Excused and Unexcused Absences

Definition of Absence

WAC 392-401-015 states the definition of an absence:

1. A student is absent when they are:
    a. Not physically present on school grounds; and
    b. Not participating in the following activities at an approved location:
        i. Instruction;
        ii. Any instruction-related activity; or
        iii. Any other district or school approved activity that is regulated by an instructional/academic accountability system, such as participation in district-sponsored sports.
2. Students shall not be absent if:
    a. They have been suspended, expelled, or emergency expelled pursuant to chapter 392-400 WAC;
    b. Are receiving educational services as required by RCW 28A.600.015 and chapter 392-400 WAC; and
    c. The student is enrolled in qualifying "course of study" activities as defined in WAC 392-121-107.
3. A full day absence is when a student is absent for fifty percent or more of their scheduled day.
4. 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.

Excused and Unexcused Absences

Students are expected to attend all assigned classes each day. Upon enrollment and at the beginning of each school year, the district shall inform students and their parents or legal 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 or legal guardians in correcting truancy. The district will also make this information available online and will take reasonable steps to ensure parents or legal guardians can request and be provided such information in languages in which they are fluent. Parents or legal guardians will be required to date and acknowledge review of this information online or in writing.

Excused Absences

Regular school attendance is necessary for mastery of the educational program provided to students of the district. At times, students may be appropriately absent from class. School staff will keep a record of absence and tardiness, including a record of excuse statements submitted by a parent or legal guardian, or in certain cases, students, to document a student's excused absences. The following principles will govern the development and administration of attendance procedures within the district:

The following are valid excuses for absences:

A. Illness, health condition or medical appointment (including, but not limited to, medical, counseling, dental, optometry, pregnancy, and in-patient or out-patient treatment for chemical dependency or mental health) for the student or person for whom the student is legally responsible;
B. Family emergency including, but not limited to, a death or illness in the family;

C. Religious or cultural purpose including observance of a religious or cultural holiday or participation in religious or cultural instruction;
D. Court, judicial proceeding, court-ordered activity, or jury service;
E. Post-secondary, technical school or apprenticeship program visitation, or scholarship interview;
F. State-recognized search and rescue activities consistent with RCW 28A.225.055;
G. Absence directly related to the student's homeless or foster care/dependency status;
H. Absences related to deployment activities of a parent or legal guardian who is an active duty member consistent with RCW 28A.705.010;
I. 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;
J. Absences due to student safety concerns, including absences related to threats, assaults, or bullying;
K. Absences due to a student's migrant status; and
L. 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.

The school principal (or designee) has the authority to determine if an absence meets the above criteria for an excused absence.

A. 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.

B. An excused absence will be verified by a parent or legal 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.

C. Except as provided in subsection (2) of this section, in the event that a child in elementary school is required to attend school under RCW 28A.225.010 or 28A.225.015(1) and 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 school district shall schedule a conference or conferences with the parent or legal guardian and child at a time reasonably convenient for all persons included for the purpose of identifying the barriers to the child's regular attendance, and the supports and resources that may be made available to the family so that the child is able to regularly attend school. To satisfy the requirements of this section, the conference must include at least one school district employee such as a nurse, counselor, social worker, teacher, or community human services provider, except in those instances regarding the attendance of a child who has an individualized education program or a plan developed under section 504 of the rehabilitation act of 1973, in which case the reconvening of the team that created the program or plan is required.

This conference is not required if the school has received prior notice or a doctor's note has been provided and an academic plan put in place so that the child does not fall behind.

Unexcused Absences

1. 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 for an excused absence.

2. As a means of instilling values of responsibility and personal accountability, 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.

3. The school will notify a student's parent or legal 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 will include the potential consequences of additional unexcused absences. The school will make reasonable efforts to provide this information in a language the parent/guardian understands.

4. The school will hold a conference with the parent or guardian after three unexcused absences within any month during the current school year. The conference will analyze the causes of the student's absences and develop a plan that identifies student, school, and family commitments to reduce the student's absences from school. If the parent does not attend the conference, the school official may still hold the conference with the student. However, the school will notify the parent or legal guardian of the steps the district has decided to take to eliminate or reduce the student's absences.

5. Between the student's second and fifth unexcused absence, the school must take the following data-informed steps:
    i. Middle and high school students will be administered the Washington Assessment of the Risks and Needs of Students (WARNS) or other assessment
    ii. These steps must include, where appropriate, providing an available approved best practice or research-based intervention, or both, consistent with the WARNS profile or other assessment, if an assessment was applied, adjusting the child's school program or school or course assignment, providing more individualized or remedial instruction, providing appropriate vocational courses or work experience, referring the child to a community truancy board, requiring the child to attend an alternative school or program, or assisting the parent or legal guardian or child to obtain supplementary services that might eliminate or ameliorate the cause or causes for the absence from school.
    iii. For any child with an existing individualized education plan 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 or legal guardian 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.

Not later than the student's fifth unexcused absence in a month the district will enter into an agreement with the student and parents or legal guardians 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.

6. If such action is not successful, the district will file a petition and affidavit with the juvenile court alleging a violation of RCW 28A.225.010 by the parent or legal guardian, student or parent or legal guardian and student no later than the seventh unexcused absence within any month during the current school year or upon the tenth unexcused absence during the current school year.

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

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 includes the student's caseworker, educational liaison, attorney if one is appointed, parent or legal 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.

Migrant Students
The district, parent or legal 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.

Cross References:
3120 - Enrollment
3230 - Student Privacy and Searches
3240 - Student Conduct Expectations and Reasonable Sanctions
3241 - Classroom Management, Discipline and Corrective Action
4218 - Language Access Plan

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
	WAC 392-400-325 Statewide definition of excused and unexcused daily absences.
	2018- August Issue
Management Resources:	2017 – July Policy Issue
	2016 - July Issue
	2015 - June Issue
	2012 - December Issue
	2011 - December Issue
	Policy News, June 2001 More Tweaking of Becca Petitions

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