

**Pasco County Schools Attend and Achieve**

## **For Parents and Caregivers**

## **Preface**

This manual is intended to provide guidance on the Pasco County Universal Attendance Procedures.

## **Why Does School Attendance Matter?**

Just as a fever can signal an underlying health issue, frequent absences from school may indicate that a child is facing deeper challenges—not the root issue itself.

When students are frequently absent, it may point to concerns such as:

* Feeling disconnected or unmotivated
* Health or safety issues
* Stress, anxiety, or boredom
* Difficulties at home

These are important issues that deserve attention. Focusing only on attendance numbers—without understanding what’s really going on—is like treating a fever without identifying the cause.

At the same time, it’s important to remember: Being in school helps children learn, build relationships, and grow. When they’re not present, they miss out on valuable opportunities that support both academic and personal success.

That’s why, instead of simply asking, *“Why isn’t your child in school?”* we’re really asking, *“What’s getting in the way—and how can we partner with you to remove those barriers?”*

## **We All Have a Role in Helping Students Show Up and Thrive**

In our district, student attendance is a shared priority. Every staff member—from teachers and counselors to office staff and principals—works together to ensure students feel welcomed, supported, and ready to learn each day.

But we can’t do it alone.

Your involvement matters. When families and schools work as a team, we can better understand what’s keeping students from school and find meaningful ways to support them—together.

Because when students show up, they grow, they connect, and they succeed.

### **Every Day Counts: Why Being in School Matters**

We understand that life gets busy and unexpected things happen. Still, being in school as consistently as possible is one of the most important ways to help your child succeed.

When students miss school, they miss out on:

* Valuable learning
* Friendships and social development
* Support from teachers and staff

If they’re not there, they can’t learn.

We encourage families to make school attendance a top priority. Of course, if your child is sick or there’s a serious reason to stay home, that’s understandable. But whenever possible, please limit absences to those that are excused and truly necessary.

Together, we can help your child build strong habits, stay on track, and feel confident in school—every single day.

## **Supporting Your Child’s Attendance—Together**

We believe that strong attendance is essential to student success—and we’re here to support you every step of the way. That’s why we’ve implemented fair and consistent attendance practices across all schools, so every student is treated equitably, and every family knows what to expect.

**To submit an absence:**

If your child needs to miss school, please report the absence as soon as possible. We’ve introduced a centralized method for reporting absences through the myStudent Parent Portal—no more navigating different forms or websites for each school.

**How to Report an Absence via the** [**myStudent Parent Portal**](https://pasco.focusschoolsoftware.com/focus/?skipSAML=true)

**From a Web Browser**

* Log in to your **myStudent Parent Portal**.
* Go to **Forms** from your menu on the left or top.
* Select **Absence Reporting**

**From the myStudent App**

* Tap **Open Focus** in the District Announcement message or Absence Reporting from your links page to log in through your browser.
* **Android:** Tap the three dots in the top-right, then select **Open in Chrome**.
* **iOS:** Tap the share icon at the bottom, then select **Open in Chrome** or **Safari**.
* Once in your browser, follow the web browser steps above.

**Completing the Absence Report**

1. Choose your child from the dropdown — this auto-fills their school, your parent account, and your email.
2. Enter a valid phone number if one is not listed
3. Select the start date of the absence, and end date if it spans multiple days.
4. Pick the appropriate reason for the absence. If “Other,” explain in the text box.
5. (Optional) Add details in the Brief Description field.
6. Check the acknowledgment box.
7. Upload any supporting documents if needed.
8. Click Submit Request after reviewing for accuracy.

For more details, visit: [**https://pasco.k12.fl.us/attendance**](https://pasco.k12.fl.us/attendance)

**What Constitutes an Excused Absence?**

* While some absences are unavoidable, we ask that families limit them to those that are excused and necessary, as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct located at <https://www.pasco.k12.fl.us/ssps/page/conduct>

**Please note**: Pasco County Schools will allow limited Excused medical absences without documentation. After five parent-reported medical absences without documentation, a note from a healthcare provider will be required for future absences to be marked as excused.

### **Plan Ahead: Schedule Around the School Calendar**

As we work together to support your child’s academic success and well-being, we kindly ask that you schedule family vacations, medical appointments, and other planned absences around the school calendar.

Even excused absences mean missed instructional time, classroom discussions, and peer interaction—moments that are difficult to replicate outside the classroom.

[2025-2026 School Calendar](https://www.pasco.k12.fl.us/library/home/calendar_25_26.pdf)

### **Increased Communication**

**Automated Messaging**

* For each Unexcused Absence you will receive a phone call, text, and email from the School.
* Families will receive a call, text, and email from the School Principal when your child has 3, 5, and 10 unexcused absences. The purpose of these messages is:
* Documentation Reminder: These communications serve as a prompt to submit any required documentation related to the absences.
* Support Meetings: Parents and caregivers are encouraged to contact the school to schedule a meeting to address any concerns or support needs.
* Truancy Information: The school will provide details about the consequences of truancy and may discuss referrals to external support agencies if appropriate.

