

Book:	WCSD Policy Manual
Section:	5000 Students
Title:	PILOT - Student Attendance Policy
Number:	5100
Status:	Active
Legal:	
Adopted:	09/20/1994
Last Revised:	03/12/2007
Last Reviewed:	06/11/2007

Policy Detail

It is the goal of the Wappingers Central School District to afford each student the opportunity to meet his/her full potential. In addition to the Commissioner's regulations (§ 3205) concerning compulsory school attendance, consistent attendance has been shown to be a major contributing factor in academic achievement. Therefore, the board of education considers that implementing an appropriate level of discipline for unauthorized absences is one mechanism for assisting parents and staff in maintaining students' attendance.

1. Compulsory Education Under New York State Law

New York state compulsory education laws specify that a minor from six (6) to sixteen (16) years of age, who is mentally and physically fit, be in regular attendance, where the student resides, for the entire time schools are in session. A child who turns sixteen (16) years of age during a school year must continue in attendance until the end of the school year. According to state law, the school year begins July 1st.

Under New York State Education Law Section 3205, parents are responsible for the regular attendance of their children.

However, successful implementation of this policy requires cooperation among all members of the educational community, including parents, students, teachers, administrators and all staff members.

Parent/Guardian Responsibilities

1. It is the responsibility of parents/guardians to ensure that their children attend school regularly and on time.
2. Parents are required to provide their current home address, telephone number, emergency number(s) and a list of adults to contact in the event of an

emergency.

3. Parents are to notify the school(s) promptly when there is a change in the emergency contact information as set forth in item 2 above.

4. When a student is absent from school, parents/guardians must provide a written excuse upon the student's return to school.

5. The written excuse must be submitted to the Attendance Office within five (5) school days of the absence. Failure to do so will result in the absence being recorded as an unexcused absence.

6. The District may require a doctor's verification of an absence purported to be related to an illness if there appears to be an inappropriate pattern of absenteeism or in other appropriate circumstances.

7. When a student is tardy to school, parents/guardians must provide a written excuse upon the student's arrival at school. Failure to do so within five (5) school days will result in the tardy being recorded as an unexcused absence.

Student Responsibilities

1. Students must attend school daily and be on time.
2. Students must attend all classes and fulfill class requirements.
3. Students must consult with their teachers to arrange a schedule for makeup assignments and class work they have missed during their absence(s).

Administrators' Responsibilities

1. Principal or designee is responsible for implementing the Attendance Policies of the District.
2. Principal or designee is responsible for his/her school's attendance services, assuring that all attendance reports are accurately completed and forwarded to the main office promptly.
3. Principal or designee must ensure register accuracy, admittance of late students, organization preparation and distribution of absence reports and provision for follow-through as needed, including phone and written communication to parents.
4. Principal or designee will review daily the daily attendance report.
5. Principal or designee is responsible for identifying students who require attendance intervention services for absence or tardiness (ref. V., 3. and VIII).
6. School officials are mandated to report all matters of suspected educational

neglect to Child Protective Services.

7. The administrators shall report to the Superintendent of Schools on a periodic basis to align with a 5-week schedule. Reports shall be both for the specific period and cumulative for the year-to-date. Reports shall be based on the following data:

- a. Daily average attendance.
- b. Number of "tardies" elevated to unexcused absences.
- c. Number of Attendance Probation contracts written and number of adherents/non-adherents to individual contracts.
- d. Number, type and quality of staff comments on the Attendance Policy.
- e. Number, type and quality of parent/guardian comments on the Attendance Policy.
- f. Number, type and quality of student comments on the Attendance Policy.

Teachers' Responsibilities

1. Classroom/subject area teachers are required to record and report attendance daily in each class as prescribed in Section 3211 of the New York State Education Law and applicable Commissioner's Regulations.
2. Teachers must submit a written referral to the appropriate administrator within five (5) school days as per the District's Code of Conduct.
3. Teachers and school personnel will continually stress to students the importance of promptness and regular attendance in educational and business matters; they will set a positive example through their own contact with classes and will report patterns of chronic absence or tardiness.

II. Objectives

Good attendance and class participation are essential to academic success. Classroom lessons foster and require social interaction, development of effective communication skills, and critical thinking in addition to subject mastery. Textbook or make-up assignments are not adequate substitutes for classroom attendance and participation.

