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WILL THE ADOPTION OF A MORE STRINGENT  
ATTENDANCE POLICY IMPROVE THE  
ATTENDANCE OF STUDENTS AT  
NEHAUNSEY MIDDLE SCHOOL?

by  
Suzanne F. Gibson

A Master's Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor

Date Approved May 2020

## ABSTRACT

Suzanne F. Gibson

Will the adoption of a more stringent discipline policy improve the attendance of students at Nehaunsey Middle School?

May, 2000

Dr. Ronald Capasso  
Educational Leadership

The purpose of this quasi-experimental research design was to discover whether after implementing a more stringent attendance policy, would the attendance of students improve? A pattern of poor attendance was observed in an increasing number of students who were absent more than 10% of the school year, and this alarming trend prompted this study. The entire student body of 200 students was included in this study, in which attendance records were studied before and after the adoption of the new Attendance Policy. Although the intention was to compare data for the ten month school year period before and after the adoption of the policy, the new policy was not adopted until January, 2000. This was an insufficient time period for data collection and comparison and for a valid conclusion to be drawn. Additional study of this problem, with data collected over a minimum of six months, could provide an answer to this question.

## Mini-Abstract

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## Acknowledgements

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Focus of Study

How many days a school year can a student be absent without suffering any consequences of that absenteeism? How many days can a student be tardy without incurring consequences? These questions are difficult to answer in general terms that can be applied to all students. All schools should operate on the premise that all students should be present each day, and that the responsibility for attendance is primarily that of the student and parent. But should a school district establish a number of days required for attendance after which there will be consequences for being absent or tardy? How can students be expected to achieve the content in the Core Curriculum Standards if they are absent or late over 10% of the school year?

This problem has plagued Nehaunsey Middle School for several years and has caused great concern among staff members. Presently in Nehaunsey Middle School there are a number of students who were absent more than 30 days in the past school year. There are even more students who were absent more than 20 days. Presently, school policy provides few consequences for excessive tardiness or absenteeism. There are presently no repercussions for a student who misses final exams or standardized tests because they are on a family vacation.

The focus of this study will be the Nehaunsey Middle School. Following



the implementation of a more stringent absentee policy, this quasi-experimental study will compare the absentee and tardy rate of students from the past two years to the 1999-2000 school year. Pre and post data will be collected and compared to ascertain if there is an improvement in attendance after the adoption of a new attendance policy.

The impetus for this study comes from the overwhelming concern of staff members about the growing numbers of students who are chronically absent or late. The lax attitude of some students toward attendance and tardiness raises this level of concern among staff members. And the indifference of some parents towards these issues raises the level of concern even higher. The students and parents must be convinced that school attendance is important every day and that learning is diminished by students who are like revolving doors.

### Purpose of Study

The research of the professional literature by the intern will lay the groundwork for school administrators proposing a change in present school policy regarding attendance and tardiness. At this stage of the research it is assumed that there is a strong link between student achievement and student attendance. At this stage there is also an assumption that a well-written and consistently enforced attendance policy is a primary component of promoting student attendance. This will be confirmed through the critical review of the professional literature.

The purpose of this study is to discover whether after implementation of a more stringent attendance policy, will the attendance and lateness of students at the Nehaunsey Middle School improve? This will be determined by a quasi-

experimental design comparing pre and post policy attendance records of students. It is important to the school that the existing erratic attendance problem be resolved because the numbers of chronically late and absent students has increased each year, and this increasing trend sends a negative message to students and their families.

### Definitions

The following terms used in this study are defined below for their particular meaning within the context of this study.

**Attendance** New Jersey statute provides that students of public schools attend school for a minimum of 180 days per school year.

**Chronic Absenteeism** Since 180 days is the required number of days in New Jersey, absences at or above 10%, which would be 18 days, are considered to be chronic for purposes of this study.

**Frequent absenteeism** Similar to chronic absenteeism.

**PAC (Pupil Assistance Committee)** A meeting of teachers, child study team members, parents and others to discuss a student's specific problem and to develop a plan to address that student's problem.

**School avoidance** This results from children who seek to avoid fearful situations (school) and whose parents reinforce such behavior by allowing them to remain at home.

**School refusal** This results from a child who becomes more willful in his avoidance of school. The child may ultimately refuse to leave home.

**"Tourist" child** This results from an indulgent family in which the parents willfully remove the child from school to participate in other activities the parents deem to be more important.

### Limitations of the Study

This study will be limited to the students Nehaunsey Middle School. This limitation is intentional in that the purpose of the study is to solve a problem at this particular school, not make a comparison to other schools or a conclusion that can be generalized to other middle schools. In addition, the study will not make inferences as to the reasons for students' tardiness or absenteeism. Reasons for a student's absence or lateness can vary greatly, as was described in the literature review in Chapter 2, but those reasons are not a consideration for the remainder of the study. The data that will be collected can only be categorized in the same manner in which it is collected. For example, if the records indicate that a student had 14 unexcused absences for illness, no conclusions can be drawn about the nature of the absence other than illness. This is a limitation of the data that will be collected. and the conclusions that can be drawn from it.

### Setting of the Study

Nehaunsey Middle School is a school of approximately 200 sixth, seventh and eighth grade students. This middle school is part of the Greenwich Township School District, Gibbstown, Gloucester County, New Jersey, which also includes an elementary school (K-5) of approximately 350 students. Nehaunsey Middle School was built in the 1970's and at that time housed elementary students. But in the 1980's enrollment began to decline and the Greenwich Township Board of Education voted to consolidate the K-8 students at the Broad Street School and lease Nehaunsey to the Logan Township Board of Education for the education of its' middle school students. In 1990, with enrollments once again increasing, the lease with Logan's BOE was not

renewed and Nehaunsey became home to Greenwich's 6-8 students.

With the arrival of the year 2000, the district is faced with declining enrollments and the ever-increasing financial burden of operating two schools for a shrinking population. For this reason Nehaunsey's future is clouded.

The operation of these two schools has consistently placed Greenwich Township "above the box" in total cost per pupil calculations. In 1998-99 the NJ State median was \$7,874 and the state mean was \$8,214. Greenwich Township's average was \$9,178, which was the highest in Gloucester County, and has been for the last 5 years. In the days of administrative penalties, Greenwich Township was penalized because there were two principals and a superintendent. Since that time positions have been consolidated and at first, there was one principal at Broad Street School and a principal/superintendent at Nehaunsey School. After one year the positions were reversed, with a principal at Nehaunsey and principal/superintendent at Broad Street School. However, even this cost savings strategy did not prove to be enough to put Greenwich Township "in the box". This decline of enrollment has also led to a decrease in state aid because most state aid is calculated on a cost per student basis. In addition, the Greenwich School District has been penalized in current budgets because of an overprojection of student enrollment in past budgets. With enrollment continuing to decline, state aid will also continue to decrease.

Further compounding the declining enrollment problem is the shrinking real property ratable base. The primary ratable has always been Mobil Oil, but the refinery was recently sold to Valero. This sale triggered a reallocation of real estate taxes and business taxes. This reallocation left Greenwich with an illusionary increase of 156M in the real estate ratable base, resulting in a tax

windfall of 1.4M. But this windfall was quickly deflated the following year, leaving Greenwich with a dramatic and subsequent decrease in the ratable base.

| <b>Years</b> | <b>Real estate ratable base</b> |
|--------------|---------------------------------|
| 1994-95      | \$677,854,216                   |
| 1995-96      | \$683,160,957                   |
| 1996-97      | \$683,457,803                   |
| 1997-98      | \$682,221,844                   |
| 1998-99      | \$838,724,269                   |
| 1999-00      | \$696,062,618                   |

For fiscal year 1999-2000, there was also an increase of 17.1% in the tuition that Greenwich Township pays to send its' high school students to Paulsboro High School. Consequently, for fiscal year 1999-2000, Greenwich Township projected a tax rate increase from 71.8 cents to 92.4 cents per \$100 of assessed property value. Although the school budget of \$8,242,681 for 1999-2000 was approved by the voters, that "yes" vote is more of an aberration than a vote of true and constant support. In the last six years, only two school budgets have been passed. The 1998-99 budget was also passed, but partly as a result of the mobilization of public outrage at the riffing of 11 teachers and the resulting larger class sizes. Only when there is a major effort by the Greenwich Township Teacher's Association, through public meetings and publicity, to pass the budget has that goal been achieved in the past six years.