### **Parent Conferences**

If your child accumulates more than five Unexcused Absences within a 30-day period, a school staff member will contact you to schedule a Parent/Caregiver meeting. This meeting is an opportunity to have a collaborative conversation, gain a better understanding of the situation, and explore ways to support your child’s attendance and overall well-being.

Your participation in these meetings is strongly encouraged and can take place in person, virtually, or by phone—whichever format is most convenient for you. If you are unable or choose not to attend, the meeting will proceed as scheduled, and all relevant documentation and outcomes will be shared with you in writing afterward.

Topics discussed in this meeting are:

* Attendance data
* Barriers to attending school
* Provide and explore interventions
* The need for referring to external Truancy resources such as:
	+ Department of Children and Families
	+ Department of Juvenile Justice
	+ Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles
	+ The State Attorney
	+ Youth and Family Advocates

### **We’re Here to Help—Not to Judge**

Our goal is simple:
To ensure every student feels supported, every family feels informed, and every child has the opportunity to succeed.

## **Who is required to be in school?**

### **Florida’s Compulsory School Attendance Law**

Under **Florida Statute § 1003.21**, all children who are **6 years old by February 1 of the school year**—and who have not yet turned **16**—are required to attend school regularly for the entire school term.

A student who turns **16 during the school year** is no longer subject to compulsory attendance **only if** they submit a **formal declaration of intent to terminate school enrollment** to the school district through their enrolled school. This declaration must be signed by both the student and a parent or guardian, and the school is required to conduct an **exit interview** to discuss the decision and explore alternative educational options.

While there are limited exceptions, this law ensures that all school-age children are engaged in education during their most critical years of development.

Recent updates to Florida law, including HB 1344 (2025), have expanded court services for students who meet the threshold for truancy. These changes also increase accountability for schools and enhance the enforceability of truancy laws, reinforcing the importance of early intervention and consistent school attendance.

### **What Are the Consequences of Poor Attendance?**

While the educational and social impacts of chronic absenteeism are significant, there may also be **formal consequences** for students and families when attendance issues persist.

### **School-Based Consequences**

* In accordance with the Student Code of Conduct, students with ongoing attendance concerns may have their participation in extracurricular activities—such as sports, clubs, and school events—restricted. Additionally, students who drive to school may lose their on-campus parking privileges if attendance issues are not addressed.

### **Community and State-Level Programs**

In addition to school-based responses, several **external agencies** may become involved when attendance issues continue:

* **Learnfare Program (Department of Children and Families)**
Families receiving Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) may see a **reduction in benefits** if a student accumulates **15 or more Unexcused Absences within a 90-day period**.
* **Youth and Family Alternatives (YFA) – CINS/FINS Program**
This program, part of the Department of Juvenile Justice, offers support for students showing signs of truancy or ungovernable behavior. **CINS/FINS** stands for *Children in Need of Services / Families in Need of Services* and provides early intervention to help families address challenges at home, school, or in the community—this program falls under The Department of Juvenile Justice.
* **Truancy Intervention Program (TIP) – State Attorney’s Office**
Focused primarily on **elementary-aged students**, this program may lead to **legal action** if attendance does not improve, including potential prosecution of parents or guardians.
* **Driver’s License or Learner’s Permit Suspension:**

Under Florida law (Florida Statute § 1003.21), students who meet the legal definition of truancy may face consequences related to their driving privileges:

* + **Students with a driver’s license may have their license suspended.**
	+ **Students not yet eligible for a license may experience a delay in obtaining future driving privileges.**

These measures are not intended to punish students, but rather to emphasize the importance of regular school attendance and ensure that students receive the support they need to succeed. Our goal is always to work in partnership with families to address attendance challenges early and constructively.

**Reinstatement of Driving Privileges**

Once a student completes 30 consecutive school days of satisfactory attendance, they may be eligible to have their driving privileges reinstated. This process requires the student to initiate and complete the necessary paperwork, including submission of the appropriate FMDMV form.

**Hardship Waiver Program**

Florida law also provides a Hardship Waiver Program for students under 18 who require a driver’s license due to personal or family hardship. According to Section 322.091(3)(b):

*“The public school principal, the principal’s designee, or the designee of the governing body of a private school shall waive the requirements of subsection (1) for any minor under the school’s jurisdiction for whom a personal or family hardship requires that the minor have a driver’s license for his or her own, or his or her family’s, employment or medical care.”*

**Types of Hardship Considered:**

* + Employment Hardship: The student must demonstrate that they provide a substantial financial contribution to their own or their family’s basic needs, such as food and shelter.
	+ Medical Hardship: The student or their immediate family members must require transportation to access necessary medical treatment. Consideration will be given to whether other licensed drivers are available in the household.

If you believe your child qualifies for a hardship waiver, please contact the school to request a waiver hearing. The school will review the situation and notify the DMV of the outcome.