

# Westgate Elementary Attendance and Tardiness Policy

**The Compulsory Attendance Law of the State of Washington** demands a great deal of accountability from schools and parents on students attendance. This legal code is a section of what is known as the "Becca Bill", named after the case of a runaway teen. The law helps schools achieve the goal of improved school attendance and the reduction of unexcused absences and tardies.

The law does not require 6 or 7 year old children to be enrolled in school, but, if they are enrolled, the child's parent must ensure that the child attends the school for the full time the school is in session.

## **Excused Absences and Tardies**

Under district policy, an excused absence or tardy is one in which the parent, by phone call and a note, presents a reason for non-attendance. Notification must be within two school days of the child's return to school. The acceptable reasons for an excused absences or tardy include:

1. Illness
2. Medical, dental, or other appointment which cannot be scheduled before or after school
3. Recognized religious observance
4. Family emergency or event such as a funeral or birth
5. A prearranged absence or tardy approved in advance by the principal.

These criteria guide schools in determining what is an excusable absence or tardy. **It is important to note that a parent simply excusing a child's absence or tardy does not make it "excused" under district policy and state law.** Not included are absences or tardies for reasons which might be detrimental to student learning.

## **Action Steps for Unexcused Absences**

Some of the basic provisions aimed at curbing unexcused absences include:

1. After one unexcused absence, the principal is required to inform parents of the potential consequences or additional unexcused absences, including conference with the principal.
2. After the second unexcused absence within any month, a parent conference must be scheduled. The intent is to find possible solutions to attendance problems. The school must make efforts to help a student improve attendance, such as adjustments in programs, remedial instruction, etc.
3. Not later than the fifth unexcused absence in a month, an agreement with the student and parent must be created that establishes school attendance requirements.
4. Not later than the seventh unexcused absence in a single month, the district is required to petition the courts to intervene. Parents who allow their children to be absent without excuse can be found liable for a \$25 fine for each absence.
5. Similarly, if there are ten unexcused absences in a school year, the district is also required to petition the courts.

To comply with this law, the Westgate office tracks whether parent contact has been made excusing their child's absences. **Parents can help by calling the school to report an absence or tardy on the morning it occurs, and providing a written note within two days of a child's return to school.**

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## School Policy and State Truancy Law Also Targets Tardiness

### Tardiness hurts learning.

Frequent tardiness of even a few minutes clearly interferes with an individual student's performance. By interrupting the class, it also disrupts other students as well. Students who are tardy without parental excuse will be required to make up class time at their recesses. Students who take advantage of our school's breakfast program will be allowed to bring their meals to the classroom so they will not be late.

To be "excused", a tardy must meet the same general criteria as an excused absence (see previous section, "Excused Absences and Tardies"). **Again, it is important to note that a parent simply excusing a child's tardy does not make it "excused" under district policy and state law.** Not included are tardies for reasons which might be detrimental to student learning. Tardiness clearly due to circumstances beyond a parent or student's control (such as a late bus) will be excused.

### Action Steps for Frequent Tardiness

If there is a frequent pattern of unexcused tardies, Westgate will contact parents as follows:

1. After two unexcused tardies in a single month, a parent conference will be scheduled or conducted by phone. The intent is to find possible solutions to tardiness problems, and communicate consequences of continued tardiness.
2. After four unexcused tardies in a single month, or the seventh unexcused tardy in a school year, another parent conference will be called. The objective will be an agreement aimed at improving punctuality.
3. After a second parent conference has been attempted, and a pattern of frequent unexcused tardies continues (four unexcused tardies in a single month, or the tenth unexcused tardy in a school year), a truancy petition to the courts can be filed (see previous section, "Action Steps for Unexcused Absences").

Reducing tardiness helps teachers get the morning's learning activities underway for all students without interruptions or having to spend time "catching up" late arrivals.

### How Parents Can Help

1. **A phone call to the school office on the morning of an absence or tardy is greatly appreciated! (425-670-7470 option 1-attendance)** The attendance line is on 24-hours a day.
2. Verification of student absences or tardies with a written note helps us check on truancy and communicable disease trends. **Please send a note explaining your child's absence or tardy when he/she returns to school.** The note must be within two days of the absence or tardy, and should include the date or dates of absence or tardy, reason, and parent/guardian signature.
3. Please keep your child home if he/she has had a fever in the last 24 hours. We appreciate your child's attendance when healthy.
4. If a child has a doctor, dental, or other appointment that requires early dismissal, please send a note with the child the morning of the appointment. Pick up your child by stopping in at the Westgate office.
5. **Help your child arrive at the recommended arrival time of 8:20 am.** Students arriving at school after **8:30 am** must check in at the Westgate office before going to class.