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## Chronic Early Absenteeism: Analysis of Kent ISD Public School Attendance Policies

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# Chronic Early Absenteeism: Analysis of Kent ISD Public School Attendance Policies

December 2010

Grand Valley State University  
College of Community and Public Service  
Johnson Center for Philanthropy

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The project team wishes to thank all persons associated with KCFCCC, KSSN, KENT ISD, and KISA for their cooperation, assistance, and support of data collection efforts including Carol Paine-McGovern, Ron Koehler, Matthew VanZetten, Glen Finkel, and the superintendents and support staff of public school districts across Kent County. This report offers conclusions drawn by the project team and do not necessarily reflect the official position of KSFCCC, KENT ISD, KISA, KSSN, or the Johnson Center.

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# Executive Summary

Recent studies have confirmed the significance of early childhood education to children's long-term educational and social success, and the undermining consequences of chronic early absenteeism on children's potential (see, e.g., Chang & Romero, 2008). The Kent Schools Services Network (KSSN) initiated this study in fall 2009 to identify and map trends in chronic early absenteeism in public elementary schools in Kent County. The Community Research Institute (CRI) subsequently contracted with Kent Intermediate School District (KENT ISD) to provide research services examining absenteeism in grades K-3 at all elementary schools within the KENT ISD to determine the prevalence of chronic early absenteeism. The first phase of the study, reported here, involved a preliminary policy analysis of KENT ISD public school district attendance policies to address the following questions:

1. How do school districts (and individual school buildings) define and count absences and tardiness in the early elementary years (K-3)?
2. What categories are used to describe and define excused and unexcused absences and how are these counted across the district and within individual schools?
3. How are attendance policies enforced and who is responsible for such enforcement?
4. What are the disciplinary consequences of missed school (by either absence, excused or unexcused, and tardiness)?

In May 2010, researchers requested district absenteeism policies, and absenteeism tracking and reporting procedures, from all twenty public school districts in Kent County. Seventeen districts of the twenty districts responded to these requests by providing faxed or digital copies of their policies, or by referring the researchers to websites where their policies could be obtained. Unfortunately, three districts failed to respond after three requests. However, the researchers were able to locate publicly available student handbooks for two of these non-responding districts. This report is limited to the materials available as either provided or obtained.

Content analysis conducted on available district policies drew both on thematic codes derived from a review of the literature on chronic early absenteeism and emergent thematic codes derived from review of the policies themselves. This extracted information was organized by district and by theme to allow both an individualized district analysis (not provided here) and an aggregate thematic analysis of district policies and procedures across the KENT ISD as reflected in this report. A summary of findings follows:

## Defining Absences

- Attendance policies may be divided into three groups: compulsory policies, aspirational policies, and mixed policies.
- The majority of responding districts' policies contained language defining attendance and absenteeism. Attendance generally is assumed as being physically present on the school campus although some districts include additional definitions of attendance.
- Absence generally is defined as "non-presence". Additionally, some districts find students to be absent if they are tardy beyond a specific time period, though that time period varies among districts.
- Few policies defined excused absences; those that did linked the excuse to parent/guardian notification and explanation to justify the absence.

## Distinguishing and Counting Excused and Unexcused Absences

- Most responding districts provided policies that contain classifications of excusable reasons for absence, including: illness, death of a relative, recovery from an accident, professional appointments, court-ordered appearances, religious observation, and other absences deemed appropriate by school officials.
- Less common excuses included pre-arranged family trips and college visitations, and work at home due to the absence of a parent.
- The district policies for truancy contained nearly identical definitional language across most districts: "A student shall be considered truant each day or part of the day s/he is inexcusably absent from his/her assigned location."
- Several policies define students as "habitual truants" when, "in spite of warnings and/or his/her parents' efforts to ensure attendance, s/he has accumulated [a specified number of] trancies during a semester." Specified numbers vary widely, from three to ten trancies.
- Students generally are defined as tardy if they are not in class when the bell rings.
- Reporting procedures appear to vary depending on the age of the tardy student.
- While not all districts appear to have release policies related to late arrival and early dismissal, existing release policies take essentially three forms, reflecting varying degrees of notification and approval: 1) advanced written request and principal approval, 2) the knowledge and approval of the principal and the parents, and 3) that students notify the attendance office before leaving early.
- Some responding districts have provisions that govern absences under special circumstances: student physical or mental condition; trip requests and vacations; extra-curricular activities; religious instruction; school-related missed periods; alternative education; and special education programs and services.



## Attendance Policy Enforcement and Responsibilities

- Some district policies clearly mandate student attendance responsibilities.
- Parents are expected to support regular student attendance and notify the school about student absences according to district notification procedures.
- Board responsibilities include: to verify absenteeism statements, investigate the causes of absenteeism, and report absenteeism to the Intermediate School District.
- Policies vary in the framing of school board investigative authority.
- Superintendent responsibilities center on the development, implementation, and enforcement of attendance and record keeping policies and procedures that comply with state education law and administrative regulations.
- Depending on the district, professional staff members are explicitly responsible for encouraging student attendance.
- In the districts where policies were available, the primary responsibility for recording attendance and documenting excused absences is assigned to teachers, though responsibilities vary depending on the grade level.
- Policies indicate district engagement of local authorities to assist with attendance-related problems, including KENT ISD and County Family Independence Agency.
- Four districts provided three different policies addressing the roles and responsibilities of attendance officers
- Those district policies that addressed record keeping fell into two categories: development of electronic record keeping systems (subject to district technological capabilities) and record retention requirements.

## Disciplinary Consequences

- Disciplinary consequences vary among districts depending on the duration and accumulation of absences. Some districts use progressive consequences for unexcused class absences. Some district policies are relative vague about attendance related discipline.
- Different districts define tardiness differently and disciplinary responses differ as well.
- Districts differ as to whether or not attendance problems should impact student grades.
- In some districts, students under the age of sixteen may be suspended or expelled for repeated violations of school attendance policies, while in other districts the superintendent is encouraged to seek alternative educational opportunities for truant students.

- Many of the district policies that permit make up work typically contain similar language. Policies may specify that make up work is permitted for absences, suspension, or both.
- Policies suggest that the discipline of truant students should comply with school board policies and due process.

This preliminary report provides insights into the nature, complexity, and relative consistency of available attendance related KENT ISD public school districts. The next phase of the study will require coordination of qualitative and quantitative components to develop variables that will define and allow researchers to measure these variations in relation to the district attendance and academic performance data. A successful accounting of these variations will allow researchers to more accurately interpret absenteeism rates across districts and, thus, provide a more robust picture of the relationship between early chronic absenteeism and school success in Kent County. It is anticipated that additional reporting will focus on existing policies and practices at the building level for those schools where statistical analyses identify chronic early absenteeism concerns. We recommend future research to investigate more fully how students, parents, and school personnel interpret, implement, and apply these attendance policies in everyday school life.

# Introduction

## Statement of Problem

Recent studies have confirmed the significance of early childhood education to children's long-term educational and social success, and the undermining consequences of chronic early absenteeism on children's potential (see, e.g., Chang & Romero, 2008). The causes of chronic early absenteeism are complex and variable, but high rates have been linked to health challenges (child or family), transportation problems, poverty and homelessness, family mobility and instability, parental disengagement, cultural barriers (e.g. language), misplaced family priorities (e.g. vacations), and unwelcoming or unsupportive schools (Chang & Romero, 2008; Nauer, White, & Yerneni, 2008). Multiple individual or family risks may compound the problem (Chang & Romero, 2008; Nauer, White, & Yerneni, 2008). Chronic absenteeism in elementary school is often a hidden problem, masked by inadequate or incomplete attendance tracking and reporting practices (Nauer, White, and Yerneni, 2008). One national study reported that an estimated 10 percent of first graders are chronically absent nationally, while studies of targeted locations indicated prevalence rates ranged between 5 to 25 percent (Chang & Romero, 2008).

Research also confirms that attendance matters, with significant impact for schools, neighborhoods, and populations. A national study found that chronic absence in kindergarten resulted in "lower academic performance in first grade for all children regardless of gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status" (Chang & Romero, 2008, p. 4). A Philadelphia study found chronic absenteeism ultimately contributed to students dropping out. Sixth graders who missed more than 20 percent of the school year had a 75 percent chance of quitting school some time before graduation (Neild, Balfanz & Herzog, 2007). Clearly, a full understanding of chronic early absenteeism in a school district can help policy makers and educators identify the problem and challenges reflected by poor attendance, and devise early intervention policies and strategies to "help schools and communities partner with families to ensure every child begins school with an equal opportunity to reach his or her potential" (Chang & Romero, 2008, p. 7).

## Purpose of the Report

The Kent Schools Services Network (KSSN) initiated this study in fall 2009 to identify and map trends in chronic early absenteeism in public elementary schools in Kent County. The Community Research Institute (CRI) subsequently contracted with the Kent Intermediate School District (KENT ISD) to provide research services examining absenteeism in grades K-3 at all elementary schools within the KENT ISD to determine the prevalence

of chronic early absenteeism, including comparison analysis with the eight sites participating in the KSSN. The study also included a policy analysis of public school district attendance policies, initiated both to inform KENT ISD about the nature and development of attendance policies across public school districts and, more importantly, to provide context for the analysis of chronic early absenteeism in these districts.

