

Excused and Unexcused Absences

Attendance and engagement are critical building blocks for student learning. If students are not present, they cannot engage in learning. Chronic absenteeism impacts all students—no matter their age. Students that miss just two days a month for **any** reason – even when excused - are more likely not to read at grade level, and more likely not to graduate from high school. Families are encouraged to utilize non-school days, early releases, and vacation periods to appointments, family activities, and/or travel.

Educators and administrators have a responsibility to monitor absences to determine if students and families need support. Students are expected to attend all assigned in-person classes each day or participate in all assigned remote instructional activities; except when there are necessary reasons for students to be absent. Upon enrollment and at the beginning of each school year, the district shall inform students and their parents/guardians of this expectation, the benefits of regular school attendance, the consequences of truancy, the role and responsibility of the district in regard to truancy, and resources available to assist the student and their parents/guardians in correcting truancy. The district will also make this information available online and will take reasonable steps to ensure parents can request and receive such information in languages in which they are fluent. Parents will be required to date and acknowledge review of this information online or in writing.

Daily attendance taking

The District will take daily attendance for all enrolled students whether the instructional modality is in-person, synchronous, or asynchronous. When instruction is synchronous online or asynchronous, secondary schools will take attendance daily in each course with planned instruction and elementary schools will take attendance at least twice a day.

Regular school attendance is necessary for mastery of the educational program provided to students of the district. At times, students may be absent from class or not able to participate remotely. School staff will keep a record of absence and tardiness, including a record of excuse statements submitted by a parent/guardian, or in certain cases, students, to document a student's excused absences. The below principles will govern the development and administration of attendance procedures within the district.

Excused Absences

1. *Illness*:
 - a. Physical health or mental health symptoms, illness, or health condition
 - b. Medical appointment for the student or person for whom the student is legally responsible including, but not limited to, medical, counseling, mental health wellness, dental, optometry, pregnancy, and behavioral

health treatment (which can include in-patient or out-patient treatment for chemical dependency or mental health)

2. *School-Related:*

- a. Participation in school athletics and/or activities
- b. Absences due to student safety concerns, including absences related to threats, assaults, or bullying
- c. Meeting with school personnel, e.g., administrator, counselor, nurse
- d. School-provided transportation issue, e.g., late school bus
- e. Post-secondary, technical school or apprenticeship program visitation, or scholarship interview
- f. Absences due to the student's lack of necessary instructional tools, including internet access or connectivity

3. *Legal:* Court, judicial proceeding, court-ordered activity, or jury service

4. *Residency:*

- a. Absence directly related to homelessness
- b. Absence directly related to student's foster care/dependency status
- c. Absence directly related to student's migrant status

5. *School Discipline:* 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

6. *Family Discretionary Absences:*

- a. Family emergency including, but not limited to, a death or illness in the family
- b. Significant family events, e.g. weddings, graduations etc.
- c. Religious or cultural purpose including observance of a religious or cultural holiday or participation in religious or cultural instruction
- d. State-recognized search and rescue activities consistent with RCW 28A.225.055;
- e. Absences related to deployment activities of a parent or legal guardian who is an active-duty member consistent with RCW 28A.705.010;
- f. An approved activity that is consistent with district policy and is mutually agreed upon by the principal or designee and a parent, guardian, or emancipated youth; and

Emergency School Closure

In the event of emergency school facility closure due to COVID-19, other communicable disease outbreak, natural disaster, or other event when districts are required to provide synchronous and asynchronous instruction, absences due to the following reasons are excused:

1. Absences related to the student's illness, health condition, or medical appointments due to COVID-19 or other communicable disease;
2. Absences related to caring for a family member who has an illness, health condition, or medical appointment due to COVID-19, other communicable disease, or other emergency health condition related to school facility closures;

3. Absences related to the student's family obligations during regularly scheduled school hours that are temporarily necessary because of school facility closures, until other arrangements can be made; and
4. Absences due to the student's parent/guardian work schedule or other obligations during regularly scheduled school hours, until other arrangements can be made.

The District may define additional categories or criteria for excused absences; the Superintendent or designee has the authority to determine if an absence meets this policy according to the above criteria for an excused absence.

1. 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 school. At a minimum, a student will be given one day for each day's absence to complete missed work. 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.
2. 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. 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. Except as provided in subsection (2) of this section, 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 (5) or more excused absences in a single month during the current school year, or ten (10) or more excused absences in the current school year, the school district shall schedule a conference or conferences with the parent/guardian 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. 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.

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.

Unexcused Absences

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 or in administrative procedure for an excused absence.
2. A student's grade may be affected if a graded activity or assignment occurs during the period of time when the student is absent and that absence is not excused.
3. The school will notify a student's parent or guardian 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 the potential consequences of additional unexcused absences. The school will make reasonable efforts to provide this information in a language the parent understands.

The superintendent will enforce the district's attendance policies and procedures. Because the full knowledge and cooperation of students and families are necessary for the success of the policies and procedures, procedures will be disseminated broadly and made available to families and students annually.

1. Students shall not be absent if:
 - a. They have been suspended, expelled, or emergency removed pursuant to chapter 392-400 WAC;
 - b. Are receiving educational services as required by RCW 28A.600.015 and chapter 392-400 WAC; and
 - c. The student is enrolled in qualifying "course of study" activities as defined in WAC 392-121-107. Course of study activities do not include sending homework packets home.
2. A full day absence is when a student is absent for fifty percent or more of their scheduled day.

Tardies

A student is tardy if they arrive after the start of the school day or class period. Students who miss more than 50% of the school day or period will be marked absent. The school or district shall not convert or combine tardies into absences that contribute to a truancy petition.

