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PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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**Attendance/ Absenteeism:  
Provision of FAPE for the student  
receiving IEP Services  
RSU and IEP Chair Training**

OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION  
SY 2013-14


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**Attendance**

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*“Because students reared in poverty benefit the most from being in school, one of the most effective strategies for providing pathways out of poverty is to do what it takes to get these students in school every day. This alone, even without improvements in the American education system, will drive up achievement, high school graduation, and college attainment rates”.*


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**Purpose**

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Today we are going to learn about attendance and absenteeism and the IEP Team’s responsibility to the student.




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**Definitions - Attendance**

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- A legal issue Section 7-301 of COMAR
- Requires regular school attendance of all children ages 5-16 years of age
- Lawful absence- includes death in family, illness of student, religious holiday, suspension, etc.
- Unlawful absence-any absence not cited as a lawful absence

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## Definitions - Absence

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- Failure to attend required sessions of work, school, etc.
- Can be demonstrated as consecutive absences or sporadic absences
- Can be for any portion of the day, for any reason other than those cited as lawful are presumed to be unlawful
- Chronic absence is calculated by monitoring both excused and unexcused absences. Students missing 20 school days in an academic year.

## Attendance Issues

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Is it the IEP Team's responsibility to monitor attendance?



YES

## Why?

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Provision of FAPE

## FAPE

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### Provision of FAPE

(a) *General.* (1) Subject to paragraphs (b) and (c) of this section and § 300.311, each State receiving assistance under this part shall ensure that FAPE is available to all children with disabilities, aged 3 through 21, residing in the State, including children with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school (IDEA 2004 300.300)

## Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

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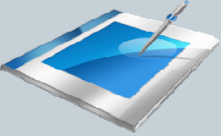
<b>Free Appropriate Public Education</b>	At no cost to the parent Meets the needs of the child to access educational opportunities provided by the public school system
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## Topics for the IEP Team

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Think about all of the possible topics the IEP Team would need to talk about with regard to a student's absences (or consistent tardiness)?



Hint: Try to categorize.

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## Categories of Student Absenteeism

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- Academic Issues
- Safety Issues
- Social Issues
- Home Issues
- Health Issues
- School Climate
- Appropriate Supports (more/less, different)
- Transportation


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## Extent of the Student absenteeism

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What would you want to review with regard to the student's absences?

Discuss with your partner.



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## Extent of the Student absenteeism

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How many days has the student been absent?	Is this a new pattern or has this been present for several years or throughout the student's schooling?
Is the student absent all day every day or during specific periods or subjects or days of the week?	Are the missed days due to medical, emotional issues, incarceration, disciplinary actions?
Is the student tardy each day rather than absent?	How late is the student's arrival if tardy?

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## Documents to Review

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**Attendance records such as:**

- SMS
- Teacher logs
- Report Card entries and comments from teachers from elementary years regarding attendance
- Review of psychological reports that might have discussed absenteeism in the past
- Social Worker's contacts with family

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## Transportation Issues

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What would you want to review with regard to the student's absences based on transportation issues?

Discuss with your group.

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## Transportation Issues to Consider

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**How does the student get to school?**

- Does the student ride a school bus that runs late, does not show, or the student does not feel safe when riding?
- Does the student take public transportation? With multiple transfers? Is the bus often late?
- Is the student attending a school far from home requiring long periods of time to get to school?
- Does the parent drive the student but always brings the student late?


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## Documents to Review

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Conversation with the guardian regarding:

- How the student gets to school?
- What time does the student leave for school?
- Does the parent bring the student?
- Is the student afraid to ride public transportation or the school bus?
- Other factors that might affect the student arriving on time?



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## Documents to Review



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Transportation Records:


- Late school bus arrivals
- Late public transportation bus arrival (other children were also late)
- Are there multiple transfers needed and the student is missing the second bus

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## Academic Issues

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What would you want to discuss with regard to academic issues?



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## Academic Issues to Consider General Education

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- Is the student bored, unchallenged, disengaged from the subject matter or school?
- Is the content rigorous enough?
- Does the student have credit deficiencies or feel defeated about being able to graduate?
- How many times has the student been retained? Over age?
- Does the student ask for help? Why not?
- Are the instruction methods, materials and equipment appropriate?
- Is the classroom organization and instructional groupings appropriate?
- Is the setting and physical environment negatively affecting the student?

