

STUDENT ABSENCES/EXCUSES/DISMISSALS

(Policy Revision August 2019)

I. Rockingham County Public Schools' Attendance Policy - General

Students are expected to be in school all day, every day and make academic progress. Students are expected to be in class every period and ready for instruction. School attendance is critical to academic achievement and preparing students for the world of work and personal success. A good attendance record is an indication that an individual is willing to accept responsibility, exert self-discipline, and develop good work habits necessary for success in school, at work, and in life. Regular attendance is the first step to academic success. Students who are frequently absent miss instruction in key concepts and skills. We ask that parents set the tone for their child by encouraging good attendance and by communicating that school is their child's job and therefore, his or her responsibility every day.

As required under the provision of law, each parent/guardian ("parent") is responsible for regular and punctual attendance of any child in his or her charge within the compulsory age for school attendance. Emancipated students are responsible for their own regular and punctual attendance. Parents and emancipated students are expected to work cooperatively with school personnel to correct attendance problems, including meetings with teachers, counselors, attendance officers, or administrators. Nothing in this policy shall be construed to limit in any way the authority of any attendance officer or the Division Superintendent to seek immediate compliance with the compulsory school attendance law. Likewise, nothing in this policy shall be construed to limit in any way the authority of each school principal to create additional rules and procedures regarding attendance, as set forth in the applicable student handbook or as otherwise enforced by the principal.

A student is counted present for state reporting purposes if present for any portion of the day. Each member of a school's faculty is expected to avoid causing a student to be tardy or absent from a colleague's class. If a student is tardy or absent because of being detained by a faculty member, the student will be considered excused and the absence will not be included in the count for excessive absences.

II. Definitions

"Attendance Conference" means a face-to-face meeting, or an interaction that is conducted through the use of communication technology, at a minimum, initiated after the seventh unexcused absence and held no later than 10 school days after the tenth unexcused absence. The attendance conference is held with school staff, and may include parents, and the student. The conference may include community representatives to participate in resolving issues related to nonattendance and revisions to the current attendance plan if necessary.

"Attendance Plan" means a plan developed jointly by a school representative, such as a school principal or his or her designee, parent; and the student to resolve the student's nonattendance and engage the student in regular school attendance. The plan shall identify reasons for nonattendance and academic, social, emotional, and familial barriers that impede daily attendance along with positive strategies to address such reasons and support regular attendance. This plan may include school-based activities or suggested referrals to community supports, or both.

"Chronic Absence" means missing 15 or more days of school due to any reason. All excused and unexcused absences will be included in computing excessive absences, except as follows:

1. School-sponsored and school-related activities
2. Recognized religious holidays

"Court Referral" means filing a complaint to the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court after the multidisciplinary school team has held an attendance conference and attempted interventions to address the student's continued nonattendance. Documentation of interventions regarding the student's unexcused absences, such as copies of the attendance plan and documentation of conference meetings, and compliance with § 22.1- 258 of the Code of Virginia will be provided to the intake worker.

"Excused Absences" means an absence of an entire assigned instructional school day with a reason acceptable to the school administration that is provided by the parent. If circumstances permit, the parent should provide the school administration with the reason for the nonattendance prior to the absence. Examples of an excused absence

may include, but are not limited to, the following reasons: funeral, illness (including mental health and substance abuse illnesses), injury, legal obligations, medical procedures, religious observances and military obligation. In this regard, the principal or designee will consider the nature of the specific request of the parent, number of prior excused and unexcused absences, past and current grades as well as the student's discipline record when making decisions about whether to excuse any prearranged absence. Suspended students continue to remain under the provisions of compulsory school attendance as described in § 22.1-254 of the Code of Virginia. An absence from school attendance resulting from a suspension shall be recorded in compliance with 8VAC20-730-30 for the period of the suspension.

"Instructional School Day" means the length of a regularly scheduled school day or the length of the school day for an individual student as assigned by the school administration.

"Multidisciplinary Team" means a school-based team that may be convened to review student records and to participate in prevention, early intervention, and provision of support services to address unexcused absences, including school-based case management. These services should address academic, social, emotional, and familial issues in order to improve regular school attendance. Team members may include, but are not limited to, the following: an administrator, school counselor, social worker or psychologist, student assistance specialist, special education and general education teacher, and may include the attendance officer and community representative.

"Parent" means the parent or parents, guardian or guardians, legal custodian or legal custodians, or other person or persons having legal control or charge of the student.

"Unexcused Absences" means an absence where the student misses his scheduled instructional school day in its entirety with no indication has been received by school personnel within three five days of the absence that the student's parent is aware and supports the absence, or the parent provides a reason for the absence that is unacceptable to the school administration. The school administration may change an unexcused absence to an excused absence when it determines that the parent has provided an acceptable reason meeting criteria for the student's absence or there are extenuating circumstances.

All other absences for reasons not included in the definition of an excused absence are unexcused. Examples of unexcused absences include: personal business, oversleeping, haircuts, shopping, failure to catch the school bus, vehicle issues, appointments for other family members and suspension.

