



# New Jersey School Register Guidance, School Year 2020-2021



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## Overview

Per *N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.1*, district boards of education and private agencies that provide educational services by means of public funds must carefully and accurately track enrollment and attendance for all students in a school register. The purpose of this document is to provide clear direction and guidance, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.1(c)*, on how to maintain school registers.

Maintaining accurate enrollment and attendance data for every student is essential, not only for the early detection of students at-risk of falling behind in school, but also for school accountability, district accountability and district funding. In terms of accountability, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) relies on attendance data to calculate each school and district's rate of chronic absenteeism. The NJDOE uses the school-level rate of chronic absenteeism as the school quality indicator required by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to identify low performing schools across the state. At the district level, each district's rate of chronic absenteeism factors into its New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJ QSAC) score.

In terms of district funding, the number of students enrolled in school registers maintained by the district on the last school day prior to October 16 determines the amount of school aid that a district generates from the state. Additionally, the NJDOE uses a district's Average Daily Enrollment (ADE) and Average Daily Attendance (ADA) to determine each district's tuition rates for students from other districts.

While Approved Private Schools for the Students with Disabilities (APSSDs) are not governed by the school register regulations at *N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8*, they are governed by *N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-18* and must record daily attendance, and they must report year-end enrollment and attendance data to the NJDOE through the auditor portion of the APSSD Budget and Audit System. They also must report attendance data to the student's sending district so the accountable school can report the student's attendance to NJ SMART through SID management.

Given the importance of maintaining school registers for accountability, financial and student wellbeing, much of the guidance on maintaining accurate enrollment and attendance data is contained in the technical guidance for each NJDOE system used to collect enrollment and attendance data. These are:

1. NJ SMART SID Management
2. Application for State School Aid (ASSA)
3. School Registry Summary (SRS)

Two additional sources of guidance on tracking enrollment and attendance are the [ASSA Question & Answers website](#) and the NJDOE's [Guidance for Reporting Student Absences and Calculating Chronic Absenteeism](#).

This remainder of this document provides an overview of the New Jersey School Register, an outline of the state reporting requirements, the requirements for the enrollment record, the attendance record and the penalty for noncompliance.

## Overview of the School Register

The school register is a record of each student's continuous, year-to-year cycle of enrollment and daily attendance in an approved program of instruction. The concept of continuous enrollment is the basis of a school register. According to this concept, each student is enrolled in the New Jersey public education system one time, and school and district administrators work together to track each student's journey from one approved program of instruction, school and district to the next. After a student's original entry in a school register, the student is transferred from the previous year's register and re-entered in a new register on the first day of each new school year, regardless of whether the student attends the first school day in session. As explained in *N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(d)*, districts must determine within the first 10 school days in session, whether a student who was enrolled the previous year but has not yet attended school in the current school year, has excused absences or has transferred or dropped out of the district. This occurs each year until the student graduates, ages out, transfers out, drops out or passes on.

As stated in *N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.1(b)*, districts have the option of maintaining school registers in hard copy or in an electronic format. The reporting requirements are the same for both formats.

## Reporting Enrollment and Attendance Data

The NJDOE requires districts to regularly report on enrollment and attendance data through three separate systems. Each system collects different pieces of enrollment and attendance data. The primary system is NJ SMART SID Management. Districts provide student-level data on enrollment entry and exit dates, the number of days students were enrolled while school was in session, the number of days that students were present, demographic characteristics, special education classifications, grade level, program assignments and more through this system. Information on all of the data elements included in SID Management are detailed in the [NJ SMART SID Management Student Data Handbook](#). The NJDOE takes two "snapshots" of the data in SID Management, once on October 15 and again on June 30. The NJDOE relies on the June 30,

End of Year snapshot, to calculate school- and district-level rates of chronic absenteeism. The NJDOE rolls up the enrollment data from the SID Management October 15, Fall Snapshot, and uses it to preload the Application for State School Aid (ASSA) system for traditional district schools<sup>1</sup> And the Charter Enrollment System (CHE) for charter schools.