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## Academic Issues to Consider Special Education

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- What are the student's instructional needs?
- Does the IEP adequately address the students academic deficits or difficulties?
- Are the IEP supports appropriate and sufficient (need more/less, different)?
- Are there "missed" interventions?
- Are there "missed" supplementary aids and services, modifications and/or accommodations?
- Is the LRE appropriate?
- Are the IEP goals appropriate?



## Documents to Review



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- Classroom grades
- MSA (HSA) scores
- Benchmark scores
- Written work
- Current IEP
  - Goals/Objectives
  - Supplementary Aids and Services
  - LRE

## Safety Issues

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What would you need to discuss with regard to safety issues?



## Safety Issues To Consider

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- Does the student feel safe on the way to school?
  - ✦ Walking?
  - ✦ Riding public transportation?
- Does the student feel safe at school?
- Has the student reported being bullied?
- Has the student bullied other children and is avoiding consequences?
- Does the student leave the classroom or building?



## Documents to Review

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- Discipline records
- Reports to guidance counselor, school psychologist, school social worker or teacher(s)
- Teacher reports of student anxiety
- Refusal to go to classes
- Avoidance of certain classes, students, or school areas
- Reports by parent/guardian


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## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL ISSUES

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What would you need to discuss with regard to social-emotional issues?




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## Social Emotional Issues to Consider

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- Does the student exhibit anxiety due to separation from the parent, performance such as taking tests, or reading aloud, socializing with peers?
- Does the student exhibit anxiety following vacations, weekends, visits with a non - custodial parent ?
- Are there physical complaints of stomachaches and headaches
- Is the student not living at home?
- Is the student transitioning from grade 5 to grade 6 in another school, or grade 8 to grade 9 in another school (this often triggers school refusal)?

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## Social Emotional Issues to Consider

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- Is the student depressed (lack of interest in activities, sleep difficulties, tired, irritable, feeling worthless/guilt)
- Has the child been hospitalized and not returned? Embarrassed to return after hospitalization?
- Has the child received a significant psychiatric diagnosis with medications that have altered functioning and the child is avoiding reintegrating at school?

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## Social Emotional Issues to Consider

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- Are the parents aware of the absences (typical for school refusal –which occurs in 2%-5% of students)
- Does the child feel isolated or rejected by other students? Faculty?
- Does the child avoid school due to feelings of incompetence?
- Is the student involved with a peer group who avoid school and engage in non-school related activities?
- Was the student incarcerated and does not want to return to the educational setting?

## Documents to Review



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- Psychological report (City Schools)
- Psychological reports from outside agencies
- Psychosocial History
- Teacher Reports
- Visits to the School Nurse
- Discipline Records
- Parent/guardian interviews
- Peer reports of concerns

## Health Issues

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What would you need to discuss with regard to health issues?



## Health Issues to Consider

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Does the student have a health issue:

**Common ones are:**  
 Asthma  
 Cancer  
 Diabetes  
 Eating disorders  
 Sleep disorders  
 Traumatic brain injury

**Not as Common ones are:**  
 Sickle Cell disease  
 Seizure disorders  
 HIV/AIDS



### Health Issues to Consider

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- Is the student pregnant?
- Is the student abusing substances?
- Does the student's health issue(s) require treatment that interferes with attendance?
- Is the student often absent due to colds?
- Does the student have vision issues that are untreated?

### Health Issues – Some Important Facts

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17% of students under 18 suffer from a chronic illness affecting school performance

The affects of the illness are not solely medical. Chronic illness affects :

- emotional/physical development
- peer relationships
- family interactions
- academic performance

### Health Issues: Medication May Affect Students

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#### Changes in Cognitive Functioning Due to illness or medication

- Sedation
- Restlessness
- Fatigue
- Irritability
- difficulty focusing
- Pain
- Nausea
- Emotional lability
- Tremor
- Poor muscle coordination

#### Changes in emotional well-being due to dealing with the disease or injury

- Avoiding peers as they feel too different or self-conscious
- Avoiding extracurricular activities
- Sense of frustration
- Sense of social isolation
- Lack motivation (school refusal)

### Documents to Review



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- Medical reports (pediatrician)
- Nurses Health Records
- Visits to the Nurses Office
- Student Record
- Parent conference
- Psychosocial Report
- Psychological Report
- Teacher Reports

## Home Issues

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What questions would you want to discuss with regard to Home Issues?