III. Strategies Employed to Accomplish Objectives

Effective implementation of the Attendance Policy requires all participants to be informed and to understand fully its purpose, procedures, and the consequences of noncompliance. To ensure that students, parents, teachers and administrators are notified and understand this policy, the following procedures shall be implemented:

1. Students shall receive a copy of the Attendance Policy, which will be reviewed in homeroom within the first two days of school. Students and their parents/guardians will be asked to sign and return a statement indicating that they have read and understand the policy;

2. The Attendance Policy will be discussed at grade-level assemblies and in individual classrooms;
3. The attendance Policy will be included in the Student Handbook;
4. The Attendance Policy will be posted in individual classrooms;
5. The Attendance Policy will be available on the district's web site;
6. The Attendance Policy will be contained in the Curriculum Guide;
7. The Attendance Policy will be reviewed with parents at orientation;
8. The school newspaper and district publications will include periodic reminders of the components of the Attendance Policy;
9. The Attendance Policy will be part of the New Teacher Orientation program;
10. The Attendance Policy will be periodically reviewed at faculty meetings;
11. The Attendance Policy will be included in the Teacher Handbook.

IV Attendance Requirements for 9th – 12th Grade Students

1. Unless they maintain the commitments put in place through the Attendance Probation process, any student in grades 9 through 12 who has been determined to exceed ten (10) school days in the aggregate in a semester course or in excess of twenty (20) school days in a full year course of unexcused absences, shall be ineligible for full course credit and shall be ineligible to submit any paper, homework or other work to be graded by their teacher(s), and shall not be permitted to take any quizzes or examinations in the course.

V Absences

1. Students shall not be considered absent when they are authorized by school officials to be somewhere other than in their regularly scheduled classes. For example, if school personnel expect the student to report elsewhere during their regularly scheduled class time for activities such as: conferences with school personnel, testing, physical exams, music lessons, drama productions, athletic competitions, field trips, mandatory college orientation (limit of one, documentation and advanced administrative approval required), college visitation days (maximum of 3 with documentation and advanced administrative approval required, or other activities as approved by the Principal, the student shall not be considered absent. (See Attendance Code, attached as Appendix "A").
2. Excused absences include: Illness of student;
 - a. Illness or death in family/immediate and extended/significant other;

- b. Urgent medical appointment, which is documented as unable to be scheduled outside the school day;
 - c. Documented religious observance;
 - d. Documented mandatory legal circumstances;
 - e. Documented quarantine;
 - f. Impassible roads;
 - g. Other absences which may have been approved by the Commissioner of Education.
3. All other absences are Unexcused Absences. They include, but are not limited to:
- a. Absent without permission;
 - b. Four (4) latenesses without an authorized pass will result in one (1) unexcused absence;
 - c. Not reporting to the designated location after obtaining an authorized pass from a class;
 - d. Leaving school due to illness without the permission of the nurse;
 - e. Leaving school due to an emergency situation without the permission of the Principal or designee;
 - f. Vacation.

VI Incentives and Consequences for Attendance Patterns

The school will offer incentives for excellence and/or improved attendance. These may include:

- 1. Recognition award each semester;
- 2. Community donated gifts given to students who meet attendance standards;
- 3. Publication of an Attendance Honor Roll each quarter;
- 4. Special privileges awarded to students with outstanding attendance;
- 5. Special events for students who meet attendance standards;
- 6. Attendance records may be reviewed and considered during the post-secondary recommendation process.

VII Communication & Notification

In the spirit of ongoing intervention and in order to motivate our students to improve attendance, parent(s)/guardian(s) will be notified of unexcused student absences. The following pertains to the number of unexcused absences in a two-semester (full-year) course. A parent may receive several notices if the excessive unexcused absences exist in more than one class.

- 1. Unexcused Absences 1 – 6: Teachers are expected to continue to confer with students and their parents concerning academic and attendance issues. [An attendance calling system will notify parent(s)/guardian(s) with a phone call in the evening.] (Unauthorized absence from class or school is considered truancy and insubordination, and the District will treat the unexcused absences in a manner

consistent with the District's Code of Conduct.)

2. As soon as possible after the 7th unexcused absence from a full year course, the high school administration shall send written notification (which may be via e-mail if the parent/guardian has agreed to receive school communications through the method) to the student's parent(s) and guidance counselor. The letters shall notify the parent(s)/guardian(s) as follows:

a. After the 7th unexcused absence, the parent(s)/guardian(s) will be notified that the student has been absent half the number of maximum unexcused absences and may lose credit if such absences continue.

b. A conference with parent(s)/guardian(s), student, and school officials will be scheduled.

c. After the 14th absence, the parent(s)/guardian(s) will be notified in writing that the student has only one (1) unexcused absence remaining and may lose credit if unexcused absences exceed the limit.

d. After the 18th absence, the parent(s)/guardian(s) will be notified in writing that the student has only one (1) unexcused absence remaining and may lose credit if unexcused absences exceed the limit.

