

Excused and Unexcused Absences

Purpose

This policy sets forth the expectation of regular school attendance and the responsibilities of school officials, parents or guardians, and students for ameliorating truancy.

Scope

This policy applies to the Superintendent, administrators, staff, students and parents or guardians.

Policy

1. The following principles will govern the development and administration of attendance procedures within the district.
 - 1.1. As defined by WAC 392-401-015, a student is absent when they are not physically present on school grounds and not participating in the following activities at an approved location:
 - (a) Instruction
 - (b) Any instruction-related activity
 - (c) Any other district or school-approved activity that is regulated by an instructional/academic accountability system, such as participation in district-sponsored sports.
 - 1.2. Students will not be absent if they:
 - (a) Have been suspended, expelled, or emergency expelled pursuant to Chapter 392-400 WAC.
 - (b) Are receiving educational services as required by RCW 28A.600.015 and Chapter 392-400 WAC.
 - (c) Are enrolled in qualifying “course of study” activities as defined in WAC 392-121-107.
 - 1.3. A full day absence is when a student is absent for fifty percent (50%) or more of their scheduled day.
 - 1.4. A school or district will not convert or combine “tardies” into absences that contribute to a truancy petition.
 - 1.5. A student will be considered absent if they are on school grounds but not in their assigned setting.
2. Students are expected to attend all assigned classes each day. Upon enrollment and at the beginning of each school year, the district will inform students and their parents or guardians (“parents”) of:
 - (a) The expectation of regular school attendance.
 - (b) The benefits of regular school attendance.

- (c) The consequences of truancy.
 - (d) The role and responsibility of the district in regard to truancy.
 - (e) Resources available to assist the student and their parents in correcting truancy.
- 2.1. The district will also make this information available online and will take reasonable steps to ensure parents can request and be provided such information in a language they can understand.
- 2.2. Parents will be required to acknowledge review of this information in writing annually.

3. EXCUSED ABSENCES

- 3.1. Regular school attendance is necessary for mastery of the educational program provided to students of the district. At times, students may be appropriately absent from class. Teachers or school staff will keep a record of absence and tardiness, including a record of excuse statements submitted by a parent or, in certain cases, students, to document a student's excused absences.
- 3.2. The following are valid excuses for absences:
- (a) Illness, health condition or medical appointment (including but not limited to medical, counseling, dental, optometry, pregnancy, and in-patient or out-patient treatment for chemical dependency or mental health) for the student or person for whom the student is legally responsible.
 - (b) Family emergency, including but not limited to a death or illness in the family.
 - (c) Religious or cultural purpose including observance of a religious or cultural holiday or participation in religious or cultural instruction.
 - (d) Court, judicial proceeding, court-ordered activity, or serving on a jury.
 - (e) Post-secondary, technical school or apprenticeship program visitation, or scholarship interview.
 - (f) State-recognized search and rescue activities consistent with RCW 28A.225.055.
 - (g) Absence directly related to the student's homeless or foster care/dependency status.
 - (h) Absences related to deployment activities of a parent or legal guardian who is an active duty member consistent with RCW 28A.705.010.
 - (i) Absences due to suspensions, expulsions or emergency expulsions imposed pursuant to Chapter 392-400 WAC if the student is not receiving educational services and is not enrolled in qualifying "course of study" activities as defined in WAC 392-121-107.

- (j) Absences due to student safety concerns, including absences related to threats, assaults, or bullying.
 - (k) Absences due to a student's migrant status.
 - (l) An approved activity that is consistent with district policy and is mutually agreed upon by the principal or designee and parent, guardian, or emancipated youth.
- 3.3. The school principal or designee has the authority to determine if an absence meets the criteria for an excused absence. The district may define additional categories or criteria for excused absences.
- 3.4. If an absence is excused, the student will be permitted to make up all missed assignments outside of class under reasonable conditions and time limits established by the appropriate teacher. Where reasonable, if a student misses a participation-type class, they can request an alternative assignment that aligns with the learning goals of the activity missed.
- 3.5. An excused absence will be verified by a parent, guardian or an adult, emancipated or appropriately aged student, or school authority responsible for the absence. If attendance is taken electronically, either for a course conducted online or for students physically within the district, an absence will default to unexcused until such time as an excused absence may be verified by a parent or other responsible adult.
- 3.6. If a student is to be released for health care related to family planning or abortion, the student may require that the district keep the information confidential. Students thirteen (13) and older have the right to keep information about drug, alcohol or mental health treatment confidential. Students fourteen (14) and older have the same confidentiality rights regarding HIV and sexually transmitted diseases.
- 3.7. Except as provided in section 3.2, in the event that a child in elementary school is required to attend school under RCW 28A.225.010 or 28A.225.015(1) and has five or more excused absences in a single month during the current school year, or ten or more excused absences in the current school year, the school district will schedule a conference or conferences with the parent and child at a time reasonably convenient for all persons included for the purpose of identifying the barriers to the child's regular attendance, and the supports and resources that may be made available to the family so that the child is able to regularly attend school.
- 3.7.1. To satisfy the requirements of this section, the conference must include at least one school district employee such as a nurse, counselor, social worker, teacher, or community human services provider, except in those instances regarding the attendance of a child who has an individualized education program or a plan developed under section 504 of the rehabilitation act of 1973, in which case the reconvening of the team that created the program or plan is required.

- 3.7.2. This conference is not required if the school has received prior notice or a doctor's note has been provided and an academic plan put in place so that the child does not fall behind.

