
OFFICE OF COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE ENFORCEMENT AND DROPOUT PREVENTION

School Attendance Officer Procedures

Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement & Dropout Prevention is responsible for ensuring that all Mississippi students enroll and attend school. Two laws govern the work of this office. Mississippi Code, Title 37, 37-13-91, speaks to Compulsory School Attendance, and 37-13-89 outlines the roles and responsibilities of all School Attendance Officers (SAOs).

Compulsory Attendance Enforcement

Mississippi Code, Title 37, 37-13-91 governs compulsory school attendance. It requires a parent, legal guardian, or custodian who has legal control or charge of a child age six (6) to seventeen (17) to enroll him or her in an education program (i.e., public, private, or home school) by August 15 of that school year. Student enrollment must occur except under the limited circumstances specified in subsection three (3) of §37-13-91 which includes but is not limited to, sending the child to a state-approved, nonpublic, or educating the child at home in an organized educational homeschool program, by August 15 of that school year. On July 1, 2003, the law was amended to include a child, five (5) years of age, who enrolls in public kindergarten to abide by the same guidelines outlined in §37-13-91.

School Attendance Officers' Duties and Responsibilities

- I. School Attendance Officers (SAOs) are the resource personnel utilized by the OCSAE & DOP to ensure the Mississippi Compulsory School Attendance Law statute is conducted within each school district by enforcing the provisions of the law. Mississippi Code §37-13-89 is the governing statute under which all SAOs perform their duties. Each SAO is assigned to one of three regions (Northern, Central, and Southern) and has an immediate supervisor within each region.
- II. SAOs are to establish and maintain professional working relationships by cooperating with any public or private agency to locate and identify all compulsory school age children who are not attending school. This includes all courts of competent authority.



- III. SAOs are to develop and maintain working professional relationships with district staff in schools.
- IV. SAOs are to demonstrate self-management. SAOs must be able to communicate, investigate, and write without heavy supervision from their immediate Supervisor. Meeting deadlines is imperative for SAOs.
- V. SAOs contacted by the media should not respond but instead refer to the media to the Office of Communications and Government Relations.
- VI. Employees must not utilize their positions to obtain benefits in the form of money, property, commercial interest, or any other economic gain for themselves, their relatives, or any family business interests. Employees should never disclose information obtained from their employment with the Department in any way which might result in any of these benefits. Employees must also guard themselves against the appearance of such conflicts.
- VII. Newly hired SAOs will participate in MDE-sponsored orientation, along with virtual and/or in-person orientation presented by SAO Supervisors. Supervisors will also assign an SAO to assist with training the new SAO periodically over the course of 30 days or longer if needed both virtually and in-person. SAOs should familiarize themselves with the MDE Policy and Procedures Manual as well as their local school districts' attendance policies located within the student handbook. Both need to be reviewed periodically.
- VIII. SAOs will visit their LEA (Local Educational Agencies) Attendance Clerks, Principals, and Superintendents before August 15th. An appointment will be made with these individuals before the meeting. Discussions about no-show students and their referral process must take place.
- IX. SAOs are to collect and maintain Certificate of Enrollment forms for each school year and remain on file in their office. Certificate of Enrollment forms are due August 15 to the local SAO. SAOs shall review previously submitted Certificate of Enrollment forms to verify students are enrolled year to year as the Certificate of Enrollment forms are only good for one school year. If a Certificate of Enrollment Form is not on file with the SAO by August 15, the SAO must contact parents via phone or email to determine that child's school enrollment for that school year. Certificates of Enrollment forms are not to be discarded.
- X. Verification of Compliance forms are to be submitted to homeschool parents upon request with appropriate justification. Verification of Compliance forms are to be submitted to the former school by the SAOs. This will function as official documentation for home school enrollment. SAOs should submit Verification of Compliance forms to schools within two weeks of receipt of Certificate of Enrollment submission. Verification of Compliance forms can be emailed.