“Unverified Absence” means the student has been absent from school and the parent has made no contact with the school to provide the reason for the absence.

"Truancy" means the act of accruing one or more unexcused or unverified absences.

III. Elementary, Middle and High School Attendance Policy

All schools in Rockingham County shall record absences for all students. This record is part of each student's permanent school record. Absences are recorded for students absent for the entire school day, as well as for middle school and high school students who are absent for any specific class period.

If a student must be absent from school, a parent or guardian **must contact** their child's school **the day of the absence by phone, email or note** and state the reason for their child's absence. If word has not been received from the home concerning the absence, the principal or designee will make every attempt to **contact the parent or guardian of each absent student by phone, email or any other electronic means to obtain an explanation**. A documented attempt will be made to contact the parent if a student is absent without administrative approval or knowledge. **Failure of the parent or guardian to provide an explanation of the absence within 5 days of an absence will result in the absence being coded as "unexcused."** The school staff shall record the student's absence for each day as "excused, "unexcused". **Early intervention with the student and parent or parents shall take place for repeated unexcused absences.**

A. Notification Procedures and Consequences for Failure to Comply with this Policy

For all absences, the school will contact the student's home each day the student is absent from school when there is no indication that the student's parent is aware of and supports the absence.

1. All Unexcused/Unverified Absences shall be recorded.

2. Third Unexcused or Unverified Absence

The school principal or designee shall contact the parent or guardian in written form via letter or electronically of the absences and inform the parent of the compulsory attendance policy.

3. Fifth Unexcused or Unverified Absence

When a student has received **five unexcused absences**, the school principal or designee shall make a reasonable effort to ensure that direct contact is made with the parent. The parent shall be contacted in a face-to-face conference, by telephone, or through the use of other communication devices. During the direct contact with the parent and the student (if appropriate), reasons for nonattendance shall be documented and the consequences of nonattendance explained. An attendance plan shall be made with the student and parent or parents to resolve the nonattendance issues. The student and parent may be referred to a school-based multidisciplinary team for assistance implementing the attendance plan and case management.

4. Seventh Unexcused Absence

When the student receives the **seventh unexcused absence**, the school principal or designee shall schedule a face-to-face attendance conference, or an interaction that is conducted through the use of communication technology. **The attendance conference must be held within 10 school days from the date of the tenth unexcused absence.** The principal or principal's designee shall make reasonable efforts to contact the student's parent or parents to attend the attendance conference either in person or via communication technology. If the principal or principal's designee, after reasonable efforts have been made, are unable to contact the student's parent or parents, the conference shall be held regardless of whether the student's parent approves of the conference. The conference shall incorporate a school-based multidisciplinary team that includes the principal or principal's designee, and school personnel (which may be a representative or representatives from the multidisciplinary team) and may include community service providers.

The school-based multidisciplinary team shall monitor the student's attendance and, as necessary, meet again to address concerns and plan additional interventions if the student's attendance does not improve. If additional meetings are necessary the principal or principal's designee should make reasonable efforts to contact the student's parent or parents and schedule a face-to-face meeting, or an interaction that is conducted through the use of communication technology. If the principal or principal's designee, after reasonable efforts have been made, are unable to contact the student's parent or parents, the conference shall be held regardless of whether the student's parent approves of the conference.

A record shall be maintained of each meeting that includes the attendance plan, the name of individuals in attendance at each conference meeting (including via telephone or electronic devices), the location and date of the conference, a summary of what occurred, and follow-up steps.

Intervention and Strategies may include the following:

- School Based interventions such as; schedule change, after school tutoring to make up missed assignments, daily Check-in/Check-out with designated school staff, or requirement to ride the school bus to and from school.
- Parent suggestions such as: scheduled bedtime and wake up time, curfew, limited use of electronics, gaming and phone at nighttime, required use of school transportation to and from school.
- Parent may be required to provide proof of medical appointments scheduled during the school day.
- The student may be referred to the school counselor, early intervention counselor, school social worker, career coach, Community Services Board, the Department of Social Services or other community agencies.

Chronic non-compliance with school attendance may result in consequences such as:

- Suspension of driving privileges
- After-school detention
- Suspension of extra-curricular activities
- Poor school standing
- In-school suspension/BIP
- Requirement to attend Saturday School
- Return of an out of district student to their home high school.
- Referral to the Attendance Officer for a community based Interdisciplinary Team Meeting or a referral to the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court

5. Additional Unexcused or Unverified Absence

Upon continued unexcused or unverified absences from school, or at the discretion of the principal or designee a student may be referred to the attendance officer. The attendance officer shall enforce the compulsory attendance regulation by taking one or more of the following actions:

- a. Meet individually with the parent/guardian and the student to discuss school based interventions and the barriers affecting improved attendance.
- b. Hold a community based Interdisciplinary Team Meeting with the parent/guardian and student to discuss school based interventions and the barriers affecting improved attendance and develop a plan of action.
- c. File a complaint with the juvenile and domestic relations court alleging the pupil is a child in need of supervision as defined in § 16.1-228 or (ii) instituting proceedings against the parent pursuant to § 18.2-371 or § 22.1-262. In filing a

complaint against the student, the attendance officer shall provide written documentation of the efforts already undertaken to resolve the student's absence. If the student's parents have joint physical custody of the student and the school has notice of the custody arrangement, then both parents shall be notified at their last known addresses.

