

## Excused and Unexcused Absences

### A. Excused Absences

If an absence or tardiness 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. For participation-type classes, teachers are expected to provide extended time for students to make up the absence when it is due to illness or a health condition that may interfere with their ability to participate. Student health and welfare should be top priority in establishing a reasonable make-up time line and the time line should not expect students to miss another class.

The following are valid excuses for absences and tardiness (tardies).

1. **Participation in school-approved activity or instructional program.** To be excused this absence must be authorized by a staff member, and the affected teacher must be notified prior to the absence unless it is clearly impossible to do so.
2. **Absence due to:** illness; health condition; medical appointment; family emergency; religious or cultural purposes; court, judicial proceeding, or serving on a jury; post-secondary technical school or apprenticeship program visitation, or scholarship interview; state recognized search and rescue activities consistent with RCW 28A.225.055; and student's homeless status.

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.

A parent/guardian may request that a student be excused from attending school in observance of a religious holiday. In addition, a student, upon the request of his/her parent, may be excused for a portion of a school day to participate in religious instruction provided such is not conducted on school property.

3. **Absence for parental-approved activities.** This category of absence will be counted as excused if agreed to by the principal or designee and the parent/guardian. An absence may not be approved if it causes a serious adverse effect on the student's educational progress.

In participation-type classes (e.g., certain music and physical education classes) the student may not be able to achieve the objectives of the unit of instruction as a result of absence from class. In such a case, a parent/guardian-approved absence would

have an adverse effect on the student's educational progress which would ultimately be reflected in the grade for such a course.

4. **Absence resulting from disciplinary actions — or short-term suspension.** As required by law, students who are removed from a class or classes as a disciplinary measure or students who have been placed on short-term suspension will have the right to make up assignments or exams missed during the time they were denied entry to the classroom if the effect of the missed assignments will be a substantial lowering of the course grade.
5. **Extended illness or health condition.** If a student is confined to home or hospital for an extended period, the school will arrange for the accomplishment of assignments at the place of confinement whenever practical. If the student is unable to do his/her schoolwork, or if there are major requirements of a particular course which cannot be accomplished outside of class the student may be required to take an incomplete or withdraw from the class without penalty.
6. **Excused absence for chronic health condition.** Students with a chronic health condition which interrupts regular attendance may qualify for placement in a limited attendance and participation program. The student and his/her parent will apply to the principal or counselor, and a limited program will be written following the advice and recommendations of the student's medical advisor. The recommended limited program will be approved by the principal or designee. Staff will be informed of the student's needs, though the confidentiality of medical information will be respected at the parent's request.

#### **Required conference for elementary school students**

If an elementary school student 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 district will schedule a conference with the student and their parent(s) at a reasonably convenient time. The conference is intended to identify barriers to the student's regular attendance and to identify supports and resources so the student may regularly attend school.

The conference must include at least one school district employee, preferably a nurse, counselor, social worker, teacher or community human service provider, and may occur on the same day as the scheduled parent-teacher conference, provided it takes place within thirty days of the absences. If the student has an Individualized Education Program or a Section 504 Plan, the team that created that program must reconvene. A conference is not required if prior notice of the excused absences was provided to the district 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.

#### **B. Unexcused Absences**

An "excused absence" means that a student has failed to attend the majority of hours or periods in an average school day, has failed to comply with a more restrictive school district policy on absences, or has failed to comply with alternative learning experience program attendance requirements.

Unexcused absences fall into two categories:

1. Submitting an excuse which does not constitute an excused absence as defined previously; or

2. Failing to submit, whether by phone, e-mail or in writing, any type of excuse statement by the parent, guardian or adult student.

