



Policy 3122 – EXCUSED AND UNEXCUSED ABSENCES

It is the policy of the Highline School Board that students are expected to attend all assigned classes each day. School staff shall keep a record of absences and tardiness, including documentation of excused and unexcused absences. Accurate attendance and tardy data shall be promptly entered into the student information system (SIS) to enable accurate and timely reporting and notifications to families.

Upon enrollment and at the beginning of each school year, the district shall inform students and their parents/guardians of the expectation that students attend school, 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 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. Parents/guardians will be required to date and acknowledge review of this information online or in writing.

It is important for students to attend school every day. Absent or late students miss valuable coursework and instruction, and may fall behind in their education. This is true even for excused absences. Families are encouraged to not schedule appointments, vacations, or other events at times that would cause students to be absent from school. We believe attendance is so important because data shows that absences of any type (excused or unexcused) dramatically decreases a student's ability to graduate on time.

A student is considered chronically absent, and therefore less likely to pass classes or graduate on time, with only two (2) absences per month or eighteen (18) absences per school year.

Definitions

- **Synchronous Online Instruction** means scheduled, real-time instruction between the student and a certificated teacher or another district staff member who is supervised by a certificated teacher. This mode of instruction provides opportunities for live, two-way interactive communication online.
 - An absence from synchronous online instruction is when the student does not log in to the synchronous class/meeting/activity
- **Asynchronous Instruction** means instruction that is prepared by a certificated teacher and occurs away from the physical school setting without two-way interactive communication.

- An absence from asynchronous instruction is when there is no evidence that the student has accessed the planned asynchronous class/meeting/activity within a 24-hour time frame of when the participation is planned or expected.

Excused Absences

Regular school attendance is necessary for students to succeed academically and graduate from high school. Schools are encouraged to engage with their families about the importance of attendance and how the school and family can jointly support consistent attendance. However, there are times when students may appropriately be absent from class. The following principles shall govern the development and administration of attendance procedures within the district.

- A. The following are valid excuses for absences:
- a. Absences due to illness, health condition or medical appointment (including, but not limited to: medical; counseling; dental; optometry; pregnancy; mental health; and in-patient or out-patient treatment for chemical dependency or mental health) for the student or a person for whom the student is legally responsible may require a note from a medical provider after three (3) absences in a month stating the reasons for the absence;
 - b. Absences due to family emergencies including, but not limited to, a death or illness in the family may require a meeting with the school to develop a plan to make up student work;
 - c. Religious or cultural purpose including observance of religious or cultural holiday or participation in religious or cultural instruction and American Indian/Alaska Native student participation in cultural or ceremonial observances connected to their tribal identity and when exercising their sovereign treaty rights by participating in fishing and agricultural activities;
 - d. Absence directly related to the student's homeless or foster care/dependency status;
 - e. Absences due to suspensions, expulsions or emergency expulsions 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;
 - f. Absences due to student safety concerns, including absences related to threats, assaults, or bullying, will be required to meet with the school and develop a plan for the student's continued education;
 - g. Absences due to participation in a prior approved activity that is consistent with district policy and is mutually agreed upon by the principal/designee and parent/guardian/emancipated youth may be excused if the student is on track and if the family meets with the school to identify a plan to either make up student work or complete additional projects related to the approved activity;
 - h. Absences due to a student's exercise of their First Amendment rights may be excused provided that the student and/or parent guardian has notified the principal/designee and that the student exercises their rights in a safe and respectful manner.

- i. Participation in a district or school approved activity or instructional program;
- j. Court, judicial proceeding, court-ordered activity or serving on a jury;
- k. Post-secondary, technical school or apprenticeship program visitation, or scholarship interview;
- l. State-recognized search and rescue activities consistent with RCW 28A.225.055;
- m. Absences related to deployment activities of a parent/guardian who is an active duty member consistent with RCW 28A.705.010;
- n. Absences due to a student's migrant status; and
- o. Absences due to the student's lack of necessary instructional tools (including internet access or connectivity).

The Principal or designee has the authority to determine if an absence meets the above criteria to be deemed an excused absence. An absence may not be considered excused if it causes a serious adverse effect on the student's educational progress.

- B. 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.
- C. If an absence is excused, the student shall be permitted to make up all missed assignments outside of class under reasonable conditions and time limits established by the appropriate teacher. A student's grade may be impacted in classes where participation during class is a demonstration of mastery.
- D. An excused absence shall 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 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.

