



**Florida Department of
Law Enforcement**

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ABSENTEE REPORTING PROGRAM PROCEDURES

NCJRS

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ABSENTEE REPORTING PROGRAM PROCEDURES

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I. THE PROGRAM IN GENERAL

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement's (FDLE) Missing Children Information Clearinghouse (MCIC) is continually looking for ways to increase our children's safety. One program which we have researched and found to be beneficial is the Absentee Reporting Program for schools. If the effort of conducting this program saves one child's life, it will have more than paid for itself.

This program is designed to notify the parents or guardians, in a timely manner, of the non-attendance of their children. This notification allows the parents and law enforcement officials to begin searching for the child immediately, rather than after it is apparent the child did not return home from school. These first hours following the report of a missing child are crucial to the investigative process.

The following is a brief overview of the features recommended in the Absentee Reporting Program:

Parents are asked to keep the school informed of their current telephone numbers. Parents are also asked to contact the school when their child will be absent.

Schools may use volunteers and/or an answering machine to handle these incoming calls. If an answering machine is

used, the parents are asked to leave a message if their child will be absent that day. This machine should be turned on each evening and the parents are asked to call in by the first hour of school.

After roll call each morning, each teacher submits to the school's office a list of unexplained absences.

(Attachment 1) An absence is unexplained, if the teacher has not been notified in advance that the student is going to be absent. The list is given to the assigned staff member or volunteer. This person reviews the list and listens to the tape machine's messages. The parents of any children, whose names are left on the list as unexplained absences, are then called. If the parent is not aware of his/her child's absence, he/she is asked to check all places the child may have gone (example: if the parent works, the child may be at their home) and is then asked to call the authorities, if the child is not located.

For the program to work successfully, each school must secure full support and cooperation from the staff and parents. The staff as well as the parents must be educated as to the importance of the program.

If possible, a media campaign should be conducted to ensure that the community, especially parents, are made aware of the program and its importance to the safety of our chil-

dren. This campaign could include educational programs, public service announcements, newspaper articles, and appearances at other public forums.

II. SETTING UP THE PROGRAM:

In setting up an Absentee Reporting Program in your school, the following factors should be weighed in determining the type program needed.

- A. If your school has adequate staff members to handle the daily calling to the absent children's parents, this is obviously the easiest method. The present staff is already familiar with the school and can be trained easily.

- B. Most schools in Florida have an active School Volunteer Program which can be utilized in obtaining a list of volunteers who would be willing to donate their time for this program. Also the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) may be very helpful in setting the program in motion. If you cannot obtain a sufficient number of parent volunteers, consider asking a senior citizens group in your area for their assistance. Whichever group you utilize, get to know your volunteers; they will be working in your school on a regular basis. A training and organization meeting will be required with the volunteers.

Once the program is established, there should be periodic meetings between volunteers and staff members to discuss all concerns and possible problems. This will encourage communication between all concerned individuals.

A volunteer should be appointed to coordinate the program thus ensuring continuity and adherence to the established policies and procedures.

- C. Whether you use staff members or volunteers, they should be encouraged to document all attempts to contact the parent/guardian of an absent child. This documentation should include the time calls were made, which numbers were called, and the name of the person that the staff member/volunteer was able to contact if any.

- D. If you have a shortage of staff members and volunteers, consider purchasing an automatic tape recorder. This recorder dials the parent's number and delivers a prerecorded message. Such a system, however, cannot guarantee that a parent is the recipient of the taped message.

III. PARENTS' EDUCATION:

Parents are a very essential part of a successfully run

Absentee Reporting Program. They must be shown the importance of the program and they should also understand that their effort is a small price to pay for the increased safety of their children. Parents will be involved in the program in two respects:

- A. In some programs, parents or other volunteers call the parents of children with unexplained absences. These parents/volunteers must be dependable. One volunteer is usually appointed to coordinate the program.
- B. The largest responsibility given to all parents is keeping the school informed of all of their child's absences, whether planned or not. A letter should be sent to all parents explaining current school policies and this program. The letter should include the phone number parents are to call to report their child's absence. Rather than the school's main telephone number, a second or alternate number should be listed. This frees the main line for other calls. If an answering machine is placed on this alternate line, the beginning message should instruct the parent to state his/her name, his/her child's name, the name of the child's teacher and grade. This information makes it easier for the volunteers to find and update the child's records.