## Home Issues to Consider

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- Is the family homeless; have multiple yearly moves?
- Are there family difficulties that might contribute to frequent absences such as parent illness, conflicts, substance abuse, child care, finances, job related, etc?
- Is the student responsible for tasks/chores that interfere with regular attendance or arriving on time?
- Is the primary caregiver incarcerated?
- Does the parent recognize the importance of regular school attendance and the impact on learning even tardiness produces?
- Does the family feel connected to the school?

## Documents to Review

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- Psychosocial report
- Parent report
- Psychological report
- Administration information
- Social service agency personnel reports
- Teacher report of family history

## School Climate

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What questions would you want to ask with regard to School Climate?



## School Climate

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- Does the student feel a sense of belonging, connectedness and competency without barriers to learning?
- Does the teaching engage the student, or re-engage student if disengaged?
- Does the school the student is attending foster a sense of mutual respect, caring, safety and civil, pro-social, and responsible behavior that would encourage the student to attend?

Note: "For low income communities with a lot of non-school problems, such as poverty, the research suggests that providing a safe, developmentally supportive school will help mitigate the risk factors".  
(Gregory Austin, director of WestEd's Health and Human Development program).

## Documents to Review



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- Psychological Reports
- Psychosocial Reports
- Teacher and/or parent information
- Student Interview
- Observation of the student in class
- Documentation of the school climate in reports
- Is a PBIS program in place and effective
- Discipline records

## How Do You Determine the Cause

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Now that we have looked at possible causative factors, what steps would the school take as attendance is first the responsibility of the school?

## How to Determine the Cause

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Initial contact is usually made by telephone calls, home visits, and or certified mail by the school assigned attendance person



### Sequence of Steps to Determine Cause of Absences by the IEP Team

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- The IEP Chair makes contact with the following people to gather information:
  - 1) the general educator(s), if appropriate
  - 2) the special education teacher and/or case manager
  - 3) the school nurse to review medical history
- The IEP Chair, in collaboration with other team members, determines who will make contact with the parent(s)/guardian(s), e.g. IEP Chair, case manager, special educator, general educator, school social worker, school psychologist, or staff member who may have a relationship with the family, administration



### Sequence of Steps to Determine Cause of Absences

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- If the parent can be reached:
- Determine if the parent is aware of the absences? All of them?
  - Is there a medical reason?
  - Will it be chronic?
  - CHIP needed?
  - Home and Hospital?
  - How long is the extended absence expected to last?
  - Family crisis? Is it resolved?
  - Is it related to issues at the school such as transportation, bullying, etc.



### Sequence of Steps to Determine Cause of Absences

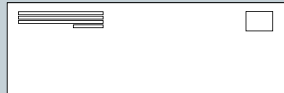
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If the parent cannot be reached by phone there are several options to follow:

Have the school social worker and/or school psychologist along with the attendance monitor or case manager visit the home



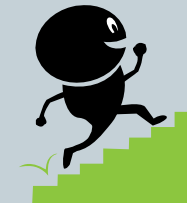
Send a certified letter indicating the parent should contact the IEP Chair, case manager, or school social worker to discuss the student's absences



### Next Steps

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What do you think are the next steps once you have investigated the possible causes?



### Next Steps

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- Gather all documents
- Schedule an IEP meeting to discuss the absenteeism, to determine if the student's absences are impeding learning. (Note: not all absences impede learning.)

### Who on the IEP Team is Responsible

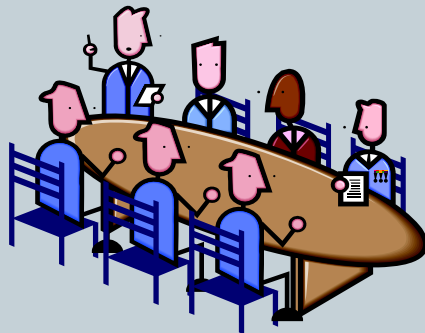
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If the IEP Team is mandated to address attendance, who on the IEP Team is responsible for the attendance issue?



### Hold an IEP Meeting

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### What is the Content the Team Discusses

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What should the IEP Team discuss when they meet?



## Content to Discuss


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**Minimizing Barriers  
Behavior Changes  
Goals**

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## Think About Minimizing Barriers First

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- Does the student need accommodations, or different ones, to eliminate a barrier to benefit from education opportunities?
- Do the instructional methods meet the students needs?
- Do the instructional materials and equipment meet the student's needs?
- Is the staffing and level or type of personal assistance sufficient?
- Does the classroom organization and instructional groupings meet the student's needs?
- Would the student be more involved if alternative options are offered such as on-line courses, adult school, community college, Job Corps, etc.