The policy analysis implemented is both descriptive and exploratory in nature aimed at examining how districts conceptualize (name) and operationalize (define for measurement) absenteeism. At the heart of this analysis, we seek to understand the point at which the district defines absenteeism as a problem and how this is reflected in its policies and practices. More specifically, the analysis addresses the following questions:

1. How do school districts (and individual school buildings) define and count absences and tardiness in the early elementary years (K-3)?
2. What categories are used to describe and define excused and unexcused absences and how are these counted across the district and within individual schools?
3. How are attendance policies enforced and who is responsible for such enforcement?
4. What are the disciplinary consequences of missed school (by either absence, excused, or unexcused, or tardiness)?

This report presents preliminary analyses of district attendance and enforcement policies at the district level. Completion of the quantitative analysis is an essential companion piece to this report. It is anticipated that additional reporting will focus on existing policies and practices at the building level for those schools where statistical analyses identify chronic early absenteeism concerns.

# Methodology for Policy Evaluation

The *qualitative content analysis* component of this study examined all participating districts' attendance policies and procedures to identify each district's definition of absenteeism, and corresponding attendance tracking and reporting procedures. Since only publicly available policies were used in this analysis, approval by the Grand Valley State University Human Research Review Board was not required.

## Data Collection

The initial phase of the qualitative data collection occurred in May 2010 and focused on acquiring district absenteeism policies, and absenteeism tracking and reporting procedures, from all twenty public school districts in Kent County. After receiving approval from the Kent Intermediate Superintendents' Association (KISA), an email invitation was distributed to all KENT ISD public school district superintendents on May 7, 2010 requesting copies of board-approved policies (whether district-wide or building specific) on school attendance (including tracking and reporting) as well as artifacts like school handbooks, codes of conduct, and other materials that describe how the policies are implemented in elementary school buildings. The researchers specifically asked for information related to: attendance expectations (including compulsory attendance), absenteeism, excused and unexcused absences, tardiness, special attendance provisions (e.g. related to special needs, programs, or services), attendance exceptions (including release or exemptions), attendance-related discipline, truancy, reporting (e.g. teachers and parents), record-keeping and tracking, attendance related roles and responsibilities (e.g., parents, teachers, administrators, staff, others), and any other provisions that might be relevant to attendance and absenteeism in the elementary schools in each district. For policies that were available on a publicly accessible website, districts provided the relevant Internet address and the researchers downloaded the policies directly. To facilitate the collection process, and save staff search and processing time, districts were invited to forward their policies in total; any relevant provisions were then excerpted. Electronic versions of the policies were preferred, if available.

A second May 12, 2010 email request sought further details related to the policy request, defining the relevant time frame as academic years 2006-2007, 2007-2008, 2008-2009, and fall 2009. The researchers recommended that the districts provide current policies, then copies of any previous policies that reflected changes since 2006. The researchers further requested access to those district policies stored on the Northeastern Ohio Learning Association (NEOLA) website. A third and final request was distributed on May 26, 2010 to those districts that had not yet responded to the initial policy requests as well as those districts whose responses were incomplete to date.

Seventeen districts of the twenty districts responded to these requests by providing faxed or digital copies of their policies, or by referring the researchers to either the NEOLA or Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB) websites. Depending on the district, these policy sources included district policies, administrative guidelines, and/or parent/student handbooks. Some but not all of the districts provided policies for the complete time frame requested. Some, but not all, districts provided policies at the building level. Unfortunately, three districts failed to respond in any way to the three requests. However, the researchers were able to locate publicly available student handbooks for two of these non-responding districts. This report, then, is limited to the materials available as either provided or obtained.

A preliminary review of student handbooks revealed little or no differentiation from general board policies in attendance-related content when board policies were available for comparison. While no further analysis of student handbooks from responding districts are included here, these handbooks may provide relevant insights into absenteeism profiles later once building-level attendance and academic performance data are analyzed. However, relevant provisions from the two non-responding districts' student handbooks have been included to account at least partially for attendance-related policies and practices in those systems. Discussion of these student handbook provisions have been incorporated into the general policy discussions as it is assumed that, like the responding districts, the non-responding districts' handbook policies are not significantly different from their board policies. Finally, the researchers have assumed that board policies included in this analysis apply generally to all schools across the district, regardless of grade level unless specified, since little or no grade-level differentiation was found.

## **Data Analysis**

Content analysis conducted on district policies received drew both on thematic codes derived from a review of the literature on chronic early absenteeism and emergent thematic codes derived from review of the policies themselves. Upon receipt, the policies were reviewed and appropriate sections extracted for each of the existing codes, then reviewed and recoded to include emergent themes. Through this iterative process all pertinent attendance-related information was extracted from the policies provided.

This extracted information was organized by district and by theme to allow both an individualized district analysis (not provided here) and an aggregate thematic analysis of district policies and procedures across the KENT ISD as reflected in this report. Both members of the policy analysis team reviewed and discussed the policies, extracted information, and code assignments to reach and confirm consensus on analysis and interpretation. A copy of the policy analysis codebook is attached as Appendix A.

# Profile of Public School Districts in Kent ISD

In advance of the April 2010 Superintendents meeting, an informational scan of existing attendance policies was completed, primarily through the means of a public document search on district websites:

1. The scope of the scan included the 20 public school districts (and 109 elementary schools) located in the KENT ISD jurisdiction. Non-public school districts were not included in the initial scan (nor are they included in the current study).
2. Almost half (eight of the 20 schools) had board policies that were accessible on line. With additional inquiry (i.e. contacting school districts to inquire if there was a board-approved attendance policy), the researchers were able to acquire policies from two more districts although these documents were not easily accessible on line.
3. Six of the districts that did not have board policies listed on line appeared to have integrated an attendance policy across school buildings.
4. In several cases, there was a universal handbook for all elementary schools in a district. This seemed to occur primarily in larger urban and suburban districts.
5. There was no evidence of district wide or specific school attendance policies in three of the districts.
6. Three districts did not respond to repeated requests for information. As previously noted, researchers were able to locate student handbooks for two of the non-responding school systems.

# Description of Attendance Policies

## Attendance Policies and Procedures for Responding Districts

A review of the attendance-related policies and procedures across the KENT ISD reveals varying degrees of development, complexity, and commonality. While some districts appear to have developed over time policies presumably tailored to their local needs, other districts have adopted language commonly used by other school boards in defining attendance policies and procedures. Much of this language appears to have been derived from model policies and procedures made available to districts by NEOLA, a for-profit management firm specializing in policy guidelines, electronic publishing, and consulting services for school districts in seven states, as reflected on its website (<http://neola.com/>). It is likely that these policies are derived in pertinent part from applicable Michigan law. This report does not seek to make that determination, except as noted. Rather, we note commonalities and differences across policies. Without further investigation, the researchers cannot determine whether the adoption of common language reflects an intentional definition and implementation of policy suited to district needs or instead might indicate institutional isomorphism at work, that is, a reproduction of policies and procedures in one location based on their existence in another (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Analyses of school attendance data may provide greater insights into the effectiveness of this common language at diverse locations. This first section explores attendance expectations, policy justifications, and definitions of attendance related activities (e.g., excused and unexcused absences, tardiness, leave of absence, etc.).

## Attendance Expectations and Rationale

While all available district policies articulated attendance expectations, across districts rationales varied as to the nature of and justification for these expectations. Attendance policies may be divided into three groups: *compulsory policies*, *aspirational policies*, and *mixed policies*. Compulsory policies mandate attendance, either through reference to state law (and to the Board of Education as an agency of the state) or through more general statements of attendance requirement. Two of the compulsory policies explicitly cited state attendance statutes, and one of these explicitly incorporated statutory language into the policy. In contrast, aspirational policies indicate that attendance is “expected” or “encouraged” rather than required, and absences are “discouraged”. Some aspirational policies include an attendance/achievement link, offering pedagogic justifications of consequent academic success or future employability. Mixed policies include language related to compulsory attendance but do not appear to mandate student attendance. Although most policies direct district expectations at students, some reference parent/family and school responsibilities for ensuring student attendance as well. It is important to note that policy language may differ across provisions for a single district. One district policy, for



example, contained compulsory language in one provision and aspirational language in another. Table 1 offers representative exemplars of compulsory and aspirational attendance expectation policies. Table 2 offers exemplars of the pedagogic justifications, the attendance/achievement link.