Through discussions between Greenwich Township and Paulsboro Boards of Education which began over three years ago, a plan entitled "Vision 2000" was proposed. Since Greenwich has always sent its' high school students to Paulsboro, this proposal would alter the current plan by sending Paulsboro's middle school students to Greenwich. Paulsboro High School now houses both

Paulsboro's middle and high school students. Yet despite a recent building addition, Paulsboro claims that it is overcrowded. Sending Paulsboro's middle school students to Greenwich could alleviate the overcrowding. However, this plan raises other serious issues. At this time the planning has been done in a secretive manner, evoking public curiosity but not much information being available to the public.

All of these factors paint a portrait of a district that is under stress and facing some major dilemmas, as yet unresolved. The district is facing serious decisions, which will have critical impact on the future direction of the district. The range of major problems has prevented the district from dealing with other less critical issues, such as the adoption of a new attendance policy.

#### Significance of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to Nehaunsey Middle School, but could have significance for other similar school districts. However, the significance of this study is not to contribute to the body of knowledge on this subject but rather to solve a problem that exists at this particular school, due partly to a particular policy. The trend toward increasing absenteeism in this district is increasing, and that trend needs to be reversed. Over 90% of the students at Nehaunsey Middle School are bussed to school. Yet with over 90% of the students eligible for bus service, many arrive at school chronically late. One eighth grade math teacher kept track of attendance and tardiness in her first period math class and discovered that on only 19 out of 180 school days was her entire class present for math instruction. Needless to say, she is very concerned about the performance of these students on the GEPA when so many have missed so much class time.

The negative perception by the student body that some students are “getting away with something” needs to be altered. But rather than focusing only on punitive measures, there needs to be a balance regarding the advantages of being in school. The study could also have significance to the elementary school in the district at a future date, but that is presently beyond the scope of this study.

#### Organization of the Study

The remainder of the study is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 - Review of Literature, Chapter 3 - Design of the Study,  
Chapter 4 - Presentation of the Research Findings, Chapter 5 - Conclusions,  
Implications and Further Study

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

How important is consistent attendance? Are there personal consequences for students who are chronically absent? Not surprisingly, attendance is a major predictor of a student's academic success as determined by teacher grades (Carruthers, 1993). In addition to the indicator of report cards grades, there is also a positive correlation between consistent attendance and performance on standardized tests, both nationally administered achievement tests and state administered criterion-referenced tests. In a review of statistics on attendance in many states, attendance rates are highest at the elementary grades, somewhat lower at the middle grades and lowest in the high school years. This decline in attendance rates should be a concern for all parents (Crone, 1992). It should be of particular concern for parents of elementary students since poor elementary school attendance often results in later problems such as retention, delinquency and dropping out. An elementary student accumulating as few as 15 absences a year is definitely at risk for poor attendance habits in the future school years (Carruthers, 1993).

There are also more subtle consequences of chronic attendance problems. In classes where students are frequently missing, teachers must spend time on remediation for the benefit of those who were absent from class. However, this can result in a class in which the balance of the students who were consistently present are now bored, unmotivated students who can be resentful that they are deprived of new learning opportunities (Crone, 1992).



Additionally, teachers protest that it is unfair that they are held accountable for student progress when they have little or no control over whether students attend class (Rood, 1989). Others would argue that if the teachers' classes are interesting, motivating and challenging, there is a greater chance that students will make it a point not to be absent from those classes. One long-term consequence can also result from poor attendance. Frequently colleges and employers request a student's permanent records, which include attendance records. Choices a student or their family made in middle or high school regarding attendance can follow them and have a detrimental impact at some later juncture.

Some detractors of the posit that there is a correlation between attendance and performance point to a lack of research to support the contention that attendance positively correlates with performance. While some literature does exist which negates the positive correlation between good attendance and achievement (Rozell in Crone), most practitioners, both through personal experience and research, are in agreement that a strong record of attendance directly relates to academic achievement (Carruthers, 1993).

Why are some students frequently absent? The term "frequently" will be defined in this literature review as a student who is absent for 10% or more of the school year. The reasons for absence are varied, surprising and revealing. Some are absent for basic reasons such as lack of transportation or bad weather, but these reasons, in conjunction with illness and family choice to absent a student account for a 5-8% rate of absenteeism, a rate that could be considered reasonable (Rood, 1989).

Some younger children, due to their introverted nature, seek to avoid

situations that are unfamiliar or uncomfortable. This can result in school avoidance due to a child's fear or anxiety. If this child is allowed to stay home, the parent reinforces these feelings of fear and inadequacy. As the child continues to remain home, perhaps enjoying a parent's attention or gaining additional time for play or TV, this school phobia can result in school refusal (Carruthers, 1993).

The role of the parent is critical in a child's attitude toward school attendance. Some parents perceive their child as suffering from real or imagined illnesses, and feel a strong compulsion to keep the child close at hand. This real or imagined weakness in the child encourages the child's continued dependence on the parent. In this type of co-dependent relationship, the family becomes enmeshed in chaos. In some cases conflict between the parents can lead to a child's school avoidance because the child infers that it is his role to keep the parent's focus on the child, and thus diverted from the battles between the parents (Carruthers, 1993).

Another variation of parental role problems can result in the "tourist child". This child generally comes from an indulgent family which willfully takes a child out of school for family vacations, ballet lessons, swim meets and other events that the family deems to be more important. These parents will often ingratiate themselves with school personnel and become active in school activities. The problem for these students becomes more apparent in the middle and high school years where it is more difficult to make up work and stay in the good graces of many teachers (Carruthers, 1993).

Sometimes inadequate student motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, is a cause of absence, usually resulting from poor self-esteem. Some students are

chronically absent due to an unchallenging academic environment with heavy reliance on repetitive assignments. A workload that is too difficult may encourage other students to be absent from school (Rood, 1989). Others find the classroom situation to be emotionally stressful and consequently choose to be absent (Eisele, 1996). In an unsupportive school environment, students who lack coping skills or who exhibit personal deficits, find themselves in an unmanageable situation, and choose to absent themselves (Rohnman, 1993). In some unfortunate cases students choose to be absent because they sense a “good riddance” attitude toward them from some staff members (Rood, 1989).

What have schools done to improve attendance? The research reveals a wide and varied number of approaches to improve attendance. Different types of mentoring programs have been implemented, some with great success, others with minimal success. Teacher mentoring programs in which teachers spend time with students on a one-to-one basis away from the classroom resulted in significant improvement in attendance (Abcug, 1991). Another program which brought together college students and at-risk eighth grade students for counseling on a variety of issues yielded no significant improvement in attendance (Huisman, 1992).

Some programs have involved parent partnerships, in which parents volunteer in the schools and also attend parenting classes. In one school this program did result in a 62% decrease in absences (Nweze, 1993). Other programs went further and had parents attend classes with students, and this also resulted an improvement in attendance (Volkman, 1997). Other formats of intensively monitoring, counseling and strengthening the family-school bond have resulted in improved attendance (Garry, 1996).

Incentives have been employed in some districts as a method to keep students in classes, and these programs have been wide ranged. One district awarded fast food coupons for improved attendance, and found this to be very successful (Philips, 1995). Other incentives included honor certificates, awards or pins for attendance, exemption from final exams or added points on grades. However, several researchers questioned the effectiveness of these attempts since “gifts do not generally motivate chronic truants” (Rood, 1989).

The attempts of some programs to improve attendance have been more punitive in nature. The most frequent component has included a reduction in a students grades or credits for poor attendance (Sperry, 1990). Some students have been required to attend alternative classes for a predetermined time. These classes were designed to segregate the students from the rest of the school population while providing them with an opportunity to keep up with their regular studies (Bristow, 1979). Some schools have gone so far as to invoke parental sanctions through the courts and even police intervention in their attempts to have students be present for school (Gullatt, 1997).

