

SUBJECT: COMPREHENSIVE ATTENDANCE POLICY

The WSWHE BOCES recognizes that student attendance in school is an important component of student success. Student interaction with teachers and other students in class helps to enhance the academic learning experience and provides a basis by which students can demonstrate competence and beyond to mastery.

Pursuant to Section 104.1 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education, this comprehensive attendance policy contains the following sections:

- I. Rationale (statement of objectives of the policy);
- II. Reporting System (strategies to meet objectives; excused and unexcused absence, tardy and early departure);
- III. Coding System for Absences
- IV. Attendance and Course Credit
- V. Interventions (incentives and/or sanctions);
- VI. Analysis of Attendance Data; and
- VII. Communication

I. Rationale

Every student has a right to educational opportunities that will enable the student to develop to his or her fullest potential. Daily attendance in school and class is an expectation and responsibility of both the student and parent/guardian.

However, each year some students accumulate an excessive number of absences from school. In some cases, verified illness is the cause, and in other cases, the absences are a direct result of disinterest or lack of concern for school. High rates of absenteeism have an impact on the entire school population.

Numerous studies link attendance with student achievement. Therefore, increased student attendance will result in improved student achievement. Given this research, we believe that by improving student attendance the following will occur:

- Improved student attitude
- Improved student achievement
- Improved classroom productivity, which enhances
- An environment conducive to teaching and learning.

An effective attendance policy is crucial to a good education. Attendance policies are based on the principle that regular school attendance maximizes the student's interaction with his or her teachers and peers, and is a major component of academic success. Improved school attendance procedures that provide for the early identification of attendance problems and effective methods to address them are most likely to succeed.

Successful implementation of any attendance procedure requires cooperation among all members of the education community, including parents/guardians, students, teachers, administrators, and support staff from BOCES and home schools. Differences exist in attendance policies between home schools and BOCES. This BOCES attendance policy applies to students who take courses at BOCES; the home school policy applies to students in their home school courses.

II. Reporting System

A. Strategies to meet objectives

A system of student attendance recordkeeping in each school or program shall provide an accurate record of each student's presence, absence, tardy, and early departure. The register of attendance shall set forth the following for each student:

- Name
- Date of birth;
- Full name(s) of parent(s)/guardian(s);
- Address where the student resides;
- Phone number(s) to contact the parent(s)/guardian(s);
- Date of the student's enrollment;
- Record of student's attendance on each day of scheduled instruction;
- Date the student withdraws or is dropped from enrollment, where applicable; and
- Record of when the school was closed for all or part of the day because of extraordinary weather conditions or school building emergencies.

Each BOCES teacher is responsible to record and report attendance daily. The teacher to whom the student is assigned (for each period, as appropriate) shall make all entries. The entries in the register of attendance shall be verified by the oath or affirmation of the individual(s) making the entries in the register of attendance and any electronic system.

The administrator of each program or school shall have the responsibility of supervising the keeping of attendance. The program administrator shall also be charged with reviewing student attendance records periodically for the purpose of initiating appropriate action to address unexcused student absence, tardy and early departure.

Process

Beginning in the 2003-2004 school year:

- Attendance shall include a student's presence/absence, tardy and early departure.

- Attendance is to be taken daily at the elementary level and for non-departmentalized (self-contained) secondary classes (including classes in component schools). Mainstreaming experiences are considered self-contained (non-departmentalized) program activities.
- Presence/Absence: Attendance is to be taken when the instructional session begins and reported no later than 10 minutes after the start of the session, including period by period at departmentalized middle and high school levels. Students who are not present at those times will be marked absent.
 - For career and technical education (CTE) where a student does not attend a “pullout” class: attendance is taken at the beginning of each session. For students who leave CTE to attend a “pullout” class, attendance is taken by the pullout teacher on a period-by-period basis.
- Tardy and early departure: A student shall be regarded for credit purposes as being absent from class under this section of the policy if he or she misses more than 50% of class time.
- Late passes: It is the responsibility of teachers to issue late passes for students who have been detained by a teacher and who will be late to another class.
- Early departure: A student must report to the office and sign out.

B. Excused vs. unexcused absence, tardy and early departure

Any absence for a school day or portion thereof shall be recorded as excused or unexcused. In the event that a student at any instructional level arrives late to class and without a pass, or departs early from scheduled instruction, such tardy or early departure shall be recorded as excused or unexcused.

The following reasons for student absence, tardy and early departure shall be considered by the BOCES to be excused:

- Personal illness, including doctor and/or hospital appointments
- Extended illness (three consecutive days or more) or chronic health condition (as documented by a physician’s note). All excuses for extended illness or health issues shall be submitted within three days of the student’s return to school in order to be considered as an excused absence.
- Immediate family illness*
- In-school disciplinary actions or suspension (unless the student fails to attend alternate instruction)
- Other (including religious observance, death in immediate family*, required court appearance, military obligations, etc.)

- Home school-excused absence
- BOCES-excused absence (including related services, field trips, etc.)
- No school transportation

Responsibilities of parents/guardians to notify the BOCES to excuse an absence, tardy or early departure are contained in Section VIIA.

