

# Attendance & Truancy: Questions & Answers for School Districts

## ABOUT THIS FAQ

This guidance is supplemental to existing OSPI information regarding [Attendance](#). The most up-to-date agency information and guidance pertaining to re-opening schools is located on OSPI's [COVID-19 Guidance & Resources](#) webpage.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

*(Updated September 22, 2020)*

- Absences are a signal that students might need additional supports & can highlight inequities
- The purpose of taking daily attendance is to provide educators with meaningful data that signals when a student is missing instructional time
- Absences should not be used in a punitive manner; they give us an opportunity to respond proactively to support students to re-engage
- Attendance is a critical first step towards engagement and mastery; there can be no learning without it
- Families and students need flexibility to attend or participate in learning activities outside of typical school hours

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

### 1. Are districts required to record daily attendance?

Yes, school districts are required to take daily attendance for each student enrolled on any day when there is planned instructional activities. This includes days with in-person, remote, or hybrid instruction. Marking a student absent is not intended to be punitive and should not be used as such.

### 2. When should a student be marked absent from remote learning?

An absence from remote learning is when a student is not participating in planned instructional activities on a scheduled remote learning day. Student presence or participation may be asynchronous or synchronous.

For the purposes of taking daily attendance, examples of what student participation could look like include, but are not limited to:

- Daily logins to learning management systems;
- Daily interactions with educators to acknowledge attendance (including messages, emails, phone calls or video chats); or



- Evidence of participation in a task or assignment.

Districts will need to adopt consistent practices for determining when students are recorded as attending during a scheduled day. Districts have broad authority to allow for the unique circumstances that their students, and the adults supporting them, face due to COVID-19.

When developing their local definition of absence, districts should take into consideration that the intent of marking a student absent is to measure when a student is missing instructional time.

### 3. Can a student demonstrate attendance or participation in remote learning in different ways than are listed in the rule?

*(NEW, added September 22, 2020.)* Yes. The list of methods on how a student can demonstrate participation in the rule was not intended to be exhaustive. In addition to the examples outlined in the rule, districts can consider other options such as those following:

#### **Ideas for evidence of participation in a task or an assignment:**

- Interview family members;
- Independent reading;
- Physical activity to meet health & fitness requirements or recess;
- Working with their family on behavior expectations for the home setting (such as create a home expectation matrix to support the behaviors families expect at home);

#### **Other examples to demonstrate attendance:**

- Accessing office hours;
- Participation in one-on-one or small group interventions;
- Participation in supplementary services including/not limited to: LAP, TBIP, highly capable, social/emotional learning,
- Participating in asynchronous activities planned by specialists: P.E., library, music, computer lab, counselor/behavior specialists;
- Social/emotional programs such as the "Kindness Club" or "Friendship Circle" where students are provided roles to help out in their school such as: food distribution, mentoring younger students, reading to younger students, recess or hall monitors, etc.

Parents and caregivers can verify that the student participated in an instructional activity in the case of younger students.

### 4. Do districts need to determine if a student's absence is a full day absence?

Yes. Districts continue to be required under [RCW 28A.225.020](#) to determine when a student misses a majority of their school day. This requirement in statute provides parameters around what counts as an unexcused absence for truancy purposes.

**5. How many times per day should districts take attendance for elementary grades?**

Districts have flexibility to determine how frequently they will track daily attendance or participation in elementary grades. This frequency should be based on their instructional plan and the requirement to determine if the student misses the majority of their school day. At a minimum, attendance must be determined once a day.

**6. In secondary grades, if a student has multiple classes on a given day, does attendance need to be recorded for each class?**

Yes. Attendance should be taken for each scheduled day and for each class that has planned instructional activities. Planned instructional activities can be synchronous or asynchronous, including participation in a task or assignment.

**7. Can a student demonstrate attendance before or after regularly scheduled school hours?**

*(Updated September 22, 2020.)* Yes. A student participating in planned asynchronous learning before or after regularly scheduled school hours can be considered present and not absent. Daily planned instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. OSPI recommends that districts provide multiple methods for students to access learning, outside of and beyond participation in live synchronous lessons.

Districts should develop a plan where educators can retroactively determine if students participated in asynchronous activities. This flexibility is critical to monitor asynchronous participation outside of the regular scheduled synchronous sessions.

**8. Can a student demonstrate attendance over the weekend for the previous week?**

*(NEW, added September 22, 2020.)* Yes. School districts have the flexibility to create schedules that work for their students and families. Districts should be in regular communication with their families and seek to establish a plan if students are not able to engage on a daily basis. Daily attendance should still be monitored. The primary goal of daily attendance taking is to understand when students are missing instructional time and to be responsive when students are not able to access their learning.