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## Think About Behavior Changes

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- Does the student need a behavior support plan, or a formal Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)?
- Would the student benefit from a self-management behavioral plan?
- Would the student benefit from Supplementary Aids and Services such as consultation through the school psychologist, school social worker, or other related service personnel; other appropriate support services?
- Is the school's positive behavior plan for all students in place and working?

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## Think About Other Behavior Changes

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- Does the student need more frequency or duration of time with the special educator, volunteer or interventionist to reinforce skills, or use different (research based alternative) instruction to make progress?
- Does the child feel connected to students and/or staff in the building? If not, how can this be changed (students fare better academically when they feel connected to a caring adult in the school setting)?
- Is there a positive working relationship present with the parent(s)/guardian(s) and the school?

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### Goals

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Does every student who is chronically absent need an IEP goal?



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### Answer

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No..... it depends on the situation.

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### Appropriate Goals

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*Appropriate goals need to meet the academic needs of the student in all aspects.*

If the student's IEP is working on "fluency" but the student is still having difficulty with knowing all letter sounds, or ending sounds for words, or if the student does not have phonemic awareness, a fluency goal will not meet the student's academic need.

Note: true for math and writing goals, too.

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### Does the Category of Disability Matter

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*"Regardless of the category of disability determined by the IEP team, the IEP needs to reflect all academic and behavioral goals needed to help the student to benefit from the educational setting including supplementary aids and services to improve attendance specific to the students needs".*

(Wrightslaw)

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## Goal Writing

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**As part of writing appropriate goals, let's review SMART GOALS**

Specific	define what is wanted
Measureable	identify targets and milestones to track progress
Achievable	the goal is realistic and manageable
Relevant	the goal is identifiable
Time Limited	you have identified a specific period of time for the goal, and

**The goal is stated in a positive manner *describing what is wanted* not what is undesired**


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## Appropriate Goal Writing

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All goals should have five components:

- 1) The current level of performance (PLAFF)
- 2) The problem you are addressing
- 3) The direction you want the learning or behavior to go ( increase/decrease)
- 4) The amount of change by the end of the IEP year
- 5) The methodology needed




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## Caution

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Before considering writing an attendance goal, remember all of the other things the IEP Team has discussed that will be changed to attempt to make attendance more likely to occur (academic goals, classroom setting, transportation, health, additional help, modifications, accommodations, etc.)




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## Generic Attendance Goals

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When considering absenteeism for a student with an IEP, you must write a goal *specific to the student* and not “generic” (i.e., Nancy will attend school 80% of the time).



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## Tool for Use for Attendance IEP Meetings

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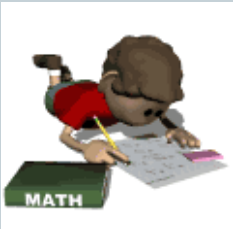
Questions	Required Document(s)	Impact Before Absences		Impact After Absences		Comment(s)
		Yes	No	Yes	No	
A. How often has the student been absent?	SMS Teacher Attendance ET provider notes of missed services due to absence /unable to locate in school building	NA	NA	NA	NA	(Note: indicate response to questions here) Absent: ____ Unexcused: ____ Tardy: ____ No. of Days school has been in session: ____
B. How many days has school been in session?						
C. How many days has the student missed the whole day?						
D. How many days are unexcused?						
E. How many days is the student tardy?						

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## Case Examples

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To put this all into action, let's work on a sample case together.



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## Scenario One

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Shawn's mother moved after the beginning of the school year and Shawn had to attend a new school.

Shawn has been receiving services as a student with a Specific Learning Disability primarily affecting reading. He is not readily making friends and is not particularly close to his teacher or other building staff.

Shawn has been absent 23 days of 95 he has been enrolled at his new school.

Shawn is not making the expected progress on his IEP goals.

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## Use the Information and Tool on this Scenario

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- Given what you know, what else would you need to find out?
- What information do you need to think about regarding the categories?
- What would you be reviewing to determine cause(s)?
- Would you think about minimizing barriers for Shawn?
- Would you think about behavioral changes? Other changes?
- What about goals?

