



FAQ: ABSENTEEISM & TRUANCY IN INDIANA SCHOOLS

Updated July 2026

This FAQ document provides an understanding of the attendance requirements and policies mandated by the Indiana Code. It includes detailed information on the conditions for excused and unexcused absences, the participation of habitually truant students in extracurricular activities, and lawful excuses for student absences. This resource aims to assist in the creation and enforcement of effective attendance policies, ensuring compliance with state laws and promoting student attendance and engagement.

1. What is a "habitual truant" according to Indiana law?

A "habitual truant" is a student who has been absent from school for more than ten (10) days within a school year without being excused.

2. Who qualifies as an "absent student"?

An "absent student" is defined as a student in kindergarten through grade 12 who is absent from school for five days within a ten-week period without an excuse or without a note from a doctor or other professional requesting that frequent absences be excused. This note must request that frequent absences be excused under the student's:

- Individualized Education Program (IEP)
- Service Plan under 511 IAC 7-34
- Choice Scholarship Education Plan under 511 IAC 7-49
- Plan under Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act

3. What does "chronically absent" mean according to Indiana law?

"Chronically absent" means missing ten percent (10%) or more of a school year for any reason.

4. What qualifies as an "excused absence"?

An excused absence is outlined in the school's policy as an excused absence. The school corporation determines what are excused absences and the compulsory attendance exemptions must be included. Indiana law provides that absences related to special education and related services can be excused if they conform with a note on file from the student's doctor, therapist, or other professional.

HEA 1004 amended Indiana Code 20-33-2-15 by consolidating the statutory attendance exceptions into a single section. School corporations are required to authorize and excuse a student's absence under the following circumstances:

- Serving as a page for or as an honoree of the Indiana General Assembly.

- Serving on a precinct election board.
- Working as a helper to a political candidate or political party on the date of a general, city or town, special, or primary election.
- Appearing in court in response to a subpoena as a witness in a judicial proceeding.
- Being ordered to active duty with the Armed Forces of the United States, including the reserve components or the Indiana National Guard, for not more than fifteen (15) instructional days during the school year, provided the student is not a habitual truant. A school corporation may authorize additional excused absences for a student ordered to active duty.
- Participating as a member of the Indiana Wing of the Civil Air Patrol and participating in an international air cadet exchange program or an emergency service operation for up to five (5) instructional days during the school year.
- Participating in or exhibiting at the Indiana State Fair for educational purposes for up to five (5) instructional days during the school year.
- Participating in a scheduled competition, exhibition, or event offered by the National FFA Organization, the Indiana FFA Association, or a 4-H club for up to six (6) instructional days during the school year.
- Participating in a school-organized or school-facilitated nonclassroom activity, provided the school gives the student's parent written notice at least one (1) full school day before the activity describing the activity and its anticipated date and time.

A student receiving an excused absence for participation in the Civil Air Patrol, the Indiana State Fair, or an FFA or 4-H event must be in good academic standing, as determined by the school corporation. The appropriate school authority should request documentation verifying the student's participation. A student whose absence is excused under Indiana law may not be recorded as absent for the applicable dates and may not be penalized because of the excused absence.

5. What are “Non-Exception (Exempt) Absences,” and when are students excused but still reported as absent?

Per the categorization framework established by the IDOE, Non-Exception (Exempt) Absences refer to situations where a student is officially excused from school but is still reported as absent in attendance records:

- **Administrator Approved:** Absences authorized by a school administrator for reasons such as health issues, family emergencies, religious observances, or other personal situations. Approval is based on school policy and administrative discretion.
- **Family Choice (Planned):** Pre-arranged absences for vacations, family events, or other personal matters that the student's family schedules in advance.
- **Family Choice (Unplanned):** Absences due to unexpected family situations like emergencies, school nurse requests, weather issues, or lack of transportation. These are recognized when they align with school policy.

