

## Excused and Unexcused Absences

### Attendance

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.

At the beginning of each school year, the school 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 and guardians in correcting truancy. The school 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.

The school will designate a staff member to serve as the attendance liaison for the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), Charter Commission, and Juvenile Court system. They will coordinate school efforts to address excessive absenteeism and truancy Actions including:

- Recruitment of the Community Engagement Board;
- Outreach and conferences;
- Coordinating the MOU with Juvenile Justice system;
- Establishing protocols and procedures aligned with State Law and WA Juvenile Court;
- Coordinating trainings for staff, families, and students
- Sharing evidence-based and culturally appropriate promising practices

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

### Definition of Absence

#### Absence from in-person learning

WAC 392-401-015 states the definition of an absence. A student is absent from in-person instruction when they are:

1. Not physically present on school grounds; and
2. Not participating in the following activities at an approved location:
  - a. Instruction; or
  - b. Any instruction-related activity; or
  - c. Any other school approved activity that is regulated by a school employee

#### Absence from Synchronous and Asynchronous Instruction

1. 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 within a reasonable period of time.

## Excused Absences

Regular school attendance is necessary for mastery of the educational program provided to students of WIHS. 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.

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.

While excused absences do not follow the same escalation of steps as unexcused absences, they still have an impact on student learning. To monitor students who are showing a pattern of excused absences:

- The school will review reasons of excused absences for any students with 5 or more *excused* absences within each semester. If a pattern or concern is shown, the student will be referred to the MTSS Team for further evaluation of need.
- The school will contact the family, offer support, and review the attendance policy for any students with more than 10 overall absences (excused and unexcused) within the current school year. The MTSS Team will work with the student(s) on strategies for success.
- The school, student, family, and other possible support personnel will hold a meeting to identify barriers to attendance and an attendance improvement plan will be put in place for all students with more than 12 excused absences per semester.

The following are valid excuses for absences and tardiness. Assignments and/or activities not completed because of an excused absence or tardiness may be made up in the manner provided by the teacher.

### **The following are valid excuses for absences:**

- Physical health or mental health symptoms, illness, health condition or medical appointment for the student or person for whom the student is legally responsible.
  - Examples of symptoms, illness, health conditions or medical appointments include, but are 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).
- Family emergencies including, but not limited to, a death or illness in the family.
- Religious or cultural purpose including observance of a religious or cultural holiday or participation in religious or cultural activity or instruction.
- Court, judicial proceeding, court-ordered activity or jury service.
- Post-secondary, technical school or apprenticeship program visitation or scholarship interview.
- State-recognized search and rescue activities consistent with RCW [28A.225.055](#);
- Absence directly related to the student's homeless or foster care/dependency status.
- Absences related to deployment activities of a parent/guardian who is an active-duty member consistent with RCW [28A.705.010](#);
- 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](#);
- Absences due to student safety concerns, including absences related to threats, assaults or bullying.
- Absences due to a student's migrant status.
- 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.
- Absences due to the student's lack of necessary instructional tools, including internet access or connectivity.

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 school may define additional categories or criteria for excused absences. A school principal or designee has the authority to determine if an absence meets this policy according to the above criteria for an excused absence.

