

Walden Academy Policy and Procedure Manual

Chapter 5000, Students

Section 5010, Attendance Policy

Date: Board Approved 10/13/2013

Responsible Department: School Director

Source Document: n/a

Consistent school attendance is critical to charter school success. Being present for classroom instructional time is essential for students to reach their goals and achieve their dreams. Chronic absenteeism has been linked to an increased likelihood of poor academic performance, disengagement from school and behavior problems. It is the intent of the Board to ensure that students attend school every day on time.

Excused Absences for Classroom Based Attendance

Absence from school shall be excused only for health reasons, family emergencies and justifiable personal reasons, as permitted by law or Board policy.

A student's absence shall be excused for the following reasons:

1. Personal illness;
2. Quarantine under the direction of a county or city health officer;
3. Medical, dental, optometric, or chiropractic appointments;
4. Attendance at funeral services for a member of the immediate family:
 - a. Excused absence in this instance shall be limited to one day if the service is conducted in California or three days if the service is conducted out of state.
 - b. "Immediate family" shall be defined as mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, spouse, son/son-in-law, daughter/daughter-in-law, brother, sister or any relative living in the student's immediate household.
5. Participation in religious instruction or exercises.

In addition, a student's absence shall be excused for justifiable personal reasons such as:

1. Appearance in court;
2. Attendance at a funeral;
3. Observation of a holiday or ceremony of his/her religion;
4. Attendance at religious retreats.
5. Other extenuating circumstances.

Method of Verification

When students who have been absent return to school, they must present a satisfactory explanation verifying the reason for the absence. The following methods may be used to verify student absences:

1. Written note from parent/guardian, parent representative;
2. Conversation, in person or by telephone, between the verifying employee and the student's parent/guardian or parent representative. The employee shall subsequently record the following:
 - a. Name of student;
 - b. Name of parent/guardian or parent representative;
 - c. Name of verifying employee;
 - d. Date or dates of absence; and
 - e. Reason for absence.

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3. Visit to the student's home by the verifying employee, or any other reasonable method, which establishes the fact that the student was absent for the reasons stated. A written recording shall be made, including information outlined above.

4. Healthcare provider verification

- a. When excusing students for confidential medical services or verifying such appointments, School staff shall not ask the purpose of such appointments but may contact a medical office to confirm the time of the appointment.
- b. A healthcare provider's note of illness will be accepted for any reported absence. When a student has had 14 absences in the school year for illness verified by methods listed in #1-#3 above without a healthcare provider's note, any further absences for illness must be verified by a healthcare provider.
- c. After 5 consecutive days of missed school due to illness, a Healthcare Provider's note is required.

Insofar as class participation is an integral part of students' learning experiences, parents/guardians and students shall be encouraged to schedule medical appointments during non-school hours. Students in grades K-8 should not be absent from school without their parents/guardians' knowledge or consent except in cases of medical emergency. Student absence for religious instruction or participation in religious exercises away from school property may be considered excused subject to administrative regulations and law.

First Day of School Policy

Students who are not in attendance due to an unexcused absence by the fifth day of school will be disenrolled from the school roster, as it will be assumed that the student has chosen another school option. The School will attempt to reach the Parent/Guardian on a daily basis for each of the first five days to determine whether the student has an excused absence. If the student has a basis for an excused absence, parents must notify the school of the absence and provide documentation.

Unexcused Absences/Truancy for Classroom Based Attendance

Students shall be classified as truant if absent from school without a valid excuse three full days in one school year, or tardy or absent for more than any 30-minute period during the school day without a valid excuse on three occasions in one school year, or any combination thereof. Such students shall be reported to the Director or designee.

The Director, or designee, shall implement positive steps to reduce truancy, including working with the family in an attempt to resolve the attendance problem. A student's progress and learning may be affected by excessive unexcused absences. In addition, the School is fiscally dependent on student attendance and is negatively impacted by excessive unexcused absences. If all attempts to resolve the student's attendance problem are unsuccessful, the School will implement the processes described below.

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Process for upholding the Attendance Policy

First Day of School Policy:

1. Students who are not in attendance on the first day of school will be contacted by phone to ensure their intent to enroll.
2. Students who have indicated their intent to enroll, but have not attended by the third day will receive a letter indicating the student will be disenrolled after the fifth day of school if the student has not attended school without valid excuse.
3. Students who have indicated their intent to enroll, but have not attended by the fifth day will receive a phone call reiterating the content of the letter.
4. Students who have not attended by the sixth day, and do not have an excused absence as defined above for not being in attendance will be disenrolled from the roster.
5. The School will use the contact information provided by the Parent/Guardian in the registration packet.
6. The District of Residence will be notified of the Student's failure to attend School and the disenrollment.

