

Policies

Westerly Public Schools Student Attendance Policy

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Rhode Island General Law § 16-19-1 requires all students between the ages of six (6) and eighteen (18) years to be registered in and attend school regularly. Studies show a positive correlation between good school attendance and academic success. Absenteeism, tardiness, and early dismissals disrupt the continuity of learning. Attendance at school is part of a student's permanent records and parents/guardians are urged to assist the school by supporting the attendance policy. It is the responsibility of the parent or guardian to encourage and monitor school attendance, report absences according to the attendance policy, and work cooperatively with the school to solve any attendance issues.

Encouraging regular school attendance is a multi-pronged effort, including:

- Establishing a school environment that engages students.
- Having all students known and monitored by at least one adult.
- Clearly articulating the expectation that students will attend school.
- Having consequences that encourage students to attend school.
- Understanding and addressing the barriers that may prevent students from attending school.

Westerly Public Schools district policy attempts to establish a set of standards that will ensure consistency across the district, while also allowing a school's administrative personnel the flexibility of individual response.

Elementary and Middle School DEFINITIONS:

Excused absences: include a student's participation in an approved school-sponsored activity, suspension days, religious holidays, family emergencies (to be approved by an administrator), doctor or medical professional excused illness or injury (a note from a doctor or medical professional must be submitted within 3 days of the absence) or funerals, and acute or chronic illness.

Acute Illness: When a student has a medical need that does not require on-going/long term care, (i.e.: knee surgery, etc.). A note from a doctor or medical professional must be given to the school. Subsequent absences due to the nature of the care will be considered excused. Families must give the reason for absence(s) due to the nature of the illness or follow-up care.

Chronic Illness: A student that requires continued medical care with a doctor or medical professional, (i.e.: type II diabetes), must provide documentation at the onset of treatment. Subsequent absence(s) due to the nature of the illness or follow-up care will be considered excused. Families must give the reason for the absence(s) due to the nature of the illness or follow-up care.

All students are expected to attend school. Appointments with doctors, dentists, etc. should be made at times other than during school hours. Students absent due to illness or suspension on the

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day of a school-related activity (e.g., athletic event, drama, dances, etc.) may not attend that activity. Extenuating circumstances may be presented to an administrator for consideration.

Unexcused Absences:

Every absence is considered “unexcused” even when a phone call by the family has been received stating the specific reason for the absence by the attendance office. For an absence that is 1 or more days in length to be considered excused, a note from a doctor or medical professional must be received within 3 days of the absence. Student absence from class for purposes of family travel or vacation is a loss of valuable class time and is strongly discouraged. The number of days missed will be counted as unexcused absences.

Please note: Family permission in and of itself is not recognized as a legitimate reason for absence.

Truancy

A student is considered truant when he/she purposely stays away from school without family permission. Students who do miss school with family permission, however, can be considered truant at the discretion of the administration.

INTERVENTION PROCESS:

The administration will notify families of excused absences, unexcused absences, tardies and/or early dismissals. Families are required to call the school to report their child’s absence prior to the start of school. The school attendance office will attempt to contact the family regarding absences if the school has not been notified.

First Stage: Whenever a student is absent without family notification, the school will contact their family to ascertain the reason. When a pattern of absenteeism, tardy or early dismissals develop, resources within the school will be utilized to improve attendance.

Second Stage: A minimum of five (5) cumulative unexcused absences, tardies and/or early dismissals may prompt a telephone call and/or written letter to the family requesting an explanation. An internal review by the principal and/or support personnel may occur depending upon circumstances.

Third Stage: After ten (10) cumulative unexcused absences, tardies and/or early dismissals a letter will be sent and/or a conference will be scheduled with the family, the student, the principal/designee, and other professionals, as needed. A referral may be made to the Truancy Officer.

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FAMILY TRAVEL/VACATION:

A student's absence from class for purposes of family travel or vacation is a loss of valuable class time and is strongly discouraged. The number of days missed will be counted as unexcused absences. Teachers are not responsible for preparing schoolwork that they will miss during a vacation that is not scheduled during school vacation periods.