1. **Parental notification.** When possible, the parent/guardian is expected to notify the school office on the morning of the absence by phone, e-mail, or written note, and to provide the excuse for the absence. If no excuse is provided with the notification, or no notification is provided, the parent/guardian will submit an excuse via phone, e-mail or written note upon the student's return to school. Adult students (those over eighteen) and emancipated students (those over sixteen who have been emancipated by court action) will notify the school office of their absences with a note of explanation. Students fourteen years old or older who are absent from school due to testing or treatment for a sexually transmitted disease will notify the school of their absence with a note of explanation, which will be kept confidential. Students thirteen years and older may do the same for mental health, drug or alcohol treatment; and all students have that right for family planning and abortion.
2. **Religious or Cultural Absence.** A parent/guardian may request that a student be excused from attending school in observance of a religious holiday. In addition, a student, upon the request of their family, may be excused for a portion of a school day to participate in religious instruction provided such is not conducted on school property. A student will be allowed one makeup day for each day of absence.
3. **Absence for parental-approved activities.** This category of absence will be counted as excused for purposes agreed to by the principal and the parent/guardian. An absence may not be approved if it causes a serious adverse effect on the student's educational progress. The student may not be able to achieve the objectives of the unit of instruction as a result of absence from class. In such a case, a parent or guardian-approved absence would have an adverse effect on the student's educational progress, including the grade for the course. A student, upon the request of his/her parent/guardian, may be excused for a portion of a school day to participate in religious instruction provided such is not conducted on school property or otherwise involves the school to any degree.
4. **Absence resulting from disciplinary actions or short-term suspension.** As required by law, students who are removed from a class or classes as a disciplinary measure or students who have been placed on short-term or long-term suspension will have the right to make up assignments or exams missed during the time they were denied entry to the classroom if the effect of the missed assignments will be a substantial lowering of the course grade.
5. **Extended illness or health condition.** If a student is confined to home or hospital for an extended period, the school will arrange for the accomplishment of assignments at the place of confinement whenever practical. If the student is unable to do his/her schoolwork, or if there are major requirements of a particular course which cannot be accomplished outside of class the student may be required to take an incomplete or withdraw from the class without penalty.
6. **Excused absence for chronic health condition.** Students with a chronic health condition that interrupts regular attendance may qualify for placement in a limited attendance and participation program. The student and their family will apply to the principal or counselor, and a limited program will be written following the advice and recommendations of the student's medical advisor. The recommended limited program will be approved by the principal. Staff will be informed of the student's needs, though the confidentiality of medical information will be respected at the parent's request.

## Unexcused Absences

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.

- 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.

### **Unexcused absences occur when:**

1. The parent, guardian, or adult student submits an excuse that does not meet the definition of an excused absence as defined above; or
2. The parent, guardian, or adult student fails to submit any type of excuse statement, whether by phone, e-mail or in writing, for an absence.

**Each unexcused absence within any month of the current school year** will be followed by a phone call, email, and/or letter to the parent informing them of the consequences of additional unexcused absences. The school will make reasonable efforts to provide this information in a language in which that parent is fluent. A student's grade will not be affected if no graded activity is missed during such an absence.

**After three unexcused absences within any month of the current school year**, the school will hold a conference with the DOO, and/or DoE, student, and parent to analyze the causes of the student's absenteeism. If a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference is scheduled to take place within thirty days of the third unexcused absence, the LEA may schedule the attendance conference on the same day. If the parent/guardian does not attend the scheduled conference, the school may hold the conference with the student and principal. However, the school will notify the parent of the steps to eliminate or reduce the student's absences.

**Between the second and the seventh unexcused absence**, the LEA will take data-informed steps to eliminate or reduce the student's absences.

- The LEA will designate a staff member to apply the Washington Assessment of the Risks and Needs of Students (WARNS) and, where appropriate, provide the student with best practice or research-based interventions consistent with WARNS. As appropriate, the LEA will also consider:
  - adjusting the student's course assignments;
  - providing the student more individualized instruction;
  - providing appropriate vocational courses or work experience;
  - requiring the student to attend an alternative school or program;
  - assisting the parent or student to obtain supplementary services; or
  - referring the student to a community engagement board.
- For any child with an existing individualized education plan (IEP) 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 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.
- For any student who does not have an IEP or Section 504 Plan, but who is reasonably believed to have a mental or physical disability or impairment, these steps will include informing the student's parent/guardian of the right to obtain an appropriate evaluation at no cost to the parent to determine whether the student has a disability or impairment and needs accommodations, special education services, or related services. This includes students with suspected emotional or behavioral disabilities. If the school obtains consent to conduct an evaluation, time should be allowed for the evaluation to be completed, and if the student is found to be eligible for accommodations, special education services, or related services, a plan will be developed to address the student's needs.

