

A Publication for

LISHA KILL &
SAND CREEK

MIDDLE
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PARENTS



CLASSROOM

connection

Good attendance is the “real” ticket to school success

Ever pull your child out of school a few days before a vacation week to save on airfare? Or let your child hang out at home, even though you were sure his complaints of a stomachache were questionable? **No harm, right?**

Wrong! Area principals say that unexcused absences are becoming more and more common today even in the face of some of the toughest academic challenges middle schoolers have ever had to meet.

New York State education law requires that children ages 6 to 16 attend school

regularly and making sure that they do is a parent's responsibility. However, the importance of school attendance goes far beyond meeting the letter of the law.

Students who are frequently absent miss out on important lessons and hands-on practice that isn't easy or practical to recreate. What's more, middle school is simply more challenging — and essential — than ever before.

Take for example a “basic” subject such as math.

Today, many students are being introduced to algebra early in middle school as a gateway to more complex, and often required, high school math and science courses such as geometry, calculus, physics and chemistry. The National Science Foundation estimates that in

2010, as many as one-fourth of all jobs will be based on math, science and technology. Additionally, the number of new U.S. jobs requiring math and science — from retail sales to high-tech computer software design and programming — continues to grow. Without adequate skills and early training in these subjects, some fear that American students will be less qualified than their peers overseas for desirable jobs.

Making school attendance a priority helps children learn the good work and study habits that will serve them well now and throughout their lives.

Consider, too, foreign language studies, another middle school staple. Not only do they teach cultural awareness (life enriching and increasingly important in our global economy), but they also provide students with the ability to communicate well and work together with their peers worldwide.

In addition to old school “basics,” middle schoolers are learning the “new basics” as they collaborate face-to-face with classmates, and electronically with students in other schools, on long-term projects. They are also becoming skilled at researching and demonstrating what they know with the same technologies regularly used in many workplaces (e.g., the Internet and Powerpoint presentation software.)



School needs to be job #1

On average, middle schoolers have one to two hours of homework each night. Even one missed day can mean having to tackle three or more hours of homework the following night — practically a guarantee that kids won't be doing their best work in the rush to just get through it all.

Regular school attendance also teaches children the ethics of responsibility and dedication. These character traits, along with strong academic and technical knowledge, are what today's employers say they value most in those they hire.

Granted, they'll have occasional sick days, but young, healthy children rarely need to miss more than a few days each year. Kids need to know that, unless they are truly unwell, you expect them to go to school every day and do their best while there. Here are some suggestions that can help you make this important point:

▲ **Make attendance and academics a priority.** Show them that going off to work and meeting your commitments — even when it might seem tempting to call in “sick” — is something you do, too. Let them know that school attendance and homework come before time with friends, extracurricular activities or the computer. Also, help them understand the consequences of missing school in terms that will hit home for them (e.g., having to stay after school to make up missed work, missing out on after-school sports and clubs or time with friends.)

▲ **Help them get organized.** Create a space in your home for kids to store backpacks, coats, sneakers and other supplies. Develop a routine where children help pack their own lunches and backpacks and do necessary laundry the night before. This will make mornings less hectic and help kids arrive at school on time each day.

▲ **Set reasonable bedtimes.** On average, middle schoolers need about nine hours of sleep to be healthy and alert. As they move into the teen years, kids' brains begin to signal them to stay up later — and to sleep in later the next day. Despite what nature is telling them, reinforce reasonable bedtimes for your children and encourage them to get up and get ready on their own.

▲ **Make medical and other appointments during non-school hours whenever possible.** Schedule family vacations during school holidays or the summer recess so students aren't missing important lessons and struggling to make up for lost time.

IMPORTANT NEWS

for Students and Parents

Good attendance counts

Understanding the importance of going to school

You have to be in it to win it, the old adage goes. That same philosophy applies to doing well in school and passing important exams. In most cases, the ticket to success for many high school students is simply coming to school on a daily basis.

One recent study showed that students who attend school 93 percent of the time or better scored 85-100 on their exams. Students with a 91 percent attendance rate scored 65-84 on their exams, and students with attendance of 85 percent or less scored 0-54.

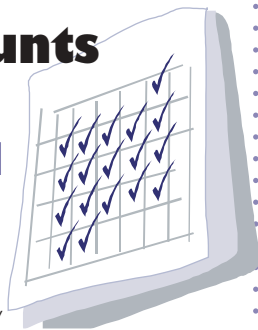
There are many reasons why a student might skip school or cut a class - even when penalties are attached. It might be personal, such as a failed relationship with another student or fear of being bullied. Or it might be academic, such as a conflict with a teacher or fear of failing a test.

Whatever it is, parents are encouraged to ask the principal or guidance counselor for help. The one thing parents can be sure of is that middle school teachers and administrators share the desire to make sure students are in school.

In some cases, parents themselves will sanction an illegal absence - e.g., to take a family vacation or to care for a sibling. There are also times when parents allow their children to "take a day off" in the belief that an absence here and there won't hurt.

Not true. Even the occasional absence increases the risk of missing that one critical class that will make a difference in a student's grades. And once a student starts to fall behind, it becomes easier to miss more classes, producing a pattern that's detrimental to success.

Educators stress that good attendance brings better test scores and leads to better learning every day!



Know your Code of Conduct policy

The South Colonie student Code of Conduct clearly spells out the consequences facing middle schoolers who are truant or tardy from school or who cut class. Parents should make it a point to review these consequences with their student on an annual basis.

Infraction - Truancy: Defined as an illegal absence from school without knowledge of a parent or guardian.

- Consequence:**
1. May result in internal suspension for up to 3 days
 2. Notify parents and discuss petition to family court
 3. Counseling if it is deemed necessary
 4. Repeated offense will result in principal's conference and/or superintendent's hearing

Infraction - Tardiness: Defined as failure of a student to report on time to homeroom/classroom or to attendance office with a valid excuse.

- Consequence:**
1. Three tardies will result in administration action which may include the development of a behavioral contract to assignment to time out
 2. Chronic tardiness will result in increased administrative action which includes parental contact and discussion of petition to family court
 3. Counseling if deemed necessary
 4. Repeated offenses may result in principal's conference or superintendent's hearing

Infraction - Cutting Classes: When a student cuts a regularly scheduled class, his safety cannot be assured. That student risks the probability of lower grades or failure as a result of missing valuable class work. Therefore, when a student misses a class and has no legal excuse, one or more of these consequences may occur.

- Consequence:**
1. **First offense:** Time out. Development of a behavioral contract. Parent conferences. Student expected to make up work missed.
 2. **Second offense:** Possible RPS (release to parental supervision). Parent conference. Student expected to make up work missed.
 3. **Third offense:** Immediate suspension, parent conference and counseling referral. Student expected to make up work missed.
 4. **Fourth offense:** Immediate suspension and parent conference. File PINS with family court. Student expected to make up work missed.

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