be permitted per Regular School Year (RSY). All absences due to illness, beyond ten (10) cumulative 'excused' in RSY will require an excuse from a licensed health practitioner. "Medically excused" absences are not counted in the cumulative lawful excused absences. School staff shall provide notice to the person in parental relation upon **every** incident of unexcused absence.

Written Explanation Procedures

All written excuses must be sent to the school secretary using one of the following methods, by visiting vistaautismservices.org under the attendance tab or via email (attendance@vistaautismservices.org), US mail, or fax (717-566-7296). "Backpack" mail or communication with the classroom teacher is NOT a replacement for notifying the school secretary. It is the parents'/guardians' responsibility to communicate directly with the school secretary using one of the approved methods (e.g. email, US mail, or fax). Written excuses by US mail will be considered received on the postmark date.

Enforcement of Attendance Requirements:

Chronic Absenteeism:

Once a student exceeds ten (10) days of cumulative lawfully excused absences for illness in the Regular School Year an excuse from a licensed health practitioner will be required for every subsequent absence. Should the parent not be able to provide an excuse from a licensed health practitioner, the absences will become 'unexcused/unlawful' and will then lead to Truant or Habitually Truant attendance enforcement.

Written notice to the parent will be provided upon 7 cumulative lawfully excused absences. Written notice will occur again upon 10 days of cumulative lawfully excused absence with the requirement of LEA notification and licensed health practitioner notice requirement.

Student who is Truant:

Written notice to the parent and LEA will be provided for each unexcused absence that occurs. When a student has been absent for three (3) days during the current school year without a lawful excuse, school staff shall provide notice to the person in parental relation who resides in the same household as the student within ten (10) school days of the student's third unexcused absence. The LEA shall be included in the correspondence.

The notice shall:

1. Include a description of the consequences if the student becomes habitually truant
2. Provided to all parental relations on file that are not precluded from receiving the information by court order

The notice to parental relations of the student's third unexcused absence, **or chronic absenteeism**, may include a mandate of a **School Attendance Improvement Conference (SAIC)**. If the student incurs additional unexcused absences after issuance of the notice of the student's third unexcused absence, and a School Attendance Improvement Conference was not previously held, the school shall mandate a School Attendance Improvement Conference.

School Attendance Improvement Conference (SAIC):

The school shall notify the person in parental relation in writing and by telephone of the date and time of the School Attendance Improvement Conference. The purpose of the SAIC is to examine the student's absences and reasons for the absences to identify ways in which those who must be invited to the SAIC can improve attendance with or without additional services.

The following shall be invited to the SAIC:

1. the student (parent can accept or decline attendance on student's behalf)
2. The student's person in parental relation
3. Other individuals identified by the parental relation who may be a resource
4. Appropriate school personnel including the LEA
5. Recommended service providers

Neither the student nor the person in parental relation shall be required to participate in the SAIC. The SAIC shall occur even if the person in parental relation declines to participate or fails to attend the scheduled conference. The outcome of the SAIC shall be documented in a written School Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP). The SAIP shall be retained in the student's file. A copy of the SAIP shall be provided to the person in parental relation, the student, and the appropriate school staff.

The school reserves the right to hold a SAIC for each subsequent day truant. The school may not take further legal or contractual actions (see bulleted items below) to address the unexcused absences until after the SAIC has taken place.

Student who is Habitually Truant

The school shall:

- Refer the student to the local children and youth agency with provided verification that the school held a SAIC
- Issue notice to the LEA in order to file a citation in the office of the appropriate judge against the person in parental relation who resides in the same household as the student (with provided verification that the school held a SAIC), pursuant with the LEA's board approved policy on filing citations for attendance
- Should further unexcused absences occur beyond the recommendation for LEA citation, The Vista School will recommend termination of the students' enrollment to Board of Directors.

Special Needs and Accommodations:

The school shall take action in accordance with the student's special needs in mind, with applicable law, regulations, and policies.

Extended School Year:

The Vista School, as part of the private school enrollment and parent contracting process, requires attendance for the Extended School Year (ESY). All 'excused' and 'unexcused' qualifiers still remain through the Extended School Year session. Should attendance during the ESY session violate the attendance policy, school administration will contact the family for improvement

planning. Should the attendance continue to be in violation, administration may determine to alert the Board of Directors for recommendation of dismissal from The Vista School.

Absence/Late Arrival/Early Dismissal Procedures

In the event that your child will be absent from or late for school, please submit the absence excuse by visiting vistaautismservices.org under the attendance tab or via email (attendance@vistaautismservices.org) or call to the attendance hotline at 717.583.5102 by 8:00a.m. to inform the school secretary or to leave a voicemail message. If transportation is provided by your school district, parents are also responsible for notifying the school district/transportation company of your child's absence. This message is to inform classrooms of the late arrival and does not serve as official documentation for the absence/late arrival.

If your child requires an early dismissal from school (any departure prior to 3:00p.m.), a written explanation is required to the school secretary (**High School/Visitor's Entrance**) before the student is allowed to leave, and the school secretary will sign out your child. If you know that an early dismissal will be happening in advance, please provide a written explanation to the school secretary before the child is to be released.

The school hours missed due to tardy arrivals and early dismissals will accrue into full day absences (e.g., 5.5 hours = 1 day). Judgments of lawful and unlawful absences are applied consistently to late arrivals and early dismissals.

Picking Up and Dropping off Your Child

To maintain a safe and secure environment for all of our students, parents/guardians must first report to the front desk/lobby inside the visitor's entrance at the High School (1st building on campus) both when picking up their child and also upon arriving late/returning their child to school. Once the child is signed in/out, the school secretary will contact the child's classroom and provide parents/guardians with further instructions.

If someone other than a parent/guardian is picking up your child, photo identification and a note from the parent will be required; the person **MUST** be listed on the student's Parent/Contact Emergency Information Form. If you would like to add a person, please contact the School Secretary to do so.

In the instance of special events at school, early dismissal procedures still apply. When students who regularly ride the bus depart with their parent/guardian, sign-out at the front office is still required so that we can account for all children during bus pick-up at the end of the day. (Parents/guardians must also notify the school district/transportation company in advance when such events occur.)

The school day is 9:00a.m. to 3:00p.m. If a parent is transporting the child to school, the expectation is that the child will be in the drop-off line at **9:00a.m.**, or the student will be considered tardy. If arriving after this time, the parent must sign the student in with the school secretary (**High School/Visitor's Entrance**). The school secretary will notify the classroom of your child's late arrival and provide further instructions. If instructed to drive your child to their building, please wait in your car until staff arrives.