3. The following pertains to the number of unexcused absences in a one-semester course.

a. Unexcused Absences 1-3: Teachers are expected to continue to confer with students and/or their parent(s)/guardian(s) with a phone call.

b. As soon as possible after the 4th unexcused absence from a half-year course, or full-year alternating day course, the high school administration shall send written notification to the student's parent(s)/guardian(s) and guidance counselor (see e-mail notification above). The letters shall notify the parent(s)/guardian(s) as follows:

i. After the 4th unexcused absence that the student has been absent half the number of maximum absences and may lose credit if unexcused absences continue. Guidance will continue to confer with students and their parent(s)/guardian(s) concerning academic and attendance issues.

ii. After the 7th unexcused absence, the parent(s)/guardian(s) will be notified in writing that the student has only one (1) unexcused absence remaining and may lose credit if unexcused absences exceed the limit.

iii. After the 10th unexcused absence, the parent(s)/guardian(s) will be notified that the student may lose credit due to excessive absenteeism.

In every letter to a student's parent(s)/guardian(s), a request will be made for the parent/guardian to contact the child's counselor. The counselor will discuss the impact of excessive unexcused absences on the student's education and the associated consequences. The parent(s)/guardian(s) will have an opportunity to confer with the school staff. However, a conference with the parent(s)/guardian(s) is not a prerequisite to denying academic credit to a student who either has failed to meet class requirements or has not successfully maintained all obligations under an Attendance Probation contract. The primary responsibility for a student's attendance in class rests with the student and parent(s)/guardian(s).

VIII. Intervention Strategies

Students who begin to exhibit an excessive number of days absent or tardy without an approved excuse will be referred to district pupil personnel service professional (e.g., guidance counselor, social worker, and psychologist) to try to identify the causes and seek solutions to the problems. The pupil personnel service professional(s) may work with families to find ways to foster better family relationships and improve student attendance. Additionally, referrals to outside agencies may be made in accordance with law and applicable confidentiality requirements.

Consequences for unexcused absences, truancy, and tardiness will include after-school detention, in-school restriction, and referral for a YSU (Youth Service Unit) or PINS (Person In Need of Support) petition, as appropriate.

The principal or the designee will be responsible for filing the PINS petition, as appropriate.

IX. Make-Up Opportunity

Student in jeopardy of losing credit may make up (remove) one previous unexcused class absence from every course where the student is about to exceed the minimum attendance requirement. This may be done through the following:

1. Obtain, complete, and return to the teacher(s) one (1) assignment, as directed, for each class period made up. This may be done only one time for every course where the student is in danger of exceeding the minimum attendance requirement.

Make up must be done prior to a student exceeding the limit that requires implementation of an Attendance Probation contract.

X. Appeal Process

As stated above, it is the goal of the District, in order to provide the opportunity for the highest individual academic achievement, to ensure that each student attends the maximum number of days possible. With that goal in mind, there is also the reality that life sometimes presents individuals with extenuating circumstances. It is not the purpose of this policy to punish students in good standing. Therefore, it will be the function of the Appeals Committee to hear students' appeals of the enforcement of this policy with respect to the mis-identification of an excused absence as an unexcused absence.

Appeals, Part A:

The written appeal for a hearing regarding the mis-identification of an excused absence as an unexcused absence must be received in the Assistant Principal's Office within 5 school days of the date of the loss of credit notice for accumulated unexcused absences unless extraordinary circumstances warrant a departure from the 5-school-day requirement.

The Appeals Committee will consist of the Principal (or his/her designee); a guidance counselor, and a teacher. The Appeals Committee will meet during the instructional day. The student and parent(s)/guardian(s) will be notified in writing of their right to appear at this meeting, to provide supporting witnesses and/or a student advocate, and/or to submit appropriate, verifiable documentation of the excused absence for consideration by the committee. Upon consideration of all relevant information, the Committee will decide whether the absence is still considered unexcused. The student and parent(s)/guardian(s) will be notified in writing of the outcome of the meeting. If the absence be determined to remain unexcused, the parameters in section VII shall be followed. If the absence is approved as an excused absence, the parent(s)/guardian(s) and the student will be reminded that the student must, at all times, continue to satisfy all course requirements.

