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Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
Chris Reykdal, Superintendent

February 25, 2021

(X) Action Required
() Informational

BULLETIN NO. 006-21 SYSTEM AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

TO: Educational Service District Superintendents
School District Superintendents
School District Business Managers
School Building Principals
District Excessive Absenteeism and Truancy Liaisons
District CEDARS Administrators
Attendance Clerks
School Counselors

FROM: Chris Reykdal, Superintendent of Public Instruction

RE: Extension of Non-truancy Remote Learning Absence for 2020–21

CONTACT: Krissy Johnson, Attendance & Truancy Program Supervisor
360-725-6045, krissy.johnson@k12.wa.us

PURPOSE/BACKGROUND

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has filed an emergency rule updating the definition of an unexcused absence from remote learning for the remainder of the 2020–21 school year. The rule, [WAC 392-401A](#), is effective beginning February 16, 2021. This is an extension of the emergency rule filed on November 9, 2020. OSPI has initiated formal rulemaking to adopt a permanent rule.

EXTENSION OF NON-TRUANCY REMOTE LEARNING ABSENCE

The emergency rule extends the non-truancy remote learning absence period through the end of the 2020–21 school year. During this time, absences from remote learning are not considered “unexcused” and will not accrue for the purposes of filing a truancy petition. No other changes were made to the rule.

ATTENDANCE TAKING & TIERED SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS

Districts will continue to follow these requirements:

- Take and track attendance daily

- Verify the absence is an excused absence
- Implement a tiered support plan to respond to student absences

FREQUENCY OF ATTENDANCE TAKING

Districts must continue to take attendance daily. For secondary schools, attendance should be taken daily for each course with planned instruction; for elementary schools once daily is the minimum expectation.

VERIFY IF ABSENCE IS EXCUSED

Districts should continue to expect parents to excuse their students' absences and communicate to students that attendance is expected in remote learning, while continuing to seek to understand and address barriers to attendance and engagement.

TIERED SUPPORTS TO RESPOND TO ABSENCES

Students are still in need of high expectations as well as consistent connection and support from their school when students have not been attending. Tiered supports, as stated in [WAC 392-401A-045](#) must include:

- monitoring daily attendance;
- verifying contact information of families;
- outreach and communication that identifies students' needs;
- universal supports; and
- a system to address barriers and provide support in increasing intensity for students at-risk of or experiencing chronic absence including school and district engagement teams, community truancy boards, and referral to community resources.

Districts are strongly encouraged to continue providing the following supports that are outlined in the law, without filing a truancy petition.

- Schedule a conference with the parent to identify and address the barriers to attendance.
- Administer a needs assessment to gather more data on the causes of absences.
- Offer interventions based on assessment/screener information from parent conference.
- Establish an attendance agreement with commitments from all (school, parents, student).
- Invite the student and parent or guardian to a community truancy (or engagement) board.
- Partner with court administration to expand the team of caring adults to connect and attempt to re-engage the student.

Find additional resources and guidance on the [OSPI Attendance webpage](#).

TRUANCY PETITIONS FOR IN-PERSON ABSENCES

Unexcused absences from in-person learning will accrue towards the filing of a truancy petition with the local juvenile court as stated in [Chapter 28A.255 RCW](#). The emergency rule does not change the expectations or definitions of an in-person absence or the legal requirements for filing a truancy petition when a student is absent from in-person learning.

DATA REPORTING TO CEDARS

If an absence from remote learning is not excused according to [WAC 392-401A-020](#) during this period, districts will report the non-truancy remote learning absences as unexcused to CEDARS. If the remote learning absence is excused because it does meet the criteria in [WAC 392-401A-020](#), districts will report these absences as excused. [CEDARS guidance](#) can be found on the OSPI website.

WITHDRAWING STUDENTS & APPORTIONMENT

Districts are not required to withdraw students from enrollment if they do not meet the requirements for claiming them for state funding. Districts cannot claim a student for funding if they have not attended at least once in the twenty consecutive school days prior to the count day, however districts are NOT directed or required to withdraw, drop or unenroll the student.

Districts are encouraged to either maintain student enrollment or keep students in their systems, even if they cannot claim them for funding. It is important that districts maintain communication channels with families, particularly as districts begin to bring students back to in-person learning. Keeping students enrolled or in their system also allows districts to attempt to secure the student's reengagement while minimizing the barrier of re-enrolling.

BASIS FOR DECISION

OSPI extended the non-truancy remote learning absence in November, due to an unprecedented number of unexcused absences from remote learning. The previous rule set an end date of February 28, 2021, intending to give districts time to refine their attendance taking. However, circumstances have not changed dramatically since November.

In January, OSPI surveyed stakeholders state-wide including district truancy liaisons, principals, attendance clerks, and courts, receiving 445 responses. The survey clearly demonstrated that data quality is still a significant concern. OSPI also reviewed preliminary unexcused absences submitted to CEDARS, which show unexcused absences have dramatically increased this year.

TRUANCY IN ALTERNATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE (ALE)

OSPI will file an emergency rule postponing the effective date of [WAC 392-550-040](#), truancy in ALE, until the 2021–22 school year.

EMERGENCY RULE LANGUAGE

The emergency rule language for [Chapter 392-401A WAC](#) is available on the OSPI website. This is a temporary emergency rule. OSPI has initiated the formal rulemaking process to adopt a permanent rule. The rulemaking process for the permanent rule will allow for public comment and include a public hearing. Documents and notices will be posted on the [OSPI Rule Making webpage](#).

INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

For questions regarding this bulletin, please contact Krissy Johnson, at krissy.johnson@k12.wa.us. The OSPI TTY number is 360-664-3631.

For questions regarding CEDARS reporting, please contact Student Information at askSI@k12.wa.us.

For questions regarding truancy procedures in ALE, please contact Anissa Sharratt at anissa.sharratt@k12.wa.us.

This bulletin is also available on the [Bulletins](#) page of the OSPI website.

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