In the event of an unexcused absence by a student eight years of age and under eighteen years of age, the school in which the student is enrolled shall:

1. Inform the student's custodial parent/guardian by a notice in writing or by telephone whenever the student has failed to attend school after one unexcused absence within any month during the school year. School officials shall inform the parent/guardian of the potential consequences of additional unexcused absences. If the custodial parent/guardian is not fluent in English, the preferred practice is to provide this information in a language in which the custodial parent/guardian is fluent. A student's grade will not be affected if no graded activity is missed during such an absence.

Schedule a conference with the custodial parent/guardian and student at a time reasonably convenient for all persons included for the purpose of analyzing the causes of the student's absences after three unexcused absences within any month during the current school year. If a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference day is to take place within thirty days of the third unexcused absence, then the school district may schedule this conference on that day. **At some point after the second and before the fifth unexcused absence**, the district will take data-informed steps to eliminate or reduce the student's absences. In middle school and high school, these steps will include application of the Washington Assessment of the Risks and Needs of Students (WARNS) or other assessment by the district's designated employee.

For any student with an existing Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan, these steps will include convening the student's IEP team or Section 504 team, including a behavior specialist or mental health specialist where appropriate, to consider the reasons for the student's absences. If necessary, and if the student's parent gives consent, the district will conduct a functional behavior assessment and will complete a detailed behavior plan to explore the function of the absence behavior.

For any student who does not have an IEP or Section 504 Plan, but who is reasonably believed to have a mental or physical disability or impairment, these steps will include informing the student's parent/guardian of the right to obtain an appropriate evaluation at no cost to the parent to determine whether the student has a disability or impairment and needs accommodations, special education services, or related services. This includes students with suspected emotional or behavioral disabilities. If the school obtains consent to conduct an evaluation, time should be allowed for the evaluation to be completed, and if the student is found to be eligible for accommodations, special education services, or related services, a plan will be developed to address the student's needs.

2. The district will designate a staff member to apply the Washington Assessment of the Risks and Needs of Students (WARNS) and, where appropriate, provide the student with best practice or research-based interventions consistent with WARNS. At such a conference the principal, student and parent will take steps to eliminate or reduce the student's absences including, where appropriate:
  - a. Adjusting the student's school program or school or course assignment;
  - b. Providing more individualized or remedial instruction;
  - c. Providing appropriate vocational courses or work experience;
  - d. Referring the student to a community truancy board;

- e. Requiring the student to attend an alternative school or program; or
- f. Assisting the parent or student to obtain supplementary services that might eliminate or ameliorate the cause or causes of absence from school.

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.

A school district representative or certificated staff member shall 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. Such adults may include the student's caseworker, educational liaison, attorney if one is appointed, parent or guardians, foster parents or the person providing placement for the student. The purpose of the review is to determine the cause of the absences taking into account: unplanned school transitions, periods of running from care, in-patient treatment, incarceration, school adjustment, educational gaps, psychosocial issues, and unavoidable appointments during the school day. The representative or staff member must proactively support the student's school work so the student does not fall behind and to avoid suspension or expulsion based on truancy.

- 3. Not later than the student's fifth unexcused absence in a month, enter into an agreement with the student and parents/guardians that establishes school attendance requirements; refer the student to a community truancy board; or file a petition and supporting affidavit for a civil action with the juvenile court alleging a violation of RCW 28A.225.010.

## Transfers

In the case of a student who transfers from one district to another during the school year, the sending district will provide to the receiving district, together with a copy of the WARNS assessment and any interventions previously provided to the student, the most recent truancy information for that student. The information will include the online or written acknowledgment by the parent and student. The sending district will use the standard choice transfer form for releasing a student to a nonresident school district for the purposes of accessing an alternative learning experience program.

## Community Truancy Board

A "community truancy 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 enter into an MOU with the juvenile court in Spokane County to establish a community truancy board prior to the 2017-2018 school year.

The district will designate and identify to the juvenile court (and update as necessary) and to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction 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.