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## Minimizing Barriers

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### Needs

**Shawn does not feel comfortable in his new school, he has no friends, he does not want to attend school.**

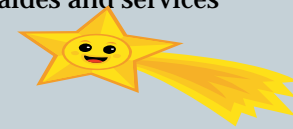
### Reducing Barriers

1. Assign a school aide, volunteer, etc., to greet Joe at the door
2. Over 2 months focus on attendance the case manager will ensure that supports are in place and monitor attendance, contact the parent/guardian reporting absence but also to support attendance
2. If needed, the school social worker can provide assistance in connecting with community based resources.
3. Consider assigning a peer-buddy
4. Encourage/facilitate inclusion in after school activities

## Additional Recommendations/Considerations

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- Increase time with the special educator
- Add intervention to review material with a volunteer
- Homework completion will be monitored carefully daily
- A positive behavioral program is created to reinforce class and homework completion and attendance
- Consider supplementary aides and services



## Goal Writing

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Assuming the IEP Team decides a goal is appropriate for Shawn, what would that look like?

### PLAFF

The problem you are addressing

The direction you want the learning or behavior to go  
(increase/decrease)

The amount of change by the end of the IEP year

The methodology needed

## Sample Goal for Shawn

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Shawn has been absent 23 of 95 school days. Shawn will be expected to have fewer than five days absent in the next two months

- > Objective 1: With teacher praise for attendance and home-school collaboration daily, by January 31, Shawn will have three or less days absent during January
- > Objective 2: With teacher praise for attendance and home-school collaboration daily, during February, Shawn will have two or less days absent during February

## Scenario Two

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- Natasha is a third grade student who has been absent 23 days of 105 this school year and late an additional 45 days
- She receives IEP services in an inclusion setting
- Natasha has asthma for which she has been hospitalized several times and there have been additional trips to the ER when she is not hospitalized

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## Use the Information and Tool on this Scenario

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- Given what you know, what else would you need to find out?
- What information do you need to think about regarding the categories?
- What would you be reviewing to determine cause(s)?
- Would you think about minimizing barriers for Natasha?
- Would you think about behavioral changes? Other changes?
- What about goals?

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## Minimizing Barriers

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Needs	Reducing Barriers
<p>Natasha needs better medical management at home and school</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Home-school collaboration by the nurse.</li> <li>2. School nurse-medical practitioner collaboration on Natasha's medical needs.</li> <li>3. Consultation by the school nurse with the classroom teacher(s) to develop a plan of action if Natasha has a sudden onset asthma attack.</li> <li>1. An action plan done with the parent, physician and school nurse would be appropriate .</li> <li>4. Collaboration by the social worker to help the family with medical connections if needed, and to determine if there is an impact emotionally for Natasha.</li> </ol>

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## Suggested IEP Goals/Objectives

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For a student with asthma, an IEP goal related to absenteeism might look like this:

**Goal:** Natasha has been absent 23 days of 105 this school year due to asthma and asthma related illness and she will decrease her absence to 10 days for the remainder of the school year (June 2013)

**Objective:** With teacher prompts and cues, Natasha will monitor her breathing using a physician designated system 3 times per school day

**Objective:** With teacher prompts and cues, Natasha will identify the need to go to the health suite for consultation with the school nurse following a pre-determined, medically based, system which may include use of her fast-acting inhaler

**Objective:** With teacher prompts, cues and assistance, Natasha will keep a diary of the 3 times she has measured her breathing; the times she needed to go to the health suite, and when she had to use her fast-acting inhaler.

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### Who writes the attendance goal?

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It depends.

Often the general or special education teacher would deliver the new goal since they see the student more often than any other specialist in the building.

The IEP Team can help write the goals and objectives if the general education teacher is going to deliver the goal(s) that specifically relate to attendance.

The goals might relate to changing interventions or accommodations that need to be provided under supplementary aids and services.

### Do all students Need Counseling for Attendance

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### Do all Students Need Counseling for Attendance

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Answer ..... No



### F A P E



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We started with the fact that attendance for IEP students is a FAPE issue.

If the IEP team meets and determines that the student's absences is impeding learning and there was a period of time in which the student was not making progress, you WILL need to hold a FAPE meeting. Use the tool handed out today to determine the student's needs, write the new IEP to include what is needed and then use the tool handed out last year to determine if compensatory services are needed following the guidelines.

Caveat: if the IEP was already designed fully to meet the student's needs and the student chose not to attend, it may not be a compensatory issue.