- **Funeral/Bereavement:** Absences for the death of a close family member or loved one, including attending services or supporting family during the grieving process.
- **Medical:** Absences due to illness, injury, mental health, or other health-related concerns. These are excused when appropriately documented by a parent or healthcare provider.
- **Religious:** Absences for observance of religious holidays, practices, or events important to a student's faith.

6. Can a student be suspended or expelled solely for being chronically absent or a habitual truant?

No. Indiana law (IC 20-33-8-16.5) prohibits public schools from suspending or expelling a student *solely* because the student is chronically absent or a habitual truant student. This provision is set to expire July 1, 2026, but could be extended or modified by further legislation.

7. What specific actions must schools take when a student is identified as an absent student?

Schools must:

- Notify parents in writing about the student's absentee status and their responsibility to monitor the student's school attendance and ensure the student attends school in accordance with compulsory attendance laws.
- Conduct an attendance conference within ten (10) instructional days after the student's fifth absence.
- Develop a truancy prevention plan which may include wraparound services, behavior expectations, and additional disciplinary actions.

8. What information must be included in the written notification to the parents of an absent student?

The written notification must include:

- **Identification as Absent Student:** Notification that the student is considered an absent student based on school attendance.
- **Parental Responsibility:** Information that the parent is responsible for monitoring the student's attendance and ensuring the student attends school according to compulsory attendance laws.
- **Truancy Prevention Measures:** Notice that the school will be initiating truancy prevention measures.
- **Attendance Conference:** Requirement for the parent to attend an attendance conference regarding the truancy prevention measures to be implemented for the student.
- **Consequences of Habitual Truancy:** See question 10.

9. Can a school corporation use email as written notification to parents?

A school corporation has the discretion to consider email as an acceptable form of written communication with parents, and it would likely satisfy the requirement. However, since

the code does not specifically define “written notification,” if a parent does not have an email on file, it is recommended to send a hard copy letter to ensure the parent receives the notification.

10. What are the consequences for a student identified as a habitual truant?

If a student meets the requirements of a habitual truant, the following actions will occur:

- **Mandatory Reporting:** The superintendent or attendance officer must report the student to an intake officer of the juvenile court or the Department of Child Services.
- **Juvenile Court Action:** The juvenile court may determine that the student is potentially committing a delinquent act under IC 31-37-2-3.
- **Parental Prosecution:** The parent may be subject to prosecution under IC 35-46-1-4.

11. Who must attend a school attendance conference regarding a student's absences?

- Representative from the school.
- The student's teacher.
- The student's parent or legal guardian.
- A representative chosen by the parent who can provide insights into the student's absenteeism, only if the parent:
 - Requests the representative's attendance and;
 - Notifies the school about the representative's identity at least forty-eight (48) hours before the conference.

12. What happens if the parents cannot attend the attendance conference?

The school is still required to hold the attendance conference within the specified timeframe, even if the parent or a representative cannot attend. The school must make efforts to ensure the parents' involvement and agreement with the plan as much as possible.

13. What efforts must a school make to accommodate parents for the attendance conference?

The school must make all reasonable efforts to hold the attendance conference at a date and time that accommodates the parent's schedule. A school must hold an attendance conference no later than ten (10) instructional days after a student's fifth absence, as described by law. This is required regardless of whether the parent or a designated representative can attend.

14. How does Indiana law address students whose absences are related to special circumstances such as pregnancy or severe illness?

The law requires that schools offer additional counseling or services to students whose absences are related to pregnancy, foster care, homelessness, or severe illness.

15. What must a school's truancy plan include?

A truancy plan may include the following components:

- **Wraparound Services:** Services provided to ensure the student attends school.
- **Behavior Description:** Specific behaviors that are required or prohibited for the student.
- **Effective Period:** The plan is effective for up to 45 instructional days after establishment.
- **Disciplinary Actions:** Additional actions if the student does not comply with the plan.
- **Referrals:** Referral to counseling, mentoring, or other services, if applicable.
- **Parental Involvement:** Whether a parent is expected to attend services with the student, if applicable.
- **Parental Agreement:** To the extent possible, the parent's signature agreeing to comply with the plan.