4. UNEXCUSED ABSENCES

- 4.1. Any absence from school for the majority of hours or periods in an average school day is unexcused unless it meets one of the criteria above for an excused absence.
- 4.2. As a means of instilling values of responsibility and personal accountability, a student whose absence is not excused will experience the consequences of his/her absence. A student's grade may be affected if a graded activity or assignment occurs during the period of time when the student is absent.
- 4.3. The school will notify a student's parent(s) in writing or by telephone whenever the student has failed to attend school after one unexcused absence within any month during the current school year. The notification will include notification of the potential consequences of additional unexcused absences. The school will make reasonable efforts to provide this information in a language the parent understands.
- 4.4. The school will hold a conference (two-way communication in person, by phone or email) with the parent(s) after three unexcused absences within any month during the current school year. The conference will analyze the causes of the student's absences and develop a plan that identifies student, school and family commitments to reduce the student's absences from school. If the parent does not attend the conference, the school official may still hold the conference with the student. However, the school will notify the parent of the steps the district has decided to take to eliminate or reduce the student's absences.
- 4.5. Between the student's second and fifth unexcused absence, the school must take the following data-informed steps:
- 4.5.1. Middle and high school students will be administered the Washington Assessment of the Risks and Needs of Students (WARNS) or other assessment.
- 4.5.2. Subsequent steps must include, where appropriate:
- (a) Providing an available, approved best practice or research-based intervention, or both, consistent with the WARNS profile or other assessment, if an assessment was applied.
 - (b) Adjusting the child's school program or school or course assignment.
 - (c) Providing more individualized or remedial instruction.
 - (d) Providing appropriate vocational courses or work experience.
 - (e) Referring the child to a community truancy board.
 - (f) Requiring the child to attend an alternative school or program.

(g) Assisting the parent or child to obtain supplementary services that might eliminate or ameliorate the cause or causes for the absence from school.

4.5.3. For any child with an existing individualized education plan or 504 plan, these steps must include the convening of the child's individualized education plan or 504 plan team, including a behavior specialist or mental health specialist where appropriate, to consider the reasons for the absences. If necessary, and if consent from the parent is given, a functional behavior assessment to explore the function of the absence behavior will be conducted and a detailed behavior plan completed. Time should be allowed for the behavior plan to be initiated and data tracked to determine progress.

4.6. Not later than the student's fifth unexcused absence in a month, the district will enter into an agreement with the student and parents that establishes school attendance requirements, refer the student to a community truancy board, or file a petition and affidavit with the juvenile court alleging a violation of RCW 28A.225.010.

4.6.1. If such intervention actions are not successful, the district will file a petition and affidavit with the juvenile court alleging a violation of RCW 28A.225.010 by the parent, student, or parent and student, no later than the seventh unexcused absence within any month during the current school year or upon the tenth unexcused absence during the current school year.

5. STUDENTS DEPENDENT PURSUANT TO CHAPTER 13.34 RCW

5.1. A school district representative or certificated staff member will review unexpected or excessive absences of a student who has been found dependent under the Juvenile Court Act with that student and adults involved with that student.

5.1.1. "Adults" includes the student's caseworker, educational liaison, attorney if one is appointed, parent or guardians, foster parents and/or the person providing placement for the student.

5.1.2. The review will take into consideration the cause of the absences, unplanned school transitions, periods of running from care, in-patient treatment, incarceration, school adjustment, educational gaps, psychosocial issues, and the student's unavoidable appointments that occur during the school day.

5.1.3. The representative or staff member must proactively support the student's management of their school work.

6. MIGRANT STUDENTS

The district, parent or guardian, and student are encouraged to work to create an Extended Absence Agreement with the school to decrease the risk of an adverse effect on the student's educational progress.

-
7. It will be the responsibility of the Superintendent or designee(s) to enforce the district's attendance policies and procedures. Because the full knowledge and cooperation of students and parents/guardians are necessary for the success of the policies and procedures, procedures will be disseminated broadly and made available to parents, guardians and students annually.

Related Procedures

3122P1-Excused and Unexcused Absences

Policy Cross References

3110-Qualifications of Attendance and Placement

3240-Student Conduct Expectations and Reasonable Sanctions

3241-Classroom Management, Discipline and Corrective Action

Policy Legal References

Chapter 28A.225 RCW – Compulsory school attendance and admission

RCW 13.34.300 – Relevance of failure to cause juvenile to attend school to neglect petition

WAC 180-16-215(4) – Minimum one hundred eighty school day year

WAC 392-400-235 – Discipline – Conditions and limitations

WAC 392-400-260 – Long-term suspension – Conditions and limitations

Chapter 392-401 WAC – Statewide definition of absence, excused and unexcused

Management Resources

Policy & Legal News, August 2018 – Revisiting student absence

Policy & Legal News, July 2017 – Continued shift in truancy law prompts updated policy and procedure

Policy & Legal News, July 2016 – Truancy spotlighted in 2016 legislative session

Policy & Legal News, June 2015 – Other updates

Policy News, December 2012 – Excused and Unexcused Absences Policy clarified

Policy News, December 2011 – Revision of Excused/Unexcused Definitions

Policy News, June 2001 – More Tweaking of Becca Petitions

OSPI Memorandum No. 052-11M – Unexcused Absence Definition

Policy History

Action:	Date:
Approved by the Board	January 21, 1998
Revised	April 18, 2012
Revised	September 21, 2016

Revised	October 18, 2017
Revised	November 21, 2018
Revised	
Revised	

Previous Policy Number: 8003