

Attendance Issue for Consideration at High Schools

Guiding Principles

- Establishing consistent attendance processes across the school is an important part of promoting equity in schools' work with students and families around attendance and truancy.
- Accurate, timely communication about attendance is essential if schools are to comply with state laws regarding attendance and truancy and to establish solid student safety and school emergency procedures.
- Accurate, timely communication about attendance can help schools, students, and families in their work together to improve student attendance.
- Well-designed attendance processes should help emphasize the importance of regular attendance, provide incentive for students to attend as much as possible, and provide effective interventions and supports that improve individual and school wide attendance.

ISSUE: The process schools use for documenting students' late arrival to class may be inconsistent across schools and classrooms and may differ considerably from processes across the state. For example, teachers in 4j high schools may be reporting a student as absent if the student is more than 10 minutes late, sometimes at the discretion of the individual teacher.

Impact: Families, staff, and data teams may be confused about whether students were actually in attendance. Schools may take action to provide interventions and consequences based on misinformation. Inaccurate attendance records may hamper efforts to ensure student safety in an emergency. Data reported to the state may misrepresent student attendance. Some students may decide to skip class entirely rather than attend since they know they will be counted absent.

Key Question: How can schools document tardies and absences in a way that

- 1) accurately reflects student actual attendance for staff, data teams, and families?
- 2) provides students incentive to arrive to class on time?
- 3) provides students incentive to attend class even if they are late?
- 4) does not misrepresent our attendance data for state data reporting?
- 5) does not substantially increase staff workload?

Recommendation for Attendance Record-keeping from the HS Rules and Protocols Team

Students who arrive late, but who are present during the class period should be recorded as late (excused or unexcused, as appropriate) and appropriate interventions or consequences should be provided. Students who arrive late to class repeatedly or who are excessively late may be referred to school administration. Students should not be marked absent for reasons other than nonattendance.

Key questions revisited:

How can schools document tardies and absences in a way that

1) accurately reflects student actual attendance for staff, data teams, and families?

The proposed change ensures that students who attend all or some of the class period will be recorded as present rather than absent. Because very few students arrive closer to the end of a class period than the beginning, we anticipate that the change will provide a more accurate overall accounting of student attendance than previous practice provided.

2) provides students incentive to arrive to class on time?

Just as before, schools will need to have policies in place to encourage punctuality and to deal with tardies. In and of itself, the previous practice of marking students absent after ten minutes did not address students who arrive a few minutes late. The HS Rules and Protocols committee is drafting a tardy policy that schools may use as a guideline.

3) provides students incentive to attend class even if they are late?

The proposed change would ensure that students still have incentive to attend, even if they are over ten minutes late.

4) does not misrepresent our attendance data for state data reporting?

Again, we anticipate that the change will provide a more accurate overall accounting of student attendance.

5) does not substantially increase staff workload?

In the event that a student arrives after the teacher has taken attendance, the teacher will need to adjust the attendance record. Although this may require an additional step on occasion, it is considered preferable to the previous practice of indicating permanently that a student was not present when he/she actually was present.

Additional Considerations

As always, school personnel and families must work together to emphasize the importance of punctuality and attendance and to try to identify and resolve issues that may lead to absenteeism.

Teachers can emphasize the importance of punctuality and attendance by 1) starting class promptly, 2) providing a bell-ringer or warm-up activity, 3) building positive relationships with students, and 4) engaging students for the entire class period.

If our goal is to make students feel welcome and valued, teachers should refrain from practices that send the opposite message (e.g. locking the classroom door, providing in-class consequences that delay a student's engagement in class activities, immediately sending a late student to the office)

Schools can provide support by:

- Communicating with students and families about the importance of regular attendance and punctuality
- Creating a consistent understanding of excused vs. unexcused tardies
- Having a process for students to excuse a late arrival
- Providing recommendations for how teachers will handle tardies
- Establishing a process for lunch detention or other school intervention
- Creating a process to determine if interventions are effective
- Discussing what impact, if any, tardies should have on grading policies in light of proficiency-based grading initiatives.