

Student Attendance Policy

Attendance Policy

Attendance on a daily basis is a mandatory requirement for all students. The *Code of Virginia, Section 22.1-254*, requires that all children who have reached their fifth birthday on or before September 30 and who have not yet reached their eighteenth birthday must attend school. This requirement does not apply to any child who has obtained a high school diploma, its equivalent, or a certificate of completion or who is exempted pursuant to the provisions of the law.

When a student accumulates more than six (6) unexcused absences in an academic year the attendance officer/superintendent's designee will enforce the provisions of the *Code of the State of Virginia, Section 22-1-258* by either or both of the following: (1) filing a complaint with the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court alleging the pupil is a child in need of supervision or (2) instituting proceedings against the parent for contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

ABSENCES

Students are expected to be in school every day. Parents/guardians are expected to contact their child's school on the day of the child's absence to inform the school of that absence. Parents/guardians are encouraged to notify the school of pre-arranged appointments as soon as the date of such appointments is known. When such notification is made, the parent/guardian need not contact the school on the first day of the absence. For any reason, a written note providing the dates of and reasons for the child's absence is required from the parent/guardian within five days of the child's return to school. The purpose of this note is to determine whether or not the student's absence is excused or unexcused. This note will be maintained until the end of the school year for documentation purposes.

EXCUSED ABSENCES

In support of the mandatory attendance law, Newport News Public Schools defines excused absences. The following conditions provide the only acceptable reasons for a student's absence from school.

Illness - When a student is unable to attend school due to an illness, a note written by the parent or a physician documenting the illness will provide evidence of the illness for the school.

Chronic/Extended Illness - For students who are absent because of chronic illnesses, a disability, or because of a need for homebound services, the parent must complete a chronic/extended illness notification form with the principal at the beginning of the enrollment of the student in school or upon the onset of the student condition that affects regular attendance. Documentation from a physician will be required. For students who are absent more than ten days in a month and/or who exhibit defined patterns of absences, the parent will be required to complete the Chronic/Extended Illness Notification Form. Documentation from a physician will be required.

If the parent does not complete the form or does not provide documentation from a physician of a chronic or extended illness, the principal will review the child's attendance for needed services and/or applicable sanctions of the attendance law (*Code of Virginia 22.1-258*).

Prearranged Appointments - For appointments with the court, social services or other state agencies and appointments with health care providers, official documentation must be presented to the school.

Family Death or Emergency - For absences because of a death in the family or an emergency beyond the family's control, the parent must notify the school and provide documentation for the absence.

Religious Observances - Absences as a result of observances of religious holidays should be prearranged by the parent, who is responsible for notifying the child's school of the religious holiday(s) to be observed. If the parent is unable to prearrange the absence, a request for exemption must be received no later than the second day after the student's return to school from the absence occasioned by the religious observance.

Exclusions/Suspensions - For absences because of an exclusion or suspension, the parent will be notified of the suspension/exclusion and the date when the student will be expected to return to school. The student must return on the indicated date.

Exceptional Circumstances - The principal may approve prearranged absences for situations in which an exemption from attendance appears to be in the best interests of the student and his/her family.

Prior to the student's absence, the parent or guardian must complete the Request for Exceptional Circumstance to Attendance Form. The parent will document on this request the rationale for the absence, dates of absence, and siblings within the school division for whom the exception will be also requested. The principal must provide the response to the Requests for Exceptional Circumstances in writing to the parent. In documented extenuating circumstances, the principal may approve an absence after-the-fact as exempt from the sanctions of the attendance policy.

For those circumstances which cause the student to be absent and prior request for approval is not possible, the parent/guardian must complete the Request for Exceptional Circumstances within two days of the student's return to school.

No more than five (5) days may be approved by the principal for exceptional circumstances during a school year. For requests of more than five days, the request must be endorsed by the principal and approved by the superintendent/designee.

PARENT/GUARDIAN NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES

Excused and Unexcused Absences

For all absences, the school will contact the home on each day of the child's absence from school using the automated dialing system.

Unexcused Absences

In compliance with the *Code of Virginia 22.1-258*, the school division has established procedures that school division personnel are required to follow when a student fails to report to school and no indication has been received by school personnel that the pupil's parent is aware of and supports the student's absence.