When evaluating the literature and research regarding school attendance, one fact remains clear: the success of any program designed to improve attendance will require the cooperative effort of school personnel, students and their families (Carruthers, 1993). In almost every program that was deemed to have been successful, family involvement was an element. Some schools went a step beyond involvement and included strategies to make parents more accountable for their child’s attendance (Garry, 1996). Additionally, the strategies that were most successful included positive motivators not only to attend school but also to improve academic performance (Zafirani, 1987).

How can a school district recognize whether the existing policy is a factor in poor attendance? There are several symptoms that the policy is a problem.

They include the following:

- Too many unexcused absences
- Inconsistent practices
- No chance for a student to learn from attendance mistakes
- Flagrant abuse of the guidelines because students know the loopholes
- Outdated policy
- Average attendance below 92%
- Excessive parent permissiveness
- Teacher frustration and stress regarding current policy

(Andrews, 1985)

If a school decides that the policy needs overhauling, the research offers suggestions to assure the best results. First, there are the legal implications of policy to be considered. Since it is critical not to write and implement policy that is in conflict with state statutes, a careful review of statutes is necessary (Rood, 1989). It should also be kept in mind that although the courts can be sympathetic toward students, “the courts are hesitant to intervene in the decisions of school officials” (Sperry, 1990). It is necessary to acknowledge that the creation of policy can be a controversial issue. To avoid undue controversy, there should be input from teachers, administrators and secretaries as well as students and parents. It is also important to inform the board and seek their endorsement (Andrews, 1985).

The purpose of the policy should not be simply punitive but rather should be educationally supportive in nature, attempting to develop a positive attitude toward attendance, and reflecting the mission or philosophy of the school. It should be written in clear, unequivocal language that can be easily understood by students, parents and school personnel (Rood, 1989). Definitions of terms

must be explicitly defined, such as the distinctions between “excused and “unexcused” absences. It is also important to recognize those areas of concern in the current policy so that those concerns may be addressed. For example, this might include examining present statistics on daily average attendance so that an acceptable rate of absenteeism can be ascertained (Andrews, 1985). There should also be a statement that proclaims that attendance is the responsibility of the student and parents (Rood, 1989). Enforcement of that policy is the responsibility of the school district.

If the policy is to contain a maximum number of permitted absences before penalties are imposed, there should be an educational rationale for the selection of the number absences that can be allowed (Rood, 1989). Notification periods after a certain number of absences must be clearly delineated. But it is also necessary to ensure that those provisions are enforced. The research yielded numerous examples of newly enacted policy that were not enforced or enforced erratically. This lack of appropriate enforcement always led to negative result in correlation.

Due process considerations must be addressed in two areas. First, once the policy is adopted, students, staff and parents must be fully informed. Students and parents should receive a written copy of the policy, and should sign, date and return a statement that they have received the new policy. There should also be a simple and expedient procedural process that allows a student an appeal for perceived unfair treatment (Rood, 1989).

It is clear from the literature review that while the attendance policy itself is a component of promoting good attendance, it is certainly not the only method to be employed. Policy must be clearly written, clearly communicated to all

concerned parties, and consistently enforced. But a solid school and parent relationship must be cultivated if the policy is to be effective.

## Chapter 3

### Design of the Study

This research design is a quasi-experimental design and its population will include all students in grades 6, 7 and 8 at Nehaunsey Middle School. They will be studied as a total group of students comprising the population of Nehaunsey Middle School, and also in a narrower context as a single grade level (i.e. sixth grade). The intent of the study is to compare the monthly attendance figures both before and after the implementation of the new attendance policy. The research hypothesis is that when comparing attendance figures by month both before and after the attendance policy implementation, the attendance figures after the adoption of the new policy will be improved.

Attendance figures were collected for the months of September 1998 through June 1999. This data was collected and tabulated by month on each individual student and was also tabulated for the month by grade level. Comparisons will be made based on data collected from the entire school population and by grade level. In addition, the research design will also track those students in the current seventh and eighth grade who have poor attendance (over 15 days absent). Even though data for the school year 1998-99 was collected, students from 8th grade have since graduated, so it is not possible to use data from those individual students as a basis of comparison. Data has also been collected from 6th grade students for the school year 1999-2000, but since they were not in Nehaunsey Middle School last year, there is no direct basis of comparison. Since only 1999-2000 seventh and eighth graders



were in the school both before and after the adoption of the policy, individual student comparisons will be made from data collected from those grade levels.

The current enrollment of the school is 189 students, approximately evenly divided among the three grades, and all students will be subjects for this study. There were 43 students who were absent for 15 or more days during school year 1998-99. Twenty of those students have graduated, but the remaining 23 are currently 7th or 8th graders. Data for these individual students will be collected and compared to ascertain if the new policy affected these individual students who demonstrated attendance problems last year.

A new electronic system for recording attendance has been in operation in the school since November 1999. This attendance module is a part of a software package entitled "School Office" that was purchased by the district from School Decision Systems. Several other modules are now in use, including scheduling, grade reporting, honor roll and grade point average calculating. This new attendance module has a distinct advantage in that the district can create or establish their own categories for recording attendance such as excused, unexcused, half/ full day absence, suspension in/out of school and any other category deemed necessary. With the existing attendance policy there are few penalties for excessive absence, and therefore, it was rarely necessary to make these distinctions. Since the new policy will make distinctions in the accumulation of excused vs. unexcused, the new system will offer a more efficient means of tracking this data on individual students.

The problem inherent in this research design is the timing of the implementation of the revised attendance policy. When this research project was conceptualized in Spring, 1999, with the intention that the new policy would

be adopted during the summer months, and be implemented at the beginning of the 1999-2000 school year. However, for reasons beyond the control of the intern, this task was not accomplished. Upon returning to school in fall 1999, the intern began the process of revising the policy and preparing a presentation of the revised policy to the board of education for consideration and adoption. Unfortunately, this adoption process was not completed until January 26, 2000. Therefore, only data from February 2000 is included in this research study. This set of data will be compared with data from February 1999.

In quantitative research one of the goals is to control the variance of dependent or confounding variables so that their affect on the independent variable can be limited or at least quantified. However, this is a quasi-experimental design that includes as its population the entire school student body. There will be no attempt to manipulate or control any variable other than the independent variable - the new attendance policy. This should maintain the internal validity of this research design and the results that are obtained.

It is acknowledged that there are factors both within and outside of the school that can affect a student's attendance. These could range from permissive parents, school anxiety or peer concerns to liking or disliking a particular course or teacher. But most of these variables are beyond the control of the researcher or the scope of this study. Because these variables existed before and will exist after the implementation of the new policy, it will be assumed that if changes are found, it will be from the effect of the policy, not from other variables.

## Chapter 4

### Presentation of the Research Findings

Despite the intention of the researcher that the new Attendance Policy would be adopted and implemented by September 1999, just in time for the beginning of the new school year, this did not happen. The researcher had provided the superintendent with the appropriate research and delineated the required steps, but no action was taken during the summer months.

In September, the researcher began the process necessary for adoption of this new policy. Several meetings were held with the superintendent and principal, and it was decided that this issue needed a committee review. The committee consisted of the superintendent and principal, two teachers and approximately ten parents of students from each grade level, kindergarten through eight. The intern presented research findings to the committee for their consideration. After two meetings with this committee, the conclusions and findings were presented to the Board of Education in October 1999. Although several of the board members agreed that this policy was long overdue and definitely necessary, it took three additional months from the initial presentation for the policy to be adopted.

