



August 2015

Dear Conestoga High School Parents/Guardians,

As another school year begins it is important for all members of the educational community to be reminded that daily school attendance is not only vital to a child's learning and educational success, but it is mandated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and by the federal No Child Left Behind law. For this reason, parents/guardians are asked to review the information contained in this letter.

It is especially important for parents/guardians to note that they must provide their child's school with a written excuse explaining why their child was absent. The note must be received by the school within three calendar days of that absence. All schools will accept hand written notes or emails from parents/guardians sent from their designated email address. Specific details are included in the information below.

Over the years, the TE Schools have enjoyed a very high rate of daily attendance, and with your support and cooperation, this trend will continue. Additionally, the TE Schools will endeavor to do everything possible to encourage compliance with compulsory attendance laws before relying on punitive measures. However, when a child is absent from school, the TE Schools shall comply with state and federal requirements regarding student attendance and truancy. Please review the following information and keep it for your records.

#### **Unlawful Absences and Need for Written Excuses**

All student absences from school shall be treated as unlawful until the District receives a written excuse explaining the reason for an absence. Parents/guardians and students shall submit the required excuse within three (3) calendar days of the absence to the child's Attendance Officer or designee and may do so in the following ways:

1. Written note signed by parent/guardian; or
2. Email sent to [chsattendance@tesd.net](mailto:chsattendance@tesd.net) from parent/guardian's email account.

Legitimate excuses for school absences include mental, physical, or other urgent reasons such as illness, family emergency, death of a family member, medical or dental appointments, authorized school activities, educational travel with prior approval from the principal or assistant principal, pre-approved religious instruction (limit of 36 hours per year) and a bona fide religious holiday. Absences from school beyond ten cumulative days shall require an excuse from a physician in addition to the written excuses from the parent/guardian.

#### **School Responses and Procedures for Unlawful Absences**

1. **No Written Excuse:** If no written excuse for the absence is received within three (3) calendar days of an absence, parents/guardians will receive a notice via email or mail requesting the written excuse.
2. **Nothing Received After First Notice:** The failure of the parent/guardian to provide a written excuse within three (3) calendar days of receipt of the notice under item 1 above will cause the absence to be categorized as "unlawful" and will trigger further procedures as explained below.
3. **First Unlawful Absence:** The Attendance Officer shall send a notice of unlawful absence to the student's parent/guardian including an attachment of the legal penalties established by law for violation of compulsory attendance requirements. Also, the name and telephone number of the school Attendance Officer will be included so that parents/guardians are able to contact a specific person to provide information, or request assistance in resolving the child's truant behavior.
4. **Second Unlawful Absence:** The Attendance Officer shall send a second notice of unlawful absence to the student's parent/guardian. Once again, the legal penalties established by law for violation of compulsory attendance requirements and the name and telephone number of the school Attendance Officer will be included. Additionally, another offer of assistance will be made to the parent/guardian.

5. **Third Unlawful Absence:** The Attendance Officer shall send a third notice of unlawful absence to the student's parent/guardian by certified mail providing "official notice of child's third illegal absence." Attached to this notice shall be penalties for violation of compulsory attendance requirements as they pertain to both the student and the parent/guardian, including information that three days after giving such notice, the student or parent/guardian who again violates the compulsory attendance requirements shall be liable without further notice. The Attendance Officer shall also coordinate a school and family conference to discuss the cause of the child's truancy and develop a mutually agreed upon Truancy Elimination Plan (TEP) to resolve truant behavior. At the end of the conference all parties should sign a comprehensive TEP that is agreed to by the school Attendance Officer, the child, and the parents/guardians and/or family.

6. **Subsequent Unlawful Absence:** After agreeing to a TEP, or if there is no agreement on a Truancy Elimination Plan and 3 days have passed since the parent/guardian received the official notice of the child's third illegal absence, if a child is unlawfully absent at any point within the school year, the Attendance Officer shall send an official notice of unlawful absence to the parents/guardians through certified mail. The purpose of this correspondence is to inform the child's parents/guardians that the child has violated the TEP or, if there is not a TEP, to inform the child's parents/guardians that the child has again violated the compulsory attendance requirements, and advise the parents/guardians that a citation will immediately be sent to the magisterial district judge by the school's Attendance Officer. The Attendance Officer will refer all future incidents of truancy directly to the magisterial district judge having jurisdiction in the region.

7. **Habitually Truant:** If a child is absent for more than three (3) school days or their equivalent following the first notice of truancy given after a child's third unlawful absence, the child will be referred by the school Attendance Officer to the local county children and youth agency for services if the child is under 13 years of age and may be referred by the school Attendance Officer to the local county children and youth agency for services if the child is 13 years of age or over.

8. **Further Options:** Under Pennsylvania law, children who are habitually and without justification truant from school while subject to compulsory school attendance are subject to an assessment with **the local county children and youth agency to determine if there is a need for general protective services.**

Thank you for your attention to this letter and for working together with the District to ensure that your child attends school regularly.

Sincerely,



Andrea Chipego, Ed.D., CSP, RN  
Director of Individualized Student Services