

A. Introduction

The Cherokee County Board of Education recognizes that, in order to receive maximum benefit from the instructional program, students are expected to attend school each day. It is understood that good attendance habits positively impact the learning process. While administrators and teachers are responsible for providing quality instruction in an environment where learning can flourish, parents/guardians and students must assume responsibility for being punctual and attending school regularly.

Although circumstances may necessitate that a student be absent from school, the School District recognizes that optimal learning takes place when the student is present and involved in classroom activities. Unless the student is ill, suspected of being ill or has been exposed to a viral pathogen, it is important that parents/guardians make every effort to have their children attend school.

B. Lawful/Authorized Absences from Class/School

A student will not be absent from class or school or other required school activity except for illness, suspicion of illness, exposure to a viral pathogen or other providential cause. No student will encourage, urge or counsel other students to violate this policy.

As permitted under State law and State Board of Education Rules, a student's absence, tardy or early checkout may be excused for the following reasons:

- a. illness suspicion of illness, exposure to a viral pathogen or when attendance in school would endanger their health or the health of others;
- b. serious illness, viral illness or death of an immediate family member;
- c. mandated by order of governmental agencies, including pre-induction physical examinations for service in the armed forces, or by a court order;
- d. the observation of recognized religious holidays;
- e. conditions that render attendance impossible or hazardous to one's health or safety; and,
- f. registering to vote or voting, for a period not to exceed one day.

Additional Notes:

1. A student whose parent or legal guardian is in military service in the armed forces of the United States or the National Guard, and such parent or legal guardian provides documentation to the attention of the Principal that he/she has been called to duty for or is on leave from overseas deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting, will be granted excused absences, up to a maximum of five school days per school year, for the day or days missed from school to visit with his or her parent or legal guardian prior to such parent's or legal guardian's deployment or during such parent's or legal guardian's leave or to attend military affairs/sponsored events provided the student provides documentation prior to or immediately after the absence.

2. A student with an absence caused by an extraordinary hardship not defined under current Policy, can provide to the attention of the Principal a written excuse (as defined in the next subsection of this policy) for further consideration of the absence. In such cases, the Principal has the authority to deem such an absence as excused under current State Board Rule (160-5-1-.10).

For school attendance purposes, students will be counted present in the following circumstances:

- a. attending school at least one-half of the instructional day;
- b. serving as pages of the Georgia General Assembly (O.C.G.A § 20-2-692);
- c. participating in the Student Teen Election Participation (STEP) program; or,
- d. as a student in foster care, attending court proceedings related to that care (O.C.G.A § 20-2-692.2); or,
- e. participating in 4-H activities.

C. Excuses

Excuses for absences will be provided by the parent/guardian in writing on the day the student returns to school, and will contain the student's name, date of the absence, reason for the absence and the signature of the parent/guardian. All written excuses will be evaluated by the Principal or designee to determine if the absence is excused or unexcused.

D. Requiring Medical Documentation for Absences

In the event that a student's personal illness or attendance at school endangers a student's health or the health of others, the school may require the student to present appropriate medical documentation upon return to school for the purpose of validating that the absence is an excused absence.

In the event that a student has excessive absences for health reasons, the school may require a physician's excuse in order to consider the absence as an excused absence. The school may ask for physician's excuses if one or more of the following conditions exist:

1. A persistent, systematic pattern of absences has been established (example –student is absent every Monday).
2. Seven or more days of absences have been accumulated during the semester.
3. Twelve or more days of absences were recorded the prior school year.

Physician's notes must be specific as to the number of days the illness is to be excused or must state when the student is expected to return to school.

E. Qualifying for Hospital/Homebound Instruction

If major sickness or injury occurs and the absence is lengthy, the student may receive credit by instruction through application of the School District's hospital/homebound instructional

process.

F. Make-Up Work

It is the expectation of the School District that all work missed due to absence will be made-up. Some work, by its very nature, is impossible to make-up and may necessitate alternative assignments. The Principal (or designee) is the final authority in determining alternative assignments.

The responsibility for arranging to complete work missed due to absence is to be assumed by the student and parent/guardian, in conjunction with the teacher. Make-up work is to be completed at the time specified by the teacher/Principal.

