



**Commonwealth of Massachusetts**  
Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
**Department of Transitional Assistance**  
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*Seamless*

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**Field Operations Memo 95-31-D**  
**March 15, 1996**

**To: Local Office Staff**

**From: Joyce Sampson, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations**

**Re: Update to Field Operations Memo 95-31, Attachment K**

**Background**

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This memo is the fourth in a series of updates to Field Operations Memo 95-31. Until a TAFDC Reference Guide is issued, updates to Field Operations Memo 95-31 will continue to be issued in this format.

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**Update**

This memo reissues Attachment K. Remove Attachment K and insert the attached replacement pages.

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**Questions**

If you have any questions, have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline at (617) 348-8478.

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## Learnfare 203.900

### Requirement

A dependent child under the age of 14 must attend school regularly. Verification must be obtained that each dependent child under age 14 of a nondisabled grantee has met certain school attendance requirements. The dependent child must not have more than eight unexcused absences during the previous 45-day school quarter.

The Department has developed an automated system to obtain all necessary verifications directly from the school. The grantee will have an opportunity to dispute any information obtained from the school which results in probation or a sanction, when the grantee believes the information is incorrect.

### Definition of Unexcused Absences

An absence is considered unexcused if the absence(s) is not due to one of the following reasons:

- illness as certified by a physician or a written statement from the grantee if the illness was less than five consecutive school days;
- hospitalization as certified by hospital records;
- a disability that would meet an exemption specified in 106 CMR 203.100;
- death of a family member as verified by a death certificate or death notice;
- religious holidays; and
- a crisis situation approved by the director or designee.

In most instances the school will make this determination. If a grantee disputes a report from the school, the grantee must demonstrate that the absence met one of the above reasons.

### **Learnfare Liaison**

Each local office will have a Learnfare liaison. This ensures that schools (public, parochial and private) that have enrolled children covered by a local office area will have only one local office contact.

**NOTE:** If a liaison has not been selected or is not available, the worker may be designated to perform any or all of the duties listed below based upon the needs of individual local offices.

The responsibilities of the Learnfare liaison are to:

- receive quarterly information about enrolled students from the schools;
- contact schools with enrolled Learnfare students that have not reported back to the Department;
- receive information for students requiring monthly reporting of absences;
- monitor probationary periods;
- inform local office workers about beginning and ending sanctions; and
- contact the school and the Department of Social Services (DSS) when a dependent child has been sanctioned for three consecutive months.

### **The Learnfare Tracking Process**

The Learnfare tracking system allows workers to inquire about dependents who meet the Learnfare select criteria, add the six-digit code used to identify the dependent's particular school and track probation periods and monthly school attendance.

Disabled grantees coded with Action Reasons 10 or 12 and Program Code 3 (AFDC cases) do not appear on the Learnfare tracking system. All ineligible grantee (AR 17) cases appear on the Learnfare tracking system, but if disabled, the grantee is not subject to the Learnfare requirement.

### *School Listing Application*

As part of the Learnfare Tracking system, a PC application titled School Listing has been developed, which consists of a statewide listing of schools and corresponding identification codes. The schools and their respective codes have been compiled onto a file that has been loaded onto the personal computers in the office. This comprehensive file lists schools by local office and/or statewide. The schools are sorted by city and town. The listing includes the school name, address, ID and phone number. Documentation for accessing and using the School Listing application can be found in the Personal Computer User's Guide, Volume 3: Learnfare User's Guide, Chapter I.

The Learnfare Tracking system is driven by school ID codes. A school identification number must be entered for each dependent subject to Learnfare at the time of a transition review or after a new dependent is known to PACES. Additional documentation for accessing and using the Learnfare Tracking System is contained in Systems User's Guide, Volume 5: Subsystems, Chapter V.

### *Quarterly Reporting Process*

Learnfare will generate letters and reports directly to schools which identify their respective students subject to the school attendance reporting requirement, copies of which will also be sent to the local offices. The reports will include names of children of new applicants and recipients whose cases were reviewed for TAFDC eligibility in the previous month. After the initial run of the reports, they will be updated and sent to local schools to provide them with identifying information on any child whose name should be added to or deleted from the list of students subject to the school attendance reporting requirement.

Schools must report back on attendance of students with more than eight unexcused absences. Schools should annotate the report and send it to the appropriate DTA local office. If the schools prefer to use another system, including an automated report or a combination of reports (for example, our original report with their own report attached), they may do so as long as all of the identifying information is included for each child on each attendance report. These reports must be submitted to the Learnfare liaison at the local office by the school within 14 calendar days of the end of a 45-day period. The quarters will end: 45 school days after January 2, 1996; the last school day of the 1995-1996 school year; 45 days after the first day of the 1996-1997 school year and every 45 school days thereafter.

A school having no students with more than eight unexcused absences must report this to the local office each quarter. If a local office does not hear from a school, the liaison must contact the school for the information.

*Probationary Status*

A grantee may be placed in a probationary status when the school reports that his or her dependent child has more than eight unexcused absences in the previous 45-day school quarter. The local office worker will:

- Determine when the absences occurred. More than eight of the unexcused absences must have occurred either after the transition review of an ongoing case or after the new TAFDC case was opened.
- Enter code "L" (L=letter) on the Learnfare Case Dependent Update screen. This code will generate a letter to the grantee of the dependent child subject to the Learnfare requirement. The letter explains the requirement and how a grantee may contact the local office and dispute the number of unexcused absences. Once this letter is produced, the system changes code "L" to code "P" (P = pending probation).
  - If the grantee responds and can verify that the absences are excused within ten days from the date of the Learnfare letter, the worker will enter a code "V" (V = verified).
  - If the grantee does not respond or cannot adequately verify that the absences are excused, code "P" will automatically change to code "Y" (Y = yes, person is on probation). This will occur on the last business day of the month, when at least 14 days have passed since the code "P" was initially entered.

When the code changes to a Y, the Department will generate a list of all students with more than eight unexcused absences. A copy of this list will be sent to all applicable schools and local offices. The student's school attendance must be reported by the school each month during the probationary period. The student may not have more than three unexcused absences during any month in the probationary period.

The monthly attendance report must be sent to the local office by the schools two weeks after the end of each calendar month. Even if all the students in a particular school meet the attendance requirements of probation, the school must indicate this to the liaison. If a local office does not hear from a school within the prescribed time frames, the liaison must contact the school for this information.

During the probationary period, the worker must code the number of monthly unexcused absences onto the Learnfare Case Dependent Update screen. The grantee shall remain in probationary status for six school months or until such time as the number of unexcused absences during the six preceding school months does not exceed 10 school days, whichever is later.

*Sanctions*

Local offices will receive the sanctioning procedures once they are finalized. Until the procedures are received, no action to sanction should be taken.