16. What policies must school corporations have regarding student absences?

The governing body of each school corporation must have policies outlining the conditions for excused and unexcused absences. These policies must include the grounds for excused absences as required by relevant sections of the Indiana code or other laws. The governing body of each school corporation must also establish a truancy prevention policy. The governing body must have policies outlining the conditions for excused and unexcused absences, consistent with the categorization framework established by the IDOE.

17. How should school corporations address the participation of habitually truant students in extracurricular activities?

The governing body of each school corporation must have a policy regarding the participation of habitually truant students in extracurricular and co-curricular activities.

18. Are students who serve as pages or honorees of the General Assembly entitled to an excused absence?

No. Effective July 1, 2026, HEA 1004 amended IC 20-33-2-14 by removing service as a page for or honoree of the General Assembly as a lawful excuse for a student's absence from school.

19. What are the attendance exceptions for students serving on election day?

The governing body of a school corporation and the chief administrative official of a nonpublic secondary school system must authorize the absence and excuse of each secondary school student who serves on the precinct election board or as a helper to a political candidate or party on the date of any general, city or town, special, or primary election at which the student works.

20. What documentation is required for a student to be excused for election service?

Before the election date, the student must submit a document signed by one of their parents permitting them to participate in the election. Additionally, the student must verify their election service to school authorities by submitting a document signed by the candidate, political party chairman, campaign manager, or precinct officer that generally describes the duties performed by the student on the election date.

21. Will a student be marked absent or penalized for participating in election service?

No. A student excused from attendance for election service may not be recorded as being absent on any date for which the excuse is operative and may not be penalized by the school in any manner.

22. What documentation is required for a student to be excused for participation in an FFA or 4-H event or competition?

To have the absence excused, students must typically provide documentation in accordance with school policy. While specific requirements may vary by corporation, documentation may include:

- Proof of event registration
- An official letter or notice from the FFA or 4-H organization
- A school-approved absence request form
- Parental or guardian written notification
- Verification from a club advisor or coach
- Details on the student's role or involvement

23. Who is eligible to participate in the school flex instructional program?

An eligible student is a student in grade 11 or 12 who meets one or more of the following criteria:

- Not on track to complete a postsecondary readiness competency.
- Determined to be chronically absent by missing ten percent or more of a school year for any reason.
- Identified as a habitual truant under state law.
- Significantly behind in credits for graduation, as identified by the school principal.
- Previously undergone at least a second suspension from school for the school year.
- Previously undergone an expulsion from school.
- Determined by the principal and the student's parent or guardian to benefit from participating in the school flex program.

24. What are the attendance requirements for students participating in the school flex program?

- Attend school for at least three hours of instructional time per school day.
- Maintain a ninety-five percent attendance rate.
- Not be suspended or expelled while participating in the program.

25. What are the additional requirements for students in the school flex program?

- Pursue a timely graduation.
- Provide evidence of college or technical career education enrollment and attendance or proof of employment and labor aligned with their career academic sequence.
- Pursue course and credit requirements for an Indiana diploma with a general designation.

26. What attendance-related responsibilities do superintendents and attendance officers have?

Superintendents and attendance officers are responsible for:

- Enforcing attendance policies.
- Maintaining records and reports.
- Visiting children reported absent, in need of books, clothing, or parental care.
- Filing affidavits for habitual truants with prosecutors.
- Meeting at least once a year with the Department of Child Services and the intake officer.
- Meeting at least once a year with the state attendance officer.

27. Where can I find attendance-related guidance from the Indiana Department of Education?

The Indiana Department of Education has published a variety of resources, including:

- [Guidance](#) on state laws passed in 2025
- An [attendance guidance memo](#)