ASSA is the second system the NJDOE uses to collect enrollment data from districts. While the ASSA system is now preloaded with data from NJ SMART, each November districts are required to verify the summary enrollment data for accuracy. ASSA is used to calculate each district's state aid entitlement. For more information on the ASSA system, please visit [the ASSA pre-login site on NJ Homeroom](#).

The third system the NJDOE uses to collect enrollment and attendance data is the School Register Summary (SRS). The SRS data entry and certification are due by July 31, 2020 or 5 days after the close of school, whichever is later. Each district, charter school, and Renaissance School Project must complete this submission, which requires three summary statistics:

1. The total number of days that each grade or program operated during the school year, also referred to as "days in session" (*N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(a)*).
2. The total number of possible days of attendance for each grade or program. (This is the sum of days enrolled of every student in the grade or program.)
3. The total number of days students were present for each grade or program. (This is the sum of days present of every student in the grade or program.)

For more information on the SRS system, please visit [the SRS pre-login site on NJ Homeroom](#). The totals provided through the SRS system are used to calculate average daily attendance (ADA) and average daily enrollment (ADE). The ADA and ADE are used by the NJDOE to determine each district's tuition rates for students from other districts and per pupil spending for federal reporting requirements such as the Maintenance of Effort (MOE) and the National Public Education Financial Survey (NPEFS).

## School Register Rules and Requirements

A list of school register rules and requirements follows.

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<sup>1</sup> State facilities enrollments are preloaded based on the data submitted by state agencies and as determined by the respective County Office of Education.

### Program Type

- Schools must maintain a separate register for each approved program of instruction offered. A list of all program types can be found in the [NJ SMART SID Management Student Data Handbook](#).
- If the same program of instruction is offered with different numbers of days in session, then that program requires as many registers as there are offerings with different number of days in session. For example, a school that offers two, grade 5 programs—one with 185 days and another with 180 days—is required to maintain two school registers for grade 5, one register for the grade 5 program that operates for 185 days and one for the grade 5 program that operates for 180 days. This is so ADA and ADE can be calculated appropriately for each program.

### Register Cover

- Each school register must be able to produce a cover page containing the following information:
  - The district's township, borough or city;
  - The district name and county name;
  - The county code and district code, which can be found in the [New Jersey School Directory](#);
  - The school name and school code, the school code can also be found in the [New Jersey School Directory](#);
  - The program type, a list of program types can be found in the [NJ SMART SID Management Student Data Handbook](#);
  - A register number, which districts can determine, and
  - The name of the teacher or authorized person responsible for the school register.

### Students on Registers

- As required by *N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.2(c)*, no student can be enrolled in a school register until the student has reached the following legal school age:
  - Kindergarten: more than four years old and less than six years old. (NJDOE [Guidance on Early Admission to Kindergarten](#) states that a student must be five years old by October 1 of that school year to have a statutory right to kindergarten enrollment, but notes that local boards of education have the discretion to admit students who are not yet five-years-old per *N.J.S.A. 18A:38-5*);

- Regional day school: more than five years old; and
- Preschoolers with disabilities: more than three years old and less than five years old (i.e., preschoolers with disabilities should not be added to the school register until they turn three, and should not be entered as preschoolers with disabilities if they are over five years of age).
- Students may only be enrolled in a school register based upon the following:
  - A promotion list, or listing of students promoted the previous year;
  - Receipt of the student's transfer card from the previous school within the state;
  - Documentation from another state that the student is transferring, and
  - Verification of the legal age for entering school.

#### Students with Disabilities

- Students with disabilities who spend 39% or less of their time in general education programs should be placed in the register corresponding to their special education program. Students with disabilities who spend 40% or more of their time in general education programs should be placed in the register corresponding to their general education program.