EARLY DISMISSALS:

By Rhode Island State law, dismissals from school for any reason are considered part of a student's attendance record. In keeping with our efforts to maximize instructional time, early dismissal from school is discouraged, and will be granted only for business that cannot be conducted after the close of school. Reasons for early dismissal shall be limited to: illness, doctor's appointment, court appearance, family emergency verified by the family or educational reasons given prior approval by the school administration.

A written request for early dismissal signed by the student's family must be presented to the office on the day of the early dismissal. Family phone calls requesting an early dismissal are discouraged and must be approved by the Principal/Designee only in the event of emergencies. This request must contain the child's first and last name, date, time, reason for dismissal, telephone number for verification, and family signature.

The nurse is responsible for early dismissals due to illness, and family verification prior to dismissal is required.

MISSED ASSIGNMENTS:

The teacher and/or guidance department can work with the student and family to coordinate a mutually agreeable timeline for work to be completed.

APPEAL PROCESS:

Students and/or families who feel aggrieved because of action taken as a result of any section in these regulations may appeal said action to the school administration level at which the action was taken. Further appeals may be taken to the Superintendent of Schools and finally to the School Committee. Further appeals after the School Committee decision may be taken through the process as defined in Title 16 of the General Laws of Rhode Island.

HIGH SCHOOL DEFINITIONS:

Excused absences: include a student's participation in an approved school-sponsored activity, suspension days, religious holidays, a pre-approved college visit, family emergencies (to be approved by an administrator), doctor or medical professional excused illness or injury (a note from a doctor or medical professional be submitted within 3 days of the absence), driving test, funerals, court appearance and acute or chronic illness. Students who are absent from a particular

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class with the permission of an administrator or a faculty member must verify the absence as excused through the attendance office.

Acute Illness: When a student has a medical need that does not require on-going/long term care, (i.e.: knee surgery, etc.). A note from a doctor or medical professional must be shared with the school. Subsequent absences due to the nature of the care will be considered excused. Families must give the reason for the absence (s) due to the nature of the follow-up care.

Chronic Illness: A student that requires continued medical care with a doctor or medical professional, (i.e.: type II diabetes, etc.), must provide documentation at the onset of treatment. Subsequent absences due to the nature of the care will be considered excused. Families must give the reason for the absence (s) due to the nature of the illness or follow-up care. All students are expected to attend school. Appointments with doctors, dentists, etc. should be made at times other than during school hours. Students absent due to illness or suspension on the day of a school-related activity (e.g., athletic event, drama, dances, etc.) may not attend that activity. Extenuating circumstances may be presented to an administrator for consideration.

Unexcused Absences: Every absence is considered “unexcused” even when a phone call by the family has been received stating the specific reason for the absence by the attendance office. For an absence that is 3 or more days in length to be considered excused, a note from a doctor or medical professional must be received within 3 days of the absence. Student absence from class for purposes of family travel or vacation is a loss of valuable class time and is strongly discouraged. The number of days missed will be counted as unexcused absences.

Please note: Family permission in and of itself is not recognized as a legitimate reason for absence.

Truancy

A student is considered truant when he/she purposely stays away from school without family permission. Students who miss school with family permission, however, can be considered truant at the discretion of the administration.

INTERVENTION PROCESS:

The administration will notify families of excused absences, unexcused absences, tardies and/or early dismissals in the following manor:

A family is required to call the school to report their child’s absence prior to the start of school. The attendance office will attempt to contact the family regarding absences if the school has not been notified. When a pattern of absenteeism, tardy or early dismissals develop, resources within the school will be utilized to improve attendance.

First Stage: Whenever a student is absent without family notification the school will contact their family to ascertain the reason. When a pattern of absenteeism, tardy or early dismissals develop,

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resources within the school such as involvement of the school counselor will be utilized to improve the attendance.

Second Stage: A minimum of five (5) cumulative unexcused absences, tardies and/or early dismissals may prompt a telephone call and written letter to the family requesting an explanation. An internal review by the principal and/or support personnel may occur depending upon circumstances.

Third Stage: After ten (10) cumulative unexcused absences, tardies and/or early dismissals a letter will be sent home and / or a conference will be scheduled with families, the student, the principal/designee and other professionals as needed. A referral may be made to the truancy officer.