**Table 1: Exemplars of Attendance Policy Expectations**

<b>Compulsory Policies</b>	The Board of Education as an agency of the State is required to enforce regular attendance of students. The Board recognizes that the presence in the classroom enables the student to participate in instruction, class discussion, and other related activities.
	Attendance shall be required of all District students, except for those exempt under Policy 5223 or by other provisions of State law, during days and hours that the school is in session or during the attendance sessions to which s/he has been assigned.
	The Board of Education requires all students enrolled in the schools of this District to attend school regularly in accordance with the laws of the state.
	In order to receive the best possible education students must attend school regularly.
	Law requires attendance in school. Michigan School Code; Section 731 reads: "Every parent, guardian or other person in the State of Michigan having control and charge of any child between the ages of six (6) and sixteen (16) years of age shall be required to send such child to the public schools during the entire school year, and such attendance shall be continuous and consecutive for the school year fixed the district in which such child is enrolled." The Board of Education as an agency of the State is required to enforce regular attendance of students. Regular attendance is considered part of the responsibility expected by the school of the students and families.
	Regular and continuous school attendance is required by Michigan statute and is the responsibility of students and parents. The schools are responsible for setting minimum attendance standards and keeping parents informed of their student's attendance record.
<b>Aspirational Policies</b>	The Board encourages regular attendance at school by all students.
	The Board expects regular and punctual attendance at school by all students.
	The Board, other than for illness or other reasons specifically referenced in Board policy, discourages any absence by any student, K-12 or pre-primary, from school.
	Because school attendance is a major factor related to academic success, the students of [name-omitted] High School are expected to attend school on a regular and consistent basis. Students must be present if they intend to take full advantage of the opportunities offered to them in the classroom...It is the responsibility of the students, parents, faculty, and administration to recognize the importance of school attendance and its impact on academic achievement.
	Attendance Guidelines - (Elementary School): All children are expected to attend school every day.
<b>Mixed Policies</b>	The Michigan Compulsory Attendance Law states that students must attend school until sixteen (16) years of age. The [name-omitted] Board of Education strongly supports a policy utilizing every resource available to involve students in an ongoing educational program on the basis of regular attendance at school.

**Table 2: Exemplars of Pedagogic Justifications: The Attendance/Achievement Link**

<b>Academic Success</b>	The Board recognizes that the presence in the classroom enables the student to participate in instruction, class discussion, and other related activities. As such, regular attendance and classroom participation are integral to instilling incentives for the student to excel.
	Presence in the classroom aids in instilling concepts of self-discipline and exposes a student to group interactions with teachers and fellow students. Such presence also enables a student to hear and participate in class instruction, discussion and other related learning experiences. These and similar considerations are proper educational values which will not necessarily be fully reflected in test results.
	The District's educational program is predicated upon the presence of the student and requires continuity of instruction and classroom participation. The regular contact of students with one another in the classroom and their participation in a well-planned instructional activity under the tutelage of a competent teacher are vital to this purpose.
	Frequent absences from school disrupt the continuity of instruction, learning, and the benefit of regular classroom instruction. The entire process of education requires continuity of instruction, classroom participation, meaningful learning experiences, and study in order to reach the goal of maximum educational benefits for each individual student. This principle of education is well established, and underlies and gives purpose to the requirement of compulsory schooling in Michigan.
	It is important that children learn the value of prompt and regular attendance and establish positive patterns at an early age.
	The ... staff and administration recognize the strong relationship between positive attendance and success in the classroom. Regular presence in the classroom enables the student to actively participate in classroom instruction and is essential to academic success. Students who do not regularly attend will not master the subject matter.
<b>Employability/ Life Skills</b>	Regular attendance contributes not only to the probability of scholastic success but also to the development of attitudes of consistent performance, which will carry over into adult life.
	Regular attendance at school teaches self-discipline and responsibility, which are characteristics of reliable and employable adults.
	Attendance, punctuality, participation, and responsibility will be ever-present obligations in the daily lives of our students long after they have left ... Public Schools. One purpose of school is to prepare students to be responsible citizens and employees.

# Attendance-Related Definitions

School attendance policies across the district reflect more or less complex regulatory schemes that seek to define attendance requirements within the context of state law and district policy. At the heart of these policies are definitions of attendance and absenteeism, excused and unexcused absences, and excused and unexcused tardiness. Additional provisions related to special release, absence for religious instruction, disciplinary absences, and leaves of absence supplement more foundational everyday policies and accompanying practices. An examination of attendance counting practices concludes the discussion in this section.

## Definitions of Attendance/Absenteeism

The majority of responding districts' policies contained language defining attendance and absenteeism. While attendance generally is assumed as being on-site, that is, physically present on the school campus, some districts recognize that attendance may be defined off-site when the student's presence is required at any place where school is considered to be in session. Absence generally is defined as "non-presence". Additionally, some districts find students to be absent if they are tardy beyond a specific time period, though that time period varies among districts from ten minutes to after the first hour of classes. One district has determined that "a tardiness of more than ten (10) minutes will be treated as an excused absence from that class (presumably the student arrives after the ten minute deadline). Another district indicates that "students who attend any part of a class shall be recorded as present."

At least one district requires that student attendance be "continuous and consecutive" for the school year. Finally, although not relevant to the current study, one district provided an "Attendance Policy for 18-Year Olds (Optional)" that allows students over eighteen to elect an alternative policy for students who have reached the age of majority. Table 3 provides common policy language related to off-site attendance, absence as non-presence, and the relationship between absence and tardiness.

**Table 3: Exemplars of Attendance and Absenteeism Definitions**

<b>Off-site attendance</b>	Attendance need not always be within the school facilities, but a student will be considered to be in attendance if present at any place where school is in session by authority of the Board.
	The Board shall consider each student assigned to a program of other guided learning experiences, authorized under Policy 2370, to be in regular attendance for the program provided that s/he reports to such staff member s/he is assigned for guidance at the place in which s/he is conducting study, and regularly demonstrates progress toward the objectives of the course of study.
<b>Absence as non-presence</b>	Absence is defined as non-presence in the school setting any time beyond the start of school.
<b>Absence as tardiness</b>	Absence is defined as non-presence in the assigned location any time beyond the tardiness limit.
	A student will be considered tardy rather than absent if s/he is in his/her assigned location within twenty (20) minutes after the official start of the school day or activity.
	Students coming to school after the first ten (10) minutes must check in with the secretary in the attendance office. A tardiness of more than ten (10) minutes will be treated as an excused absence from class.
	Absence is defined as non-presence in the school setting any time beyond the first hour of classes.
	(Elementary school) Any child arriving at school after 10:30 a.m. is considered absent for the morning. Any child arriving at school after 2:00 p.m. is considered absent for the afternoon.

## Definitions and Examples of Excused Absences

Few policies defined excused absences; those that did linked the excuse to parent/guardian notification and explanation to justify the absence. Two policies required notification within a specified time period and one required that the school principal accept the explanation provided. Table 4 provides excused absences definitions from all three districts.

Most responding districts provided policies that contain classifications of excusable reasons for absence. Common excusable reasons included illness (student or family member), death of a relative, recovery from an accident, professional appointments (though some districts encouraged parents to schedule these outside of school hours), court-ordered appearances, religious observation, and other absences deemed appropriate by school officials. Less common excuses included pre-arranged family trips and college visitations (the latter not relevant to elementary school children) and work at home due to the absence of a parent (limited to the term of absence and applicable only to children under age eleven). These classifications had two main formats: excused absences were either simply listed (the policies reflect two main types of lists) or were listed with accompanying explanations. Table 5 provides examples of lists typical of each format.

**Table 4: Excused Absences Definitions**

<b>Excused Absence Definitions</b>	Excused absences are those accounted for through parent contact, medical/legal documentation, or school activities. All other absences will be considered unexcused.
	<b>Excused Absences</b> When a student is absent for any part or all of the day, building procedure requires that an explanation of the absence be furnished to the office. This can be done by the parent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contacting the high school on the day of the absence, and</li> <li>Providing a written explanation upon the student's return to school. Any absence which is not cleared up within two (2) school days will be considered an unexcused absence.</li> </ul>
	Excused Absence: Students are excused if parent(s)/guardian(s) contact the school attendance office before or during the first day of absence or within 24 hours of the student's return to school, and the reason provided is accepted by the school Principal.

**Table 5: Typical Excused Absence Policies**

<b>Typical Excused Absence Lists</b>	<p>The Board considers the following factors to be reasonable excuses for time missed at school: A. illness, B. recovery from accident, C. required court attendance, D. professional appointments, E. death in the immediate family, F. observation or celebration of a bona fide religious holiday, and G. such other good cause as may be acceptable to the Superintendent or his/her designee.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>College visits (on or off campus),</li> <li>Illness (in or out-of-school),</li> <li>Pre-arranged excused absences for student participation in approved non school competition and performance activities,</li> <li>Family travel (with prior approval),</li> <li>Medical appointments that cannot be scheduled outside of the school day,</li> <li>Court-ordered appearances,</li> <li>Death in the student's immediate family, close friend, or relative,</li> <li>Religious holidays,</li> <li>School-related absences,</li> <li>Homebound/hospitalized,</li> <li>Suspension,</li> <li>Official school closures, and</li> <li>Other, as authorized by the Principal or designee.</li> </ul>
<b>Typical Excused Absence List with Explanations</b>	<p>A written excuse for absence from school may be approved for one (1) or more of the following reasons or conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Personal Illness: The principal may require a doctor's confirmation if s/he deems it advisable.</li> <li>B. Illness in the Family</li> <li>C. Quarantine of the Home: This is limited to the length of the quarantine as fixed by the proper health officials.</li> <li>D. Death of a Relative</li> <li>E. Observance of Religious Holidays: Any student shall be excused for the purpose of observing a religious holiday consistent with his/her creed or belief.</li> <li>F. Absence during the School Day for Professional Appointments: Parents are to be encouraged to schedule medical, dental, legal, and other necessary appointments other than during the school day.</li> </ul> <p>Since this is not always possible, when a student is to be absent for part of the day:</p> <p>The student shall have a statement to that effect from his/her parents, and The student may be required to bring a signed statement from the doctor, dentist.</p>

## Truancy and Definitions of Unexcused Absences

The district policies for truancy contained nearly identical definitional language across most districts:

A student shall be considered truant each day or part of the day s/he is inexcusably absent from his/her assigned location.

