STUDENTS

Attendance and Excuses

The following procedures and regulation have been adopted for uniform application in all Prince William County Public Schools, in accordance with Policy 720, “Attendance,” Policy 724, “Student Absences, Excuses, and Tardies,” and those provisions of Virginia law governing the compulsory education of students.

I. Legal Requirements for Student Attendance

A. Virginia law provides that all children of compulsory attendance age are expected to attend school each day that school is in session, unless otherwise excused under School Board policy, regulation, and the compulsory attendance laws.

B. As detailed in Sections III and IV of this regulation, it is the responsibility of parents/guardians (defined to also include other persons having control or charge of a student) to ensure that their children attend school regularly. Students who are 18 or older are responsible for their own school attendance. Married students are subject to the same attendance rules and regulations as other students, including the requirement that they attend school within the ages defined by law.

C. As set forth in Sections IV-VI of this regulation, schools are required by law to take certain measures to ensure regular school attendance by students.

D. Students who fail to attend school despite the measures taken by the school to ensure their attendance, and parents/guardians who do not comply with their responsibility to ensure such attendance, may be subject to legal proceedings in the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, as outlined in Sections V and VI of this regulation.

II. Classification/Definition of Truancy, Absences, and Tardies

Truancy means the act of accruing one or more unexcused absences. Absences shall be classified as either excused or unexcused, as provided below.

A. Excused Absences

Absences shall be recorded as excused on the basis of verified contact with the parent/guardian only for the following reasons:
1. Personal illness of the student. A written note signed by the student’s medical provider certifying that the student has a bona fide medical reason for his/her absence, may be required by the school principal or his/her designee after a student has accrued 10 or more absences for the school year, and for every additional absence thereafter.

2. Medical and dental examination and/or treatment for the student when such appointments cannot be scheduled other than during school hours.

3. Death in the student’s immediate family (defined as father, mother, stepfather, stepmother, brother, sister, stepbrother or stepsister, spouse, son, daughter, or grandparent), not to exceed five consecutive days. Requests exceeding five consecutive days shall be referred to the Office of Student Services for approval.

4. Religious, faith, or commemorative observances. School absences for the purpose of participating in these observances will not be counted against perfect attendance, nor shall the student be deprived of any other award or the eligibility to compete for any award. Students will be allowed to make up any missed work and complete any missed assessments. Students will not be required to take missed assessments or turn in missed work the day after the absence for religious, faith, or commemorative observances. Teachers will work with students on a case-by-case basis to ensure that timely access is granted to missed assessments. As a calendar supplement and resource, a listing of religious, faith, and commemorative observances potentially celebrated by students will be made accessible on school webpages and the School Division website.

5. Emergency conditions in the student’s home which require temporary help from the student in caring for sick or injured members of the student’s immediate family. However, repeated use of this excuse, or requests for absences for more than five consecutive days for such purposes, shall be referred to the Office of Student Services for approval. Students will not be excused for such reasons more than 10 cumulative days during the school year without the approval of the Office of Student Services.
6. Parents/guardians retain the option of not permitting their child to attend school in circumstances when, in the judgment of the parent/guardian, the roads or walkways in their neighborhood are too hazardous to use. The parent/guardian shall give the school prior notice of such absence by electronic or telephone communication. In such cases, the student shall be given an excused absence, but shall be required to make up the work missed.

7. Seniors shall be excused for the purpose of college admission visitations or to apply for post-graduation jobs. In each instance, prior approval of the principal or his/her designee shall be obtained by the student.

8. Court appearance of a student who has been served with a subpoena, summons, or court order requiring his/her attendance in court or at a deposition, or in response to the filing of criminal charges against the student. A copy of the document requiring the student’s appearance in court must be provided to the principal or his/her designee in advance of the absence.

9. Students may be granted up to five days excused absence for the purpose of visiting with a parent/guardian who has been called to active duty, is on leave from this duty, or has immediately returned from deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting. The student must satisfy the requirements for an excused preapproved absence as set forth below.

