KINGSWAY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Committed to Excellence

Ms. Sharon Ormsbee
School Business Administrator

Dr. James J. Lavender
Superintendent of Schools

Ms. Patricia Calandro
Assistant Superintendent

June 9, 2026

Hello Kingsway Families,

Regular school attendance is one of the strongest predictors of student success. Students who are present in school benefit not only from direct instruction, but also from classroom discussions, collaborative learning experiences, assessments, extracurricular opportunities, and the daily routines that support academic growth. Every day matters, as missed instructional time cannot be fully replicated through make-up work or independent study.

Over the past several years, approximately **13% of Kingsway students have been identified as chronically absent**, meaning they missed 10% or more of the school year. Chronic absenteeism has become an increasing focus of the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) and state policymakers, including the recent establishment of a statewide Chronic Absenteeism Task Force charged with studying the causes of absenteeism and developing recommendations to improve student attendance throughout New Jersey. Importantly, students are considered chronically absent regardless of whether their absences are classified as excused or unexcused.

While Kingsway has implemented a variety of strategies to improve student attendance, our chronic absenteeism rate has remained relatively unchanged despite these efforts. In reviewing our attendance practices, we also found that many absences supported by physician notes were being classified differently at the local level than they are under NJDOE attendance reporting guidelines. As a result, **beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, Kingsway will align its attendance procedures with New Jersey statutes and NJDOE guidance regarding excused absences**. This change is intended to create consistency between district practices, state reporting requirements, and the way student attendance is measured and reported across New Jersey.

Starting in September 2026, the following will be counted as excused absences:

1. College visit(s), up to three (3) days per school year for students in grades eleven and twelve;
2. Take Your Child to Work Day;
3. Religious observance, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:36-14 through 16;
4. Participation in observance of Veterans Day, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:36-13.2;
5. Attendance at civic event(s), pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:36-33.2;
6. Closure of a sending school district that prevents a student from having transportation to the receiving school;
7. An absence considered excused by the Commissioner or a NJDOE regulation.

All other absences, including those related to illness, medical appointments, family vacations, or personal reasons, will be recorded as unexcused for attendance reporting purposes unless specifically identified as excused under New Jersey law. This designation does not imply wrongdoing or disciplinary action, but rather reflects the attendance classifications established by the State of New Jersey.

Moving forward, students will be permitted up to **sixteen (16) total excused and unexcused absences** before additional review may be required. We will continue with the current progressive communication process pursuant to Board policy and administrative regulation. As students approach the maximum permitted absences, their information will be presented to the Attendance Review Committee, which will evaluate each student's individual circumstances and may provide recommendations that include:

- Approval of specific absences when appropriate.
- Development of an Attendance Improvement Plan.
- Participation in attendance or credit recovery opportunities on designated Saturdays.
- Loss of course credit when warranted.
- Additional actions permitted under Board policy and state law.

Students receiving approved home instruction services will continue to be reported as present for instructional purposes in accordance with state requirements.

Recording absences supported by doctor's notes as unexcused for attendance reporting purposes does not mean that we want students to attend school when they are ill. **Student health and safety remain our priority. Families should continue to keep students home when illness would make attendance unsafe or inappropriate.** Prior to the start of the school year, guidelines will be distributed outlining when students should remain home due to illness and when they may safely return to school.

As stated previously, these changes are intended to ensure consistency between district attendance practices, state statutes, and NJDOE reporting requirements. If the NJDOE modifies what constitutes an approved absence in the future, we will update our policy and procedures accordingly.

We understand that families may have questions regarding these changes. If you have questions about the new attendance procedures, you are welcome to contact me directly or speak with your building principal. Additionally, you may complete the 2026-2027 Student Attendance Questionnaire. Responses will be used to develop a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) resource that will be posted on the district website prior to the start of the school year.

In the meantime, families are encouraged to monitor attendance regularly through the Genesis Parent Portal. If you have questions regarding your child's attendance record or the district's attendance procedures, please contact your building principal.

Thank you for your partnership and support as we work to improve student attendance and maximize instructional opportunities for all students. By working together, we can ensure that every student is present, engaged, and positioned for success.

Very truly yours,

James J. Lavender, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools