



## Example Habitual Truancy Letter per [118.16\(2\)\(cg\)](#)

This letter is meant to provide one example of the type of truancy letter that may be effective in encouraging parents and guardians to connect with school staff to problem-solve attendance barriers. It is important for leaders to consider the local context and make determinations related to the messaging and actions taken. Before a letter is sent to families, best practice would have classroom teachers and other staff reaching out to students and families to show compassion and concern for absences. This letter would not be the first time a family is notified of truancies. Research related to the truancy letters indicates shorter and simpler letters that chunk information and highlight the most important points are most effective (Lasky-Fink et al. 2020). Again, this letter provides sample language and it is not meant to be adopted without modifications to the local context.

### Some Considerations Include

- Consider changing this data for elementary: Students that miss as little as two days per month beginning in Kindergarten are likely to perform behind their same aged peers in reading by third grade (Romero and Lee 2007).
- Consider offering transportation for in-person meetings.
- Consider scheduling virtually, instead of in-person and contacting parents or guardians to schedule the meeting at a time that is convenient for them. Consider parent and guardian work schedules and offer time before and after school in addition to school day.

### Attendance Meeting Best Practices

- Habitual truancy notification letters are written using trauma-sensitive and simpler language and fewer words to improve their effectiveness.
- Schools develop attendance improvement plans that are led by student and parent perspectives, goals, and needs.
- When parents or students are unable to attend a meeting, school staff make other attempts to get information from them, and should still create an improvement plan.
- School leaders consider how the system itself may be contributing to the issue. There is strong evidence that it is these aspects of school environments – safety, caring adults, academic support, and interesting and relevant classes – that impact whether or not students attend school regularly when they have a choice (Eastman et al. 2007).
- School leaders set dates for follow-up meetings to ensure improvement plans are being implemented effectively and, if not, make adjustments including additional layers of support.
- Improvement plans may include changes to a student’s schedule and increased attendance expectations over a time period, and curricular modifications.
- Only after the attendance improvement process fails to resolve the student’s habitual truancy over time, schools may refer students to juvenile court intake or municipal court.

### ★ Resources

- [Writing truancy notices that can improve attendance](#) - Attendance Works Blog
- [Sample Notice of Truancy](#) - Attendance Works
- [Student Attendance Success Plans](#) - Attendance Works
- [Best Practice Approaches to Truancy Reduction: Information for School Attendance Officers](#) - DPI



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Dear Parent/Guardian & Student:

Date

We would love to connect with you. We notice that **[student]** has missed **X** number of partial or whole days of school this semester unexcused. We wish the best for your student and want them to reach their goals. We are inviting you to meet with us, so we can hear more about the challenges related to attendance and so we can problem-solve together.

**Attendance Matters!** By 9th grade, regular and high attendance gives us a better idea of who will graduate than 8th grade test scores. Students who miss just one or two days of school each month can fall seriously behind.

\*Read more about the research on the [Attendance Works Seminal Research website](#).

**Please Meet with Us:** Let us know what works best for you. At this time we have scheduled an in-person meeting at the school to meet with you, your student, and school staff.

**Meeting Time: 12:30 p.m. Wednesday, November 11, 2021 - X High School**

**School Staff Attending: X, X, X**

**Need to Change the Meeting Details?** Please contact us as soon as possible if you prefer a different time, day, place, or if you would prefer to meet virtually.

Call/email to change meeting: School Staff Name, Address, Phone: (608) XXX-XXXX,  
email: [improveattendance@k12.wi.edu](mailto:improveattendance@k12.wi.edu)

**Your Team:** Let us know if you or your student would like specific school staff members present at the meeting, or if there are others who are important to include.

- The parent, guardian, or child may request program or curriculum modifications for the child under Wis. Stat. § 118.15(1)(d) and the child may be eligible for enrollment in a program for children at risk under Wis. Stat. § 118.153(3).

**What does Habitual Truancy Mean?** A student is considered habitually truant when they are absent without an acceptable excuse all or part of five or more days in a school semester. Each school district determines what constitutes “part of a day.” Our school district defines truancy as **XXX**.



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**What are the Consequences?** Our biggest concern is that your student may fall behind. We want to help with improving your student's attendance and avoid other negative consequences. According to state law, we must include the information below:

- It is the parent's or guardian's responsibility, under Wis. Stat. § 118.15(1)(a) and (am), to cause the child to attend school regularly. If you fail to do so, you may be subject to penalties under Wis. Stat. § 118.15(5). Such penalties may include:
  - For the first offense, a fine of not more than \$500 or imprisonment for not more than 30 days or both.
  - For a second or subsequent offense, a fine of not more than \$1,000 or imprisonment for not more than 90 days or both.
- You may be required to perform community service work for a public agency or a nonprofit charitable organization in lieu of the penalties listed above.
- You may also be ordered to participate in counseling at your own expense or to attend school with your child, or both.

**Laws:** (add any additional required statute information from Wis. Stat. §§ 118.15-16 as per locally approved language)

We look forward to meeting with you to discuss the needs of your student and work together to improve your student's attendance.

**Signed: Mr/s. Principal**



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### References

Eastman, Gay, Siobhan M. Cooney, Cailin O'Connor, and Stephen A. Small. 2007. "Finding Effective Solutions to Truancy." *What Works, Wisconsin Research to Practice Series* (5). UW-Extension. Accessed August 2021.

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Lasky-Fink, J., Chang, H., Rogers, T. 2020. *Using Behavioral Insights to Improve School Administrative Communications: The Case of Truancy Notifications Faculty Research Working Paper Series*. Harvard Kennedy School. Accessed October 2021.

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Romero, Mariajosé, and Young-Sun Lee. 2007. "A National Portrait of Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades." National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP). Columbia University. Accessed October 2021.

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/A-National-Portrait-of-Chronic-Absenteeism-in-the-Early-Grades-Oct-2007.pdf>.