10. Preapproved absences are discouraged and will only be granted on a case-by-case basis by the principal or his/her designee. We encourage family trips to be scheduled during school holidays and over summer break. Absences for family trips will not be excused unless accompanied by extraordinary circumstances. A determination of whether extraordinary circumstances exist lies in the discretion of the principal, in collaboration with the Office of Student Services. Preapproved absences which become excessive in length may result in the absences being marked unexcused and a referral made to the attendance officer for compliance with the compulsory education laws. Preapproved absences that are extended by
the student/parent/guardian beyond 15 school days will result in the withdrawal of the student from school in accordance with Virginia Department of Education regulation. In order for any preapproved absences to be classified as excused, the principal will consider the following:

a. The principal/designee must be notified in writing of the request for preapproval, of the reason for the absence, and the duration of the absence within a reasonable time prior to the absence;
b. Grades; and
c. Attendance records.

Due to the varied demands on teachers for make-up work, teachers shall have discretion to determine the type/amount of work and when students shall make up work for preapproved absences.

11. Students experiencing homelessness, as defined in Regulation 718-1, “Students Experiencing Homelessness,” who are awaiting processing of a transportation request shall be considered excused. Parent notification through a written request and confirmation of that request from the McKinney-Vento liaison in the Office of Student Services is required for documentation.

12. Out-of-school suspension. When a school administrator places a student on out-of-school suspension, the absence from school shall be classified as excused.

B. Unexcused Absences

1. The following shall be classified as unexcused absences:
   a. All-day truancy;
   b. Class truancy;
   c. Missing a ride, a bus, or car trouble;
   d. Prearranged absences without proper prior notification or without justification and prior approval; and
   e. Failure to timely produce an appropriate explanation for an absence or requested documentation.
2. Justification of Absences. A written statement signed by the parent/guardian or electronic communication from the parent/guardian which provides the reason for the absence is the preferred method of verifying a justifiable absence. Alternate means of verification may include telephone or other electronic contact with the parent/guardian, parent/guardian conference with the principal or designee, a written certification signed by the student’s medical provider, or such other methods as are deemed adequate by the principal. (School staff shall preserve all verification of absences and documentation of parental contacts regarding attendance for five years, as required for compliance with Virginia’s record retention and compulsory attendance laws.)

3. All explanations of absences must be received by the school no later than the third day after the absence, and any changes made, as necessary, in the student information system. Failure to produce an appropriate explanation for an unverified absence by the third day shall result in an unexcused classification (UAB), unless the explanation of absence has been accepted by the principal by that time.

4. A student whose absence is unexcused is still expected to make up all missed assignments and assessments. Parents/guardians should become aware of the school’s guidelines for turning in late or missing assignments. These assignments must be completed within the timeframe established by the school.

C. Tardies

1. Tardies to school shall be excused for the following reasons:
   a. All reasons listed above in Section II (A) of this regulation;
   b. Emergency situations arising from unusual weather conditions; and
   c. All tardies resulting from late buses shall be excused and shall be recorded separately from tardies for other reasons (BTY).

2. In schools where students make class changes during the day, tardies to class shall be handled by the school administration according to school procedures.
3. Students may be suspended or expelled from attendance at school for sufficient cause. However, Virginia law prohibits suspensions based only on instances of truancy.

D. In unusual circumstances, i.e., pandemic, the Superintendent may change the classification of absences and tardies.

III. Parental Accountability

As required by the Virginia Code and the Prince William County Public Schools “Code of Behavior,” each parent of a student enrolled in a public school has a duty to assist the school in enforcing compulsory school attendance, and if required, to meet with the principal or his/her designee to ensure the student’s compliance with the compulsory school attendance, to discuss improvement of the student’s school attendance and to develop a plan to resolve the student’s non-attendance. Failure to do so can result in the filing of a complaint against the parents/guardians with the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, as provided at Virginia Code §§ 22.1-258 and 22.1-262.