One of the major stumbling blocks to adoption was the issue of family vacations taken during the school year, and whether these absences should be considered as excused absences. Two board members were adamant that this provision be included. They shared this position because of a concern for families in which parents had no choice concerning when they could take a

vacation. Valero (formerly Mobil) employs many parents in this town, and the newly hired employees must take their vacation when the company dictates. These board members felt that a family should not be penalized for taking a vacation during the school year. Their first proposal was that all students would be permitted one family vacation per year, for an unlimited number of days, and these days would be excused absences. Members of the Attendance Policy committee attended these board meetings and expressed their concern that this would lead to abuse. Another point raised by committee members was that students with divorced parents might circumvent the intent by taking a vacation with each parent. Most committee members felt that it was not the role of the school (or the board) to be concerned with family vacations. Rather, the objective of the Attendance Policy was to reduce excessive absences. The debate on this issue continued, and was not resolved for three months. The final decision of the board was to adopt the Attendance Policy with the provision that students would be allowed up to four days of excused absence for a family vacation, with prior approval by the building principal.

The Greenwich Township Board of Education adopted the revised Attendance Policy on January 24, 2000. The changes in the policy are briefly outlined here.

Excused absences include:

- Pupil illness, as evidenced by a doctor's note
- Death in the immediate family
- A bona fide family emergency
- Observance of a religious holiday
- Pupil's suspension from school
- Pupil's attendance in court

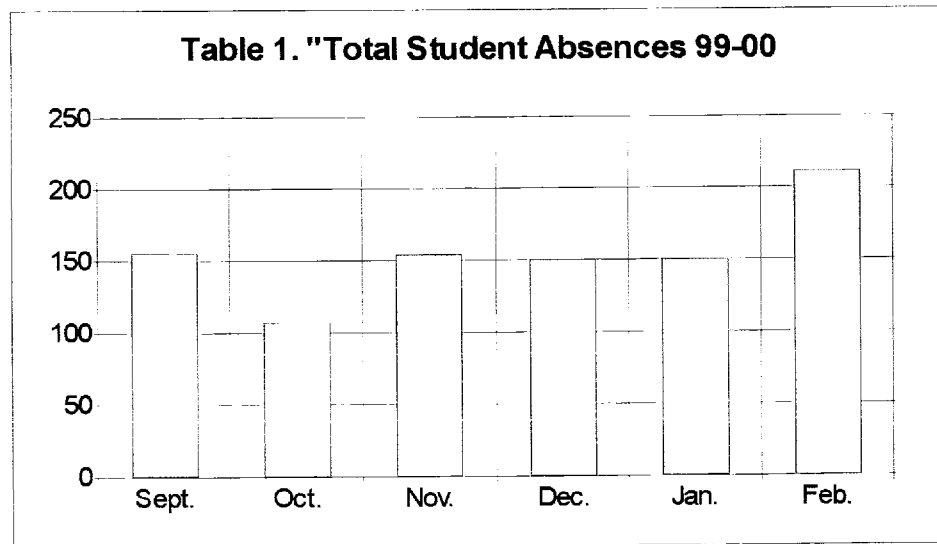
- Interview with prospective employer or school
- Medical or dental appointments that cannot be scheduled at another time
- All other absences are unexcused
- Three instances of unexcused tardiness will constitute one unexcused absence.
- When a student reaches five (5) days of unexcused absence, a letter will be sent home again notifying parents of this policy.
- When a student reaches six days of unexcused absence, a Pupil Assistance Committee meeting will be scheduled to suggest a plan to help the student.
- When a student in grades 4-8 reaches eight (8) days of unexcused absence, the student will be required to attend a four (4) hour session of Saturday school.
- When a student in grades 4-8 reaches twelve (12) days of unexcused absence, the student will be required to attend two 4 hour sessions of Saturday school.
- In the case of a family vacation, if the family submits a letter to the building principal in advance, the student will be granted 4 days of excused absence. These vacation days will not count towards the accumulation of 8 days of unexcused absence.

These changes in the Attendance Policy were summarized in a letter that went home to inform all parents (Appendix A). Parents were required to sign a copy of the letter indicating that they had received the changes in the policy. The superintendent announced at the January 24th board meeting that because the policy had been adopted at the mid-year, the penalties as outlined above would be cut in half, and effective immediately.

It was only possible to collect data from February 2000 because the board did not adopt the new Attendance Policy until January 24, 2000. This is most unfortunate because with only one month of data, especially data that was collected after the Attendance Policy was adopted mid-year, it is insufficient data

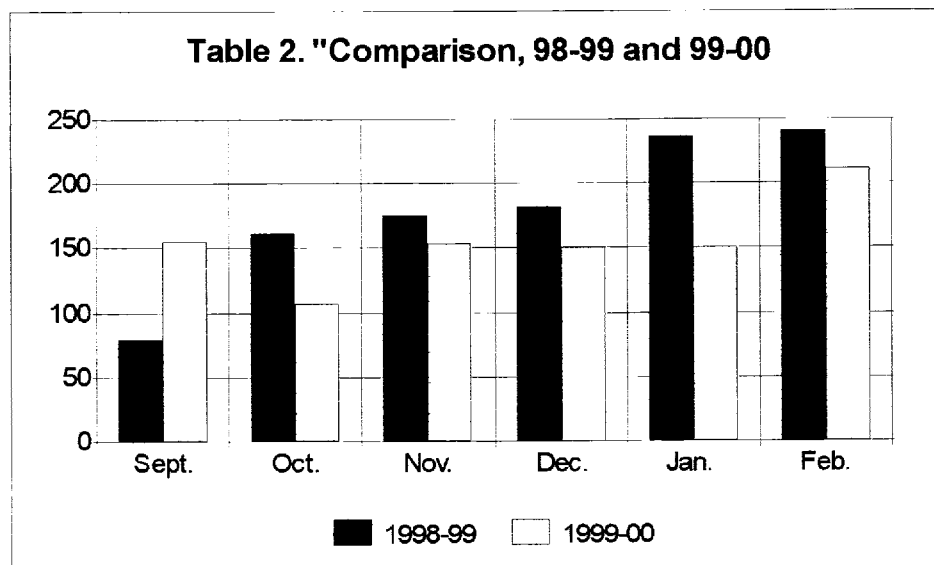
from which to draw a valid conclusion. Parents need sufficient time to understand and adapt to the new requirements, especially parents of those students who are chronically absent. This conclusion was quickly reached when chronically absent students returned to school with no note. When the school nurse called, parents said they didn't understand that a note was required. They did not understand that a parent note for illness would not excuse the absence.

Nonetheless, a summary of the data that was collected indicated that there was virtually no change in the attendance patterns of most students, especially those who were chronically absent. In fact, when viewing the total number of students absent in the month before (January) and after the policy was in effect, (February), the total number of absences increased to the highest level of the school year.



This one statistic does not necessarily indicate any specific trend. The fact that student absences increased by 40% in the first month after the adoption of the new policy could be explained by several other reasons. In comparing the attendance for the same months for the previous year, it was found that

attendance for 1999-2000 was overall improved, and that in 1998-99, February had also been the month of highest absence.



Given that the impetus for this policy was to address those students who were chronically absent, data is presented indicating the number of days absent during the 1999-2000 school year for the twenty students with the worst attendance records. Twenty represents approximately 10% of the student population, and includes those students with more than ten absences from September 1999 through February 2000. The absences recorded here are a total of excused and unexcused absences for these months. Prior to February 2000 daily records of absences were kept, but not categorized as excused or unexcused.

