

# Excused and Unexcused Absences

## Definition of Absence

### Absence from in-person learning

WAC 392-401-015A 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; or
    - 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.
    - iv. On school grounds and not in assigned seating.

### Absence from synchronous and asynchronous online instruction:

1. A student is absent from synchronous online instruction when:
  - a. The student does not log in to the synchronous meeting/class.
2. A student is absent from asynchronous instruction when there is no evidence that the student accessed the planned asynchronous activity.
  - a. Evidence of student participation in asynchronous activities must occur daily, within a twenty-four-hour time frame of when the participation is planned or expected.

## Daily attendance taking

The District will take daily attendance for all enrolled students whether the instructional modality is in-person, synchronous, or asynchronous. When instruction is synchronous online or asynchronous, secondary schools will take attendance daily in each course with planned instruction and elementary schools will take attendance at least twice a day.

## Excused and Unexcused Absences

Educators and administrators have a responsibility to monitor absences to determine if students and families need support. Students are expected to attend all assigned in-person classes each day or participate in all assigned remote instructional activities; except when there are necessary reasons for the students to be absent. Upon enrollment and at the beginning of each school year, the district shall inform students and their parents/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 and guardians in correcting truancy. The district will also make this information available online and will take reasonable steps to ensure parents can request and receive such information in languages in which they are fluent. Parents 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 absent from class or not able to participate remotely. School staff will keep a record of absence and tardiness, including a record of excuse statements submitted by a parent/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:

- A. The following are valid excuses for absences:

1. Physical health or mental health symptoms, illness, health condition or medical appointment for the student or person for whom the student is legally responsible. Examples of physical health or mental health appointments include but are not limited to medical, counseling, mental health wellness, dental, optometry, pregnancy and behavioral health treatment (which can include in-patient or out-patient treatment for chemical dependency or mental health);
  2. Family emergency including, but not limited to, a death or illness in the family;
  3. Religious or cultural purpose including observance of a religious or cultural holiday or participation in religious or cultural instruction;
  4. Court, judicial proceeding, court-ordered activity, or jury service;
  5. Post-secondary, technical school or apprenticeship program visitation, or scholarship interview;
  6. State-recognized search and rescue activities consistent with RCW 28A.225.055;
  7. Absence directly related to the student's homeless or foster care/dependency status;
  8. Absence related to deployment activities of a parent or legal guardian who is an active duty member consistent with RCW 28A.705.010;
  9. Absence due to suspension, expulsions, or emergency expulsions imposed pursuant to chapter 392-400 WAC if the student is not receiving educational services and is not enrolled in a qualifying course of study activities as defined in WAC 392-121-107;
  10. Absence due to student safety concerns, including absences related to threats, assaults, or bullying;
  11. Absence due to a student's migrant status; and
  12. An approved activity that is mutually agreed upon by the principal (or designee) and parent or guardian, or emancipated youth;
  13. Absences due to the student's lack of necessary instructional tools, including internet access or connectivity.
- B. In the event of emergency school facility closure due to COVID-19, other communicable disease outbreak, natural disaster, or other event when districts are required to provide synchronous and asynchronous instruction, absences due to the following reasons are excused:
1. Absences related to the student's illness, health condition, or medical appointments due to COVID-19 or other communicable disease;
  2. Absences related to caring for a family member who has an illness, health condition, or medical appointment due to COVID-19, other communicable disease, or other emergency health condition related to school facility closures;
  3. Absences related to the student's family obligations during regularly scheduled school hours that are temporarily necessary because of school facility closures, until other arrangements can be made; and
  4. Absences due to the student's parent's work schedule or other obligations during regularly scheduled school hours, until other arrangements can be made.

The District may define additional categories or criteria for excused absences. The school principal or designee has the authority to determine if an absence meets this policy 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. If a student misses a class with an emphasis on participation, 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/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. In the event that a child in primary 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 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, administrator, or teacher. However, an IEP or 504 team meeting is required to be convened 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. This conference is not required if the school has received a prior notice or doctor's note has been provided and an academic plan has been put in place so that the child does not fall behind.

