



THE POWER OF PRESENCE

◆ LDOE ATTENDANCE ◆

The **STAR Task Force** with multiple state agency representatives and other critical stakeholders was established by the State Superintendent of Education in the summer of 2022. The STAR Task Force has worked to address the following:

- Analyze statewide and system-level attendance and truancy data.
- Understand and provide solutions for the top two or three attendance and truancy critical barriers.
- Establish multi-state agency coordination opportunities to improve structural changes to support attendance and truancy recovery initiatives.
- Research other SEA's and LEA's chronic absenteeism data and initiatives.
- Create a strategic plan with recommendations to address the current attendance and truancy crisis.
- Establish measurable STAR Task Force goals/key performance indicators to progress monitor and report quarterly.

Over the course of several years the Task Force engaged in the following:

- Reviewed and discussed statute and policy related to attendance and truancy
- Identified critical barriers related to attendance
- Reviewed and discussed statewide and system-level attendance data
- Delved into the topic of chronic absenteeism and truancy
- Discussed strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism and truancy

Based on the feedback from the Task Force, recommendations were presented to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) in January 2023 and March 2023.

- Recommendation 1 - Definition of Chronically Absent
- Recommendation 2 - Types of Absences
- Recommendation 3 - Academic Recovery
- Recommendation 4 - Attendance Data Reporting
- Recommendation 5 - Terminology
- Recommendation 6 - Next Steps

The Task Force was paused until April 2024. At that time, BESE approved policy streamlining the types of absences to excused, unexcused, and suspension/expulsion.

- **Excused Absences**—absences which are not considered for purposes of truancy, including absences incurred due to extenuating circumstances in accordance with §1103. of this Chapter.
- **Unexcused Absence**—any absence not meeting the requirements set forth in the excused absence definition, including but not limited to absences due to any job (including agriculture and domestic services, even in their own homes or for their own parents or tutors) unless it is part of an approved instructional program.
- **Suspension/Expulsion**—absence in which a student is not in attendance in the regular instructional setting due to disciplinary actions imposed by the school. The absence is not considered for purposes of truancy unless the student was assigned to an alternative site and is not in attendance at the assigned alternative site.

Policy also was updated to allow students who are absent, including suspended students, to submit missed assignments and tests and be eligible to receive the same academic credit and grades originally available when work is completed satisfactorily and in a timely manner. School systems, through local policy and guidance, determine what constitutes satisfactory and timely work.

Additionally, in accordance with R.S. 17:232, student attendance shall be checked each school day and at the beginning of each class period. Updated BESE policy now requires that attendance be submitted daily to the LDOE beginning with the 2024-2025 academic year. This daily submission should include the number of students in attendance, the number of students absent, and the truancy status of each student.

The STAR Task Force reconvened in 2024, meeting in April, June, and November of that year.

The following individuals offered their time, experience, and knowledge to the work of the Task Force:

Member	Representing
Johnnie Adams	Louisiana Association of School Superintendents
Karen Austin	LA Department of Children and Family Services
Kelly Bonaventure	East Baton Rouge District Attorney's Office
Faith Boudreaux	LA Department of Health
Tony Cain	LA Association of Public Charter Schools, Union Parish School District
Dr. Sharon Clark	2nd BESE District
Judge Ranord J. Darensburg	Orleans Parish Juvenile Court
Dr. Dymphna Davis	Louisiana School Counselors Association
Judge Blair Edwards	LA Judiciary 21st Judicial District Court
Tahanna Francis	Louisiana Association of Child Welfare & Attendance
Larry Frieman	Attorney General's Office
Judge Gail Grover	Juvenile Judges Association, East Baton Rouge Juvenile Court
Kasie Mainiero	Caddo Parish Child Welfare & Attendance Specialist
Ronnie Morris	6th BESE District
Beth Maillho	Louisiana Parent Teacher Association
Jennie Ponder	East Baton Rouge Parish Schools
James Russell	Louisiana Association of Child Welfare & Attendance
Dr. Robyn Simmons	Director of Child Welfare and Attendance, Ascension Parish
Erin Sims	CIS Gulf South

Tirzah Smith	Child Welfare and Attendance Director, EBR Schools
Jonathan Winfrey	FINS, Jefferson Parish
Shannon Wyche	Volunteers for Youth Justice

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Require schools to utilize an existing team to monitor and analyze attendance data.