**Table 3. Attendance Records of Twenty Chronically Absent Students**

|    | Sept. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. | Jan. | Feb. | Total |
|----|-------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| JA | 4     | 11   | 3    | 3    | 14   | 6    | 41    |
| LM | 10    | 6    |      | 8.5  |      | 2    | 26.5  |
| SC | 5     | 6    |      | 7    | 4    | 4    | 26    |
| CS | 2.5   | 10   | 2.5  | 1    | 3    | 4    | 23    |
| TG | 2     | 3    | 3    | 3    | 2    | 6    | 19    |
| SS | 14    | 1    |      | 1    |      | 3    | 19    |
| LS |       | 3    | 1    | 4    | 4    | 7    | 19    |
| EB | 2     | 3.5  | 7    | 1    | 2    | 3    | 18.5  |
| JP | 4     | 4    | 3    |      | 3    | 4    | 18    |
| JW |       | 2    | 5    | 6    | 4    |      | 17    |
| BB |       | 3    |      | 2    | 2    | 9    | 16    |
| SW |       |      | 4    | 3    | 2    | 5    | 14    |
| JG | 2     | 4    |      | 1    | 4    | 2    | 13    |
| WS | 4     | 3    | 1    | 3    | 2    |      | 13    |
| JK | 3     | 1    | 3    |      | 4    | 1    | 12    |
| PC |       | 2    | 3    | 3    | 1    | 3    | 12    |
| SF | 1     |      | 4    | 1    |      | 6    | 12    |
| VC | 1     | 2    |      | 1    | 1    | 7    | 12    |
| MP |       | 2    | 3    | 5    | 1    |      | 11    |
| DP |       | 7.5  |      |      |      | 3    | 10.5  |
|    | 54.5  | 74   | 42.5 | 53.5 | 53   | 75   | 352.5 |

In an effort to assess whether the new policy had any effect on unexcused absences, the number of unexcused absences of these same twenty students was examined. They were ranked by the number of unexcused absences in February, 2000, and this data was compared to the total absences for the year.



**Table 4. Unexcused Absences for Twenty Students, February, 2000**

| <b>Student</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>Unex. Feb.</b> |
|----------------|--------------|-------------------|
| VC             | 12           | 7                 |
| TG             | 19           | 6                 |
| SC             | 26           | 5                 |
| SW             | 14           | 5                 |
| CS             | 23           | 4                 |
| SS             | 19           | 4                 |
| EB             | 18.5         | 3                 |
| PC             | 12           | 3                 |
| DP             | 10.5         | 3                 |
| JA             | 41           | 2                 |
| LS             | 19           | 2                 |
| JK             | 12           | 1                 |
| SF             | 12           | 1                 |
| LM             | 26.5         | 0                 |
| JP             | 18           | 0                 |
| JW             | 17           | 0                 |
| BB             | 16           | 0                 |
| JG             | 13           | 0                 |
| WS             | 13           | 0                 |
| MP             | 11           | 0                 |

While 35% of these students had no unexcused absences during this month, more than 50% of these students had 2 or more unexcused absences in one month. Six students had four or more unexcused absences, warranting a session of Saturday school from 8AM to 12PM. While one month of data collection is insufficient to draw any valid conclusion, it appears that the policy may have been moderately successful with improving the attendance for 30% of this group.

In studying the entire school population, there was a 40% increase in the

total absences during the month of February 2000, the month following the adoption of the new policy. There were 18 students who accumulated 3 or more unexcused absences in February, and of those 18, 5 were not in the group of chronically absent students. Although it cannot be proven with the data at this point in the study, it does not appear that this policy is a strong deterrent to chronic absences at least not yet.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions, Implications and Further Study

The first conclusion to be drawn from this research is that a single month of data is a completely insufficient period of time for meaningful study or comparison. In the single month of data collection, the overall attendance of the total student population actually showed a 40% increase in absenteeism. However, this single statistic may or may not be indicative of any trend. As noted in Chapter 4, during the year prior to the implementation of the Attendance Policy, the number of students absent for the month was also highest in February of 1999, even though February has the fewest days. The study of those individual students with the highest number of days absent was also inconclusive due to the short duration of time. No valid conclusion can be drawn from this data.

The other conclusion that can be reached is that this problem deserves continued study. At this time there is no conclusion as to whether the Attendance Policy had or will have any affect on attendance at Nehaunsey Middle School. But the attendance problem still exists, and must continue to be studied. It is hoped that effect of this policy will be clearly seen by the improvement in attendance next year. With ample time for families to understand the new policy and its implications and possible consequences, this is a possibility.

The results of this study have changed the responsibility of the researcher from the quantitative role of data collector and interpreter to the qualitative role of seeking an explanation of why this policy failed to achieve its intended goal.

Although the answer to that question is multi-faceted, it can be summarized in this statement: in a dysfunctional school district where leadership is preoccupied with a contractual impasse and the problems resulting from that impasse, the will or focus to address other problems or affect meaningful change is not present. This conclusion is based on many of the events that occurred during the Attendance Policy adoption process.

When the 1999-2000 school year began in September, Greenwich Township was the only district in the state without a contract for the second year in a row. There had even been talk of a strike on the first day of school. In fact, during a previous negotiations session in 1995, a vote had been taken by the teacher's association that they would never again return to school on opening day without an approved and ratified contract. However, due to a family tragedy of the association president, the negotiations process was detoured during the summer of 1999, and the staff returned to school for a second year without a contract. Needless to say, staff morale had plummeted and it was quickly being replaced with cynical, defiant antagonism. Against this backdrop the researcher began this project.

In discussions with the superintendent in spring of 1999, he agreed that attendance was a problem, and he felt that a revised attendance policy might begin to address the problem. While he raised the possibility of assembling a committee to address this issue, the researcher suggested that formulating policy was a board of education matter and perhaps better left to the board. As the school year ended, the researcher supplied the superintendent with the attendant research and suggested guidelines and the superintendent agreed that he would take this issue to the board.

When the superintendent returned in mid-August from his 5 week vacation, the researcher learned that the attendance policy had been shelved for the summer and it had not be presented to the board. Accordingly, there would be no new policy for the opening of school. The superintendent had also decided that a committee of administrators, parents, students and teachers would be required to develop this new policy.

The researcher, with the guidance of the building principal, selected members for this committee. Only one other teacher was willing to participate due to job actions rising from the continued impasse. One parent selected was also the chairperson of the policy committee of the Board of Education. In this way the board would be informed as to the intent and progress of the Attendance Policy Committee. When the committee met in October, most issues were quickly resolved. The issue of family vacations was discussed, but the group was unanimous (even the board member) that vacations during the school year should be unexcused.

The first draft was presented to the board for the October meeting. The board members listened attentively to the proposal and agreed that the problem needed to be addressed expeditiously, but they were unwilling to be rushed into any decision. (They were still reeling from the fallout of a hasty decision by the superintendent to withhold two days' salary from teachers for not attending an In-service program on the first two days of school. This matter has since gone to PERC.) Two members voiced the opinion that family vacations should be excused absences. Their employment situations (one works for Mobil/Valero, the primary employer in Gibbstown) were at the root of their strong positions, and their rigid positions held up the adoption until January 2000.

After the board voted unanimously to adopt the policy (with a provision for excused family vacations), the superintendent announced that since the policy was being adopted mid-year, the number of days absent necessary to incur a penalty would be cut in half. He had not consulted with any committee member or the building principal before announcing this. While at first glance his proclamation seems like an appropriate measure, it created significant logistical enforcement problems. A PAC meeting is now necessitated when a student reaches three (not six) days of unexcused absence. A Saturday school program is the penalty for students who reach four (not eight) days of unexcused absence. During February alone, several students reached these thresholds, and by March over 15 students required PAC meetings. This shortening of the number of accumulated days has affected students who would not have been disciplined if the policy had been in effect for a full year. But worse, the provision that a student who misses more than five (ten) days shall be reported to the Chief School Administrator for possible prosecution has been completely ignored, even though some students have accumulated over 20 days of unexcused absence. To date not a single family has faced prosecution in municipal court for excessive absence. Ironically the well-intended Attendance Policy has now become not only ineffective, but also the object of ridicule by staff members who must attend PAC meetings for students with three days unexcused absence.

The leadership skills of the researcher have been tested and strengthened throughout this project. Without the active support of the chief school administrator, it is difficult to move toward any change. Several other projects did not require the same level of administrative support because they

would affect only Nehaunsey Middle School and not the entire district. In these projects it was relatively easy to build a consensus for change because there would be direct tangible benefit to staff members. This was most clearly seen in initiating an electronic grading program. Once staff members saw the benefits of change, moving toward change was painless. Even those teachers who would now be required to keep electronic attendance records because of the new Attendance Policy did so readily because they saw the benefit. Sustaining that commitment to the Attendance Policy has been more difficult because it now appears the policy will not achieve its goal, at least not this year.