- XI. Private school rosters must be submitted to SAOs by August 15. These rosters are to be filed in SAOs offices. Rosters will need to be updated in August, January, and May.
- XII. SAOs should receive or request a no-show student referral (a student that has not been enrolled in a school within 15 calendar days after the first day of the school year) as soon as the 15th day happens. SAO will need demographic information to investigate the referral. SAOs will investigate a no-show referral by making a phone call, mailing a Non-Enrollment Letter, or home visit. All documentation of efforts made by the school district to locate students are to be provided to SAO. It is the work of the SAO to find additional details of the students' whereabouts. SAO 's will inform the school district of where the student is located. The school district can then request records based on the SAO-supplied information.
- XIII. Summer Activity is typically released from MSIS in late October. Students generated in this report are those enrolled in Month 9 (May) but not in Month 1 (August/September). Before the Summer Activity report, the school district provided the SAO with a no-show list, including names in this report. The SAO must investigate the whereabouts of students that have not enrolled in school. School districts are to input the reasons why students are not enrolled. SAOs are not to change the reasons but assist the districts with locating the students. SAOs will participate in training as scheduled by the supervisor as a refresher.
- XIV. SAOs will work with the district to receive student referrals as prescribed by law. Districts must provide the necessary demographic information to SAOs to work on the referral accurately and promptly. Referrals are to be uploaded to the SAO Portal. If they have not been trained in the SAO Portal, they may email until the training has been completed.
- XV. SAOs will maintain contact with the Superintendent (and/or their designee)/Attendance Clerks (and/or their designee) to receive the necessary information and maintain regularly updated contact information for students and parents as needed. SAOs are to make a minimum of one in-person school visit per month to address staff-student attendance issues with school personnel. If a situation arises in the department (e.g., limited budget, illness outbreak), SAOs can also participate in monthly virtual meetings with school districts upon approval from their supervisor.
- XVI. SAOs will make daily phone calls, send letters (email letters when parents or districts have provided the correct email address), and perform home visits (when necessary) to ensure that parents understand the significance of their child(ren) attending school. Priority will be given to those students that have reached the prescribed number of unlawful unexcused absences according to the law. All calls, letters, conferences, and home visits will be entered by the SAO in their PowerApp database. All calls must be documented as no answer, left voicemail, or whom the SAO spoke with concerning the student and what was discussed.

- XVII. To establish a consistent process for School Attendance Officers (SAOs) when responding to student attendance referrals submitted by school districts. SAO's will follow the below instructions.
- XVIII. SAOs need to be aware that suspensions are not to be counted as an unlawful unexcused absence. The superintendent (and/or their designee) must report any student out of school suspensions or student expulsions to the School Attendance Officer as they occur.

A. First Referral – Five (5) Unlawful Unexcused Absences

1. Upon receipt of a referral indicating a student has accumulated five (5) unlawful unexcused absences, the SAO shall:
2. Review the referral for completeness and accuracy. If the LEA has not allowed the student, the applicable time to turn in an excuse per their policy, the referral will not be processed and the LEA notified of the referrals status.
3. Will send the **First Attendance Notice** to the parent, guardian, or custodian by either email or U.S. mail.
4. Document all actions taken in the PowerApp database.

B. Second Referral – Eight (8) Unlawful Unexcused Absences

1. Upon receipt of a referral indicating a student has accumulated eight (8) unlawful unexcused absences, the SAO shall:
2. Will send the **Second Attendance Notice** to the parent, guardian, or custodian by U.S. mail.
3. Attempt to contact the parent, guardian, or custodian by telephone to discuss the attendance concerns and seek resolution.
4. Verify that the school district has provided documentation of interventions implemented to address the student's attendance issues and identified root causes.
5. Document all correspondence, telephone calls, and intervention information in the PowerApp database.

C. Third Referral – Twelve (12) or More Unlawful Unexcused Absences

1. Upon receipt of a referral indicating a student has accumulated twelve (12) or more unlawful unexcused absences, the SAO shall:
2. Will send a **Final Attendance Notice** to the parent, guardian, or custodian by email and/or U.S. mail.
3. Attempt telephone contact with the parent, guardian, or custodian.
4. Conduct a home visit if telephone contact is unsuccessful or if additional intervention is warranted.
5. Document all efforts, including notices, phone calls, and home visits, in the PowerApp database.

D. Petition Filing – Fifteen (15) Unexcused Absences

1. After all reasonable efforts have been made to resolve the attendance issue, the SAO shall **file a petition** in the appropriate Youth, City, County, or Justice Court when a student accumulates fifteen (15) unexcused absences.

2. If a petition is not filed, the SAO must maintain supporting documentation, including appropriate evidence, explaining why court action was not pursued.
3. All supporting documentation shall be maintained in the student's attendance case file.
4. All cases will be filed by the end of the next business day, not exceeding 72 hours.

Returned Mail Procedures

1. If any attendance notice is returned as undeliverable: The SAO shall contact the school district to obtain updated contact information for the student and family.
2. The returned mail shall be documented in the attendance database.
3. Additional attempts to contact the parent, guardian, or custodian shall be made using any updated information obtained.