Not later than a student's **seventh unexcused absence within any month during the current school year, or a tenth unexcused absence during the current school year**, if the district's

attempts to substantially reduce a student's absences have not been successful and if the student is under the age of seventeen, the district will file a petition and supporting affidavit for a civil action in juvenile court.

### **Petition to juvenile court**

The petition will contain the following:

1. A statement that the student has unexcused absences in the current school year. (District Note: While petitions must be filed if the student has seven or more unexcused absences within any one month, or ten or more unexcused absences in the current school year, a petition may be filed earlier. Unexcused absences accumulated in another school or school will be counted when preparing the petition);
2. An attestation that actions taken by the school district have not been successful in substantially reducing the student's absences from school;
3. A statement that court intervention and supervision are necessary to assist the school district to reduce the student's absences from school;
4. A statement that RCW 28A.225.010 has been violated by the parent, student or parent and student;
5. The student's name, date of birth, school, address, gender, race and ethnicity; and the names and addresses of the student's parents/guardians, whether the student and parent are fluent in English, whether there is an existing individualized education program (IEP) and the student's current academic status in school;
6. A list of all interventions that have been attempted, a copy of any previous truancy assessment completed by the student's current school district, the history of approved best practices intervention or research-based intervention(s) previously provided to the student by the district, and a copy of the most recent truancy information document signed by the parent and student.
7. Facts that support the above allegations.

Petitions may be served by certified mail, return receipt requested, but if such service is unsuccessful, personal service is required. At the district's choice, it may be represented by a person who is not an attorney at hearings related to truancy petitions.

If the allegations in the petition are established by a preponderance of the evidence, the court shall grant the petition and enter an order assuming jurisdiction to intervene for a period of time determined by the court, after considering the facts alleged in the petition and the circumstances of the student, to most likely cause the student to return to and remain in school while the student is subject to the court's jurisdiction.

If the court assumes jurisdiction, the District will periodically report to the court any additional unexcused absences by the student, actions taken by the District, and an update on the student's academic status in school at a schedule specified by the court. The first report must be received no later than three months from the date that the court assumes jurisdiction.

In the event of an unexcused absence by a student six or seven years of age, who has been enrolled in the District and has not been formally removed from enrollment, the school in which the student is enrolled shall:

1. Inform the student's custodial parent/guardian by a notice in writing or by telephone whenever the student has failed to attend school after one unexcused absence in any month during the current school year.
2. Request a conference with the parent/guardian and student at a time reasonably convenient for all persons included for the purpose of analyzing the causes of the student's absences after two unexcused absences within any month during the current school year. If a regularly scheduled teacher-parent conference day is to take place within thirty days of the second unexcused absence, then the District may schedule this conference on that day.
3. Take steps to eliminate or reduce the student's absences. These steps shall include, where appropriate:
  - a. Adjusting the student's school program or school or course assignment;
  - b. Providing more individualized or remedial instruction;
  - c. Offering assistance in enrolling the student in available alternative schools or programs; or
  - d. Assisting the parent or student to obtain supplementary services that may help eliminate or ameliorate the cause or causes for the absence from school.
4. After seven unexcused absences in a month, or ten unexcused absences in a school year, the District shall file a petition for civil action as provided in RCW 28A.225.035 and section C.4. above.

### **C. Disciplinary Action**

1. Students are expected to be in class on time. When a student's tardiness or unexcused absences become frequent or disruptive, the student will be referred to the principal or counselor. If counseling or parent conferencing is ineffective in changing the student's attendance behavior, he/she may be subject to discipline or suspension pursuant to Policy and Procedure 3241.
2. Any student who presents false evidence, with or without the consent of his/her parent/guardian, in order to wrongfully qualify for an excused absence will be subject to the same corrective action that would have occurred had the false excuse not been used.
3. All sanctions imposed for failure to comply with the attendance policies and procedures will be implemented in conformance with state and District regulations regarding discipline or corrective action. (See WSSDA policy 3241, Classroom Management, Discipline and Corrective Action.)

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