IV. Parent Provided Transportation

If a parent chooses to provide transportation to and from school for their child, the parent is legally responsible for getting the student to school on time each day. If the student is chronically late to school; Rockingham County Public Schools may initiate an attendance improvement plan.

V. Early Dismissal

Students who leave school early are required to follow proper procedures and must leave school property. Students are not permitted to leave school before their school day is completed unless they are approved in the office and properly signed out.

Students who expect to leave early must have their parent provide to the school by phone, email or written note the reason for the early dismissal, the time for dismissal, and the telephone number where the parent can be contacted. If transportation is by someone other than the parent this should be included in the communication from the parent.

If the student is leaving early from school in a habitual manner and picked up from school by the parent or with the parent's permission, Rockingham County Public Schools may initiate an attendance improvement plan.

Dismissal Precautions: Principals shall not release a student during the school day to any person not authorized by the student's parent to assume responsibility for the student. Students shall be released only on request and authorization of the parent. The Division Superintendent shall provide procedures for release of students who are not residing with or under the supervision of a parent. The burden of proof on the authority of the person to receive the student is on the requesting party. A formal check out system shall be maintained in each school.

VI. On School Grounds During an Absence

Students absent from school are not to be on school grounds without permission from school administration. Students who are absent from school and come onto school

property during the school day without appropriate permission or without their parent or guardian may be subject to discipline.

VII. Students Leaving School Property and/or Skipping Class

Once a student arrives on school property, he or she may not leave the school campus without permission from school administration prior to the end of the regularly scheduled school day. Students who leave school property without permission and/or fail to report to their assigned location during the school day will be referred to the school principal, assistant principal, or designee who may choose one or more of the following disciplinary actions:

- Suspension of driving privileges
- After-school detention
- Suspension of extra-curricular activities
- Poor school standing
- In-school suspension
- Lunch detention.
- Requirement to attend Saturday School.
- Return of an out of district student to their home high school.

VIII. Student Illness

Students that become ill or injured and need to leave school should report to the school clinic. In this case, parents will be contacted before a student will be released early from school (also see serious illness or injury procedure in parent/student handbook).

IX. Family Vacation

The school division recommends no more than five absences due to family vacation during regularly scheduled school days. Parent/Guardian shall notify the principal or designee in writing by email or note prior to the vacation indicating the dates of the vacation. It is the responsibility of the parent and the student to request assignments and ensure all assignments are completed. Any assignment not completed may result in the student receiving a zero grade for the assignment.

The principal has the discretion to count absences beyond five days of vacation as excused or unexcused based on the student's prior school absences, whether or not the student has a current attendance improvement plan and the academic standing of the student.

Parents are encouraged to consider scheduling vacations around school holidays and breaks.

X. Attendance Reporting

Student attendance shall be monitored and reported as required by state law and regulations. At the end of each school year, each public school principal shall report to the Superintendent the number of pupils by grade level for whom a conference was scheduled. The Superintendent shall compile this information and provide it annually to the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

XI. Make-Up Work Needed Due to Absences

Any student absent from class is required to make up all work missed whether the absence is excused or unexcused. **Students may choose to obtain all homework assignments prior to leaving the building on the day before a known or preplanned absence will occur. It is the responsibility of the student and the parent to request assignments for the day the student is out. A student and parent's failure to request make up work and to schedule make up work timeframes with his or her teacher for excused and unexcused absences can result in the student receiving a zero grade for the assignments not completed.**

XII. Extracurricular Activities on the Day of the Absence

Students must be in attendance, at a minimum, **half** of the school day in order to participate in any extra-curricular activity that day. For over the weekend school activities, students must be in attendance for the last four hours of the school day on Friday. However, exceptions may be made if the specific absence has been discussed with and approved by the school principal or designee prior to the student missing any time in school.

XIII. Attendance Requirements by Class

Massanutten Technical Center, dual enrollment, and/or honors courses may have additional, more stringent attendance requirements than provided in this policy and under applicable law. Students attending such programs are expected to meet these additional requirements. For example, classes that lead to a nursing diploma or a certificate of completion in a technical area have attendance requirements that are set by the teacher and school principal. In this regard, in many of these classes, there may be a specific number of seat time hours required in addition to the completion of the

actual class and homework. If these attendance hours are not met, students may not receive a passing grade or credit for the class.

XIV. Work Study

Students in approved work study programs may qualify for early dismissal or late arrival. Students enrolled in work study programs must arrive at and exit the school premises at the time designated. Remaining at school or on school grounds during the work study period is not permitted and any exceptions need to be approved by the administration. School administration and the work study coordinator must approve work study students for early release or late arrival. These students must have a work study agreement on file and they must adhere to the terms of their contract.