The following procedure will be implemented when notifying parent/guardians of unexcused absence:

The law mandates that whenever any student fails to report to school and no indication has been received by school personnel that the pupil's parent is aware of and supports the student's absence (unexcused absence), a reasonable effort to notify the parent by telephone to obtain an explanation for the student's absences shall be made by the principal's designee(s), or volunteers.

Whenever a student fails to report to school for a total of three (3) days, a warning letter will be sent by the school explaining the consequences when a parent/guardian and student are in violation of *Code of Virginia 22.1-258*.

Whenever a student fails to report to school for a total of five (5) days in the school year, as defined above (unexcused absence), the school principal/designee shall make a reasonable effort to ensure that direct contact is made with the parent, whether in person or through telephone conversation by the attendance officer or school based superintendent's designee to obtain an explanation for the absence and to warn of the consequences of continued nonattendance.

After the 5th unexcused absence, as defined above, the attendance officer or superintendent's designee(s), the student and the student's parent jointly develop a plan to resolve the student's nonattendance. The plan shall include documentation of the reasons for the student's nonattendance.

If the student is absent again (6th unexcused absence) after direct contact was made with the parent, the attendance officer or principal's designee(s) shall conference with the parent within ten (10) school days to resolve the issues related to the student's nonattendance. This must be held no later than fifteen (15) school days after the 6th absence.

If the student is absent seven (7) days as defined above, the attendance officer or superintendent's designee(s) is to be notified by the school principal or his/her designee to enforce the provisions of the law by either or both of the following:

- filing a complaint alleging the student is a child in need of supervision (CHINS Petition) or
- instituting proceeding against the parent

Schools will provide interventions and alternative educational options for a student who fails to make academic progress as a result of attendance problems.

EXCESSIVE EXCUSED ABSENCES

The principal/designee will also notify the Office of Student Leadership of excessive absences or a pattern of absences that appear to be having an effect on the academic performance of a child. Efforts will be made to identify reasons for excessive absenteeism or patterns of absenteeism.

MAKE-UP WORK

When students are absent, (this includes absences for suspension or expulsion recommendations), an opportunity to make up work will be provided. Make-up work is encouraged so that students will profit from future instruction. In middle and high school, it is the student's responsibility to ask the teacher for the make-up work. Work (including tests) missed due to an absence may be made up and credit given for such work. Upon the student's return to school, he/she must make up the work within five school days. Additional time may be granted by the principal due to the extenuating circumstances. A student will not be penalized for a teacher's absence.

Students are encouraged to get make-up work assignments before returning to school. They may do this according to the following procedures:

Absence of one or two days: Contact a friend in class to obtain information on work missed.

Absence of three or more days: Call the school office requesting assignments remembering that teachers need 24 hours to prepare assignments.

PERFECT ATTENDANCE

For purpose of determining perfect attendance, the student must be in attendance for a period of two hours to be counted as present for the school day.

Pre-arranged absences for religious observance will not count against perfect attendance.

TARDIES

Tardiness to school or to class is addressed as a discipline issue in the Rights and Responsibilities Handbook.

REPORTS OF CHILDREN ENROLLED AND NOT ENROLLED

Code of Virginia, 22.1-260, requires that within ten (10) days after the opening of the school, each public school principal will report to the division superintendent:

The name, age and grade of each pupil enrolled in the school, and the name and address of the pupil's parent or guardian: and to the best of the principal's information, the name of each child subject to the provisions of this article who is not enrolled in school, with the name and address of the child's parent or guardian.

Within one calendar month of the opening of school, the principal of each school will send to the parents or guardian of each student enrolled in the school a copy of the compulsory school attendance requirements of the law and the enforcement procedures and the policies established by the School Board.

The school division will typically comply with the above requirements by delivering a copy of the student **Rights and Responsibilities Handbook** to students and their parents at the beginning of the school year. Attendance law, policies and procedures will be reflected in that handbook.

REPORTS OF CHILDREN WITH FIVE (5) OR MORE UNEXCUSED ABSENCES

At the end of each school year, each public school principal will report to the division superintendent the number of pupils by grade level for whom a conference was scheduled as required by *Code of Virginia 22.1-258*. The division superintendent will compile such grade level information for the division and provide such information to the Superintendent of Public Instruction annually.