Accompanying the letter should be a card or form for the parent to complete and return to the school (Attachment 2). This card includes all telephone numbers where the parent or guardian can be reached. The card also should include any brothers or sisters attending the school who could be contacted concerning their sibling's absence. These cards are filled out by the parent or guardian and sent back to school.

It has been found that the parents who do not return the information cards are the same parents who will not call and report their child's absence. But, children will remind their parents of their responsibility if the teachers stress it during their classes.

IV. SPECIAL PROBLEMS WHICH MAY BE ENCOUNTERED:

Each school may have unique questions and problems regarding setting up and operating an Absentee Reporting Program. Some problems which may occur and ways of handling these have been listed here.

A. Parents without phones.

This problem is twofold: (1) The volunteer has no way to contact the parents after it has been determined

that the child is absent; (2) the parent has no way of notifying the school of his/her child's absence. Schools should ask the parent to list a friend's or neighbor's phone where they can leave a message. Parents are also asked to either send word with another child regarding their child's absence or phone the school from a nearby phone.

- B. Parents who refuse to send back the information cards and/or routinely fail to report their children's absences.

There is obviously no easy answer for this problem; each case will be different. In many cases, repeated reminders help. In notes sent home to the parents and in school newsletters, put a reminder stating the importance of parental cooperation and support. Many times, teachers will talk to the children about the program and the importance of their parent's help, and in turn the children will remind their parents.

- C. The school staff does not have the time to schedule and coordinate the program.

After initially starting the program, ask one of the volunteers to be in charge of it. Request that he/she report to staff members only problems which cannot be easily solved.

- D. There is no money available to purchase a tape machine to record parents' calls.

Ask the PTO or other organizations to assist in fundraising activities. These recorders are relatively inexpensive and may be purchased for around \$100.

- E. A parent cannot be reached and the child is not in school.

This situation should be handled on a case-by-case basis. A school staff member should be made aware of the situation and certain factors should be considered. Has the parent called in regularly in the past to report the child absent? Is there a pattern of the child missing a large number of days? Does the child have other siblings or neighborhood friends who could be questioned? Are all the siblings out on the same day? All this information should be considered before the law enforcement officials are notified.

If school officials have exhausted all efforts to locate an absent child and/or the child's parents, the school officials cannot be held liable if the child is later determined to be missing.

In addition to the above unique problem areas which may be encountered is the possible false identification of a person calling to report an absence. For example, a non-custodial parent calling in to report an absence thereby gaining additional time to flee with a child or simply one student calling in an absence for another student. Be cognizant of these possible problem areas and caution parents to keep the school informed of information which may directly affect the welfare of their child (i.e., custodial information, visitation rights, restraint orders, etc.).

The Absentee Reporting Program may not prove to be 100% effective; however, through the implementation of these procedures we will ensure increased protection of our most valuable resource, "our children".

ATTACHMENT 1

(RECOMMENDED SIZE - 5" x 8" Index Card)

TEACHER ABSENTEE REPORTING LIST

Teacher's Name _____

Grade _____

Day/Date _____

Children's Names	*Explained	Unexplained	Remarks

* Explained - Notified in advance

ATTACHMENT 2

(RECOMMENDED SIZE - 5" x 8" Index Card)

STUDENT INFORMATION CARD

Date _____

Child's name _____
Last First Nickname

Teacher _____

Address _____ Phone no. _____

Mother's name _____ Business Phone no. _____

Father's name _____ Business Phone no. _____

Other Emergency Contact Person(s) _____ / _____ Phone no. _____
Relationship

List names of brother(s) and/or sister(s) attending the same school:

Name Teacher

Name Teacher

Name Teacher

If the student does not have brother(s) and/or sister(s) attending the same school, list a student who is a close relative or neighbor who attends the same school (if any):

Name Teacher Relationship