Truancy demonstrates a deliberate disregard for the educational program and education considers it a serious matter. Administrative action taken will be as follows.

Different policies articulate different steps to be taken as a consequence of truancy, either containing all or various combinations of two of the three following actions: 1) "A record of the truancy will be entered in the student's record file;" 2) "no credit will be recorded for work missed as a result of truancy;" and 3) "A parent conference may be held."

Several policies define students as "habitual truants" when, "in spite of warnings and/or his/her parents' efforts to ensure attendance, s/he has accumulated [a specified number of] trancies during a semester." Specified numbers vary widely, from three to ten trancies.

Policies also indicate district engagement of local authorities to assist with attendance-related problems. Some policies indicate that the district will work KENT ISD to monitor attendance and tardiness. Another policy references support from local authorities to deal with school problems related to attendance. A number of policies indicate that truants who are minor parents should be reported to the County Family Independence Agency. Finally, policies suggest that the discipline of truant students should comply with school board policies and due process. Table 6 provides examples of truancy provisions.

As previously noted, absences may be deemed unexcused, for example, if the parent/guardian fails to contact the school with proper explanation within the specified time period, or if the school official does not accept the reason given for the absence. In one district, the policy explicitly recognizes the principal's discretion when excusing absences. Note that at least one district specifically prohibits an organized "Skip Day". Only two district policies appear to provide specific examples of unexcused absences. See Table 7 for lists of unexcused absences from those two districts.

**Table 6: Exemplars of Truancy Provisions**

<b>Common Policy Example</b>	<p>A student shall be considered truant each day or part of the day s/he is unexcusably absent from his/her assigned location. Truancy demonstrates a deliberate disregard for the educational program and is considered as a serious matter. Administrative action taken will be as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. No credit will be recorded for work missed as a result of truancy.</li> <li>B. A record of the truancy will be entered in the student's record file.</li> <li>C. A parent conference may be held.</li> </ul>
<b>Habitual Truancy</b>	<p>A student shall be considered an "habitual truant" when, in spite of warnings and/or his/her parent's efforts to ensure attendance, s/he has accumulated ten (10) trancies during a semester.</p>
<b>Local Support</b>	<p>The Superintendent shall include in his/her annual report any information relative to students not attending school, which he/she feels, should be called to the attention of the Board and the community. The Superintendent shall attempt to enlist the support and cooperation of local authorities in dealing with school problems created by students not attending school. A significant part of the school day, for student attendance purposes, shall be 70 percent of the time in attendance at school.</p>
	<p>Truant students who are minor parents are to be reported to the County Family Independence Agency.</p>
	<p>We work with the Kent Intermediate School District (KENT ISD) to monitor attendance and tardiness. If either becomes excessive, a truancy report is sent to the KENT ISD. Warning letters will precede a truancy report.</p>
<b>Parent Notification</b>	<p>Truancy: Students absent from school without parental knowledge/permission are considered truant. It is the policy of the school to notify the parent and work with the family to eliminate such behavior.</p>
<b>Investigation Processes</b>	<p>Compulsory Attendance Requirements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Parents are expected to report student absences to the school office daily. If absences are noted, but no call is forthcoming, the school in turn calls the home. In each case, the reason for the absence is recorded.</li> <li>2. If truancy is suspected, the building principal makes a phone contact or physical appearance at the home; the building principal or designee may be utilized.</li> <li>3. If steps one and two fail, a letter is sent explaining the seriousness of the situation.</li> <li>4. If the situation is not resolved, the case is referred to the Kent Intermediate School District.</li> </ol>
<b>Due Process</b>	<p>The disciplining of truant students shall be in accord with Board policies and due process, as defined in Policy 5611 and the Student Code of Conduct.</p>
	<p>DUE PROCESS is the right of the student/parent contesting the loss of credit due to excessive absences to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Have an opportunity to state his/her side of the story,</li> <li>B. Be permitted to ask questions for defense, and</li> <li>C. Have access to an appeal process of the building principal, the Superintendent or his/her designee, and the Board of Education.</li> </ul>



**Table 7: Listing of Unexcused Absences**

<b>Unexcused Absences</b>	<p>The following is a listing of attendance behavior that results in an unexcused absence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cutting class,</li> <li>Oversleeping,</li> <li>Absence from a class to do work or study for another class,</li> <li>Absence from a class to work in the library media center,</li> <li>Failure to clear up an absence in two (2) days,</li> <li>Sent from a class for disciplinary reasons,</li> <li>Leaving class early without the permission of classroom teacher,</li> <li>Leaving the building because of illness or accident without reporting to the office,</li> <li>Falsifying notes or telephone calls, and</li> <li>Students who are in the building (i.e., library media center, writing center, etc.) And fail to report to class will be given an unexcused absence.</li> </ul>
	<p>Examples may include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non pre-arranged travel,</li> <li>Missed bus (public transportation),</li> <li>Traffic congestion,</li> <li>Over sleeping,</li> <li>Truancy,</li> <li>Refusal to attend the alternative learning program (high school only),</li> <li>Babysitting,</li> <li>Leaving school without permission, and</li> <li>Job related absence.</li> </ul>

## Definitions and Reporting Procedures for Tardiness

Students generally are defined as tardy if they are not in class when the bell rings. As noted above, a student tardy that continues beyond a specified time period may be deemed an absence. Few districts offered explicit tardiness policies, only two provide examples of excused tardiness, and only one provides examples of unexcused tardiness. Reporting procedures appear to vary depending on the age of the tardy student. One policy requires a family escort for young tardy students. Table 8 provides tardiness policies, including available policies for excused and unexcused tardiness.

**Table 8: Tardiness Definitions and Procedures**

<b>Definitions and Procedures for Tardiness</b>	<p>Tardiness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Students not in homeroom or in class when the late bell rings are considered tardy.</li> <li>B. All students who are tardy to school must report to the principal's office to sign in.</li> <li>C. When a teacher detains a student after class, s/he shall issue a late pass for the student's next class.</li> <li>D. Teachers are requested to refer cases of chronic tardiness to the principal.</li> </ul>
	<p>Tardiness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Students not in homeroom or in class when the late bell rings are considered tardy.</li> <li>B. Middle School students who are tardy to school must report to the principal's office to sign in. High school students will report directly to class.</li> <li>C. When a teacher detains a student after class, s/he shall issue a late pass for the student's next class.</li> <li>D. Teachers are requested to refer only those cases of chronic tardiness to the principal.</li> <li>E. When a High School/Middle School student has been tardy to a homeroom or to a class on three (3) occasions will be assigned by the principal. An additional consequence is to be assigned for every one (1) tardy thereafter.</li> </ul>
	<p>Students arriving after 8:40 am must sign-in at the office and make any necessary lunch arrangements before proceeding to their classroom. Due to the young age of the children, an adult family member must escort a tardy child to the office.</p>
	<p>Any child arriving at school late must stop in the office and get a pass before being admitted to class.</p>
<b>Excused Tardiness</b>	<p>Excused Tardiness: Pass to class. Examples may include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical appointment (must have written documentation from provider),</li> <li>• School-related, and</li> <li>• Teacher/counseling conference.</li> </ul>
	<p>We do not count students tardy if they arrive late due to a late bus.</p>
<b>Unexcused Tardiness</b>	<p>Unexcused Tardiness: No pass to class, but admitted to class. Examples may include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over sleeping,</li> <li>• Late arrival, and</li> <li>• Babysitting.</li> </ul>

## Release and Other Special Provisions

While not all districts appear to have release policies related to late arrival and early dismissal, existing release policies take essentially three forms, reflecting varying degrees of notification and approval. The seemingly most stringent policy requires parents to submit an advanced written request outlining compelling circumstances for release; the principal must determine that the reasons provided are justifiable. This policy also addresses issues related to release of students to custodial and non-custodial parents. A second set of policies require that the release occur with the knowledge and approval of the principal and the parents, although no advanced notice is required. These policies also generally provide student protection against release to any government agency unless necessary conditions have been met. Finally one policy only requires that students notify the attendance office before leaving early. Table 9 provides examples of each type of policy.