XIX. Documentation Requirements

- A. SAOs shall maintain accurate and timely documentation of all attendance-related activities & SAO Documents, including but not limited to the following:
 1. Referrals (Database Entry & Hard File)
 2. Notices Sent (Database Entry)
 3. Telephone contacts and attempted contacts (Database Entry)
 4. Home visits (Database Entry & Hard File)
 5. School interventions received (Database (enter that they were received) & Hard File)
 6. Returned mail (Database Entry (enter that it was received) & Hard File)
 7. Court petitions filed (Database Entry (enter that case filed) & Hard File)
 8. Travel Vouchers (Hard File)
 9. Travel Authorizations (Hard File)

All hard file documents related to attendance will be filed by school & month of the current school year. All home visit tracker forms will be filed by month. All case files will be filed by student name with school intervention documents. All files related to an employee will be filed by month.

- B. SAOs will need to follow up with students withdrawing from one school district and enrolling in another. If a student is transferring to another school district in Mississippi, communication between SAOs is essential to ensure enrollment

- XIV. SAOs, under the leadership of the OCSAE & DOP Executive Director and SAO Supervisors, will work with the district to leverage community partners to strengthen the efforts needed to bolster school attendance in the district. To strengthen this effort, speaking engagements will be performed within the community that the SAO serves. Documentation of speaking engagement will be documented on the Speaking Engagement form.

- XX. SAOs will collaborate with school personnel and youth courts to obtain accurate

Information from the Juvenile Detention Centers (JDC). It is JDC's responsibility to Notify school districts when a student is placed in that facility. JDC will request records on students serving at JDC. While a student is serving time at a JDC, that students need to be marked as present. When asked, SAOs will serve on JDC Transition Teams.

- XXI. Students serving at Alternative Schools will only be marked absent when that student is absent from school. Truant students will be reported to SAOs by the feeder schools. SAOs will perform investigations in the same manner as other students.
- XXII. If SAOs have an issue with the enrollment and/or attendance of foster care students, please notify OCSAE & DOP point of contact for foster care. Please know that foster care students follow the same guidelines as other Students.

OSCAE/School Attendance Officer Check-In and Report Submissions

Daily Score of Work:

- I. A check-in is required by each SAO. The check-in must be conducted using the SAO Supervisor's TEAMS Channel. This check-in is to be made at the time the SAO arrives at their duty station. If an SAO is not reporting directly to their duty station, the SAO should contact their supervisor by phone, text, or email to advise of the reason. If an SAO is requesting leave, the SAO will abide by leave request procedures set by MSPB Employee Manual.
- II. Leave Forms need to be submitted to the SAO Supervisor prior to taking leave. Any emergency leave should be communicated with the Supervisor as soon as possible, and leave form submitted immediately upon return.
- III. Timesheets must be submitted to Supervisor on the last working day of the month by COB.
- IV. Calendars will be kept on your database and should be updated weekly by COB on Mondays of the corresponding week.
- V. All travel must be pre-approved by the immediate supervisor. Travel Authorizations are to be submitted on Mondays by COB for a week in advance. These Authorizations are to be submitted to SAO Supervisors. If unexpected travel must be made during the week, written documentation will be submitted to SAO Supervisor including city & state. Vouchers for reimbursement must be submitted to the SAO supervisor within seven days of the last date of travel for the month.
- VI. Monday will be utilized as an office day to complete any outstanding work from the previous week.
- VII. Equipment Receipts are due quarterly (September, December, March, and June). All equipment with an asset number in SAO's possession must be documented. Pictures of asset numbers must also be submitted in September, December, March, and June.
- VIII. MSR (Monthly Status Reports) are to be completed by the 15th of the month.
- IX. A checklist with End of Year Reports will be emailed in April. A deadline for reports will be given at that time also.
- X. School Attendance Officer's telephone voicemail and/or answering service must state: "You have reached the Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement and Dropout Prevention. Please leave your name, telephone number, and a brief message and your call will be returned as soon as possible. Thank you."
- XI. Please note that all calls must be returned within 24 hours of receipt. When answering the phone, you are expected to say, "Office of Compulsory School Attendance, this is (your name), how may I help you."
- XII. All e-mail messages must contain the following message: The foregoing electronic message and any files transmitted with it are confidential and are intended only for the use of the intended recipient named above. This communication may contain material protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). If you are not the intended recipient, copying, distribution, or use of the contents of this message is strictly prohibited. If you received this electronic message in error, please notify me immediately

at (your number). Your name, School Attendance Officer- (your county), office & MDE cellphone number go here.

- XIII. All email signatures will be in compliance with MDE Office of Communications guidelines.
- XIV. A headshot must be on your email as required by MDE.
- XV. School Attendance Officers must check their e-mail a minimum of twice per day and ensure prompt responses are submitted within 48 hours not to include weekends.

