



CHAPTER 3:

Truancy and the School Attendance Review Board

A. Is it mandatory for my child to attend school every day?

Yes! Children between the ages of 6 and 18 must go to school. It's the law!

B. Why does truancy matter?

It is very important that your child attends school every day. Otherwise your child will not get a chance to learn from a teacher and will miss out on assignments needed to do well in school. Not only will your child have trouble catching up with schoolwork, but there are other problems that can result from missing school such as:

- Higher chance of dropping out of school
- Quickly falling behind in school
- Higher chance of being a victim of a crime
- More likely for a child to get in trouble and caught up in the juvenile justice system

C. What are the consequences if my child does not attend school?

In addition to the personal risks a student may face as a result of missing school, a student's family could be in trouble. When a child is identified as truant, a parent will be notified and asked to deal with the issue by working with the school. If that does not work, the following may happen:

- A finding of truancy
- Referral to School Attendance Review Board, probation, or a district attorney mediation program
- Start of juvenile court proceedings
- Criminal and civil penalties

This is why it is very important to verify excused absences! It is also in your child's best interest to have an accurate attendance record. If your child has absences that can be excused, call your school or visit the school office to give any necessary documentation to excuse the absence. Some reasons for which absences can be excused include but are not limited to:

- Medical appointments
- Illness
- Naturalization ceremonies
- Court dates

D. What is a School Attendance Review Board (SARB)?

A child with a high number of unexcused absences may be referred to the School Attendance Review Board. This board is organized at the state, county, or local level and contains people from community and local agencies.

The goal of the board is to figure out why the student is missing school or misbehaving at school and to help the student and their family get the resources they need to fix the problem with the school's help. SARB should be trying to keep students away from the juvenile justice system and from dropping out of school.

E. When is a student referred to SARB?

There are different levels of truancy:

- Truant: absent in school three or more times for more than thirty minutes
- Habitual truant: a student who has been reported as truant three or more times

- Chronically truant: absent 10% or more of the school year

A student who is habitually truant may be referred to SARB.

However, it is important that the school and district try different things to help the student attend school regularly before referring the student to SARB.

F. What happens during a SARB hearing?

At a SARB hearing, the SARB will decide if community services are available to help address a student's attendance or behavior problems. If there are community services that can help resolve the problem, the parent and child may be asked to sign a contract with the SARB that they will follow the SARB's recommendations. The parent and child may be asked to come back for another hearing with the SARB to provide an update on how the child is doing. If it is determined at the SARB hearing that community services cannot fix the problem, the case may be referred to the District Attorney or to juvenile court.

G. SARB referrals to alternative schools

In some cases, a SARB may recommend that a child transfer to a different school such as an alternative school. If this happens, the parent and student have the right to disagree and object to the SARB's recommendation to transfer to an alternative school.

A parent or student may object to the transfer for any of the following reasons:

- Concerns about the student's safety
- The other school is too far away from where the student lives
- The student's family cannot physically transport or take the student to the other school because they do not have a car or access to transportation
- The other school does not meet the student's educational needs

If a parent objects, the district must either address the concern or find another placement in a school in the district.

The district may require you to put your objection in writing. Even if they do not ask you to, it is better if

you do. Make sure to include the date and keep a copy for your own records.

A student may only be ordered to be placed in a county community school if:

- Space is available in the school
- The school can meet the child's education needs
- The student's parent has not objected based on reasonable safety concerns, location or transportation access, or because the school does not meet child's education needs

A student who is transferred to an alternative school due to a SARB referral/recommendation must be allowed to return to their prior school or another comprehensive school in the district at the end of the semester following the semester when the acts leading to the SARB referral occurred.

H. Tips for getting ready for your SARB hearing

- Ask for your child's attendance and discipline records in advance of the hearing
- Talk with your child about each time they missed school or class and figure out if any of them were for a good reason that should be excused
- Take a list of the dates and any good reasons why they may have missed school with you so you can share with the SARB
- If any of the trancies were due to homelessness, trauma, disability, or another reason beyond your or your child's control, make sure to say that during the SARB hearing
- Think about the services you or your child need to help improve attendance or behavior and request those services or assistance accessing those services during the SARB hearing
- Do not agree to a school transfer if you are concerned for your child's safety, the school is too far away from where you live, your child does not have transportation, the school does not meet your child's needs, or you don't believe it is in your child's best interest
- If you or your child are cited and/or referred to the juvenile court for truancy, consider talking with an attorney and asking for help ■