### **Unexcused Absences**

- A. 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.
- B. A student's grade may be affected if a graded activity or assignment occurs during the period of time when the student is absent if that absence is not excused.
- C. The school will notify a student's parent or 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 that the parent understands.
- D. The school will hold a conference with the parent or guardian after three unexcused absences within any month during the current school year to identify the causes of the student's absences and to 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 conference may still be conducted with the student and a school official. However, the parent will be notified of the steps the district has decided to take to eliminate or reduce the student's absences.
- E. Between the student's second and seventh unexcused absence, the school must take the following data-informed steps:
  - 1. Junior and high school students will be administered the Washington Assessment of the Risks and Needs of Students (WARNS) or other assessment.

2. 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 child to obtain supplementary services that might eliminate or ameliorate the cause or causes for the absence from school.
  3. For any child with an existing individualized education plan or 504 plan, these steps must include the convening of the child's IEP or 504 team, to consider the reasons for the absences. If necessary, and if consent from the parent is given, a functional behavior assessment to explore the function of the absence behavior shall be conducted. Time should be allowed for the behavior plan to be initiated and data tracked to determine progress.
- F. Not later than the student's seventh unexcused absence in a month the district will enter into an agreement with the student and parents that establishes school attendance requirements, refer the student to a community engagement board or file a petition and affidavit with the juvenile court alleging a violation of RCW 28A.225.010.
- G. 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, student or parent and student no earlier than the seventh unexcused absence within any month during the current school year and not later than the fifteenth unexcused absence during the current school year.

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

A doctor's note may be required by the parent/guardian after a student has accumulated more than ten excused or unexcused absences in a school year.

#### **Tiered response system for student absences**

WAC 392-401A-045 require school districts to implement minimum requirements of a multitiered system of support for attendance to address barriers to student attendance, provide timely interventions and best practices to reduce chronic absenteeism and truancy. Multitiered systems of support include:

- A. Monitoring daily attendance data for all students who are absent from remote learning, whether excused or unexcused;
- B. A process to contact families and verify current contact information for each enrolled student that includes multiple attempts and modalities in the parent's home language;
- C. Differentiated supports that address the barriers to attendance and participation that includes universal supports for all students and tiered interventions for students at-risk of and experiencing chronic absence, including school and district attendance or engagement teams, connecting to community resources, and community engagement boards; and
- D. A process for outreach and reengagement for students who have been withdrawn due to nonattendance and there is no evidence that the student is enrolled elsewhere. This outreach and reengagement process must include:
  1. A school and/or district point person/people to maintain the list, keep it updated, and coordinate the outreach;

2. School or district staff assigned to conduct the outreach and attempts at reengagement in coordination with community partners or other programs;
3. Multiple methods of communication and outreach in a language or mode of communication that the parent understands including phone calls, texts, letters, and home visits;
4. Referral to community-based organizations;
5. Documentation of the attempts to reach student and family; and
6. Follow the required steps to address unexcused absences in chapter 28A.225 RCW, including early communication to parents, holding parent conferences and administering a truancy screener to understand the underlying reasons for the absences, and providing evidence-based or best practice interventions, even if the student has been withdrawn due to nonattendance.

### **Tardies**

The District has the flexibility to determine what constitutes a tardy for both in-person and online settings. The District differentiates a tardy from an absence (where the student does not attend at all) and will exclude tardies from any reports that tally absences for the purposes of filing a truancy petition.

### **Disciplinary Actions**

- A. Students shall not be absent if:
  1. They have been suspended, expelled, or emergency expelled pursuant to chapter 392-400 WAC;
  2. Are receiving educational services as required by RCW 28A.600.015 and chapter 392-400 WAC; and
  3. The student is enrolled in qualifying "course of study" activities as defined in WAC 392-121-107.
- B. A full day absence is when a student is absent for fifty percent or more of their scheduled day.
- C. 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 seating.

### **Minimum Time for Being Considered Present**

The District has authority to establish minimum thresholds for the time in which a student must be physically in a class or logged in to be considered present. The Superintendent will develop a consistent and equitable approach that is documented in the student handbook and communicated clearly to all students and families.

### **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 may include the student's caseworker, educational liaison, attorney if one is appointed, parent or 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.

## **Migrant Students**

The district, parent/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  
  3241 - Student Discipline  
  4218 - Language Access

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  
  Chapter 392-401 Statewide definition of absence, excused and  
  unexcused.

Management Resources:           2022 - June Issue  
  2020 - September Alert  
  2018 - August Policy Issue  
  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

Adoption Date: 9/22/10

Classification: **Essential**

Revised Dates: 5/13/15, 1/10/18, 10/9/19, 8/11/21, 9/14/22