* Immediate family = brother, sister, parents/guardians, grandparents, spouse or child. The definition may be expanded at the District Superintendent's discretion.

III. **Coding System Identifying Reasons for Absence, Tardy, or Early Departure**

On the initial day of any Absence, Tardy, or Early Departure, the teacher shall note it. A determination will be made subsequently of whether the absence, tardy or early departure is excused or unexcused and the reason. For any absence, tardy or early departure that is excused, the coding system shall identify the reason for such. An absence, tardy or early departure shall be assumed to be unexcused until the BOCES teacher receives either oral or written confirmation that such absence, tardy or early departure is in fact excused with appropriate reason. (See Section VIIA.)

System Absence Codes

- A** Excused - Individual/family illness
- B** Excused – BOCES (e.g. related services, field trip, Alternative Learning Environment)
- C** Excused – Home school suspension
- D** Excused – BOCES suspension
- E** Excused – Bus suspension
- F** Excused – other home school activities/court/bereavement/religious observance/military obligations
- G** Excused – school transportation
- H** Unexcused
- I** Tardy – (excused) - as indicated above
- J** Tardy – (unexcused)
- K** Early departure (excused) – use note field to indicate time

IV. **Student Attendance and Course Credit**

The BOCES recognizes that regular attendance in class is essential to the total learning process. Although some class absence may be unavoidable, each student is expected to make every effort to attend each assigned class. The underlying rationale for an attendance policy that denies course credit for non-attendance is based on a recognition of the vital role classroom attendance and participation plays in academic achievement.

For BOCES to recommend to a home school that a student receive credit for a course, the student must attend regular class meetings. For a full-credit course, 18 days of unexcused absence (or, on a prorated basis, 10% of the possible days of attendance) shall result in BOCES not recommending credit to the home school (or not recommending a student for promotion towards an IEP certificate or GED testing). For a half-credit course, 9 days of unexcused absence (or 10% of the possible days of attendance) shall result in BOCES not recommending credit to the home school (or not recommending a student for promotion towards an IEP certificate or GED testing).

Any student absence that is properly excused shall not be counted as an absence for the purpose of determining the student's eligibility for course credit under this policy.

It shall be the student's responsibility to obtain all make-up work from his or her BOCES teacher(s) immediately upon return to the BOCES course or to school. Make-up work shall be submitted to the teacher(s) within two days after the excused absence to be reviewed and graded by the teacher. (Note: Even with excused absences, a student must still pass the course). Every program and/or teacher will have a grading policy that will have a percentage of the class grade allocated for daily class participation. The percentage is determined by each program or teacher for each class. However, students with either excused or unexcused absences cannot make-up the "class participation" part of their grade.

A tardy or early departure may be excused or unexcused. If excused, the student shall perform the necessary make-up work within the allotted time, in order for the tardy or early departure not to be counted as an unexcused absence for the purpose of determining the student's eligibility for course credit under this policy.

Responsibilities of parents/guardians to notify the BOCES to excuse an absence, tardy or early departure are contained in Section VIIA.

APPEAL PROCESS

When a student reaches 18 days (or 10% of the possible days of attendance)* of unexcused absence, his/her record will be reviewed and verified by a BOCES administrator. Following verification, written notification to parents/guardians and home school staff (e.g. CSE, home school principal) will be made of the denial of course credit recommendation. A meeting to review the student's attendance record may be held at the request of parents/guardians or home school staff.

The only basis for an appeal is whether attendance was taken or recorded correctly. The process to be used by parents/guardians would be:

1. To request a meeting with the teacher to review the student's attendance record;
2. To request a follow-up review meeting, if necessary, with the principal or program administrator; and
3. To request a review of the attendance record with the District Superintendent.

If the home school does not follow the recommendation of the BOCES, the appeal should be made to the home school administration.

* No more than 18 days absent in a 180-day school year, or prorated accordingly.

V. Interventions

Student attendance may be positively affected by the use of incentives to encourage student attendance and disciplinary sanctions to discourage unexcused student absence, tardy and early departure from school.

A. Incentives

Positive primary intervention helps improve student attendance by providing an atmosphere that responds to meeting the personal needs of the students by building self-confidence and self-management skills. Behavioral rewards specific to each program should focus on improving self-esteem and attendance. Examples of this can be:

- School assemblies recognizing students;
- Parent/guardian calls of a positive nature;
- Perfect attendance (by attendance period): certificate of recognition, SABEA or other agency monetary award;
- Perfect attendance (quarterly): certificate of recognition, SABEA or other agency monetary award;
- Perfect attendance (yearly): SABEA monetary award/certificate;
- Attendance improvement award: earning of school activity privileges;
- Recognize perfect attendance and attendance improvements made by students.

Incentives to be used to improve student attendance will continue to be developed by groups such as student government and site-based committees.

B. Sanctions

Disciplinary sanctions shall be available for use by the BOCES program according to the Code of Conduct and Behavior Management System in order to discourage a student absence, tardy or early departure or a pattern of such by a student.

