

EXCUSED AND UNEXCUSED ABSENCES

Students are expected to attend all assigned classes each day. School staff will keep a record of absence and tardiness, including a call log and/or a record of excuse statements submitted by a parent/guardian or, in certain cases, students, to document a student's excused absences.

Definition of an 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.

Excused Absences

The following are valid excuses for absences and tardiness. Assignments and/or activities not completed because of an excused absence or tardiness may be made up in the manner provided by the teacher.

1. **Absence due to:**
 - a. 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 symptoms, illness, health conditions, or medical 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);
 - 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/designee and a parent/guardian, or emancipated youth.

A principal/designee has the authority to determine if an absence meets the above criteria for an excused absence.

2. **Parental notification to the school.** 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.
3. **Absence for parental-approved activities.** This category of absence will be counted as excused for purposes agreed to by the principal and the parent/guardian. An absence may not be approved if it causes a serious adverse effect on the student's educational progress. 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, including the grade for the 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, long-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 that interrupts regular attendance may qualify for placement in a limited attendance and participation program. The student and his/her parent/guardian 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. Staff will be informed of the student's needs, though the confidentiality of medical information will be respected at the parent/guardian'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/guardian(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 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 (IEP) 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.

Unexcused Absences

An "**unexcused 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 District policy on absences, or has failed to comply with alternative learning experience program attendance requirements.

1. Unexcused absences occur when:
 - a. The parent/guardian or adult student submits an excuse that does not meet the definition of an excused absence as defined above; or
 - b. The parent/guardian or adult student fails to submit any type of excuse statement, whether by phone, email or in writing, for an absence.
2. **Each unexcused absence within any month of the current school year** will be followed by a letter or phone call to the parent/guardian informing them of the consequences of additional unexcused absences. The school will make reasonable efforts to provide this information in a language in which that parent/guardian is fluent.

A student's grade will not be affected if no graded activity is missed during such an absence.

3. **After three unexcused absences within any month of the current school year**, the school will hold a conference with the principal, student, and parent/guardian to analyze the causes of the student's absenteeism. If a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference is scheduled to take place within thirty days of the third unexcused absence, the District may schedule the attendance conference on the same day. If the parent/guardian does not attend the scheduled conference, the school may hold the conference with the student and principal. However, the school will notify the parent/guardian of the steps to eliminate or reduce the student's absences.
4. **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 junior high and high school, these steps will include application of the Eastmont Needs Assessment by the District's designated employee.
5. **Not later than a student's seventh unexcused absence in a month**, the District will:
 - a. Enter into an agreement with the student and parents/guardians that establishes school attendance requirements;
 - b. Refer the student to a community engagement board; or
 - c. File a petition to juvenile court (see below).

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/guardian 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/guardian 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.

The District will designate a staff member to apply the Eastmont Needs Assessment and, where appropriate, provide the student with best practice or research-based interventions.

As appropriate, the District will also consider:

- adjusting the student's course assignments;
- providing the student more individualized instruction;
- providing appropriate vocational courses or work experience;
- requiring the student to attend an alternative school or program;
- assisting the parent/guardian or student to obtain supplementary services; or
- referring the student to a community engagement board.

Tiered Response System for Student Absences

WAC 392-401A-045 requires 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:

1. Monitoring daily attendance data for all students who are absent, whether the absence is excused or unexcused;
2. 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;
3. 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
4. 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:
 - a. A school and/or district point person/people to maintain the list, keep it updated, and coordinate the outreach;
 - b. School or district staff assigned to conduct the outreach and attempts at reengagement in coordination with community partners or other programs;
 - c. 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;
 - d. Referral to community-based organizations;
 - e. Documentation of the attempts to reach student and family; and
 - f. 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.

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 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/guardian 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 Engagement Board

A “**community engagement 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 Douglas County to establish a community engagement board.

The District will designate and identify to the juvenile court (and update as necessary) and to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) a staff member to coordinate the District’s 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 engagement board members.

After the student’s **seventh unexcused absence within any month during the current school year, and not later than the fifteenth 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 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 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 District to reduce the student’s absences from school;
4. A statement that RCW 28A.225.010 has been violated by the parent/guardian, student or parent/guardian 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/guardian 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 provided to the parent/guardian; and
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 will 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 school, 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 (3) months from the date that the court assumes jurisdiction.

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 Policy 3241 Classroom Management, Discipline, and Corrective Action.)