**Table 9: Exemplars of Release Policies**

<b>Prior Notification and Approval</b>	<p>Late Arrival and Early Dismissal:</p> <p>It is necessary that a student be in attendance throughout the school day in order to benefit fully from the educational program of the District.</p> <p>The Board of Education recognizes, however, that from time-to-time compelling circumstances require that a student be late to school or dismissed before the end of the school day.</p> <p>As agent responsible for the education of the children of this District, the Board shall require that the student's parent notify the school in advance of such absences by personal request, which shall state the reason for the tardiness or early dismissal. Justifiable reasons shall be determined by the principal.</p> <p>If the courts have awarded custody of the student to one parent by the courts, the parent of custody shall provide the school with a copy of the custody order and inform the school in writing of any limitations in the rights of the noncustodial parent. Absent such notice, the school will presume they can release the student into the care of either parent.</p>
<b>Notification and Approval</b>	<p>Students Leaving School During the Day:</p> <p>No staff member shall permit or cause any student to leave school prior to the regular hour of dismissal except with the knowledge and approval of the principal and with the knowledge and approval of the student's parents.</p> <p>The school will not release any students to any government agency without proper warrant or written parental permission except in the event of an emergency as determined by the principal.</p>
<b>Notification</b>	<p>All students must notify the Attendance Office staff before leaving the school during the school day. If they leave the building without doing so, they are unexcused.</p> <p>The school only allows parent(s)/guardian(s) to call in absences.</p>
<b>Release to Government Agency</b>	<p>No student will be released to any government agency without proper warrant or written parental permission except in the event of an emergency as determined by the principal.</p>

Additionally, some responding districts have provisions that govern absences under special circumstances. (While some of these policies might easily be discussed under excused and unexcused absences, they may be considered special release provisions so are included here.) Across the districts, these circumstances relate to: student physical or mental condition (including attitude); trip requests and vacations; extra-curricular activities; religious instruction (both absence for religious instruction and religious exemption); school-related missed periods (e.g. for field trips, music events, etc.); alternative education; and special education, including Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) programs and services. Note that one policy provides that “hours lost because of excused absences or illness or other causes are deemed to be ‘provided’” in ECSE programs. Table 10 provides examples of these policies.

**Table 10: Exemplars of Special Attendance-Related Provisions**

<b>Physical or Mental Conditions</b>	A student may not be required to attend school if it is shown to the satisfaction of the Superintendent that the mental condition of the student is such that s/he cannot benefit from instruction, or that the bodily condition of the student is such as to prevent attendance at school or that s/he is receiving instruction at home from a person certified to teach the branches of education in which instruction is required.
<b>Trip Requests and Vacations</b>	Trip Requests: This request must be made at least three (3) school days in advance of departure in order that an approximate outline of materials to be covered during the period of absence can be provided by the teacher.
	Advance Dismissal Requests: The Board strongly discourages students absences during the course of the school year. Adequate vacation time is provided for family trips, etc., during the course of the year. If such an absence is inevitable, planned absences must be requested in advance (five (5) school days) and in writing by the parent. Class work missed must be made up before the absence unless the teacher makes other arrangements.
	Parents may arrange for their child to accompany them on a family trip. However, the student must prearrange the absence with his/her teachers and the main office at least two (2) weeks prior to leaving. Assignment request forms may be picked up in the main office. The forms should be initiated by each teacher and then returned to the office.
	<p>Student Vacations During the School Year: Students are permitted to go on vacation during the school year without penalty. The purpose of this administrative guideline is to accommodate parents who want to take their vacations during the school year because of company (industry) policies and the desire to enjoy that time as a family.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Whenever a proposed absence-for-vacation is requested, parents must discuss it with the principal. The length of absence should be made clear, and those involved should have an opportunity to express their views on the potential effects of the absence.</li> <li>B. The student can be given his/her books and the approximate material and pages to be covered.</li> <li>C. Separate daily assignments may be given.</li> <li>D. The time missed will be counted as absence, but shall not be a factor in determining grades.</li> <li>E. Absence for vacation shall not be allowed during the last week of either semester.</li> </ul>

<b>Extra-Curricular Activities</b>	Extracurricular Participation: A student must be in attendance for at least three hours in order to participate in a sporting event or extracurricular performance that day. All absences must be excused on the day of participation. This requirement may only be waived by administration per rules established by the Michigan High School Athletic Association.
<b>Religious Instruction</b>	Absences for Religious Instruction: The Board of Education desires to cooperate with those parents who wish to provide for religious instruction for the children but also recognizes its responsibility to enforce the attendance requirements of the State. Upon the signed request of a student's parent, the Board will allow exceptions to the student's continuous attendance at school: A. for religious instruction outside the school building for no more than two (2) class hours per week; B. for attendance at confirmation classes provided the child is twelve (12) or thirteen (13) years of age and the instructional period is no longer than five (5) months in either of those years. A student must be properly registered and a copy of such registration must be filed with the principal. The time for release for religious instruction or education shall be arranged by the Superintendent in keeping with the regulations of the State Board of Education.
<b>Religious Exemption</b>	Any student, who has completed the eighth grade before reaching 16 years of age and who is a member of a recognized church or religious denomination that objects to a regular public high school education, may attend classes in a regularly supervised non-public program of instruction approved by the State Board of Education. Attendance of such a student in a non-public educational program shall conform to state law. It is the parent's responsibility to provide transportation to such non-public religious activities.
<b>School-Related Missed Periods</b>	School-related missed periods of instruction such as field trips, athletic events, music events, college visitations (limit two (2)), and mentorship days... will not count toward the maximum of seven (7).
<b>Alternative and Special Education</b>	Alternative Education Attendance Policy: We believe that attendance is essential to show that learning is taking place. 85% attendance over the course of a marking period is currently the norm to be eligible for credit in a subject. If attendance falls below 85%, eligibility in the program will be in jeopardy. If the student misses more than nine days in a trimester marking period, the student will receive "No credit" in all classes in which attendance exceeds nine absences. A student is expected to bring a written explanation signed by a parent, doctor or other official within two days of the student's return in order to excuse the absence. If students choose to leave the site, the students are not expected to return that day. Students who are late returning from break or lunch will be marked absent for the remainder of the day. Students under 16 years old need the permission of their guardians to leave the site.
	Home Community and ECSE Classrooms: Membership for students enrolled in Early Childhood Special Education classrooms under rule R340.1754 is computed on the basis of the required 450 instructional hours that are scheduled and provided. Membership for students enrolled in non classroom services under rule R340.1755 is computed on the basis of the number of instructional hours within 180 school days that are scheduled and provided. Hours lost because of excused absences for illness or other causes are deemed to be "provided".

## Making up Missed Work

Many of the district policies that permit make up work typically contain the common language reflected in Table 11. Policies may specify that make up work is permitted for absences, suspension, or both. Some policies specify that make-up work must be done with a “properly certified teacher” while another involves the student’s counselor in arranging for make-up work. Finally, one district allows make up work at “Saturday School” after six absences.

**Table 11: Exemplars of Make Up Work Policies**

<b>Common Language</b>	Students will be given the opportunity for making up work missed due to approved absences. The length of time for completion of make-up work shall be commensurate with the length of the absence.
	Students will be given the opportunity to make-up work missed due to suspension.
	The make-up work must be completed and presented to the teacher upon his/her return to school. Tests missed during the period of suspension may be made up by the students by contacting the teacher on the day of his/her return to school. The teacher, at his/her convenience, may administer the test or assign alternate written work in lieu of the test missed.
<b>Counselor Involvement</b>	Make-Up Opportunities A student may make up units of study with a properly certificated teacher if prior approval has been granted by the principal.
<b>Counselor Involvement</b>	A student wishing to make up work must call his/her counselor. The counselor will consult with the student’s teachers and send assignments to the student.
<b>Teacher Satisfaction</b>	All work missed due to any absence must be completed to the satisfaction of the teacher. It is the student’s responsibility to contact each teacher to arrange for make-up of all work missed. Students on suspension will be required to turn in work on the day they return to class.
<b>Reinstating Credit</b>	Reinstate Class Credit: When a student exceeds six (6) absences Saturday School is available to make-up instructional time missed. If a student goes beyond six (6) class absences, each period must be made up in order to receive credit. Saturday School will be open between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and noon on Saturdays. An hour must be made up for each period absent. A complete day in Saturday School is equal to a complete day of school. Students are to arrange for make-up work with their teachers prior to attending Saturday School. (If a student needs to make-up lab work in a lab-type class, this work will be in addition to Saturday School time.)

# Description of Attendance Enforcement Policies

## Attendance-Related Responsibilities

As discussed previously, some district policies clearly but simply mandate student attendance responsibilities. For example, one policy states “Students shall: a) Arrive to each and every class on time prepared to learn; b) Monitor their own attendance and adhere to the consequences; and c) Report attendance errors to their teacher.” Another policy affirms “Students are expected to be in the classroom when school begins. It is the responsibility of the parent and student to see that the student arrives at school on time.”

As noted above, parents and guardians are expected to support regular student attendance and notify the school about student absences according to district notification procedures (although some policies do not explicitly recognize guardians). Required notification may be in writing, by phone, or both. Table 12 summarizes parent/guardian responsibilities.

