

Be Here!

DoDEA starts the new school year with a new attendance policy

From the Department of Defense Educational Activity

School attendance is important and in order to receive the best education, students need to Be Here! Beginning with the 2011-2012 school year, DoDEA has implemented a system-wide attendance policy for students in DoDEA schools throughout the world. This new policy is consistent with those found in many public schools throughout the United States.

School attendance issues have been identified as a serious issue for children throughout the country and military children are no exception.

DoDEA's new attendance policy provides specific guidance on attendance, absences and identifies support services for students at-risk for not fulfilling the grade or course requirements.

It's not surprising that regular school attendance correlates directly with success in academic work, improves social interaction with adults and peers and provides opportunities for important communication between teachers and students. Regular attendance also has a cumulative effect of establishing life-long positive traits — responsibility, determination, respect for rules of society — that are critical for developing career readiness skills, success in college and in life.

Here are a few of the highlights of the policy:

- All students are required to attend school for 180 instructional days per school year.
- Academic penalties will not be imposed for excused absences.
- Whenever a student needs to be out for more than five days, the teacher will provide a Student Educational Monitoring Plan to lessen the impact of a student

missing instruction in class.

- Excused absences can include:
 - Personal illness
 - Medical, dental, or mental health appointment
 - Serious illness in the student's immediate family
 - A death in the student's immediate family or of a relative
 - Religious holiday
 - Emergency conditions such as fire, flood, or storm
 - Unique family circumstances warranting absence and coordinated with school administration.
 - College visits that cannot be scheduled on non-school days
 - Reasonable amounts of time surrounding deployments and reintegration providing missed schoolwork is obtained in advance and completed upon return.

The policy establishes a balance between the need for military families to spend time together following deployment, while emphasizing the importance of education. We have and will continue to be as flexible as possible in accommodating the precious time families have together but flexibilities and accommodations have limitations, especially when they impact on student performance and attendance at school.

Procedures for monitoring daily student attendance and communicating with families are established in this policy. Academic penalties will not be imposed for excused absences. Students at-risk will be monitored by the Student Support Team and school administration to include the identification of supports and interventions.

Many families—both military and non-military—underestimate the importance of regular school attendance for young children (kindergarten and first grade) but even missing just 5 percent of kindergarten—that's just nine days—can be an indicator that a child will fall behind by the fifth grade.

Children take their cue from their parents when it comes to the importance of school attendance. To have a quality education experience, you need to be here.

There are times when a student needs to miss school - everyone understands that. But attendance is important. To have a quality education experience, you need to Be Here.

Attendance—what parents should know

- Parents can team up with teachers to make sure students are in school and ready to learn.
- How parents can help:
 - Schedule medical and dental appointments outside of school hours.
 - Schedule vacations during school breaks.
 - Schedule Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves to coincide with summer breaks or other scheduled school breaks.
 - When moving, check school calendars to be aware of important school dates (beginning/ending of school year; testing dates, breaks, etc.).

Make it a habit to contact their child's teachers/principals to arrange to pick up missed school work, either in advance if the absence is known, or the same day their child is absent. ●

Education Activity Launches Online Preregistration

By Elaine Wilson

Defense Department officials have launched an online preregistration application that's intended to help parents get an early start on enrolling their children in DOD schools.

Through the site, parents can preregister their children in a DOD school from anywhere in the world, and even while on the move from one installation to another, explained Mike Lynch, chief of policy and legislation for the Department of Defense Education Activity.

The site, located at <https://registration.dodea.edu>, is open to parents with students entering pre-kindergarten up to 12th grade.

"We want to reduce the time it takes to register children for school," he said. "This way, the school can be ready the day the parents get there so they can get in and out quicker."

The site is intended to aid with new enrollments into Defense Department schools, Lynch said, rather than re-registration requests. "An online re-registration application is something we're looking at developing for next school year," he said.

Lynch said the site can help military parents worldwide, whether they're moving their children from an off-base school to one on base or are in the early stages of preparing for a move, either stateside or overseas.

Parents who are readying for a move can preregister children even before they know the exact school their child will enter, he noted. On the site, parents can choose options ranging from the community they're moving to down to the specific Defense Department school their child will attend.

"If you're going to Europe, for example, you can pick that option, then the country, community and school," he said. However, "You can stop at any point along the way."

Registrars will be on the lookout for new registration paperwork, he said. And, for those who didn't designate a specific school, the registrar can quickly pull the paperwork from a queue upon the family's arrival. "It takes only a few minutes to print and have it ready," he said.

The site is simple and easy to navigate, Lynch said. Parents answer questions ranging from student's birth date to citizenship.

They also can attach documents, such as military orders and birth certificates, to their online preregistration paperwork.

While the site is designed to streamline the registration process, he said, it doesn't replace the need for an in-person school visit. Parents still will need to stop by the school to update documents, complete other forms, such as bus routes, and sign an official registration request.

Along with parents, the site also offers benefits for school officials, Lynch noted. Since the system generates pre-filled forms, it eliminates the need to have registrars transfer data from sometimes hard-to-decipher handwritten registration forms. Additionally, the schools can better track the number of incoming students.

"But that's not why we're doing this," Lynch said. "We're committed to making school transitions easier, and we believe that improving the school registration process is the perfect place to start." ●

Elaine Wilson is a writer and blogger for the American Forces Press Service



Father and son on the beach with view across to St. Michael's Mount. Courtesy of British Tourist Authority.