The charge of the Appeals Committee is to maintain the balance between the District goal and the special needs of a very small percentage of the student population. The Committee will be ever mindful of the obvious and time-tested correlation between frequent attendance and academic success.

Any further unexcused absence during the appeals process may result in dismissal of the appeal. The written notice to student and parent(s)/guardian(s) shall include a caution regarding this possibility.

If the Appeals Committee decides to approve the appeal to identify an unexcused

absence as excused, it is expected that attendance from that point will be perfect or fully documented as legal. In the event of future illegal absences see Attendance Probation (B below).

Appeals, Part B:

B: Attendance Probation:

The district recognizes that responsibility and maturity develop at different rates. For the student who has not met his/her attendance responsibilities with respect to unexcused absences and may lose credit for that reason, the policy includes a “fail safe” provision. If the student is finally ready to commit to academic success and is resolved to attend school and follow all school rules and procedures, the student may apply for Attendance Probation.

Eligibility:

Students are eligible for and may apply for reinstatement in any class in which the minimum attendance requirement is exceeded with or without the Appeals process.

All students who elect to go through the Appeals: Part A will be notified of the attendance probation process.

Attendance Probation Procedure:

1. The student will report to the principal’s office and fill out a probationary appeals application within five school days of notification of loss of class credit for unexcused absences. The student will complete and sign an Attendance Probation Form, which will be signed by the principal or designee. Once this form has been executed, the student is reinstated in the class and may immediately return to that class.
2. The principal will schedule a meeting as soon as possible with the Attendance Probation student to develop a contract that provides a path back to solid academic standing. The contract will be developed by a team consisting of the student, his/her parent(s)/guardian(s), a guidance counselor, the classroom teacher, and anyone else deemed appropriate by the principal, (social worker, school psychologist, etc.).
3. The basic elements of the contract will be the same for all students. These include but are not limited to:
 - a. No unexcused absences
 - b. Advanced notification for anticipated legal absence, or emergency absence with parent notification
 - c. A scheduled calendar for producing all make-up work
 - d. Any special conditions determined by the principal or his designee

4. Once the contract is developed and signed, the student must demonstrate his/her determination to re-instate him/herself by meeting all conditions of the contract. If the student does not meet the conditions agreed to in the attendance probation contract, individual course credit will be denied for that course and there are no further appeals, nor application for further attendance probation will be permitted for that course.

The student and parent(s)/guardian(s) will be made aware that, by the time the maximum unexcused absence limit has been exceeded and the student is involved in the Probationary Appeal process, a critical amount of class work, participation, and growth in the subject has been lost. Without a total and positive commitment, this process will not work, and the student should consider other alternatives to achieve that credit.

XI. Minimum Attendance Requirement 6th – 8th Grade Students

The policy for 6th – 8th grade students is consistent with the District's Attendance Policy. If a student in grade 6, 7, or 8 misses, without an acceptable excuse, a class which s/he is taking for high school credit, the student will lose credit pursuant to the procedures as applicable to students in grades 9 through 12. This shall apply to all students in grades 6-8, unless otherwise stated on a student's individual educational plan or 504 plan. The high school definition of absences, as well as the appeals procedure, applies for all 6th – 8th grade students.

XII. Minimum Attendance Requirement for K – 5th Grade Students

The K – 5th grade attendance requirements are consistent with the District's Attendance Policy. All students must attend as per the Code of Conduct. This shall apply to all students in grades K – 5. The school staff will discuss the importance of school attendance and offer assistance to parents and guardians of students who are excessively absent without an approved excuse. Parent notification will take place as per the District's Code of Conduct.

Pilot adoption criteria and schedule:

Upon approval of the Pilot Attendance Policy, the document will be disseminated for educational and informational purposes to staff, parent(s)/guardian(s), and students in a focused manner. The weeks between the board pilot adoption date and the end of the school year shall be used to educate the Wappingers Central School District community as to the rationale, purpose, and implementation of this policy.

The administration will follow the reporting schedule (ref. Administrators' Responsibilities) and the Board of Education shall review the reports at its regularly scheduled public meetings.

Upon receipt of the final report due at the Board's first meeting in April 2008, the Board shall discuss the adoption of the Attendance Policy on a non-pilot basis at its subsequent meetings. The Board shall make its decision to adopt the Attendance Policy, with whatever modifications or amendments have been determined to be required, at its first meeting in May 2008.

Nothing within the context of this implementation schedule shall prevent the Board of Education from amending the Pilot Attendance Policy at an earlier date based on its review of the administration's reports.