**9. Can a district count a student as present for a class if they are unable to attend a live scheduled session?**

*(Updated September 22, 2020.)* Yes. Districts can count a student present if they engage in asynchronous activities, in place of a live scheduled session. Districts are encouraged to provide this flexibility but are not required to provide this alternative. By creating these

asynchronous activities, school districts will provide flexibility for families unable to log in to live sessions for several hours every day due to internet access, bandwidth, access to childcare, other family obligations, and work schedules. OSPI recommends school districts increase access to this type of flexibility as schools learn more about student engagement levels in response to remote and hybrid schedules.

#### **10. Does a student have to attend a certain portion of a synchronous class or complete a whole assignment in order to be considered present?**

No. Districts should adopt policies and practices which allow students to be marked present when a student attempts an assignment, logs on for a part of the class, or asynchronously demonstrates participation. Attendance should not be tied to completion.

District monitoring of student engagement and mastery is outside the scope of the purpose of taking attendance.

#### **11. Can a student be marked tardy while participating remotely?**

*(NEW, added September 22, 2020.)* School districts continue to have flexibility regarding the definition of a tardy or whether to track tardies at all. Districts should consider what tardiness looks like in a virtual educational environment which includes new student challenges such as unreliable internet connections, equipment failure (microphones and cameras), expired links, failed login attempts and changing passwords. It is likely that strict enforcement of classroom tardies is not responsive to these new challenges students and families are facing.

#### **12. Do districts need to adopt identical procedures on taking daily attendance for remote, in-person, and hybrid instructional modalities?**

No. Districts have the flexibility to align attendance taking procedures with different instructional modalities while operating within the daily attendance taking requirement and the definitions of absence for in-person and remote learning. As the school year progresses with a goal of providing in-person instruction [using the school reopening decision tree](#), this flexibility will be important. Districts will need to ensure attendance procedures can adapt throughout the planned and scheduled calendar.

#### **13. What are the new reasons that a student can be considered excused?**

*(Updated September 22, 2020.)* The list of reasons for absences to be excused was expanded to create flexibility for families, keeping in mind the intent of monitoring attendance is not to punish, but to understand when students are missing instructional activities in order to engage students and families to problem solve.

The emergency rule specifies additional reasons that a students' absence must be excused.

- Absences related to the student's illness, health condition, or medical appointments due to COVID-19;

- Absences related to caring for a family member who has an illness, health condition, or medical appointment due to COVID-19;
- Absences related to the student's employment or other family obligations\* during regularly scheduled school hours that are temporarily necessary due to COVID-19 until other arrangements can be made, including placement in a more flexible education program;
- Absences due to the student's parent's work schedule or other obligations during regularly scheduled school hours, until other arrangements can be made;
- Absences due to the student's lack of necessary instructional tools, including internet broadband access or connectivity, stability, reliability, outages, etc.
- Other COVID-19 related circumstances as determined between school and parent or emancipated youth.

\*Note: Other family obligations include when a student must care for younger siblings.

See the emergency rule [Chapter 392-401A WAC](#) for the complete list of excused reasons.

OSPI will offer additional virtual opportunities and guidance in September 2020 for attendance clerks and specialists to engage in a deeper manner on attendance and truancy procedures, such as excusing and unexcusing absences in a culturally responsive manner.

### **Additional Guidance Regarding the Employment of Minors**

A student is eligible to work during school hours under the following circumstances:

- When the student is earning credit through a work experience (either CTE or non-CTE) monitored by the school district; or
- When the minor student is working during school hours at a company with a minor work variance approved through Labor and Industries.

Please visit [L&I Youth Employment Website](#) for more information on hiring minors, including minimum age and hours they can work.

### **14. How will the emergency rule impact apportionment?**

*(Updated September 22, 2020.)* Apportionment is based on enrollment on a monthly count day. The most up to date rules for reporting students for state funding can be found in the annual [Enrollment Reporting Handbook](#). Enrollment for apportionment reporting and daily attendance are two different measures.

Districts are strongly encouraged to reach out to families and students if they have not participated or engaged prior to the count day. This outreach should rely on the guiding principle that absences are an opportunity to start a conversation to understand the challenges and or barriers that may stand in the way of a student participating.

## 15. Do districts have to withdraw or unenroll students based on lack of attendance or participation before count day?

*(Updated September 22, 2020.)* No. Districts are **not** required to withdraw students from enrollment if they do not meet the [requirements for claiming a student](#) for state funding. Districts are encouraged to maintain students in their local system even if they cannot claim the student for state funding. This enables districts to communicate with families, attempt to secure the student's reengagement, and reduces the barrier of re-enrolling when the student does start attending again.