Rationale: An attendance team will utilize data to review trends occurring at the school level, focusing on student-specific issues as to why the student may be missing school. The attendance team can be an established team at the school (SBLC, School Improvement team, etc.). Guidance shared by LDOE will include recommendations for incorporating attendance issues as part of regular team processes as well as recommendations for utilizing tools such as needs assessments to identify the root cause of student absences.

Recommendation 2: Keep definition of truancy in statute but create a discretionary referral process to most efficiently utilize the resources of the justice system.

Rationale: Allow schools to determine whether a student is referred for truancy based on the academic status of the student or any student disciplinary concerns. Although a local determination would be made regarding referral, the student would still be included in the truancy data. This recommendation would allow for targeted use of resources and collaboration between the school system and the justice system. Guidance shared by LDOE will include resources to support the decision-making process and to clarify required actions related to reporting and referral.

Recommendation 3: The adoption of a formal definition of chronic absenteeism as students who are enrolled for at least 10 days and are absent 10% or more of the school days enrolled; students are counted once at each level (state, school system, and site).

Rationale: Forty-four states and the District of Columbia deem students as chronically absent if they miss 10 percent or more of school days. The other states set a specific number of days missed or leave it up to local school districts to define. Utilizing a definition of 10 percent is favorable because it allows school leaders to flag problematic attendance patterns early, giving them a better chance of intervening.

Recommendation 4: Identify ways to make past attendance history available to the receiving school system.

Rationale: Allow school systems/schools to access the attendance record of a student from their previous school once they transfer to a new school system. The availability of prior absences provides a more complete picture of the attendance patterns for the entire school year rather than fractured reporting that may hinder implementation of necessary academic and behavioral supports.

Recommendation 5: Create model program guidance on reducing truancy in conjunction with stakeholders with an interest in reducing truancy.

Rationale: Collaborate with attendance stakeholders, Juvenile Court Judges, law enforcement, non-profit organizations, etc. to create model guidance to improve attendance and reduce truancy. One example of this is Project Truancy with the East Baton Rouge Parish Juvenile Court. The court has established a system which includes multiple individuals focused on the prevention of truancy. The court requires each individual with a vested interest in the attendance concern to be present. Project Truancy is a collaborative effort between parents, the Juvenile Court, TASC, and the local school system. Each party is expected to participate in the plan of action to improve the attendance of the student. The LDOE would create guidance for best practices based on Project Truancy and other exemplar programs.

Recommendation 6: Limit number of days that can be excused by a parent note to 5 per year.

Rationale: Minimizing the overuse of parent-written notes and addressing unexcused absences will allow local attendance teams to identify concerns in a more timely fashion and to identify trends with specific students.

Recommendation 7: Create a standardized paper and digital form for parent notes.

Rationale: A [standardized parent note](#) would streamline the communication process and ensure that parents are being responsible and held accountable for their children's absences from school. The usage would be an option for school systems. Standardized parent notes assist schools in maintaining accurate attendance records/documentation for students.

Recommendation 8: Require and improve delivery of career exploration and extracurricular activities in elementary and middle schools.

Rationale: R.S. 17:183.2 requires activities introducing middle school students to career/technical and academic fields of study. The task force suggests that participation in extracurricular activities may increase students' sense of engagement or attachment to their school, and thereby decrease the likelihood of school failure and dropping out. Indicators of successful participation in school include consistent attendance, academic achievement, and aspirations for continuing education beyond high school. Collaboration with community partners to begin career exploration and extracurricular activities as early as the elementary years could improve student engagement in school. LDOE should support this expansion by offering guidance and collaborative facilitation among schools and school systems.

For additional information please contact attendance@la.gov