IV. School Intervention and Responsibilities - Notification of Absences, Conferences, and Related Documentation

A. Recordation of Attendance by Teachers

1. Teachers are required by Virginia Code § 22.1-259 to maintain an accurate daily record of the attendance of each student in their classrooms.

2. Homeroom teachers shall record daily in the student information system the absences of students in their classrooms. In those schools utilizing period attendance, classroom teachers shall record in the student information system for each period the absences of students in their classrooms.

3. Each school principal shall establish procedures to assure that students are accounted for during the school day. It shall be the responsibility of the teacher to follow those procedures.
B. School Notification to Parent/Guardian of Absences and Required Documentation

Whenever a student fails to report to school on a regularly scheduled school day and no indication has been received by school personnel that the student’s parent/guardian is aware of and supports the absence, school personnel or volunteers organized by the school administration for this purpose shall make a reasonable and documented effort to notify the parent/guardian by telephone, email, or any other electronic means in order to receive an explanation for the student’s absence. Schools may use non-instructional personnel for this notification.

C. The school must document in the student information system all contacts made by the school with the parent/guardian for each unexcused absence, indicating in the comments section of the student information system the reasons provided for the absence. This should be documented on the associated date’s comments field on the student’s attendance page in the student information system.

D. Initial Intervention Conference and Required Documentation:

1. Whenever a student fails to report to school for a total of five scheduled school days for the school year and no indication has been received by school personnel that the student’s parent/guardian is aware of and supports the student’s absence, and a reasonable effort to notify the parent/guardian has failed, the school principal and/or his/her designee shall make reasonable efforts to ensure that direct contact is made with the parent/guardian, either in person, by telephone, or other electronic means, in order to obtain an explanation for the student’s absence, and to explain to the parent/guardian and student the consequences of continued non-attendance. This information must be documented in the student information system.

2. As part of this Initial Intervention Conference, school staff shall develop an attendance plan with the student and the parent/guardian intended to resolve the non-attendance issues, and shall document that attendance plan
in the student information system, as “Initial Attendance Conference.” The attendance plan shall include written documentation of the reason(s) for the student’s non-attendance, and the parent/guardian and student shall be advised of the consequences of continued non-attendance. The attendance plan must also document the name of each person in attendance (including via telephone or other communication devices), the date the conference is held, a summary of what occurred, and follow-up steps.

E. Interagency Team Meeting and Required Documentation

If the student is absent for more than one additional day after the Initial Intervention Conference, and the school has not received notification that the parent/guardian is aware of and supports the absence, the principal or his/her designee shall schedule a conference with the student, parent/guardian, and school personnel. The Interagency Team Meeting must be held no later than 10 school days after the 10th unexcused absence, regardless of whether his/her parent/guardian approves of the conference. The meeting shall include the parent/guardian, student, and school personnel (which may be a representative or representatives from the multi-disciplinary team) and may include community service providers and other school personnel familiar with the student who can address any academic, social, emotional, and familial issues to improve school attendance. The attendance officer should participate in the meeting, if available to attend. Staff shall document the conference in the student information system as the Interagency Team Meeting. The staff present shall review the Absences Intervention Plan, developed during the Initial Intervention Conference with the student and parent/guardian to resolve issues related to the student’s non-attendance, and shall document their efforts in the student information system as “Attendance-Interagency Team Meeting.” If the student/parent/guardian fails or refuses to attend the Interagency Team Meeting, this should also be noted in the student information system. The names of the individuals in attendance at the conference (including via telephone or other communication devices), the date the conference is held, a summary of what occurred, and follow-up steps must be documented in student information system in the Interagency Team Meeting summary.

V. Attendance Officer Duties and Actions

The conference team shall monitor the student’s attendance and may meet again as necessary to address concerns and plan additional interventions if attendance does not improve. In circumstances in which the parent is intentionally noncompliant with
compulsory attendance requirements, the principal or his/her designee shall make a referral to the attendance officer. The attendance officer shall note the date of receipt of such documentation in the student information system, acknowledging the transfer of the compulsory attendance process for the school to the attendance officer.