There has been limited organizational change that has resulted from this project. Preoccupation with the contractual impasse as well as other major problems such as a decision on the consolidation of two existing buildings into just one has not allowed time for consideration of other issues. And although the new Attendance Policy was finally adopted, the timing and lack of attention to its implications was counterproductive to its success. Moving a few individuals toward change is possible when they are convinced that they will personally benefit from it. Moving an organization toward change without the support of the decision-makers is difficult if not impossible.

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**Appendix A**  
**Revised Attendance Policy**

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## 5200 ATTENDANCE

### A. Definitions

1. "Attendance" is a pupil's presence in school and in the classroom to which he or she is assigned at the times scheduled for instruction or other school activities.
  - a. A pupil will be considered to have attended school if he or she has been present at least four hours during the school day.
  - b. A kindergarten pupil will be considered to have attended school if he or she has been present at least four hours during the kindergarten session to which the pupil is assigned.
  - c. A pupil not present in school because of his or her participation in an approved school activity, such as a field trip, meeting, cooperative education assignment, or athletic competition will be considered to be in attendance.
2. "Excused absence" is a pupil's absence from school for a full day or a portion of a day for one or more of the following reasons:
  - a. The pupil's illness, as evidenced by a doctor's note
  - b. A death or critical illness in the pupil's immediate family;
  - c. Quarantine;
  - d. Observance of the pupil's religion on a day approved for that purpose by the State Board of Education;
  - e. The pupil's suspension from school;
  - f. The pupil's required attendance in court;

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- g. Interviews with a prospective employer or with an admissions officer of an institution of higher education; and
  - h. Necessary and unavoidable medical or dental appointments that cannot be scheduled at a time other than the school day.
3. "Truancy" is a pupil's absence from all or a part of the school day without the knowledge of the pupil's parent. A pupil will also be considered truant if he or she
- a. Leaves school at lunch time without a pass;
  - b. Leaves school without permission when school is still in session;
  - c. Leaves class because of illness and does not report to the school nurse as directed; or
  - d. Is present in school but is absent from class without approval. Such truancy from class is a "class cut."
4. "Unexcused absence" is a pupil's absence for all or part of a school day for any reason other than those listed in A2 above.
- a. Absence is expressly not excused for any of the following purposes (this list is intended to be illustrative and is not inclusive):
    - (1) Employment other than school-approved work assignments,
    - (2) Performance of household or baby-sitting duties, and
    - (3) Hunting.

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- b. Three instances of unexcused tardiness as established by Policy No. 5200 will constitute a single unexcused absence.

## B. Notice to school of a pupil's absence

1. A parent or adult pupil is requested to call the school office between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. of the morning of the pupil's absence.
2. The parent of a pupil who attended morning session but will not attend afternoon session should call the school office before 9 a.m. to give notice of the pupil's absence.
3. A parent or adult pupil who anticipates a future absence or anticipates that an absence will be prolonged should notify the Principal, who will assist in the arrangement of makeup work. If the absence is to be short-term (less than one week), the pupil's teacher will provide home assignments. If the absence is to be a long-term absence (one week or more), home instruction will be arranged.

## C. Readmission to school after an absence

1. A pupil returning from an absence of any length must present to the teacher a written statement, dated and signed by the parent or adult pupil, of the reasons for the absence.
2. A note explaining a pupil's absence for non-communicable illness for a period of more than three working days must be accompanied by a physician's statement of the pupil's illness.
3. A pupil who has been absent by reason of having or being suspected of having a communicable disease must present to the school nurse written evidence of being free of communicable disease, in accordance with Policy No. 8451.

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## D. Instruction

1. Teachers are expected to cooperate in the preparation of home assignments for pupils who anticipate an excused absence of two working days or more duration. The parent or adult pupil must request such home assignments.
2. A pupil who anticipates an excused absence of more than one weeks duration may be eligible for home instruction in accordance with Policy No. 2412. The parent or adult pupil must request home instruction.
3. Pupils absent for any reason are expected to make up the work missed. In grade 4 and above, the pupil is responsible for requesting missed assignments and any assistance required. Teachers will provide make up assignments as necessary.
4. In general, pupils will be allowed a reasonable time to make up missed work for each one day of absence. Teachers shall make reasonable accommodations to extend time for pupils.
5. A pupil who missed a test because of an excused absence shall be offered an opportunity to take the test or an alternate test. In no case will a pupil who missed a test because of his or her observance of a religious holiday be denied an opportunity to make up the test.

## E. Denial of course credit

1. The teacher will determine the credit to be awarded a pupil for make-up work, subject to the rules set forth in this section. Where class participation is a factor in the learning process, the teacher may consider a pupil's absences in determining a final grade, except that absences for the observance of a pupil's religious holiday or for a suspension from school cannot adversely affect the pupil's grade. The teacher may record an incomplete grade, in accordance with Regulation No. 2624, for any pupil who has not had full opportunity to make up missed work.

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2. An elementary pupil may be retained at grade level, in accordance with Policy No. 5410, when he or she has been absent for 20% (36) or more school days, excused or unexcused, except that absences for the observance of religious holidays and during a pupil's suspension will not count toward the total. Exceptions to this rule may be made for pupils whose absences are excused and who have demonstrated through completion of home assignments and/or home instruction that they have mastered the proficiencies established for the assigned courses of study.

## F. Notice to pupils and parents

Parents will be notified on a daily basis to inform them of a pupil's absence.

## G. Discipline

1. Pupils may be denied participation in co-curricular activities if their attendance fails to meet the standards set forth in Policy No. 2430.
2. Pupils may be denied participation in athletic competition if their attendance fails to meet the standards set forth in Board Policy No. 2431.
3. No pupil who is absent from school for observance of a religious holiday may be deprived of any award or of eligibility for or opportunity to compete for any award because of the absence.
4. Truancies will be handled as follows:
  - a. First instance: school personnel will confer with the pupil about the illegal absence and will notify the pupil and the parent that continued truancies may result in serious discipline.
  - b. Second instance: school personnel will request the parent to attend a conference with the teacher and the pupil to discuss the cause of the truancies.

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- c. Third instance: school personnel will confer with the guidance counselor. The counselor may confer with the pupil and/or parent, change the pupil's program, or refer the pupil to the Child Study Team.
5. When a pupil under the age of sixteen is absent without excuse more than 10 school days in any one school year, the Principal shall inform the Chief School Administrator for possible prosecution in municipal court pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:38-27 et seq.
6. The absence of a pupil missing from school for unexplained reasons will be handled in accordance with Regulation No. 8464.
7. When a student reaches 5 days of unexcused absence, a letter will be sent home notifying parents.
8. When a student reaches 6 days of unexcused absence, a meeting of the Pupil Assistance Committee will be immediately scheduled to suggest a plan to address excessive absence of the student.
9. When a student in grades 4-8 reaches 8 days of unexcused absence, the student will be required to attend a Saturday school session of 4 hours. When a student in grades 4-8 reaches 12 days of unexcused absence, the student will be required to attend two Saturday school sessions of four hours. If a student fails to attend a required Saturday school session, a hearing before the Board of Education will be required.
10. When a student in Grades 4 through 8, prior to family travel, submits a letter to the building Principal regarding his/her trip, the threshold of eight (8) days of unexcused absence will become twelve (12) days of unexcused absence. The family travel threshold increase in days will be a one-time exemption for each calendar school year. Upon the building Principal receiving the letter regarding family travel and having acknowledged receipt of said notice, the student involved will be entitled to instruction as per Section D. Instruction



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and Saturday school will not be a factor until he/she has reached the adjusted threshold of twelve (12) days.

## H. Recording attendance

1. Teachers must accurately record the pupils as present, tardy, or absent each day in each session or each class. Attendance records must also record pupils' attendance at out-of-school curricular events such as field trips.
2. The principal's office will classify and record each absence as excused, unexcused, or truancy.
3. The attendance form will be delivered to the school office, which will verify pupil absences.
4. A report card will record the number of times the pupil was absent and tardy in each marking period.
5. A pupil's absence for observance of a religious holiday will not be recorded as such on any transcript or application or employment form.