**No later than the student's seventh unexcused absence in a month** the school will:

- Enter into an agreement with the student and family that establishes school attendance requirements;
- Refer the student to a community education board; or
- File a petition and affidavit with the juvenile court alleging a violation of RCW 28A.225.010

**After seventh unexcused absence within any month during the current school year and not later than the fifteenth unexcused absence during the current school year**, if prior action has not been successful, the school will file a petition and affidavit with juvenile court alleging a violation of RCW 23A.225.010 by the parent, student, or parent and student.

#### **Petition to juvenile court**

The petition will contain the following:

- A statement that the student has unexcused absences in the current school year. *(Note: While petitions must be filed if the student has seven or more unexcused absences within any month, or ten or more unexcused absences in the current school year, a petition may be filed earlier. Unexcused absences accumulated in another school or school will be counted when preparing the petition);*
- An attestation that actions taken by the school LEA have not been successful in substantially reducing the student's absences from school;
- A statement that court intervention and supervision are necessary to assist the school LEA to reduce the student's absences from school;
- A statement that RCW 28A.225.010 has been violated by the parent, student or parent and student;
- The student's name, date of birth, school, address, gender, race and ethnicity; and the names and addresses of the student's parents/guardians, whether the student and parent are fluent in English, whether there is an existing individualized education program (IEP) and the student's current academic status in school;
- A list of all interventions that have been attempted, a copy of any previous truancy assessment completed by the student's current school LEA, the history of approved best practices intervention or research-based intervention(s) previously provided to the student by the LEA, and a copy of the most recent truancy information document provided to the parent.
- Facts that support the above allegations.

Petitions may be served by certified mail, return receipt requested, but if such service is unsuccessful, personal service is required. At the LEA's choice, it may be represented by a person who is not an attorney at hearings related to truancy petitions.

If the allegations in the petition are established by a preponderance of the evidence, the court shall grant the petition and enter an order assuming jurisdiction to intervene for a period of time determined by the court, after considering the facts alleged in the petition and the circumstances of the student, to most likely cause the student to return to and remain in school while the student is subject to the court's jurisdiction.

If the court assumes jurisdiction, the school LEA will periodically report to the court any additional unexcused absences by the student, actions taken by the school LEA, and an update on the student's academic status in school at a schedule specified by the court. The first report must be received no later than three (3) months from the date that the court assumes jurisdiction.

All sanctions imposed for failure to comply with the attendance policies and procedures will be implemented in conformance with state and LEA regulations regarding discipline or corrective action. (See WSSDA policy 3241, Student Discipline.)

## Tardies and Disciplinary Actions

- Students shall not be absent if:
  - They have been suspended, expelled, or emergency expelled pursuant to chapter 392-400 WAC;
  - Are receiving educational services as required by RCW 28A.600.015 and chapter 392-400 WAC; and
  - The student is enrolled in qualifying "course of study" activities as defined in WAC 392-121-107.
- A full day absence is when a student is absent for *fifty percent or more* of their scheduled day.
- A school or district shall not convert or combine tardies into absences that contribute to a truancy petition.
- A student shall be considered absent if they are on school grounds but not in their assigned setting.

### Tiered response system for student absences

WAC 392-401A-045 states:

School districts must implement a tiered response system to reduce chronic absenteeism and address barriers to student engagement. Tiered response systems under this section must include:

- Monitoring daily attendance data for all students who are absent from remote learning, whether excused or unexcused;
- A process to contact families and verify current contact information for each enrolled student that includes multiple attempts and modalities in the parent's home language;
- Daily notification of absences to parents;
- A process for outreach from the school to determine student needs, such as basic needs, connectivity and hardware, connection with health and social services as necessary;
- 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; and
- When feasible and appropriate, transitioning the students to full-time in-person learning or other programs to accommodate the student's needs.

### Transfer Students

In the case of a student who transfers from one LEA to another during the school year, the sending LEA will provide to the receiving LEA, together with a copy of the WARNS assessment and any interventions previously provided to the student, the most recent truancy information for that student. The information will include the online or written acknowledgment by the parent and student. The sending LEA will use the standard choice transfer form for releasing a student to a nonresident school LEA for the purposes of accessing an alternative learning experience program.

### Migrant Students

The district, parent/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.

### 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 or guardians, 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.

#### 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 392-401A WAC Statewide definition of absence for the 2020-21 school year

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