#### Home Instruction

- The enrollment and attendance of students who receive home instruction (which differs from students receiving instruction in a remote learning environment due to a Public Health Emergency) must be recorded in the school register for the program in which the student is enrolled. Home instruction is a term used for individual instruction of students with disabilities as defined in *N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.8* and *4.9* and for general education students pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:16-10.1* and *10.2*. No transfer code should be used to indicate that a student is being placed on home instruction. The number of possible days in session for a student on home instruction will be the same as for other students in the program in which the student is enrolled.

#### Charter School Students

- Districts are required to keep charter school students who are residents in the district on district school registers for the purpose of state aid payments to charter schools as detailed in *N.J.S.A. 18A:36A-12(b)*, and for determining the district's eligibility for certain state aid categories. The student should be entered into the appropriate school register

of the district school to which the student would have been assigned had the student not selected the charter school.

#### Choice Students

- Choice districts in the inter-district public school choice program are required to identify choice students in their school registers. For purposes of state aid, the choice district reports choice students on the ASSA. The choice district assigns choice students their district and status codes in NJ SMART. A resident district code identifies the district in which the student resides. A tuition code is also required for ASSA purposes, if applicable.

### The Enrollment Record

The purpose of a school register is to record each student's enrollment and attendance from the date of entry to the date of official exit. This includes documenting changes such as transfers to another school or to another district and dropping out.

Documentation of enrollment begins after a student has been added to a school register. The NJDOE, through NJ SMART SID Management, utilizes six data fields to track student enrollment: 1) District Entry Date, 2) School Entry Date, 3) School Exit Date and, 4) School Exit Withdrawal Code, 5) Status, and 6) Enrollment Type.

The District Entry Date identifies the year, month and day of the first day the student enrolled in the district and could attend a district school. School Entry Date marks the year, month and day of the first school day in session the enrolled student could be in attendance. The District Entry Date and School Entry Date should be the same for students enrolling in a district for the first time. School Entry Date and District Entry Date do not reset at the first day of each new school year; rather, they remain the same date for as long as the student remains enrolled in the district and in the school. The School Entry Date only changes when the student enrolls in a new school.

The School Exit Date identifies the year, month and day of the first day *after* the date the student last attended school, unless the student is absent for up to 10 days before requesting a transfer. In the latter case, the transfer date is the date that the parent or guardian notified the school of the transfer. School Exit Date is used when students make a mid-year transfer. It is not used when students matriculate to another school in the district (for example, when students make the natural progression from elementary to middle school in the same district).

The School Exit Withdrawal Code is used to describe the type of mid-year transfer, exit or withdrawal of a student. Please see the [NJ SMART Sid Management Student Handbook](#) for a list of all acceptable transfer and dropout codes.



The data field, Status, categorizes the student as either an active or inactive. Students are active unless they are no longer enrolled in a district school. The Enrollment Type field identifies the student as either a full-time or shared-time student. A student is considered full-time if the student attends the school for more than half of a school day in session. A student is considered shared-time if the student attends a vocational school for half of the school day and another school for the other half of the school day.

By federal and state law, all public school districts must track a number of student characteristics, in addition to enrollment and daily attendance. A list of these characteristics can be found in the NJSMART SID Management Student Handbook.

### The Student Transfer Card

As noted above, the purpose of the school register is to track each student's journey from one approved program of instruction, school and district to the next. It is each district's responsibility to verify the movement of a student from one school to another within the state. The goal is to prevent students from slipping through the cracks.

One way school officials can prevent students from slipping through the cracks is through the use of student transfer cards. Once a parent or guardian requests a transfer for a student, the transferring school can use the NJDOE's [Student Transfer Card](#) to notify the new school of the student's transfer. If a local board of education would like to adopt its own transfer card, that version should include the following information:

- Student name, grade, date of birth and State Identification Number (SID)
- Name and current address of the parent or guardian
- The parent or guardian's forwarding address
- Name and address of the student's new school
- Name and address of the student's current school
- Signature of the principal or designee of the current school

In the event that the parent or guardian can only identify the area to which they are moving within the state, the student's current school must contact the new district to determine the school to which the student will be assigned. Otherwise, the student's current school maintains responsibility for the student and must request that the parent or guardian notify the current school of their new address and school so that the transfer card and student records can be sent to the new school.

