

Commonly Asked Questions

Our team receives many questions from school practitioners related to attendance; the most common this year has been about excessive excused absences. Here is OSPI's guidance on this topic:

What can districts do about excessive excused absences?

For many valid reasons, students are absent from school. However, even when there is communication from the parent, absences add up and can significantly impact a student's progress towards learning. To that end, in addition to the legal requirements for elementary excused absences, there is regulatory authority for districts to address excessive excused absences.

[RCW 28A.225.020\(2\)](#) establishes district authority to create policies addressing excused absences:

(2) For purposes of this chapter, an "unexcused absence" means that a child:

(a)(i) Has failed to attend the majority of hours or periods in an average school day or has failed to comply with a more restrictive school district policy; and

(ii) Has failed to meet the school district's policy for excused absences.

[WAC 392-401-020](#) outlines the reasons student absences must be excused. This rule also clarifies that a school principal or designee has the authority to determine if an absence meets the criteria for an excused absence as outlined in this section of the WAC and their school district policy for excused absences.

Therefore, a district is authorized to establish a policy that would stop excusing absences, even if the reason for the absence is articulated in [WAC 392-401-020](#).

Districts are strongly encouraged to develop a policy and procedure to address excessive excused absences; and communicate this policy and procedure to families and students.



Recommendations

If a district does not have a policy, please consider the following recommendations and best practices:

- Establish standard or consistent responses at specific thresholds of absences (e.g. at 5 absences, we will... at 10 absences we will...)
- Invite parent/guardian to a conference to understand and address the absences; together, develop that outlines the commitments and supports the school will provide, the commitments the parent and student will make, and the outcome if there are future absences
- Provide supports and address barriers in order to support the student to attend more regularly
- In addition to this individualized approach, schools can get ahead of absences by reviewing data and talking with students and families to understand which groups of students are missing significant amounts of school and why

If absences do not improve, schools can stop excusing the absences, in accordance with their district policy or school procedure or practice, if every effort has been made to communicate this to the family. This would start the truancy process, which also requires screening, interventions, and possibly the filing of a truancy petition.

OSPI strongly recommends that schools attempt to engage families and students in a dialogue about the causes of the absences, before making the decision to stop excusing absences.

[Click here to read more commonly asked questions on the OSPI Attendance FAQ.](#)