## 16. What is "non-truancy remote learning absence" and why did OSPI develop this new category?

*(Updated September 22, 2020.)* The emergency rule creates the new category of absence "non-truancy remote learning absence" which shall be used to identify any absence from remote learning through October 4.

This new category of absence is neither excused nor unexcused. Beginning October 5, districts will begin differentiating between excused and unexcused for absences on remote learning days. Districts should review their methods of communicating with families about attendance (e.g. letters, robocalls, family and student portals) to ensure that the "non-truancy remote learning absence" is not communicated as excused or unexcused.

The purpose of this new category is to create flexibility at the beginning of the school year as students, families, and schools adjust to remote learning settings. Districts are still required to develop a tiered response system for all absences, including "non-truancy remote learning" absences, as outlined in [WAC 392-401A-045](#) and in Question 19.

This rule change ensures that no truancy petition will be filed based on remote absences through October 4. Districts should ensure that this rule change is shared with all staff, in particular registrars, attendance clerks, building principals, and other staff that work daily on attendance and communication with parents.

## 17. How does the non-truancy remote learning absence affect the "20 day drop" rule or requirements for claiming students for state funding?

The non-truancy absence remote learning absence category is still an absence. However, as stated above, districts are not required to withdraw the student, but can keep them enrolled while ensuring they are not claimed for state funding.

## 18. What parts of the compulsory attendance laws (or Becca Bill requirements) are still required this fall?

*(Updated September 22, 2020.)* Districts are still required to comply with [Chapter 28A.225 RCW](#). For schools that are fully remote or where remote learning days are planned as part of a hybrid model, absences from remote learning will be considered non-truancy remote learning

absences through October 4, 2020. This mean absences from remote learning, until October 4, are neither excused nor unexcused and therefore do not contribute to the accumulation of unexcused absences which require action under [RCW 28A.225.020](#) or [28A.225.030](#).

Districts are still required by [Chapter 28A.225 RCW](#) to do the following:

- Provide information about attendance to parents including district policies, supports and resources, and expectations of students. ([RCW 28A.225.005](#))
- Convene team for youth in foster care or dependent pursuant to chapter 13.34 to review excessive or unexpected absences to determine causes of absences and support youth's school work ([RCW 28A.225.023](#))
- Daily notification of all absences

For students currently on a petition, districts should continue to partner with their local juvenile courts and follow expectations accordingly.

Though not true in all situations, there are instances in which truancy is wielded as a threat and a hammer to get students and parents to comply. More recently, the threat of truancy has been used to persuade parents to enroll. These practices may disproportionately impact students from families with low-incomes and communities of color. OSPI's addition of non-truancy remote learning absence, providing a temporary hiatus of unexcused absences, and specifying additional reasons for excused absences, are all for the purpose of lessening disproportionate impacts associated with the truancy process.

## **19. What is required as part of a tiered response system?**

*(Updated September 22, 2020.)* School districts must develop a tiered response system for all absences ([WAC 392-401A-045](#)), regardless of their type (excused, unexcused, or non-truancy remote). The tiered system is intended to address barriers to student participation and engagement in learning during the COVID epidemic.

Tiered response systems must include:

- Monitoring daily attendance data for all absences
- A process to contact families and verify current contact information that includes multiple attempts and modalities in the parent's or caregivers home language
- Daily notification of absences to parents, preferably in their preferred method (email, text, phone)
- A process for outreach to determine student needs
- Differentiated supports that address the barriers to attendance and participation that includes universal supports for all students and tiered interventions for students at-risk of and experiencing chronic absence; and

See the emergency rule [Chapter 392-401A WAC](#) for complete details.

It is important for this communication with families to occur in a culturally responsive manner.

## 20. What strategies and resources does OSPI recommend for developing a tiered response system for all absences?

School districts should consider reviewing their existing strategies implemented under the compulsory attendance laws ([Chapter 28A.225 RCW](#)), which include:

- Hold parent conferences
- Administer an assessment to identify barriers to attendance
- Provide best practice interventions
- Refer the student to a community truancy board
- File a truancy petition
- Convene the IEP or 504 team

### Additional Resources

- [Attendance Playbook: Smart Solutions for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism in the COVID Era](#) (FutureEd)
- [Guide to Using the Attendance Playbook: Smart Strategies for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism in the COVID Era](#) (Attendance Works)
- [Improving Attendance in a Remote Learning Environment](#) (Center on PBIS)
- [Multi-Tiered System for Attendance Resources](#) (Attendance Works)
- [Remote Learning Tiered Engagement Tool – Sample](#) (High Desert ESD, Oregon)
- [Family Connections Tool](#) (High Desert, ESD)

Please visit the [OSPI Attendance Webpage](#) for additional resources on effective strategies to increase student attendance and participation.