The transfer card should be sent the first day after the student's last date of attendance. The transfer card notifies the new school of its responsibility to enroll and locate the transferring

student. As mandated through *N.J.S.A. 18A:36-19a* and described in *N.J.A.C. 6A:32-7.5(e)10*, the chief school administrator or designee of the receiving school must request, in writing, the transferring student's records from the district of last attendance within two weeks from the date the student enrolls in the new district.

The new school must enroll the transfer student the day that the transfer card is received or, if received in the summer, on the first school day in session of the next school year. (If the student arrives before the transfer card, the student must be enrolled upon arrival at the new school.) If the student does not attend that day, the student must be marked as absent until the first day of attendance. If the student does not attend within 10 days, the new school must investigate the reasons for the absences pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.6(a)4*. The information on the transfer card should be used to verify the student's whereabouts or school status. If the student cannot be located, the new school must report the dropout to the NJDOE as a School Exit Withdrawal Code "D7". Such a student may be considered as having 0 days in membership and 0 days present.

If charter school or choice student's parent or guardian requests a transfer back to a resident district school or to a nonpublic school, then the charter school or choice district must immediately notify the resident district in writing of this transfer. Transfer cards and records of the student must be sent back to the district of residence to correctly report the school status of the student in the resident district's school register.

The requirement of the new school to track transfer students only applies to students who transfer to a public or nonpublic school within the state. New Jersey does not have jurisdiction over the register procedures of other states.

## The Attendance Record

The basis of the New Jersey School Register, the Student Attendance and Accounting subchapter at *N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8*, is intended to facilitate the necessary federal reporting requirements of enrollment and attendance imposed on each state. The rules on local, unexcused absences are codified at *N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.6(a)3* and clarify that each district board of education must develop, adopt and implement policies that include a definition of unexcused absences that count towards truancy. The district board of education action requirement in *N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.6* does not change the requirements for recording daily attendance in the school register pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8* as authorized by *N.J.S.A. 18A:36-14* through 16.

## Attendance Record Rules and Requirements

Please see the [Guidance for Reporting Student Absences and Calculating Chronic Absenteeism](#) for more details on recording absences.

### Record Keeping

- In accordance with *N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(f)*, a teacher or authorized person must keep a record of the attendance of all students on roll in a school register each day that school is in session.
- The state accepts three values of student attendance: absent, present or excused for a state-approved reason per *N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(i)*. For more on state-excused absences, please see the subsection of the same name below.
- Districts policies and procedures regarding attendance, whether for students on school premises or in remote learning environments, must comply with regulations at *N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.6*.
- Districts are obligated to provide for the early detection of missing and abused children per *N.J.S.A. 18A:36-25*.

### Day of Attendance

- As outlined in *N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(a)*, for the purpose of school attendance, a day in session is a day in which school is operating and students are under the guidance and direction of a teacher or teachers engaged in the teaching process.
- Per [Executive Order No. 175](#), for school year 2020-2021, a school day in session, whether in-person or remote, must consist of at least four (4) hours of instruction which may include synchronous and/or asynchronous instruction to students by an appropriately certified teacher. One continuous session of two and one-half hours may be considered a full day in kindergarten, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3*, but a full school day of kindergarten must be at least four hours long in districts formerly designated as Abbott school districts. Districts must also ensure that the requirements set forth in *N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9* for a 180-day school year are met. Finally, per *N.J.S.A. 18A:35-4.31* districts must provide a daily recess period of at least 20 minutes for students in grades kindergarten through 5.
- According to *N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(e)* a school day in session is considered a full day only if school is in session for four hours or more, exclusive of recess periods or lunch periods. Per *N.J.S.A. 18A:35-4.31* districts must provide a daily recess period of at least 20 minutes

for students in grades kindergarten through 5. Breaks from instruction may be considered recess.