- E. If a student in elementary school has five or more excused absences in a single month, or ten or more excused absences during the school year, the school will schedule a conference with the parent/guardian and student for the purposes of identifying the barriers to the student's regular attendance, and the supports and resources that may be available to help the student regularly attend school.
- a. The conference should be scheduled at a mutually agreeable time for all attendees.
 - b. If a regularly scheduled parent/guardian-teacher conference is scheduled within thirty days of the absences the attendance conference can take place at that time.
 - c. The conference should include at least one district employee such as a nurse, counselor, social worker, teacher, or community services provider, except if the student qualifies for special education services or has a Section 504 plan. In those cases the student's IEP team or Section 504 team should be convened to discuss the student's absences.
 - d. A conference is not required if prior notice of the excused absences is provided to the school, 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.

Excused Absences During School Facility Closures

In the event of an 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, the following are approved excused absences:

- a. Absences related to the student's illness, health condition, or medical appointments due to COVID-19 or other communicable disease;
- b. 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;
- c. 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
- d. Absences due to the work schedule or other obligations of the student's parents during regularly scheduled school hours, until other arrangements can be made.

Tardy

The term "tardy" shall be defined as missing at least 25% of the school day with or without the permission of parents/guardian or school personnel. The teacher shall counsel with those students who are developing a pattern of being tardy. The teacher shall refer to a school administrator those students who in the teacher's judgment are not making progress towards correcting the problem. The administrator may select the appropriate action from the following options: school service, parent/guardian contact, or a student/parent or guardian conference.

Unexcused Absences

- A. Any absence from school for the majority of hours or periods in an average school day, or the failure to comply with alternative learning experience program attendance requirements, is unexcused unless it meets one of the criteria for an excused absence. This includes absences for which no excuse is ever provided.
- B. As a means of instilling values of responsibility and personal accountability, a student whose absence is not excused shall experience the consequences of his/her absence. A student's grade may be impacted in classes where participation during class is a demonstration of mastery.
- C. The school shall 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 shall include the potential consequences of additional unexcused absences.
- D. A conference with the parent/guardian and, when appropriate, the student, shall be held after three unexcused absences within any month during the current school year.
 - a. If a regularly scheduled parent/guardian-teacher conference is to take place within thirty days of the third unexcused absence, the attendance conference can take place on that day.
 - b. If the student's parent/guardian does not attend the conference, the conference may be conducted with the student and school official. However, the parent will be notified of the steps taken to eliminate or reduce the student's absences.
- E. Not later than a student's 7th unexcused absence in a month the school must take data-informed steps to eliminate or reduce the student's absences. Where appropriate, the steps must include:
 - a. Providing a best-practice or research-based intervention, consistent with an assessment, if an assessment was done (assessment could be the Washington Assessment of the Risks and Needs of Students (WARNS) or another assessment)
 - b. Adjusting the student's course assignments;
 - c. Providing the student more individualized instruction;
 - d. Providing appropriate vocational courses or work experience;
 - e. Requiring the student to attend an alternative school or program;
 - f. Assisting the parent or student to obtain supplementary services; or
 - g. Referring the student to a community truancy board; or
 - h. Assisting the parent/guardian or child to obtain supplementary services that might eliminate or ameliorate the cause of the absences.
 - i. For students in middle and high school the data-informed steps must include the application of the WARNS assessment or another assessment done by the district's designee.
 - j. For students who qualify for a special education or for Section 504 services, the data-informed steps must include convening the student's IEP or 504 team, including a behavior specialist or mental health

specialist where appropriate to consider the reasons for the absences. If necessary and upon consent from the parent/guardian, a functional behavior assessment shall be conducted and a behavior plan completed.

- k. For students without an existing IEP or 504 plan, but where disability is suspected, the data-informed steps include informing the family of their right to an appropriate evaluation.
 - l. The district will designate a staff member to apply the WARNS assessment where appropriate.
- F. No earlier than the student's seventh unexcused absence in a month and not later than the fifteenth unexcused absence in a year, the district shall enter into an agreement with the student and parent/guardian 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.
- G. If such action is not successful, the district shall 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 fifteenth unexcused absence during the current school year.

The Superintendent or designee shall 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 shall be disseminated broadly and made available to parents and students annually.

Community Engagement Board

A "community engagement 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 will designate and identify to the juvenile court and to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (and update as necessary) 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 and assisting in the recruitment of community truancy board members.

Cross References

Student Privacy - Policy 3230

Legal References

Relevance of failure to cause juvenile to attend school to neglect petition - RCW 13.334.300

Compulsory school attendance and admission - RCW 28A.225
Minimum 180 school day year - WAC 180-16-215(4)
Discipline – Conditions and limitation - 392-400-235
Long-term suspension – conditions and limitations - 392-400-260
Statewide Definitions of Absence - WAC 392-401

Management Resources

More Tweaking of Becca Petitions - *Policy News*, June 2001
Policy & Legal News - July 2016

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