Excessive Tardies:

Students are encouraged to come to school every day and on time. Students are allotted three (3) unexcused tardies before receiving an office consequence. After the third unexcused tardy, students will be issued an office detention. At the change of the semester, this count resets.

FAMILY TRAVEL/VACATION:

A student's absence from class for purposes of family travel or vacation is a loss of valuable class time and is strongly discouraged. The number of days missed will be counted as unexcused absences. Teachers are not responsible for preparing schoolwork that a student will miss during a vacation that is not scheduled during school vacation periods.

TARDINESS TO SCHOOL:

Westerly High School does not distinguish between excused and unexcused tardies. Students who have an outstanding personal or medical circumstance that prevents them from coming to school on time should speak to their school counselor and provide the appropriate documentation. Students who arrive at school late must sign in at the attendance office where they will receive a pass to class.

TARDINESS TO CLASS:

Each student and teacher has the right to expect class time free of interruptions such as a student coming into class late without a verifiable excuse. Students who arrive tardy to class without a pass will receive a teacher-assigned detention. Students will not be allowed extra time to make up work if they arrive tardy without a pass.

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Students will be allowed to enter class at any time with a pass from a staff member without any consequences. However, teachers will retain the right to send students back to the Attendance Office if the late arrival to class/interruption causes a disturbance.

CLASS CUTS:

Unauthorized absences from class are prohibited. All class cuts will be added to the number of unexcused class absences. All class cuts will result in administrative intervention.

EARLY DISMISSAL:

In keeping with our efforts to maximize instructional time, early dismissal from school is discouraged, and will be granted only for business that cannot be conducted after the close of school. Reasons for early dismissal shall be limited to illness, doctor's appointment, court appearance, family emergency verified by the family, educational reasons given prior approval by the school administration. A written request for early dismissal signed by the student's family must be presented to the office on the day of the early dismissal. Family phone calls requesting an early dismissal are discouraged and must be approved by the Principal/Designee only in the event of emergencies. This request must contain the child's first and last name, date, time, reason for dismissal, telephone number for verification, and family signature. Such requests must be presented to the attendance office in accordance with the handbook procedure for approval. All students who have submitted the paperwork to be dismissed early must report to the Attendance Office to sign out prior to leaving the building. Students returning to school must sign back into school at the Attendance Office.

The nurse is responsible for early dismissals due to illness and family verification prior to dismissal is required. Under no circumstances shall a student leave school without first reporting to the Attendance Office. Students not reporting to the office prior to leaving school may receive a disciplinary consequence.

PARTICIPATION IN CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES:

In order to participate in a co-curricular activity sponsored by Westerly High School, students must be present in school during the day. Co-curricular activities include but are not limited to drama and music rehearsals and productions, proms, school dances, and athletic practices and competitions. Exceptions for any absence or dismissal on these days must have prior approval of an administrator. Advisors/coaches are responsible for monitoring student attendance to determine which students are eligible to participate on the day of the activity. Students who arrive later than arrival times noted in the handbook or leave school prior to 12:30pm will not be allowed to participate in a SKHS-sponsored afternoon or evening activity.

MAKE-UP WORK FOR EXCUSED/UNEXCUSED ABSENCES:

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The responsibility for make-up work due to an absence lies with the student. A student who has excused absences must contact the teacher within two days of their return to school for make-up work. The teacher and student can decide upon a mutually agreeable timeline for the work to be completed. Families may access assignments via the online grading service on the school website at www.westerly.k12.ri.us.

Students excused from a specific class due to an appointment with a school counselor, assistant principal, etc., will be allowed to make up the work provided that they inform the teacher prior to the appointment whenever possible, and the student contacts the teacher by the end of the day to make up any missed work.

APPEAL PROCESS:

Students and/or families who feel aggrieved because of action taken as a result of any section in these regulations may appeal said action to the school administration level at which the action was taken. Further appeals may be taken to the Superintendent of Schools and finally to the School Committee. Further appeals after the School Committee decision may be taken through the process as defined in Title 16 of the General Laws of Rhode Island.

Adopted: June 3, 2009
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