

Dear HR Knowledge, I have a lot of employees who ask to leave early or come in late for their kids' school events. How should I handle this?

With the school year in full swing, this is the season for parent-teacher conferences, field trips, volunteer events, children's doctor appointments and other school-related activities. As these types of events unfold, employers may notice an uptick in time-off requests from working parents and caregivers, leaving them wondering how to accommodate all these requests.

Employers should be aware that there are leave laws in place that allow eligible employees to participate in school-related functions. School-related parental leave laws are state-specific, and each jurisdiction has its own eligibility requirements and provisions. However, the common denominator is that the time off is unpaid; however most state laws allow employers to require that employees use their accrued paid time off.

There are currently 10 states with school-related leave laws in place. Generally, they all provide a certain number of hours of unpaid leave, either annually, per month, or per school year. Most states require employers with 50 or more employees to offer this leave. In Massachusetts, the Small Necessities Leave Act provides up to 24 hours of unpaid leave during a 12-month period to eligible employees. This time is in addition to any leave allowed under the federal Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). The Small Necessities Leave Act not only covers time off to attend school-related activities but also allows employees to accompany their elderly relatives to routine medical and dental appointments or nursing-home meetings or interviews.

Other New England states with school-related laws in place include Rhode Island and Vermont. Rhode Island employers with at least 50 employees must provide up to 10 hours of unpaid leave in a 12-month period, and Vermont employers with at least 15 employees must provide up to four hours of unpaid leave in a 30-day period. California is the most generous state, providing people who work for an employer with at least 25 employees, up to 40 hours of unpaid leave to attend school activities for their children in childcare or kindergarten through grade 12.

So, what's an employer to do? Consider the state(s) you operate in and your obligations under these types of laws. We encourage you to review your leave-of-absence policies and employee handbook to ensure compliance and understand the interplay of paid time off (i.e., PTO, vacation, and sick time policies) with these school and parental leave laws. Even if you operate in a state that does not require these types of leave, you should still



be aware of any state-specific sick time laws, which often cover leave to take qualified family members to doctor and dentist appointments.

About HR Knowledge

Founded in 2001, HR Knowledge, Inc. provides integrated outsourced HR services tailored to our clients' needs. Our full array of offerings includes managed payroll, employee benefits administration, and HR consulting and support services, such as training, compliance, and Hiring Process Management™, our comprehensive recruitment service that takes you from finding to onboarding new talent. Our major markets are fast-growing small- and medium-sized businesses, many of which are venture-capital-backed; foreign companies expanding into the states; and charter schools. Partner with us to reduce your administrative costs, minimize your legal risk, find and develop talent, and alleviate the HR burden so you can focus on your core business.

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