



**STATE OF MISSISSIPPI  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE**

ANDY GIPSON  
COMMISSIONER

September 17, 2026

Dear School Superintendent or Administrator,

Earlier this year, the Mississippi Legislature amended state law governing student absences. The new law requires that students not exceed five (5) excused absences per semester without specific approval of the school superintendent, or their designee, upon a showing of extenuating circumstances. This letter is to officially request that your school district recognize excused absences for all Covered Events as outlined in my Commissioner's Order Designating Educational Opportunities of Substantial Merit, attached hereto, and the specific request made below. Please consider designating the absence of \_\_\_\_\_ from school on \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/2026 for participation in the \_\_\_\_\_ as an educational opportunity of substantial merit.

Mississippi agriculture represents more than the largest industry in our State. It represents the hardest working people in Mississippi, and the heart, soul and backbone of who we are as Mississippians. Participation in the above event will provide agricultural education and an opportunity for students to explore the geography of our beautiful state, participate in various agricultural, horse and livestock competitions, learn about animal husbandry see the various agricultural aspects of life in action, and experience the direct connection to the history of our State. This is a unique learning opportunity for all participating students and it provides many lessons that simply cannot be taught within the four walls of a classroom.

This absence would clearly fall under Mississippi Code 37-13-91 section (4)b which provides "Extenuating circumstances may include, but are not limited to . . . participation in educational opportunities of substantial merit ..." and is recognized as a Covered Event under the Commissioner's Order.

Participation in the agricultural related events celebrating Mississippi's agricultural heritage is truly a valid educational opportunity, and directly results in youth leadership development. I respectfully request you approve this student's absence in accordance with the foregoing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Andy Gipson", is written over the word "Sincerely,".

Andy Gipson  
Commissioner