- Regardless of the number of hours of instruction students receive each day in session, one calendar day may not count as more than one school day in session.

#### State-Excused Absences

- A state-excused absence is being absent for religious observance (*N.J.S.A. 18A:36-14*); a college visit (up to 3 visits each school year for 11th and 12th grade students); Take Our Children to Work Day, or other rule issued by the Commissioner; participation in observance of Veterans' Day (*N.J.S.A. 18A: 36-13.2*); board of election membership activities (*N.J.S.A. 18A: 36-33*), or closure of a busing district that leaves students without transportation to receiving schools. A state-excused absence does not include illness, quarantine, suspensions, extended family vacations, homelessness or other prolonged absence.
- Per [New Jersey's approved ESSA plan](#), a state-excused absence cannot be counted as a day of attendance in the school register. Instead, districts must deduct state-excused absences from the number of possible days of attendance (or cumulative days in membership). For example, if a Kindergartener missed only one school day in session, for Take Our Children to Work Day, out of 180 possible days of attendance, that Kindergartener's cumulative days in membership must be submitted as 179 days with 179 cumulative days present.
- It is important to note that districts may have local determinations of "excused" and "unexcused" absences for the purposes of defining expectations and consequences regarding truancy, student conduct, promotion, retention, and the award of course credit, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.6*. Districts make take any and all action authorized by their policies and procedures when categorizing these absences. However, only state-approved excused absences may be recorded as excused in school registers. Students with "excused" absences per local decisions must be marked as absent when reported to the NJDOE.

#### Shared-Time Students

- Shared-time students must be enrolled in the appropriate school register of both schools they attend and identified as shared-time students.

- For shared-time students, each school day in session, or “possible number of days of attendance” is considered a ½ day in each school register.
- Each school must mark shared-time students as either ½ day present or ½ day absent on each school day in session. (A shared-time student must attend at least one hour to be counted present.)
- The attendance for shared-time students and full time students must be kept in one register by program type because the year-end data must be reported as a total for full-time and shared-time students. However, the enrollment record must identify shared-time students. This will help count students for the ASSA report and will also highlight shared-time students for attendance purposes.
- All full-time students may be grouped and recorded first on the enrollment page(s) followed by all shared-time students grouped at the end of the enrollment page(s). Shared-time students may also be kept in a separate section of the same register.

#### Home Instruction

- A student who has been placed on home instruction must have his or her attendance status recorded on the school register attendance pages for the program in which the student is enrolled. For the period beginning the first day the student is unable to attend school and ending the day before the first instructional day at the student’s place of confinement, the student must be marked absent. On the first day that home instruction is provided, a code should be used to indicate that the student is receiving home instruction. This code should be used until the student returns to school.
- No absences will be recorded for the student while on home instruction, providing the hours of instruction are no less than required by *N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.8* and *4.9* for a student receiving special education or by *N.J.A.C. 6A:10-2* for a general education student. The number of possible days of enrollment for a student on home instruction will be the same as for other students in the program in which the student is enrolled.
- Students on home instruction who receive the number of hours of instruction required by New Jersey Administrative Code should be considered present on those days when reporting Cumulative Days Present to the NJDOE via NJ SMART SID Management.

## Penalty

New Jersey Statutes (N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9) provides that no state aid shall be paid to a school district which has not provided school for at least 180 days during the preceding school year, unless the Commissioner, for good cause shown, remits the penalty.

Each school district, which has grounds to request that the Commissioner remit the penalty for operating less than 180 days, should make their request as soon as possible. The request should be accompanied by all the data necessary to enable the Commissioner to make a determination and should be submitted in time for the Commissioner to act before the close of the school year.

School districts should not assume the penalty will be remitted. Each request will be examined individually and decided on its merits in light of all circumstances. It is reasonable to expect that a district which provides extra days in its calendar for unforeseen emergencies will receive greater consideration than a district which does not make that provision.