## 21. If a student is absent because they need an accommodation due to a disability (IEP or 504), can that absence be excused?

Yes. Students with a 504 plan or IEP can be marked as an excused absence in accordance with the rules. If, however, a student with a 504 plan or IEP is in contact with their teacher or other district official regarding their potential need for an accommodation, they may not need to be given an excused absence. Educators should be willing to engage with families and the members of the student's IEP and/or 504 teams to discuss how the student has a need for an accommodation that is not yet met. Districts may need to develop a plan where teachers can retroactively determine if students participated in asynchronous activities with accommodations. OSPI supports this flexibility and value for equitable access to learning.

## 22. How will this emergency rule impact absence data reporting to CEDARS?

School districts will continue to report all absences to CEDARS, including the temporary "non-truancy remote" absence. When reporting this temporary absence in CEDARS, districts will report it as "excused." In their local student information systems, districts are encouraged to create a separate category to capture the "non-truancy remote learning" absence to ensure that these absences are not communicated as excused or unexcused to parents and students.



Districts continue to be required under [RCW 28A.225.020](#) to determine when a student misses a majority of their school day.

The CEDARS manual and reporting guidance will be updated as soon as possible and will be available [on the OSPI CEDARS webpage](#).

### 23. How long will the emergency rule be in effect?

The emergency rule will be in place temporarily for four months. OSPI intends to engage in rulemaking to make the rule permanent for the remainder of the school year.

### 24. What is chronic absence?

Chronic absence is when a student misses 10% or more of their school days, for any reason, whether the absence is excused, unexcused or non-truancy remote learning. This amounts to two days a month. Washington measures student's [regular attendance](#) as an element of the accountability system, the Washington School Improvement Framework, in alignment with the definition of chronic absence.

## REVISION LOG

All substantive changes to the guidance since it was published on August 26, 2020 are included in the table below.

| Page(s) Revised | Topic                                   | Description   | Date               |
|-----------------|---|---|--------------------|
| Page 1          | Guiding Principles                      | Added additional guiding principles regarding absences as a signal for support and families and students need flexibility at this time.     | September 22, 2020 |
| Page 2          | Ways to demonstrate remote attendance   | Added additional ways a student can demonstrate participation in remote settings.   | September 22, 2020 |
| Page 3          | Attendance outside of school hours      | Added detailed recommendation that districts provide ways to access instruction outside of live sessions.                                   | September 22, 2020 |
| Page 3          | Attendance on weekend for previous week | Added language that confirms districts have flexibility to allow students to demonstrate attendance over the weekend for the previous week. | September 22, 2020 |
| Page 3          | Asynchronous options                    | Added language recommending that districts provide multiple ways of asynchronous participation and highlights the need for flexibility.     | September 22, 2020 |

| <b>Page(s)<br/>Revised</b> | <b>Topic</b>  | <b>Description</b>  | <b>Date</b>        |
|----------------------------|---|---|--------------------|
| Page 4                     | Tardies   | Added language clarifying districts have flexibility to define and monitor tardies, however caution is advised given unique circumstances of remote learning.   | September 22, 2020 |
| Page 4                     | Excused absences                                    | Added clarification that family obligations include caring for siblings and additional guidance on employment of minors.  | September 22, 2020 |
| Page 5                     | Apportionment                                       | Updated to reference OSPI Enrollment Report Handbook for latest guidance. Added language to recommend that districts reach out to families who have not participated prior to count day.                      | September 22, 2020 |
| Page 5                     | Apportionment                                       | Added language for clarity and removed reference to September count day.  | September 22, 2020 |
| Page 6                     | Non-truancy remote learning absence                 | Added language to clarify that no truancy petitions will be filed based on remote learning absences through October 4.  | September 22, 2020 |
| Page 6                     | Non-truancy remote learning absence & apportionment | Removes reference to September count day.   | September 22, 2020 |
| Page 6                     | Compulsory attendance requirements                  | Added language that clarifies the intent of changes to the rule were to lessen the punitive use of truancy and reduce the disproportionate impact on students of color and students from low-income families. | September 22, 2020 |
| Page 7                     | Tiered response to absence                          | Added language to clarify that communication to families should be culturally responsive and in multiple methods.   | September 22, 2020 |