

What Parents Need to Know about Bullying and Truancy

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Mascenic Regional High School is undergoing many changes and not all of them are physical. The state has passed new laws affecting both Truancy and Bullying and the student and teacher handbooks have been updated. Some of the highlights of these changes are as follows.

Truancy: A student is considered truant if they have more than ten half-day unexcused absences within one semester. Under the former law, a student was not considered truant until they had twenty half-day unexcused absences. The State Legislature recognizes that attendance is an important part of your son or daughter's academic success.

Bullying: Harassing or bullying a student is a violation of law. Under the new law, harassment has been expanded to cover bullying which takes place off of school grounds if the bullying affects the learning opportunities of the student. Bullying also includes "Cyber-bullying," a form of harassment using electronic devices, such as computers, web sites, texting or any other electronic device. Any incident of bullying will automatically result in the filing of a report with the police. The new law is designed to help create a respectful atmosphere among students not only in the school but outside as well.

The High School is gearing up for its accreditation process with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). Every ten years, NEASC visits and evaluates schools to ensure that they are using effective teaching methods and appropriate curriculum. The school will be submitting an initial report in February, followed by an in depth self-study in 2012. Members of NEASC will conduct an on-site visit in 2014.

Student and Teacher handbooks contains many changes, chief among them is a description of the State's new bullying law and the District's policy on computer use within the school. In addition, students are reminded that texting or using a cell phone in class will result in confiscation of the device. Those students hoping to use parking privileges at the high school are being advised that the use of the lot will be directly tied to how students score on standardized tests such as NWEA and NECAP.



TRUANCY

1. Mascenic School Board delegates the responsibility of Truancy Officer to the Assistant Principal of the high school.
2. EXCUSED ABSENCES ARE DEFINED AS THE FOLLOWING:
 - a. Absence due to hospitalization and/or illness accompanied by a doctor's note
 - b. Absences accompanied by a note from the parent explaining the absence. These excused absences will be permitted as long as they do not have an adverse effect upon the student's educational progress.
 - c. College visits – limited to two per year for seniors only
 - d. Family emergencies, which will be evaluated by the building principal on a case by case basis
 - e. School sponsored activities, such as field trips, athletic activities, academic visits arranged by the guidance office.
 - f. Parents/guardians may appeal absences which do not fall under the above guidelines to the principal of the school, who will convene an Absence Review Committee.
3. An appeal for absences can be filed by the parent with the school principal who will convene an Absence Review Committee (ARC). The committee will consist of the Assistant Principal, Guidance Counselor, Nurse and a Special Education Teacher (if the student has an IEP). The committee will meet with the parent and discuss the absences. When making a determination as to waiving the previously unexcused absences, the primary factor to be considered in this appeals process is whether or not the absences have had an adverse effect upon the student's educational process.
4. If the ARC does not waive the absences, then the parent/guardian may appeal their decision to the principal, then the Superintendent and finally the School Board.
5. Schools will maintain attendance records and when a student has accumulated five unexcused absences within a semester, a designated administrator from the school concerned will contact the parent and request a meeting with the parent/guardian, student and the ARC. The goal of the meeting will be to establish a system which will improve school attendance and assist the student in achieving academic excellence. When appropriate, other staff members may be invited to participate in the meeting.
6. If the parent is unwilling to meet, then the ARC will request the Truancy Officer visit the parent first and if there is no improvement in attendance, the Truancy Officer will request a visit by the police. The purpose of these visits will be to inform the parent of their duties in ensuring their son/daughter attends school in accordance with state laws and to advise the parent of the possibility of the school filing a petition with the court if those responsibilities are not met.
7. In the event of continued absences, a meeting of the ARC will take place, with both the parent and student in attendance. If the parent/guardian is unwilling to meet and/or take remedial measures to improve attendance, then the ARC will review the steps taken to date and if necessary requests the Truancy Officer file a petition with the court for a child in need of services.
8. A petition to the court for a child in need of services will not be filed until all of the above provisions are met.

Title IIa Grant

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The Mascenic Regional School District benefits from the receipt of Title IIa funds each school year. These funds are provided to school districts by congress to promote the development of highly qualified teachers throughout the country. They are targeted for the improvement of our teachers and staff and cannot be used for any other purpose.

Funds from this grant are used to provide specific professional development activities. The funds have been used to provide additional training to teachers on curriculum matters, to develop strategies and procedures

to use our resources efficiently, and to provide training in communication strategies.

Title IIa funds are used to build additional leadership capacity among our staff and to train teachers and staff in the use of digital tools. Previously, teachers received a variety of training opportunities in areas such as: Math instruction, bullying, student leadership, and subject specific workshops.

These funds are also used to pay for services that support staff development. Our Mascenic Mentor program is funded from this grant. Participation in the Successful Practices network is also funded by this grant. The program that we use to keep track of staff development, "MyLearning Plan" is, itself, funded from this grant. The Title IIa grant has helped the district to keep our teachers and staff trained in the best educational practices that are available.