School board responsibilities, also previously introduced in a prior section, rest on state-mandated authority to enforce regular attendance of students. A review of policies indicates accompanying board responsibilities to verify absenteeism statements, investigate the causes of absenteeism, and report absenteeism to the Intermediate School District. Board policies vary in the framing of investigative authority, reserving the right to investigate the cause of attendance violations along an apparent continuum. Some policies appear to adopt a proactive approach to chronic absenteeism, allowing board investigation after a single absence. Other policies reserve the right only after prolonged absence and/or repeated unexplained absence and tardiness. Table 13 provides exemplars of these investigatory powers in attendance-related matters.

Superintendent responsibilities center on the development, implementation, and enforcement of attendance and record keeping policies and procedures that comply with state education law and administrative regulations. Various district superintendents also are mandated, among other things, to require written explanations of absenteeism; to develop administrative guidelines and procedures to ensure that student academic progress and/or credits are not unfairly affected by attendance problems as well as address problems with habitual truants; and to make attendance reports to the board. Examples of superintendent responsibilities are offered in Table 14.

**Table 12: Exemplars Summarizing Parent/Guardian Responsibilities**

<b>Parent/Guardian Responsibilities</b>	<p>It is the responsibility of the parent(s)/guardian(s) to see that their child attends school. Schools, on the other hand, must inform parent(s)/guardian(s) when their child is not in school. Consequently, a specific attendance procedure has been adopted by the public schools that are understandable and reasonable in its expectations of students and parent(s)/guardian(s).</p> <p>Parents/Guardians shall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Support their child in arriving to school on time.</li> <li>B. Communicate and reinforce school expectations around attendance.</li> <li>C. Monitor accumulated absences and tardies.</li> <li>D. Report attendance errors to the teacher, attendance office, Principal, or designee.</li> <li>E. Contact the school to report the absences daily.</li> </ul>
<b>Parent Notification - Written</b>	<p>The Superintendent shall require, from the parent of each student or from an adult student who has been absent for any reason, a written statement and/or confirmation of the cause for such absence. The Board reserves the right to verify such statements and to investigate the cause of each single absence.</p>
<b>Parent Notification - Phone</b>	<p>Please call the attendance line whenever your child is absent. Call this 24-hour attendance line by 9:00am, each day your child is absent.</p>
	<p>On the day of a student's absence, parents should call [number omitted] between 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. to verify the absence. If the school does not receive a call on the day of the student's absence, the student's parents/guardians will be called at home or at work to verify the absence.</p>
<b>Parent/Guardian Notification – Written and by phone</b>	<p>Parents or the guardian must contact the attendance office when a student misses a day of instruction. Parents/Guardians may call (616) 363-4857 to communicate information regarding the student's absence. The attendance office is open from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The attendance phone operates twenty-four (24) hours a day with an answering machine in use after 4:00 p.m. Parents may send a note with the student explaining the reason for the absence. If a note is written, please include a telephone number where the parent/guardian can be reached.</p>
	<p>When illness religious holiday, or an emergency situation make it necessary for a child to be absent, please follow these procedures:</p> <p>Please call the school as soon as you know your child will be absent. In the event a child must leave school early, please call for him/her at the office and sign the check out register. When your child is not well, we suggest that he/she be kept home until you know that the child's illness is not contagious. Except for doctor's orders, we assume a child is well enough to participate in all aspects of a school day. Parents are asked to send a note that explains any other circumstances. Our responsibility is to keep the entire school from being exposed to communicable diseases.</p>



**Table 13: Exemplars of School Board Investigatory and Reporting Powers**

<b>Single Absence</b>	The Board reserves the right to verify such statements and to investigate the cause of each single absence.
<b>Prolonged Absence</b>	The Board reserves the right to verify such statements and to investigate the cause of each:  A. Prolonged absence, and B. Repeated unexplained absence and tardiness.
<b>Repeated Unexplained Absence or Tardiness</b>	The Board reserves the right to verify such statements and to investigate the cause of each repeated unexplained absence and tardiness.
<b>Report to KENT ISD</b>	The Board may report to the Intermediate School District infractions of the law regarding the attendance of students below the age of sixteen (16).

**Table 14: Exemplars of Superintendant Attendance-Related Responsibilities**

<b>Written Explanation</b>	The Superintendent shall require, from the parent of each student or from an adult student who has been absent for any reason, a written statement and/or confirmation of the cause for such absence. The Board reserves the right to verify such statements and to investigate the cause of each single absence.
<b>Guidelines and Procedures</b>	The Superintendent shall develop procedures for the attendance of students which:  A. Ensure a school session which is in conformity with the requirements of the law; B. Ensure that students absent for any excusable reason have an opportunity to make up work they missed; C. Ensure the student is not given a failing grade or his/her credit is not unconditionally revoked where lack of attendance is the sole or primary determining factor, but which allow reduction in grade or denial of credit, if the student does not make appropriate use of make-up sessions provided by the instructor or administrator; D. Govern the keeping of attendance records in accordance with the rules of the State Board and the Michigan Department of Education Pupil Accounting Manual, including a written electronic attendance procedure, if applicable; and E. Identify the habitual truant, investigate the cause(s) of his/her behavior, and consider modification of his/her educational program to meet particular needs and interests.
<b>Board Reports</b>	The Superintendent shall include an attendance report as a section of the annual report to the Board and may report attendance problems to the Board at other times, as he/she deems necessary.

Depending on the district, professional staff members are explicitly responsible for encouraging student attendance. Additionally, in some districts, administrative staff members are directed to incorporate student attendance rules into staff and student handbooks and/or provide appropriate notice to parents/guardians. Table 15 displays common policies reflecting administration and professional staff responsibilities.

In the districts where policies were available, the primary responsibility for recording attendance and documenting excused absences is assigned to teachers, though responsibilities vary depending on the grade level. One type of policy delegates recording responsibilities to classroom teachers at the elementary level, “under the supervision

of the building principal and upon forms prescribed by the Superintendent and State Department of Education. Another policy engages teachers more deeply in monitoring attendance and preventing/addressing attendance problems, requiring teachers to:

- a. Monitor the hallways during class passing periods.
- b. Record hourly attendance.
- c. Require a pass for student movement within the building during class time.
- d. Make parent/guardian contacts when tardiness and/or attendance is problematic (see progressive consequences).
- e. Positively encourage prompt arrival in class.
- f. Develop, implement, and evaluate the success of interventions.
- g. Admit tardy students to class (see consequences).

One district imposes on “all staff” the responsibility to “make every effort” to monitor the school campus and specifically school hallways before and after class.

Four districts provided three different policies addressing the roles and responsibilities of attendance officers as indicated in Table 16.

**Table 15: Exemplars of Administration/Professional Staff Responsibilities**

<b>Administration Roles</b>	<p>Therefore, the District shall develop procedures reflecting the following:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The importance of a student’s attendance and punctuality.  The importance of staff, parent(s)/guardian(s), and community members working collaboratively to ensure students are present and on time to each class.  The importance of guidance in gaining an understanding that attendance and timelines are imperative to a student’s success in our society.  The importance of monitoring attendance procedures and providing timely responses.</p> <p>Responsibilities and Consequences  Everyone has a role. Administration shall:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Clearly communicate expectations about attendance to all stakeholders.</li> <li>B. Support teaching staff by monitoring student attendance and tardiness.</li> <li>C. Counsel students that are chronically tardy or absent.</li> <li>D. Make parent/guardian contacts.</li> <li>E. Coordinate the development, implementation, and success of interventions.</li> <li>F. Supervise tardy/attendance school-wide monitoring.</li> <li>G. Follow-up with students not adhering to attendance policies.</li> </ol>
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<b>Professional Staff Member Responsibilities</b>	<p>Promoting and fostering desired student attendance habits requires a commitment from the administration, faculty, and parents. No single individual or group can - in and of itself - successfully accomplish this task. A professional staff member's responsibility must include, but not be limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Providing meaningful learning experiences every day;</li> <li>B. Therefore, a student who is absent from any given class period would be missing a significant component of the course;</li> <li>C. Speaking frequently of the importance of students being in class, on time, ready to participate;</li> <li>D. Keeping accurate attendance records (excused vs. unexcused);</li> <li>E. Requiring an admit slip from a student when s/he returns from an absence and invoking a consequence if s/he does not have one;</li> <li>F. Incorporating defined, daily participation as part of the teaching/learning process and each grading period (see AG 2220); and</li> <li>G. Requiring students to make up missed quizzes, tests, and other pertinent assignments.</li> </ul>
<b>Notification to Parents</b>	<p>Parents will be notified either by phone or letter whenever a student has an unexcused absence.</p> <p>Parents will be notified by letter when a student has accumulated eight (8) absences in a class.</p> <p>Parents will be notified by phone when a student has accumulated ten (10) absences. They will be informed of any Attendance Committee meetings and/or action pertaining to their student's attendance profile. In the event that parents are not satisfied with the outcome of the Attendance Committee's action, they should contact the principal for a conference.</p> <p>School Responsibilities to Notify Parents: When possible, the attendance secretary will contact parents/guardians when their student has been absent without notification to the school. A letter will be sent to parents after four (4) missed days of instruction and after six (6) missed days. The six (6) day letter will indicate credit is lost in the classes where the student has exceeded six (6) missed days of instruction.</p>
<b>Incorporation into Handbooks</b>	<p>Rules and regulations that conform to applicable federal or state laws and administrative rules regarding student absences shall be developed by the administrative staff and reviewed by the Board. Those rules will be incorporated into the appropriate staff and student handbooks. Where student handbooks are not available for a particular program, the administration shall ensure that appropriate written notice of the absence rules for that program is provided to parents/guardians.</p>

**Table 16: Policies Related to Attendance Officers**

<b>Selection of Attendance Officers</b>	The Board shall select (or not select) attendance officers in accordance with current law.
<b>Cooperation with Attendance Officers</b>	District personnel are to follow the state guidelines regarding student attendance accounting and reporting. The District's staff is to cooperate with attendance officers and law enforcement personnel when enforcing the compulsory attendance laws. The Board may select an attendance officer in accordance with current law.
	The Superintendent may appoint an attendance officer(s) in accordance with the law. The administration shall enlist the support and cooperation of the Kent Intermediate School District in dealing with student truancy.