The attendance officer shall schedule a conference with the student and his/her parent/guardian within 10 school days of receiving the referral to address attendance concerns and to make the parent/guardian aware of court action designed to compel compliance with compulsory attendance law.

VI. Court Action to Compel Attendance

A. After the attendance officer has conferenced with the student and his/her parent/guardian and the student incurs one or more unexcused absence(s) without indication to school personnel that the parent/guardian is aware of and supports the absence, or upon the failure of the parent/guardian to comply with the attendance laws by inducing the child’s absence or failing to meet with the principal, the principal’s designee, the Interagency Team, or the attendance officer, then the attendance officer, in consultation with the principal and or his/her designee, shall enforce the provisions of the compulsory attendance laws by either or both of the following:

1. Filing a petition for a Child In Need of Supervision or Services (CHINS) with the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, alleging that the student is a child in need of supervision/services as defined by Virginia Code § 16.1-278.4 or § 16.1-278.5, as authorized by Virginia Code § 22.1-258; and/or

2. Instituting proceedings against the parent/guardian in the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court pursuant to Virginia Code §16.1-241.2 and/or § 22.1-262, as authorized by Virginia Code § 22.1-258.

B. When filing a CHINS petition with the Court, the attendance officer shall provide written documentation of the school’s contacts, interventions, and meetings with the student and his/her parent/guardian, and all attendance plans and supports offered, including any plans developed by the Interagency Team. In the event that both parents have been awarded joint legal and/or physical custody of the student and the school has received the custody order, both parents shall be notified of the
filing of any petition or complaint at the last known addresses provided by the parents/guardians to the school.

C. As provided by Virginia Code § 22.1-258, attendance officers and other school personnel, or volunteers organized by the school administration for the purpose of seeking compliance with the compulsory attendance laws, are immune from any civil or criminal liability in connection with the notice to parents/guardians of a student’s absence or failure to give such notice as required by law and this regulation.

VII. Court May Suspend Driver’s License Issued to Students Under Age 18

In addition to such other remedies as are available to the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court arising out of a student’s violation of the compulsory attendance laws, the Court has authority under Virginia Code § 46.2-334 to suspend the driver’s license of a student less than 18 years old when the student has had 10 or more unexcused absences from school on consecutive school days, or when the student has been determined by the Court to be a Child In Need of Supervision.

VIII. Reports and Investigation of Children Not Enrolled

A. Within 10 days after the opening of school, each principal or his/her designee shall report to the attendance officer, as designee of the Superintendent:

1. The name, age, and grade of each student enrolled in the school and the name and last-known address of the student’s parent/guardian; and

2. To the best of the principal’s information, the name of each child subject to the compulsory attendance laws, who is enrolled in school but has not attended school since the beginning of the school year, and the name and last-known address of the parent/guardian. Prior to submitting a report to the attendance officer, the school must attempt to make contact with the student’s family and document any reasons for the student’s non-attendance (i.e., family out of country or has moved, unable to contact parents/guardians using all numbers in the student information system, etc.).

B. Each school year, on dates determined by the Virginia Department of Education, the Office of Student Services shall report to the Superintendent the number of attendance conferences that were required to be held and attendance plans that were required to be developed. This report also includes the reasons that these
conferences were held or not held. Schools are required to work with the Office of Student Services to ensure that the data reported is accurate before submission to Virginia’s Superintendent of Public Instruction.

C. Attendance Officer Duties for Children Not Enrolled

The attendance officer shall review the reports submitted by the principal and shall, within five days of receiving all reports submitted, make a list of the names of children who are not attending any school and who are not exempt from school attendance.

The attendance officer shall investigate all cases of non-enrollment or non-attendance and, when no valid reason is found, notify the parent/guardian or other person having control of the child to require the attendance of the child within three days from the date of the notice.

The Associate Superintendent for Student Learning and Accountability (or designee) is responsible for implementing and monitoring this regulation.

This regulation and related policy shall be reviewed at least every five years and revised as needed.