## I. Appeal

1. A pupil who has been suspended or expelled for truanicies may appeal that action in accordance with Policy Nos. 5610 and 5620.
2. A pupil who has been retained at grade level for excessive absences may appeal that action in accordance with Policy No. 5410.

## J. Attendance improvement plan

1. The Chief School Administrator will collect attendance data from each of the schools in the district and calculate the average daily attendance rate for the district and for each school. The attendance rate shall be calculated by dividing the total number of pupil days present for all pupils by the total possible number of

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pupil days present for all pupils and multiplying the result by one hundred.

2. When the average daily attendance rate is below 90% for the district or below 85% in any one school, the following attendance improvement plan shall be implemented, district-wide or in the affected school, as appropriate.
  - a. The Chief School Administrator is responsible for implementing the attendance improvement plan district-wide. The principal is responsible for implementing the attendance improvement plan in any school.
  - b. The procedures for notifying parents and disciplining pupils, set forth in ¶F and ¶G, shall be strictly followed.
  - c. Classroom teachers will identify and report to the Principal the pupils for whom prompt attendance is a problem. The Principal will confer with the parent of each identified pupil by telephone or in person to determine the causes of the pupil's poor attendance and to impress upon the parent the district's attendance expectations. Every reasonable effort shall be made to determine whether the pupil's absenteeism is caused by an inappropriate educational program; if necessary, the pupil's instructional program will be modified.
  - d. At the end of the school year, the Principal will compile a list of pupils at risk for attendance problems at each grade level. The names, along with a record of each pupil's attendance and reasons for absences, will be forwarded to appropriate teachers at the next grade level or to the principal of the school to which pupils will transfer, as appropriate. The attendance of the identified pupils will be closely monitored. If any such identified pupil is absent more than five times in the month of September, the social worker will conduct a home

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visit to discuss the pupil's absenteeism and to inform the parent of his or her legal responsibility to comply with the compulsory attendance statute.

- e. The social worker shall conduct a follow-up visit to the parent if the pupil's attendance fails to improve.
- f. The administrative team will analyze attendance data to determine any patterns of absence that may occur district-wide, in individual schools, and in pupil population groups. The results of the analysis will be reported to the Chief School Administrator.

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Late Arrival and Early Dismissal

## 5230 LATE ARRIVAL AND EARLY DISMISSAL

### A. Definitions

1. "Late arrival" means the arrival of a pupil after the beginning of the pupil's school day for an excused purpose. A late arrival is not an instance of tardiness for the purpose of applying Regulation No. 5240.
2. "Early dismissal" means the release of a pupil from school prior to the end of the pupil's school day for an excused purpose; "early dismissal" includes the release of a pupil for a period of time that occurs during the pupil's school day. An early dismissal is not an absence for the purpose of applying Regulation No. 5200.
3. "Dismissal from class" means 'a pupil's brief absence from his or her assigned class for a reason that has been approved in advance. A "dismissal from class" is not a class "cut" for the purpose of applying Regulation No. 5200.

### B. Acceptable excuses

The following circumstances justify a pupil's late arrival. The list is not meant to be exhaustive, and the Principal should use his or her best judgment in determining whether or not there is good cause for the pupil's late arrival.

1. The pupil's disability from illness or injury, including any necessary emergency visits to a physician or dentist;
2. A bona fide family emergency;
3. The observance of a religious holiday;
4. Religious instruction;
5. Medical or dental appointment that cannot be scheduled at a time other than during the school day;

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6. The pupil's required attendance in court;
7. Private lessons in music, art, or dance or private practice sessions in preparation for competitive events, such as in figure skating or gymnastics; and
8. An interview with an admissions officer of an institution of higher education.

## C. Late arrival

1. A pupil's late arrival in school should be approved by the principal or his/her designee in advance. A late arrival that is not approved in advance will be considered to be an instance of tardiness.
2. The parent or adult pupil shall submit a written request for approval of a late arrival to the principal. The request must include the reason for the pupil's late arrival and a statement of why it is necessary to delay the pupil's arrival at school.
3. A pupil who arrives late at school shall report to the school office and pick up a late arrival permission slip, signed by the principal or his/her designee. The permission slip will include the date and the time of the pupil's arrival. The pupil will proceed to his or her assigned class and present the permission slip to the teaching staff member in charge, who will verify the date and time.

## D. Early dismissal generally

1. A pupil's early dismissal must be approved by the principal or his/her designee in advance. Except for emergencies, an early dismissal that is not approved in advance will be considered to be an absence.
2. The parent or adult pupil shall submit a written request for approval of an early dismissal to the principal or his/her designee. The request must include the reason for the pupil's early dismissal and a statement of why it

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Late Arrival and Early Dismissal

is necessary to excuse the pupil before the end of the pupil's school day.

3. A pupil must obtain an approved early dismissal permission slip from the school office and present the slip to the teaching staff member in charge of the class or activity from which the pupil is to be dismissed. The permission slip will include the date and time of approved dismissal. The teaching staff member in charge must verify the date and time.

## E. Early dismissal for illness or injury

1. A pupil who suffers a significant illness or injury during the course of the school day will be treated in accordance with Policy No. 8441 and Regulation No. 8441.
2. A pupil who suffers a minor illness or injury will be sent to the school nurse. A pupil in grades K through 8 who is sent to the school nurse must be accompanied by an adult or responsible pupil. If the nurse's office is unattended, the pupil should report to the principal's office.
3. If the school nurse determines that an elementary pupil should be sent home, the pupil's parent or the responsible adult designated by the parent will be telephoned to pick up the pupil.
4. No pupil shall be released from school before the end of the school day except in the presence of the pupil's parent or an agent of the parent.

## F. Early dismissal for family emergency

1. A pupil's parent or caretaker may request the pupil's early release for a bona fide family emergency. Early dismissal for family emergency must be approved by the principal or his/her designee.
2. A pupil will be released to a parent who reports to the school office and explains satisfactorily to the

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principal that good and sufficient reason justifies the pupil's release from school before the end of the pupil's school day.

3. A pupil will be released to an agent of the parent provided the parent or a caretaker personally known to the principal has requested the pupil's release by
  - a. Written request signed by the parent or caretaker and verified by telephone call to the signer or
  - b. A telephone call that is verified by a return telephone call to the pupil's residence or, if the call does not originate in the pupil's home, by questionion the caller to test his or her knowledge of specific facts about the pupil.
4. The principal shall verify the identity of the agent to whom the pupil is released by examination of documents or by verification of characteristics supplied by the parent or caretaker.
5. If the principal believes that a genuine emergency may exist but cannot verify the identity of the person who requests release of the pupil, the principal shall arrange for the pupil's transportation by a school staff member directly to the custody of the parent or designated agent of the parent.
6. The principal shall maintain a record of each pupil's parent(s) or guardian. The record shall include any legally sufficient notice given the principal by a parent in sole custody that the non-custodial parent's access to the pupil has been limited. In the absence of such notice, the principal shall presume that the pupil may be released into the care of either parent.

## Sign-In and Out Procedure

All pupils who are to leave the building other than by normal procedures (walking, SACC, or riding the bus) must be signed in and out in the Principal's Office by a parent, guardian, or other responsible person in charge.

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## Picking Up Students at School

Children are never released directly from the classroom to leave school before dismissal time. In the case of unavoidable appointments, parents are to:

1. Send a note to the classroom teacher notifying him/her that the child will be leaving at a designated time so that:
  - a. The teacher can send this notice to the Principal's Office for reasons of attendance.
  - b. The teacher can plan and will be able to remind the student to prepare for the earlier dismissal.
2. Report to the Principal's Office if it is necessary to take a child out of school. The office personnel will send for the child and then release him/her.
3. Students who leave the school early must be signed out in the Principal's office by a parent, guardian, or person listed on the Student Responsibility Card. Deviations from this should be made in writing to the Principal's Office.