## Attendance Tracking and Record Keeping

As previously noted, district superintendents are charged with developing and implementing attendance tracking and record keeping systems. Those district policies that addressed record keeping fell into two categories: development of electronic record keeping systems (subject to district technological capabilities) and record retention requirements. As discussed above, some policies explicitly referenced state legal and regulatory mandates. Table 17 provides exemplars of each.

**Table 17: Exemplars of Tracking and Record Keeping Policies**

<b>System Development</b>	Daily attendance records shall be maintained for each student in each school. The Superintendent is authorized to develop and utilize an electronic system of attendance record keeping subject to the technology capabilities of the District and to generate appropriate administrative rules to implement the system.
<b>Record Keeping</b>	Each absence shall be explained in writing and signed by the student's parents. The excuse shall be submitted to the principal and filed as part of the student's school record.
<b>State Requirements</b>	The Superintendent shall develop procedures for the attendance of students, which govern the keeping of attendance records in accordance with the rules of the State Board and the Michigan Department of Education Pupil Accounting Manual, including a written electronic attendance procedure, if applicable.

## Attendance Problems and Consequences

Districts count accumulated absences differently. Some districts appear to calculate the percentage attendance a student must have over a marking period to earn class credit (e.g., 70%, 85%). Other districts appear to use numerical values that may be calculated by missed periods generally or by classes specifically. In one district, "the ten (10) day maximum absences apply to each class and are not a total of all classes." In another, "missed

days...will be counted towards the seven (7) missed periods of instruction,” with no indication whether this is by class.

Disciplinary consequences similarly vary among districts depending on the duration and accumulation of absences. Some districts use progressive consequences for unexcused class absences. Some district policies are relative vague about attendance related discipline. One notes, for example, “If a student violates the attendance or other rules of the school, s/he should be disciplined appropriately for the misconduct.”

Districts differ as to whether or not attendance problems should impact student grades. In one district “unexcused absences will result in detention time equal to the amount of time missed,” while in another “an unexcused absence will result in the student losing credit for that day’s work.” In two districts, ten or more absences in a semester class will trigger heightened disciplinary action that may include teachers removing them from the class and receiving an E and no credit.

In contrast, other districts explicitly mandate that student attendance should not affect the student’s grade: “Such guidelines should provide that a student’s grade in any course is based on his/her performance in the instructional setting and is not reduced for reasons of conduct. If a student violates attendance or other rules of the school, s/he should be disciplined appropriately for the misconduct, but his/her grade should be based upon what the student can demonstrate s/he has learned.”

Finally, in some districts students under the age of sixteen may be suspended or expelled for repeated violations of school attendance policies, while in other districts the superintendent is encouraged to seek alternative educational opportunities for truant students.

Students similarly are subject to disciplinary action for excessive tardiness. As discussed in a previous section, different districts define tardiness differently and disciplinary responses differ as well. Those districts with tardiness policies generally require that students report to either the principal or attendance office before proceeding to class. Similarly, most districts allow students to be tardy if they have a late pass. Finally, districts differ as to whether tardiness can be considered in determining a student’s grade in the course and offer progressive or non-progressive disciplinary consequences. For examples of attendance-related disciplinary provisions, see Table 18.

**Table 18: Exemplars of Attendance-Related Disciplinary Provisions**

<b>Consistent Pattern</b>	Any consistent pattern of tardiness or absenteeism by a student shall be cause for the Principal/designee to initiate contact with the student and/or the student's parent(s)/guardian(s) by a counselor, teacher, and building administrator or outside agency.
<b>Absenteeism Disciplinary Policies Non-Progressive</b>	Frequent or prolonged absences from school or repeated tardiness without satisfactory reason shall be grounds for disciplinary action.
<b>Absenteeism Disciplinary Policies Progressive</b>	Should a student reach ten (10) absences in a semester class, the Attendance Committee will meet to determine the magnitude of adverse effect the excessive absences have had on the student's opportunity for academic success. The result of their assessment could be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. The student needs to make up time missed;</li> <li>B. The student is removed from the course, placed in Time-Out for the remainder of the semester and will have to repeat the course; and</li> <li>C. Parents make acceptable arrangements with the student's teacher for the student to maintain credit for the course.</li> </ul>
	The ten (10) day maximum absences apply to each class and are not a total of all classes. In most circumstances, a student missing more than ten (10) days in any one class in a semester will not receive credit for that course. Unless circumstances warrant special consideration, the semester grade, upon the 11th absence, will be an E and no credit (NC). The following procedures will be followed in denying credit: <p>On the 10th absence, the school will notify the parents/guardians. This notification will serve as a reminder that a student loses credit (NC) on the eleventh (11th) absence.</p> <p>On the eleventh (11th) absence, credit will be denied (NC) and the student will receive an E and be dropped from the class.</p> <p>If after consultation with the counselor, teacher, parents, and student, special consideration seems appropriate, the administration may allow a student to continue in the class under the conditions of an audit.</p>
	Progressive Consequences for Unexcused Class Absences: It should be noted that a call to the parent(s)/guardian(s) will be made for each unexcused class absence. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Level I: Five (5) days unexcused absence in one class or fifteen total (is equal to approximately 95% attendance in a trimester) - Attendance letter sent by teacher (advisory teacher where available) or school selected designee.</li> <li>2. Level II: Ten (10) days unexcused absence in one class or twenty five total (is equal to approximately 91% in a trimester) - One-day alternative learning placement and reinstatement conference with parent(s)/guardian(s), Principal, teacher, or designee.</li> <li>3. Level III: Fifteen (15) days unexcused absence in one class or thirty five total (is equal to approximately 88% attendance in a trimester) - Loss of privileges (see #1 and #2 above) for three weeks. (Loss of privileges will extend to the next trimester/semester). The Principal or designee may adjust consequences for extenuating circumstances.</li> </ol>

<b>Tardiness Disciplinary Policies- Non-Progressive</b>	In cases of frequent tardiness, after school detention will be issued and the parent will be notified so the situation can be corrected.
<b>Tardiness Disciplinary Policies Progressive</b>	<p>Progressive Consequences for Unexcused Tardiness (Tardy to class without a pass)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Level I: Five (5) Tardies (total) - Tardy letter sent by teacher (advisory teacher where available).</li> <li>2. Level II: Ten (10) Tardies (total) - One day alternative learning placement and conference with parent/guardian, Principal, teacher, or designee.</li> <li>3. Level III: Fifteen (15) Tardies (total) - Loss of privileges for two weeks. Loss of privileges may include, but not be limited to: dances, special school events, clubs, Student Council, awards, extracurricular activities, athletic events, or participate in any of the aforementioned activities. Loss of privileges will extend to the next trimester/semester. The Principal or designee may adjust consequences for extenuating circumstances. A student may be required to complete missing assignments prior to having privileges reinstated.</li> <li>4. Middle and alternative schools may exercise alternative options as appropriate for their schools.</li> </ol>
<b>Suspension/Expulsion</b>	The Board may report to the Intermediate School District infractions of the law regarding the attendance of students below the age of sixteen (16). Repeated infractions of Board policy requiring the attendance of enrolled students may result in the suspension or expulsion of the student from the District program.
<b>Alternative Educational Opportunities</b>	The Board authorizes but does not encourage the Superintendent to suspend a student from a particular class or from school if sincere efforts by the staff and parents cannot rectify the pattern of absence. In keeping with its philosophy, the Board supports efforts to provide for out-of-school alternative educational opportunities for truant students rather than to heighten the effects of absence through suspension.

# Summary of Policy Analysis and Recommendations

This preliminary report is provided at the client's request. Additional policy analyses for this phase are ongoing. Further district-specific analyses will be completed in conjunction with the quantitative phase once attendance and academic performance data have been received from KENT ISD and analyzed. Even so, the researchers offer the following comments and preliminary recommendations based on this initial review to inform succeeding phases of this study. Before addressing the questions posed at the outset of this report, it is important to review some of the limitations of the policy analysis as presented.

A primary concern throughout this study was the absence of available district materials from three KENT ISD districts that did not provide resources despite three requests. While the researchers located student handbooks for two of the non-responding districts, and used these in lieu of district policies, the remaining district is not represented in this analysis.