The time limit to complete missed work is not to exceed 10 school days after the date the student resumes attendance. Exceptions will be decided by the parent/guardian, student, teacher and Principal, with the Principal having the final decision.

Final course grades of students will not be penalized because of absences if the following conditions are met:

1. Absences are justified and validated for excusable reasons.
2. Make-up work for excused absences was completed satisfactorily.

G. Incentives for Good Attendance

Each individual school is responsible for providing incentives for good and perfect attendance.

H. Truancy, Parent Notifications and Reporting Protocol

Truancy is the act of willful and/or continued unexcused absences, tardies and/or early checkouts from school. Absences, tardies and early checkouts of this nature are unlawful within the State's compulsory attendance law and can result in penalties under that law. Students and parents/guardians are notified of the State's compulsory attendance law on an annual basis through the School District's Student/Parent Handbook.

Parents/guardians of students with five unexcused absences will be notified by the school regarding the consequences of such absences. After two reasonable attempts to notify the parent, guardian or other person who has charge of the student, the School District will send written notice via certified mail with return receipt requested, or first-class mail. Further parent notification will be made at 10 and 12 days of excused or unexcused absences.

Students with seven or more unexcused absences in a class per semester will be referred to a school social worker for truancy evaluation. An additional social work referral will be made at 15 excused or unexcused absences in a class per semester. It is the role of the school social worker to work collaboratively with the school, student and parents/guardians to resolve truancy issues. Schools may utilize a school-based attendance intervention meeting or school-based truancy panel to address absenteeism. The school-based intervention team may include,

but is not limited to, the Principal and/or his/her administrative designee, school counselor, social worker and the school nurse.

When all administrative actions taken to correct truancy have not had the desired effect, the school social worker may require families to attend the Cherokee County Truancy Panel and request them to sign a contract designed to help improve attendance, file proceedings in Cherokee County Juvenile Court for violation of the State's compulsory attendance law for students under 16 years of age or refer families to the School Police if proceedings need to be filed against parents for failure to send their children to school.

Chronically truant students will be referred each school year to the school social worker. School administrators will not assume that cases will be held over by the social worker for monitoring from one school year to the next. Some cases that have been referred to the Cherokee County Truancy Panel or to Cherokee County Juvenile Court may be held over; but an updated referral by the school may be requested.

I. Absence Notification Procedures

School personnel will monitor absences by following the steps below:

1. The School District will send electronic notifications to parents/guardians after the 5th unexcused absence as well as the 10th and 12th days of excused or unexcused absences.
2. The school will notify the parent/guardian on the fifth unexcused absence that continued absences will result in a referral to the school social worker.
3. On the seventh unexcused and 15th excused or unexcused absence in any class during a semester, a referral to the school social worker will be filed.
4. After the seventh unexcused absence, a school-based attendance intervention meeting may be conducted.
5. The school social worker will notify the proper authorities if unexcused absences continue.

J. Additional High School Absence Procedures

Any student having seven or more excused, approved or unexcused absences in a semester will receive no credit for that class unless a waiver is granted by the School Attendance Committee. However, students will not be denied credit for a course if they have seven or more excused absences in a semester when the following conditions are met: (1) the absences are validated by the School Attendance Committee as excused; (2) make-up work is satisfactorily completed; and, (3) a passing grade has been earned for course work during the semester. Eligibility for credit will be restored if recommended by the School Attendance Committee. The Principal has the final decision on this matter.

The Attendance Committee is a standing committee composed of five members appointed by the Principal and chaired by an administrator. The chair will vote only in case of a tie.

K. Student Withdrawals and Notification

Any student who is absent unlawfully either 10 consecutive days or 40 total days in a school year, is beyond the compulsory attendance age or is not receiving instructional services from the School District through hospital/homebound instruction or instructional services required by the Federal Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), may be withdrawn. The Principal has the discretion of entering or re-entering in the present grading period any student 16 years old or older, who has failed to attend for unlawful reasons.

In the case of a school's plan to withdraw a student, the Principal will use reasonable measures to notify the parents/guardians if the student is not 18 years old.

L. Driver's License/Learner's Permit Denial

The School District will establish appropriate protocol relative to State law regarding the documentation of students who are enrolled in the School District and not under an expulsion for purposes of denial or suspension of driver's licenses/learner's permits.

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Cherokee County Board of Education