## Staying After School

### Detention:

In the event a student needs to remain in the classroom later than dismissal time to attend After-School Detention, parents will be notified in advance and are responsible for providing the transportation.

### School Activity:

In the event a student needs to remain after school to participate in a student activity, practice, etc., parents will be notified in advance and are responsible for providing the transportation unless a school bus route has been



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Late Arrival and Early Dismissal

designated by the Board of Education for activities such as band, bell choir, and chorus.

## Social Visits After School:

Please do not ask to have your child walk home or ride the bus with a classmate for the purpose of social visiting. These visits should be taken care of by parents after the child has arrived home safely for the day.

However, in cases of emergency, where a child must walk to the home of another, the office will need a note from both parents giving approval. Again, in emergencies, permission for a walker to board a bus, or for a regular bus pupil to board a different bus will be granted only from the Business Administrator's office (224-4920 ext. 120) and this requires a written request from a parent.

## Early Dismissal

Parents/guardians should notify the Office as early as possible when they plan to remove their child from school prior to the end of the regular school day. This notification should occur through a written or telephone request from the parents/guardians. The parents/guardians must come into the Office and sign the Early Dismissal Book in order to have the student released early from the school.

If another responsible adult will be picking up the student instead of the parent, the parent must communicate the name of the responsible adult to the Office prior to the release of the student. The responsible adult can be any family relative or close friend. The same sign-out procedure will be followed for the responsible adult.

## Dismissal

When the regular school day ends all students are to leave school the same way they arrived and go directly home. All students who will be leaving school by a different means than how they arrived, or not going directly home, must bring a permission note from their parent/guardian to the Office.

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Late Arrival and Early Dismissal

## Homeroom Period

During homeroom period attendance and lunch counts are taken, and other school-related items are discussed. All students must be in their homerooms during this period.

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Tardiness

## 5240 TARDINESS

### A. Definitions

1. A pupil is tardy to school when the pupil reports to his or her assigned homeroom five minutes before the end of homeroom without approval for the delay.
2. A pupil is tardy to class when the pupil reports to his or her assigned classroom or other place of instruction after the late bell rings without approval for the delay.
3. A pupil who is late to school or class for an excused purpose pursuant to Policy No. 5230 is not tardy for the purpose of this regulation.

### B. Procedures for tardy arrivals

1. A pupil who is tardy to school must report to the Principal's office to present a written note explaining the reason for the tardiness. The pupil must sign in and receive a late pass for admission to class.
2. A pupil who is tardy to class may be sent by the teacher to the Principal's office to explain the reason for the tardiness and obtain a late pass for admission to class.
3. No pupil who arrives at school after attendance has been taken will be admitted to class without a late pass.

### C. Discipline

1. A pupil who has been tardy to school or class three times will be assigned to detention. An additional detention will be assigned for each instance of tardiness thereafter.
2. A pupil who has been tardy from school or class six times in any marking period will be reported to the Principal for counseling. The pupil's parent will be notified and will be requested to attend a conference with the Principal.

# REGULATION GREENWICH TOWNSHIP

PUPILS

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Tardiness

3. A pupil who has been tardy to school three times in any one month will be counted as absent from school one day for purposes of applying Regulation No. 5200.

**Appendix B**

**Letter to parents regarding new Attendance Policy**

# Greenwich Township School District

Gibbstown, NJ 08027

TO: PARENTS/GUARDIANS  
FROM: MR. STEPHEN C. COMBS, SUPERINTENDENT  
DATE: JANUARY 28, 2000  
RE: REVISED ATTENDANCE POLICY



## 5200 ATTENDANCE SYNOPSIS

This revised policy will be effective immediately and will be prorated for this year. If you have any questions regarding these changes, please do not hesitate to contact my office for clarification (224-4920, Ext. 132) or for a copy of the entire policy as it now is written. Thank you for your adherence to this policy.

- "ATTENDANCE" is a pupil's presence in school and in the classroom to which he or she is assigned at the times scheduled for instruction or other school activities.

### - NOTICE OF ABSENCE:

Parent or adult of pupil:

1. Is to call the school office between 8:00 and 9:00 A.M. of the morning of the absence.
2. Who attend morning session but will not attend afternoon session should call school office and report absence.
3. Who anticipates future or prolonged absence should notify the Principal.

### - READMISSION TO SCHOOL:

1. Pupil must present a written statement, dated and signed by the parent stating the reasons for the absence.
2. Pupil absent for non-communicable illness for more than three school days must be accompanied by a physician's statement of the pupil's illness.

### - "EXCUSED ABSENCE" SAMPLE REASONS:

1. Pupil's illness, as evidenced by a doctor's note;
2. A death or critical illness in the pupil's immediate family;
3. A bona fide family emergency;
4. Quarantine;
5. Observance of pupil's religion on a day approved for that purpose by the State Board of Education;
6. The pupil's suspension from school;
7. The pupil's required attendance in court;
8. Interviews with a prospective employer or with an admissions officer of an institution of higher education; and
9. Necessary and unavoidable medical or dental appointments that cannot be scheduled at a time other than the school day.

*Policy synopsis is continued on the back.*

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PLEASE RETURN THE BOTTOM PORTION OF THIS NOTICE TO YOU CHILD'S HOMEROOM TEACHER BY FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2000. THANK YOU.

TO: \_\_\_\_\_ Homeroom Teacher

FROM: \_\_\_\_\_ Student's Name

[ ] I have received the Revised Attendance Policy approved at the January 24, 2000 Board of Education Meeting.

- **"UNEXCUSED ABSENCE"** is a pupil's absence for all or part of a school day for any reason other than those listed above.

A. Absence is not excused for the following illustrative reasons (this is not inclusive):

1. Employment other than school-approved work assignments,
2. Performance of household or baby-sitting duties, and
3. Hunting.

B. Three (3) instances of unexcused tardiness will constitute a single unexcused absence.

- **DISCIPLINE PROCEDURES:**

1. Pupils may be denied participation in athletic competition and co-curricular activities if their attendance fails to meet the standards.

2. When a pupil under the age of sixteen is absent without excuse more than 10 school days in any one school year, the Principal shall inform the Chief School Administrator for possible prosecution in municipal court pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A: 38-27 et. seq.

3. When a student reaches five (5) days of unexcused absence, a letter will be sent home notifying parents.

4. When a student reaches six (6) days of unexcused absence, a meeting of the Pupil Assistance Committee will be immediately scheduled to suggest a plan to address excessive absence of the student.

5. When a student in Grades 4-8 reaches eight (8) days of unexcused absence, the student will be required to attend a Saturday school session of 4 hours.

6. When a student in Grades 4-8 reaches twelve (12) days of unexcused absence, the student will be required to attend two Saturday school sessions of four hours. If a student fails to attend a required Saturday school session, a hearing before the Superintendent will be required to determine possible Board of Education action.

7. When a student in Grades 4-8, prior to family travel, submits a letter to the building Principal regarding his/her trip, the threshold of eight (8) days of unexcused absence will become twelve (12) days of unexcused absence. The family travel threshold increase in days will be a one-time exemption for each calendar school year.

8. A pupil who has been tardy to school or class three (3) times will be assigned to detention. An additional detention will be assigned for each instance of tardiness thereafter.

9. A pupil who has been tardy from school or class six (6) times in any marking period will be reported for counseling, parents notified and they will be requested to attend a conference with the Principal

## Biographical Data

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| <b>Name</b>               | <b>Suzanne F. Gibson</b>  |
| <b>Middle School</b>      | <b>Nehaunsey Middle School<br/>Greenwich Township Schools<br/>Gibbstown, NJ</b>             |
| <b>Undergraduate</b>      | <b>Bachelor of Arts<br/>Political Science<br/>Rutgers University<br/>Camden, NJ</b>         |
| <b>Graduate</b>           | <b>Master of Arts<br/>Educational Administration<br/>Rowan University<br/>Glassboro, NJ</b> |
| <b>Present Occupation</b> | <b>Middle School Teacher<br/>Nehaunsey Middle School<br/>Gibbstown, NJ</b>                  |