A second limitation relates to the depth of analysis to date. The first phase of policy review was intended to provide a broad picture of public school district policies in Kent County. This report does so. However, as the preceding narrative suggests, depending on the topic some policies have significant variation and some seem nearly identical. Some policies appear to be more complete and robust, while others seem to be general guidelines rather than explicit regulations. While it might be tempting to evaluate the policies on their face, this cannot be done in the abstract. It cannot be determined whether and how the attendance policies are working without an analysis of district (and school) specific attendance and academic performance data. It may be that the most general of policies is effective while the most specific reflects concerns in a district fighting high absenteeism. These implications, and accompanying policy rationales, must await the next phase of this study. The following conclusions and recommendations are offered then in light of these limitations.

## Defining and Tracking Absences and Tardiness

This policy analysis sought to determine attendance policies and practices within and across KENT ISD public school districts generally and at the individual elementary school level. Analysis suggests that attendance policies may be *compulsory policies*, *aspirational policies*, and *mixed policies* though the implications of the differences must await later analyses. Similarly, while schools assume attendance generally as being physically present on the school campus some districts recognize attendance under other conditions as well. Absence generally is defined as “non-presence”, though some districts find students to be absent if they are tardy beyond a specific



time period (that time period varies among districts) and at least one district considers a student present who attends “any part of a class.”

The implications of these variations are significant for the quantitative phase of the study. How each district frames attendance expectations, and defines absenteeism and tardiness, must be considered when interpreting the absenteeism rates in each district. Absenteeism definitions will need to be captured in appropriately scaled variables to permit measurement and more meaningful interpretation of absenteeism rates across districts.

## **Defining and Tracking Excused and Unexcused Absences**

Excused absences are defined affirmatively through explicit articulation of categories / classifications and, in some districts, explicit lists of examples. Unexcused absences, in contrast, appear to be defined as those absences that are not excused. This is explicit in the truancy provisions, but only two districts provide examples of unexcused absences.

Districts also address tardiness differently, with few districts defining excused tardiness and only one providing examples of unexcused tardiness. Additionally, the definition of tardiness varies, from not being in class when the bell rings to being ten minutes late to arriving after the first hour of class. The relationship between tardiness and absenteeism varies as well, as some districts consider prolonged tardiness to constitute an absence while at least one other considers a student present, even if tardy, as long as s/he attends at least part of the class.

As noted, no conclusions can be drawn about the relative effectiveness of more detailed provisions, providing examples, or the relationship between tardiness and absenteeism but the relative effectiveness of these differing approaches should be examined when the attendance and academic performance data are available. Again appropriately scaled variables will be required to capture and measure this variation across districts.

## **Attendance Policy Enforcement and Responsibilities**

Reading across districts, attendance policy enforcement responsibilities fall on students, parents, staff, administrators, the school board and superintendent, and special attendance officers. Quite simply, students are expected to attend school. Parents are expected to support regular student attendance and notify the school about student absences according to district notification procedures. Teachers are primarily responsible for recording attendance and documenting excused absences. Superintendent's develop, implement, and enforce

state-compliant attendance policies (along with attendance officers in some districts) and school boards verify absenteeism explanations, investigate absenteeism causes, and report absenteeism to KENT ISD.

Yet these integrated responsibilities from student to school board are not fully articulated in all district policies available for review, nor do all of the policies articulate how these responsibilities are to be communicated to students, parents, teachers, and staff. Whether and how districts define and communicate responsibilities will need to be conceptualized and operationalized to inform the quantitative analysis.

## **Disciplinary Consequences**

The cut-off numbers for accumulated absences that trigger disciplinary action vary by district. Disciplinary actions also vary among districts depending on the duration and accumulation of absences, with consequences including equivalent detention time and lost credit. Many districts permit make up work for absences, suspension, or both. Some districts explicitly prohibit absence problems from impacting student grades. Some districts use progressive consequences for unexcused class absences. Some district policies are relatively vague about attendance-related discipline. Approaches to habitual truancy appear to vary by district. In some districts students under the age of sixteen may be suspended or expelled for repeated violations of school attendance policies, while in other districts the superintendent is encouraged to seek alternative educational opportunities for truant students. Finally, some of the policies specify that discipline of truant students should comply with school board policies and due process. Each of these variations must necessarily be captured by appropriately scaled quantitative variables to make analysis of relevant school records meaningful.

# Conclusion

This preliminary report provides insights into the nature, complexity, and relative consistency of available attendance related policies across KENT ISD public school districts. The next phase of the study will require coordination of qualitative and quantitative components to develop variables that will define and allow researchers to measure these variations in relation to the district attendance and academic performance data. A successful accounting of these variations will allow researchers to more accurately interpret absenteeism rates across districts and, thus, provide a more robust picture of the relationship between early chronic absenteeism and school success in Kent County. It is anticipated that additional reporting will focus on existing policies and practices at the building level for those schools where statistical analyses identify chronic early absenteeism concerns.

# References

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- Neild, R.C., Balfanz, R., & Herzog, L. (2007). An early warning system: By promptly reacting to student distress signals, schools can redirect potential dropouts onto the path to graduation. *Educational Leadership*, 28–33.

# Appendix A

## District Attendance Policy Analysis Codebook

- *# of Elementaries*: Number of elementary schools in the district.
- *Aspirational Attendance*: Policy reference to expectations without compulsory attendance language.
- *Attendance Exceptions*: Any policy reference to conditions or status that may exempt student from school attendance.
- *Attendance Expectations*: Defines the school board/institution's expectations for student attendance.
- *Attendance-Achievement Link*: Defines any references made in the policies to links between attendance and achievement, including but not limited to academic and employment success.
- *Compulsory Attendance*: Policy reference to state compulsory attendance laws.
- *Data Location*: Where data was found (individual elementary school to be used if district policy and/or administrative guidelines are not available so institution is identified).
- *Definition of Absenteeism*: Policy definition of absenteeism.
- *Definition of Disciplinary Absence*: Policy definition of absences resulting from school disciplinary actions (e.g. suspension, expulsion, detention).
- *Definition of Excused Absence*: Policy definition of excused absence.
- *Definition of Law Violation Absence*: Policy definition of absences as a result of law-related sanctions.
- *Definition of Tardiness*: Policy definition of tardiness, generally defined as being late for school, class, or activity.
- *Definition of Unexcused Absence*: Policy definition of unexcused absence.
- *Definition of/Procedures for Tardiness*: Policy definition and procedures for tardiness.
- *Disciplinary Absence Examples*: Examples of disciplinary absences provided in the policy.
- *District*: Name of the District and URL Link to Webpage.
- *Excused Absence Examples*: Examples of excused absence provided in the policy.
- *Excused Tardies Examples*: Examples of excused tardies provided in the policy.
- *Habitual Truancy*: Policy reference to truancy that persists despite intervention efforts.
- *Law Violation Absence Examples*: Examples of law violation absences provided in the policy.
- *Make Up Work*: Academic work students are permitted to complete following absence(s).
- *Parent/Guardian Responsibilities*: Policy reference to parent/guardian responsibilities in relation to student attendance and reporting of student absences (note, these provisions may be in the disciplinary policies).
- *Pattern of Absenteeism*: Policy reference to any consistent pattern of absenteeism.
- *Pattern of Tardiness*: Policy reference to any consistent pattern of tardiness.

- *Personnel Responsibilities - Administrative/Prof.* Policy reference to responsibilities of administrators (Principal, Vice Principal) in relation to attendance accounting and reporting.
- *Personnel Responsibilities - All Staff.* Policy reference to responsibilities of staff in relation to attendance accounting and reporting.
- *Personnel Responsibilities – Attendance Officer.* Policy reference to responsibilities of attendance officer in relation to attendance accounting and reporting.
- *Personnel Responsibilities – Attendance Officer.* Policy reference to responsibilities of attendance officer in relation to attendance accounting and reporting.
- *Personnel Responsibilities - Board.* Policy reference to responsibilities of board in relation to attendance accounting and reporting.
- *Personnel Responsibilities – Other.* Policy reference to responsibilities of others (security, law enforcement, etc.) in relation to attendance counting and enforcing.
- *Personnel Responsibilities - Superintendent.* Policy reference to responsibilities of superintendent in relation to attendance accounting and reporting.
- *Personnel Responsibilities - Teacher.* Policy reference to responsibilities of teachers in relation to attendance accounting and reporting.
- *Policy Data Range:* Range of dates cited in policy.
- *Policy Source:* Identification of source of attendance policies (e.g., District policy, school policy, student handbook).
- *Record-keeping:* Policy provisions related to attendance record keeping.
- *Release Provisions:* Any policy reference to release of students during the school day.
- *Special provisions:* Policy provisions related to absenteeism or tardiness in relation to special needs, programs, or services.
- *Student Responsibilities:* Policy reference to student responsibilities in relation to attendance, including tardiness.
- *Tracking:* Policy provisions related to attendance tracking.
- *Truancy:* Policy provisions related to student truancy, including legal action.
- *Unexcused Absence Examples:* Examples of unexcused absences provided in the policy.
- *Unexcused Tardies Examples:* Examples of unexcused tardies provided in the policy.
- *URL:* Link to data location.



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