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## **PROCEDURE - EXCUSED AND UNEXCUSED ABSENCES**

### **Excused Absences**

For an absence to be excused, the parent/guardian should notify the school office prior to or on the morning of the absence when possible and provide a valid excuse for the absence by phone, e-mail or written note. The following are valid excuses for absences and tardiness.

- **Participation in school-approved activity or instructional program.** To be excused, this absence must be authorized by a staff member and the affected teacher must be notified prior to the absence unless it is clearly impossible to do so.
- **Absence due to:** illness; health condition; medical appointment; family emergency; religious purposes; court, judicial proceeding or serving on a jury; post-secondary, technical school or apprenticeship program visitation, or scholarship interview; State recognized search and rescue activities consistent with RCW 28A.225.055; directly related to the student's homeless status; and any other reason identified by OSPI rules or other applicable state law as a valid excuse for absence or tardiness.
- **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 is inconsistent with District policy or causes a serious adverse effect on the student's educational progress. In participation-type classes (e.g., certain music and physical education classes) 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 which would ultimately be reflected in the grade for such a 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. A parent/guardian may request that a student be excused from attending school in observance of a religious holiday.
- **Absence resulting from disciplinary actions — or short-term suspension.** Students who have been suspended, expelled, or emergency expelled will be afforded all rights to which they are entitled under state law. Students who are removed from a class or classes as a disciplinary measure or students who have been placed on short-term suspension will have the right to make up assignments or exams missed during the time they were denied entry to the classroom.

- **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.
- **Excused absence for chronic health condition.** Students with a chronic health condition which interrupts regular attendance may qualify for placement in a limited attendance and participation program. The student and his/her parent will consult with the principal or counselor, and a limited program may 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 and as FERPA rules apply.

Assignments and/or activities not completed because of an excused absence or tardiness may be made up in the manner provided by the teacher.

### **Documenting Excused Absences**

Parents/guardians are responsible for excusing their student's absences within five school days of returning from the absence. After five school days, the absence will be permanently marked as unexcused. To excuse an absence, an adult student or emancipated student or parent/guardian must call the attendance line/school office, personally speak with an attendance secretary or designee, or send written communication to the school. Phone calls will be documented by the school's attendance secretary or designee. Notes, whether from guardians or medical providers, will be scanned and attached to the student's electronic attendance record. When the absence meets the criteria of an excused absence, the student's electronic attendance record will be updated to reflect an excused absence.

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 and older have the right to keep information about drug, alcohol or mental health treatment confidential. Students fourteen and older have the same confidentiality rights regarding HIV and sexually transmitted diseases.

For purposes of this procedure, excessive absenteeism is defined as 12 or more absences in a school year. When a student has excessive absenteeism, appropriate additional documentation or verification may be required for the absence, which may include medical documentation or a visit to the school nurse for health related absences. Documentation need not provide details of the medical condition, provided it contains a medical professional's certification that the absence is medically necessary. Failure to provide such documentation upon request may result in further absences being considered unexcused and/or in the filing of a truancy petition to a local truancy board or to the courts.

### **Required conference for elementary school students**

- If an elementary school student 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 District will schedule a conference with the student and their parent(s) at a reasonably convenient time. The conference is intended to identify barriers to the student's regular attendance and to identify supports and resources so the student may regularly attend school.

- The conference must include at least one school District employee, preferably a nurse, counselor, social worker, teacher or community human service provider, and may occur on the same day as the scheduled parent-teacher conference, provided it takes place within thirty days of the absences. If the student has an Individualized Education Program or a Section 504 Plan, the team that created that program (or their designees) must reconvene. A conference is not required if prior notice of the excused absences was provided to the District or if a doctor's note has been provided and a plan is in place to ensure the student will not fall behind in their coursework.

### **Unexcused Absences**

An unexcused absence occurs when an adult student or parent/guardian fails to submit a statement by phone, email, or writing adequately identifying a valid excuse for the student's absence or tardiness. An absence may also be considered unexcused if a student fails to comply with the attendance requirements prescribed by state law and by District policy or to comply with alternative learning experience program attendance requirements. Any absence from school for more than fifty-percent of hours or periods in a student's scheduled day is unexcused unless it meets one of the criteria above for an excused absence.

The District will take the following actions in response to unexcused absences:

- **Each unexcused absence within any month of the current school year** will be followed by a letter or phone call 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**, a conference will be held between the principal/designee, student and parent to analyze the causes of the student's absenteeism. The parent will be notified in writing in his/her primary language that the student has unexcused absences. If a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference is scheduled to take place within thirty days of the third unexcused absence, the District may schedule the attendance conference on the same day. If the parent/guardian does not attend the scheduled conference, the conference may be conducted with the student and principal/designee. However, the parent will be notified of the steps to be taken to eliminate or reduce the student's absences.
- **At some point after the second and before the fifth unexcused absence**, the District will take data-informed steps to eliminate or reduce the student's absences and to evaluate barriers to regular school attendance. In middle school and high school, these steps will include application of the Washington Assessment of the Risks and Needs of Students (WARNS) or other assessment by the District's designated employee. If the student has an IEP or a 504 Plan the team should convene to consider the reasons for absences.
- **Not later than a student's fifth unexcused absence in a month**, the District will enter into an agreement with the student and parents/guardians that establishes school attendance requirements at the secondary level.
- **Not later than a student's seventh unexcused absence within any month during the current school year, or a tenth unexcused absence during the current school year**, if the District's attempts to substantially reduce a student's absences have not been successful and if the student is

under the age of seventeen, the District will file a petition and supporting affidavit for a civil action in juvenile court.

### **Washington Assessment of the Risks and Needs of Students**

The District will designate a staff member to apply the Washington Assessment of the Risks and Needs of Students (WARNS) and, where appropriate, provide students with best practice or research-based interventions consistent with WARNS. As appropriate and necessary, the District 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 truancy board.

In addition, 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, the District will inform 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.

### **Transfers**

In the case of a student who transfers from one district to another during the school year, the sending district will provide to the receiving district, 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 district will use the standard choice transfer form for releasing a student to a nonresident school district for the purposes of accessing an alternative learning experience program.

### **Community Truancy Board**

A "community truancy board" means a board established pursuant to a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between a juvenile court and the school District and composed of members of the local community in which the student attends school. The District has entered into an MOU with the juvenile court in Mason County to establish a community truancy board.

The District will designate and identify to the juvenile court (and update as necessary) and to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction a staff member to coordinate District efforts to address excessive absenteeism and truancy, including outreach and conferences, coordinating the MOU, establishing protocols and procedures with the court, coordinating trainings, sharing evidence-based and culturally appropriate promising practices. The District will also identify a person within each school to serve as a contact regarding excessive absenteeism and truancy.

### **Petition to juvenile court**

The petition will contain the following:

- A statement that the student has unexcused absences in the current school year;
- An attestation that actions taken by the school District 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 District 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, which may include: a copy of any previous truancy assessment completed by the student's current school District; the history of approved best practices intervention or research-based intervention(s) previously provided to the student by the District; and a copy of the most recent truancy information document provided to the parent; and
- 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 District's choice, it may be represented by a person who is not an attorney at hearings related to truancy petitions. All sanctions imposed for failure to comply with the attendance policies and procedures will be implemented in conformance with state and District regulations regarding discipline or corrective action.

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