The District Superintendent or designee is charged with the task of monitoring the effectiveness of the use of incentives and disciplinary sanctions in each of the programs and schools. The annual report to the BOCES on the analysis of attendance patterns may also include the use of incentives and sanctions in each school.

VI. Analysis of Attendance Data

In order to increase student attendance in each school building and across all BOCES programs, it is important to identify patterns of student absence, tardy or early departure. Then, specific intervention strategies can be employed in an attempt to change such patterns.

The principal of each school and administrator of each program is charged by the BOCES to be the person responsible for reviewing student attendance records and initiating appropriate actions at the building and program level to analyze, review, and address unexcused student absence, tardy or early departure.

Each BOCES division director also shall be charged with monitoring overall student attendance and determining and addressing specific patterns of student absence, tardy or early departure. Committees at the divisional level shall be comprised of the director, at least one instructional administrator, a school nurse, and teachers and other support staff, as determined by the director.

The committee shall meet quarterly, and shall identify patterns of unexcused absence, tardy or early departure and the divisional intervention strategies to be employed by teachers and other school staff to address these patterns. Minutes of each meeting of this committee shall be kept and shall be sent to the District Superintendent and designee for information and review.

VII. Communication

A. Notice to parents/guardians

Any student absence, tardy or early departure other than those specified is considered by the BOCES to be unexcused. It is the responsibility of the parents/guardians to obtain the appropriate excuse and notify the program office by telephone. As a follow-up to any oral notification, parents/guardians may be required to provide a written excuse, including the reason(s). If proper written excuse for the absence or tardy is not received by the school from the parent/guardian after three school days, a telephone call may be made to the parent/guardian to notify him/her of the need for proper excuse of the child's absence or tardy.

A parental note must accompany any early departure request. Without said note, the student shall not be released.

NOTIFICATION

Notice to the student's parents/guardians, and to home schools regarding absences, and the strategies that shall be employed, including prior to recommending denial of course credit to the student for insufficient attendance, shall be as follows:

- When a student is absent, tardy or departs early from a BOCES course or from school, a call will be made home and a fax sent to the home school that day.
- After five days of unexcused absence from a BOCES course, the teacher will meet with the student upon his/her return and determine an intervention plan (with the student, where appropriate).
- After 10 days of unexcused absence from a BOCES course, an Intervention Process meeting will be scheduled within 48 hours (using the school calendar) to recommend intervention strategies and to develop an attendance contract. The contract, agreed to by the school and the family, may include the requirement that all future absences shall be considered to be unexcused unless official documentation (e.g., doctor's note, court notice, home school letter, etc.) is provided. The meeting will be convened by the BOCES teacher and coordinated by a counselor or case manager, as appropriate. It may involve but will inform:
 - BOCES program administrator
 - Parent/guardian
 - Home school representative
 - Student, where appropriate

If there are more than 15 days unexcused absences from a BOCES course, an Intervention Process meeting will be arranged within 48 hours (using the school calendar) in order to develop additional strategies to improve attendance. The BOCES program administrator will coordinate this meeting and inform and involve:

- BOCES classroom teacher
- Home school representative
- BOCES counseling staff
- Parent/guardian
- Student, where appropriate

B. Notice to Home School

A fax will be sent daily notifying each home school of student absences from a BOCES program or course.

When a student reaches 18 days (or 10% of the possible days of attendance)* of unexcused absence, his/her record will be reviewed and verified by a BOCES administrator. Following verification, notification to parents/guardians and home school staff (e.g. CSE, home school principal) will be made of the denial of course credit recommendation.

If at any time a pattern of excused or unexcused absences is recognized, an intervention meeting may be convened at BOCES discretion to investigate the reason(s) for the pattern, to recommend intervention strategies, and to develop an attendance contract. The contract, agreed to by the school and the family, may include the requirement that all future absences shall be considered to be unexcused unless official documentation (e.g., doctor's note, court notice, home school letter, etc.) is provided.

* No more than 18 days absent in a 180-day school year, or prorated accordingly.

C. Dissemination

All staff will be provided with a copy of the comprehensive attendance policy and any amendment to such policy following the initial adoption or amendment of the policy. New staff members shall receive a copy of the comprehensive attendance policy upon commencement of employment with the BOCES. The policy will also be available in the Instructional Employee Handbook.

All students will be provided with a plain language summary at the beginning of the school year or upon their entry into a program. Copies of the complete policy will be available at each program office.

The BOCES shall provide a plain language summary of the policy to the parents/guardians at the beginning of each school year and take other steps to promote the understanding of such policy by students and their parents/guardians. Copies of the comprehensive attendance policy shall be available in the office of the District Superintendent and in each school and BOCES program building, and will be provided to any member of the community upon request.

D. Annual review by the BOCES

The BOCES shall annually review overall student attendance and the student attendance records for each division and BOCES program or school. Should such records demonstrate a decline in student attendance, the BOCES shall have an opportunity to amend the comprehensive attendance policy and make any revisions to the policy deemed necessary to improve student attendance. Any such amendment to the comprehensive attendance policy shall be provided in writing to each staff member after adoption of the amendment by the BOCES.

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