Truancy:

1. Each of the first two (2) unexcused absences and tardies (defined here as 30 minutes or longer) will result in a call home to the Parent/Guardian by the Office Manager.
2. Upon reaching three (3) unexcused absences or tardies in a school year, parent/guardian will receive a "Truancy Notification" letter from the School. This letter must be signed by the parent/guardian and returned to the school.
3. Upon reaching four (4) unexcused absences or tardies, a call will be made to parent/guardian by the Director or designee to discuss truancy and improving student attendance. The parent/guardian will receive a second "Truancy Notification" letter from the School.
4. Upon reaching five (5) or more unexcused absences, the Parent/Guardian will receive a third "Truancy Notification" letter and will be required to meet with the School Attendance Review Team ("SART"). The SART Team may include a Director(s), Board member, classroom teacher, and support staff such as psychologist and/or counselor .
5. The School Attendance Review Team will discuss the absence problem with the Parent/Guardian to work on solutions, develop strategies, discuss appropriate support services for the student and his/her family, and establish a plan to resolve the attendance issue.
 - a. The SART shall direct the Parent/Guardian that no further unexcused absences or tardies can be tolerated.
 - b. The SART will identify the corrective actions required in the future and shall have the authority to require one or more of the following consequences (in no particular order):
 - i. Student retention
 - ii. School counseling

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- iii. Loss of field trip privileges
 - iv. Loss of school event privileges
 - v. Required remediation plan as set by the SART
 - vi. Parent/guardian to attend school with the child for one day
 - vii. Notification to the District Attorney
 - c. The SART may refer the student to the School's independent study program or discuss other school placement options.
 - d. Notice of action recommended by the SART will be provided in writing to the Parent/Guardian.
6. The School will use the contact information provided by the Parent/Guardian in the registration packet.
7. If student is absent five or more consecutive days without valid excuse and parent/guardian cannot be reached at the number or address provided in the registration packet, student will be deemed to have voluntarily disenrolled and notification of the disenrollment will be sent to the district of residence.

Tardies Thirty Minutes or Less

When a student is tardy (defined here as 30 minutes or less) three times within one month, the teacher will contact the Parent/Guardian to discuss the problem and try to resolve it. If the problem persists, the Parent/Guardian will receive a letter from the School outlining the dates the student was tardy, the problems associated with tardiness, and a request to remedy the problem. If the problem continues to persist, the Parent/Guardian will be asked to attend a meeting with the Director to determine what steps might be necessary to resolve the problem.

Referral to County District Attorney

It is the School's intent to identify and remove all barriers to the student's success and will explore every possible option to address student attendance issues with the family. If a child's attendance does not improve after a SART meeting, or if the parents fail to attend a required SART meeting, the parents and the child may be referred to the District Attorney's office for prosecution through the court system. Students 12 years of age and older may be referred to the juvenile court for adjudication.

These policies will be enforced fairly, uniformly, and consistently without regard to any protected classification, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, disability, or sexual orientation.

Short-term Independent Study Program

The parent/guardian may enroll the student into the short-term independent study program for an expected absence longer than two days. Participation in this program requires the following:

- Parent/Guardian must obtain the approval of the Director or designee and the student's teacher.

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- Students will be allowed a maximum of twenty (20) days.
- Student and Parent/Guardian must complete and sign an Independent Study Contract.
- Student must meet with the teacher to review work.
- Student must complete and return all assignments within one week of returning to school to receive credit for short-term independent study.

Long-term Independent Study Program

A student's continued enrollment at Walden is based on keeping scheduled appointments as well as the hours of work completed. It is expected that students will complete 20- 30 hours of work each week. If a student does not complete his/her assignments or meet regularly with the teacher as expected, the following steps will be taken:

1. **Verbal Warning** – The first time that the student is tardy or has not completed an assignment, the teacher will warn the student that this is not acceptable.
2. **First Warning Letter** – If the student misses a meeting, continues to be tardy, or continues to fail to complete work, the teacher will complete a warning letter that will be mailed to the student's home. At this point, the parent/guardian is also expected to attend the student's next supervisory meeting.
3. **Second Letter and SST Meeting** – If the student misses a second meeting with the teacher, is tardy to the meetings, or again fails to complete work, the teacher will complete a SST meeting letter. The letter will be mailed and include the date and time of the meeting. The parent/guardian is needs to attend the meeting; the supervisory teacher, all subject area teachers, the school counselor, and the director will also attend. If at the meeting the student decides to continue enrollment, the SST attendees will draw up and sign a probationary contract. The details of the contract and the effective time period (from two weeks to one semester) are left to the discretion of the administrator.
5. **Failure to Meet for SST** – If the parent/guardian or student fails to attend the SST meeting a final attempt will be made to contact the student and parent(s) to determine the reason for missing the meeting. The administrator will determine whether the student will be disenrolled based on that contact or if another meeting time will be scheduled.
6. **Drop Letter** – If a student is not meeting the probationary contract requirements, the teacher will notify the administrator, who will have a disenrollment letter mailed to the student's home. Also, if a student and parent(s) fail to respond to a final contact letter within three days, a disenrollment letter will be mailed to the student's home. The drop letter will indicate that the student has been dropped from Walden Academy and should enroll at their home school or the district continuation school.