Tiered response system for student absences

WAC 392-401A-045 requires:

School districts to implement minimum requirements of a multitiered system of support for attendance to address barriers to student attendance, provide timely interventions and best practices to reduce chronic absenteeism and truancy.

Multitiered systems of support include:

1. Monitoring daily attendance data for all students who are absent, whether the absence is excused or unexcused;
2. A process to contact families and verify current contact information for each enrolled student that includes multiple attempts and modalities in the family's home language;

3. Differentiated supports that address the barriers to attendance and participation that includes universal supports for all students and tiered interventions for students at-risk of and experiencing chronic absence, including school and district attendance or engagement teams, connecting to community resources, and community engagement boards; and process for outreach and reengagement for students who have been withdrawn due to nonattendance and there is no evidence that the student is enrolled elsewhere. This outreach and reengagement process must include: school and/or district point person/people to maintain the list, keep it updated, and coordinate the outreach;
4. School or district staff assigned to conduct the outreach and attempts at reengagement in coordination with community partners or other programs;
5. Multiple methods of communication and outreach in a language or mode of communication that the family understands including phone calls, texts, letters, and home visits;
6. Referral to community-based organizations;
7. Documentation of the attempts to reach student and family; and
8. Follow the required steps to address unexcused absences in chapter 28A.225 RCW, including early communication to families, holding family conferences and administering a truancy screener to understand the underlying reasons for the absences, and providing evidence-based or best practice interventions, even if the student has been withdrawn due to nonattendance.
 - a. The school will hold a conference with the parent/guardian after three (3) 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/guardian does not attend the conference, the school official may still hold the conference with the student. However, the school will notify the parent/guardian of the steps the district has decided to take to eliminate or reduce the student's absences.
 - b. Between the student's second and seventh unexcused absence:
 - i. for middle school and high school, the school must administer the Washington Assessment of the Risks and Needs of Students (WARNS) or other assessment.
 - ii. In addition, data-informed steps for all grade levels must include, where appropriate, 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, adjusting the child's school program or school or course assignment, providing more individualized or remedial instruction, providing appropriate vocational courses or work experience, referring the child to a community truancy board, requiring the child to attend an alternative school or program, or assisting the parent or child to obtain supplementary services that might eliminate or ameliorate the cause or causes for the absence from school.

- iii. For any child with an existing individualized education plan (IEP) or 504 plan, these steps must include the convening of the child's IEP 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 shall 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.
- c. Not later than the student's seventh unexcused absence in a month the district will enter into an agreement with the student and parent/guardian that establishes school attendance requirements, refer the student to a community engagement board or file a petition and affidavit with the juvenile court alleging a violation of RCW 28A.225.010.
- d. If such action is 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/guardian and/or student no earlier than the seventh unexcused absence within any month during the current school year and not later than the fifteenth unexcused absence during the current school year.

Students dependent pursuant to Chapter 13.34, RCW

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. Adults include the student's caseworker, educational liaison, attorney if one is appointed, parent/guardian, foster parents and/or the person providing placement for the student. 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. The representative or staff member must proactively support the student's management of their school work.

DEFINITIONS

Absence from in-person learning

WAC 392-401-015 states the definition of an absence:

- 1. A student is absent from in-person instruction when they are:
 - a. Not physically present on school grounds; and
 - b. Not participating in the following activities at an approved location:
 - i. Instruction; or
 - ii. Any instruction-related activity; or
 - iii. Any other district or school approved activity that is regulated by an instructional/academic accountability system, such as participation in district-sponsored sports.

Chronic Absenteeism

As defined by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), a student is considered chronically absent if they miss 10% or more of their school days for **any** reason – whether excused, unexcused, or for suspensions. This is equivalent to 18 days per school year, or 2 days per month, September – May.

Minimum Time for Being Considered Present

The District has authority to establish minimum thresholds similar to in-person attendance for the time in which a student must be logged in to be considered present. The Superintendent will develop a consistent and equitable approach that is documented in the student handbook and communicated clearly to all students and families. Determining a threshold for when a student is present or absent should not be left to individual teachers.

Presence vs. Participation

Participation, such as turning video on and participating in discussion or chat, are not to be considered when determining if a student is present or not. These are examples of participation and should be considered distinct from attendance.

Absence from synchronous and asynchronous instruction

A student is absent from synchronous online instruction when the student does not log in to the synchronous meeting/class. (2) A student is absent from asynchronous instruction when there is no evidence that the student accessed the planned asynchronous activity. (3) Evidence of student participation in asynchronous activities must occur daily, within a twenty-four-hour time frame of when the participation is planned or expected.

Tardies

The District has the flexibility to determine what constitutes a tardy in synchronous online settings. The District differentiates a tardy from an absence (where the student does not attend at all) and will exclude tardies from any reports that tally absences for the purposes of filing a truancy petition.

Cross References:

3120 - Enrollment
3230 - Searches of Students and Student Privacy
3241 - Student Discipline
4218 - Language Access

Legal References:

Chapter 28A.225 Compulsory school attendance and admission
RCW 13.34.300 Relevance of failure to cause juvenile to attend school to neglect petition
Chapter 392-401 WAC Statewide definition of absence for the 2020-21 school year

Management Resources: 2022 - June
2020 - September Alert
2018 - August 2018 - August Policy Issue
2017 - July Policy Issue
2016 - July Issue
2015 - June Issue
2012 - December Issue
2011 - December Issue
Policy News, June 2001 More Tweaking of Becca
Petitions

Adoption Date:

Classification: **Essential**

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