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PARTICIPATION



GRADUATION

# 2023-2024 Student Attendance Manual



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2023-2024 WASD ATTENDANCE CAMPAIGN





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## OVERVIEW & PENNSYLVANIA

## COMPULSORY EDUCATION LAWS

### OVERVIEW

**T**he Williamsport Area School District is committed to working with students and parents/guardians to provide a framework that supports consistent and regular attendance for all children. We value the education of our students, recognizing the relationship between regular attendance and student achievement. We work with our families to ensure that whenever possible, their children are in attendance at school.

The purpose of this attendance manual is to provide information about the laws and regulations governing school attendance, and the procedures followed by the district to maintain compliance with these mandated policies. Through utilization of the guidelines and forms provided in this manual, the district reinforces consistent implementation of attendance procedures across all K-12 schools. These procedures help ensure students attend school on a regular basis as required by Pennsylvania Compulsory Education Laws.

### PENNSYLVANIA COMPULSORY EDUCATION LAWS

The term compulsory school age in Pennsylvania refers to the period of a child's life from the time the child enters school as a beginner (kindergarten or first grade), which may be no later than six years of age, until the age of eighteen or graduation from a high school, whichever occurs first. It is mandatory for all children of compulsory school age having a legal residence in Pennsylvania to attend a day school in which the subjects and activities prescribed by the Standards of the State Board of Education are taught in the English language, except in certain situations found in sections 1327, 1327.1, 1329, and 1330 of the Pennsylvania School Code.

All students from age 6 until age 18 are required to participate in an approved educational program. Parents or guardians are required by law to ensure that their children attend an approved educational program.

*See page 3 for a quick overview of Pennsylvania's educational laws regarding compulsory school attendance.*



Code Section	Tit. 24 §§13-1326, et seq.
Age at Which School Attendance is Required	Between 6 and 18 or at the time of the child's life that they have entered school
Exceptions to Attendance Requirements	Graduated high school; 15 and with approval from the district superintendent and the Secretary of Education or 16 with approval from district superintendent, child may enroll in private trade school set forth by the State Board of Education or State Board of Career and Technical Education; enrolled in home education program pursuant to Tit. 24 §13-1327.1 or private school; physical/mental defects rendering education impracticable; 16 and lawfully employed during the school session with a valid employment certificate (35 hours or more per week of employment); 15 and engaged in farming or domestic service with a permit approved by the school district or 14 if engaged in same having achieved highest elementary grade who hold a permit recommended by the district and approved by the Secretary of Education.
Home School Provisions	File annual notice with a notarized affidavit of various information including proposed education objectives and immunization record; evaluation by teacher or administrator; minimum course requirements at each educational level; portfolio of records and materials
Penalties on Parents for Noncompliance	Up to \$300, together with costs and upon default of payment subjected to county jail up to five days

Although the compulsory education law defines the starting age as 6 years, WASD implements these regulations as soon as a student enrolls in the school system. For example, if a student is enrolled in kindergarten at the age of 5 or 6 years old, the district will implement the attendance laws for that child. All students enrolled in the district prior to the age of 6 must abide by the attendance laws.

## ABSENCE FROM SCHOOL

Absence is defined as the nonattendance of a student on a day that school is in session. It is expected that a parent/guardian notify the school about the student's illness or family emergency with a written excuse within three (3) days of a child's return to school. Absences will be considered unlawful until an excuse is received. Excuses can be sent with your child, faxed or submitted via email to your school's attendance secretary.

### **UNLAWFUL ABSENCE (UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE) / UNEXCUSED ABSENCE (18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER)**

Parents/guardians must provide a written explanation for the absence of their student. All absences should be treated as unlawful until the school district receives a written excuse explaining the reason(s) for an absence. Parents/guardians and students should submit the written explanation within three (3) school days of the absence. If no written explanation is provided, the absence is recorded as unexcused/unlawful. Likewise, if a written explanation offers an excuse for absence that is not allowable (as outlined in Board policy no. 204 of this attendance manual), the absence will be recorded as unexcused/unlawful. If a written explanation is questionable in nature, the absence will be investigated. An absence only becomes excused when the school codes it accordingly.

When students under the age of 18 have an unexcused absence, the absence will be



**Students should miss no more than 9 days of school each year to stay engaged, successful and on track to graduation.**

*Source: Attendance Works*

counted as unlawful. As per the Pennsylvania Department of Education, all unlawful absences are considered truant.

Unexcused absences include absence from school due to parental neglect, parental consent for reasons other than those specifically excused, illegal employment, and truancy.

### **LAWFUL ABSENCE**

A lawful absence from school is broadly defined by the state. Excused absences from school at WASD include the following:

- Illness, including if a student is dismissed by designated district staff during school

hours for health-related reasons (*a doctor's note may be required after the 10th absence for the school year*)

- Quarantine
- Family emergency
- Recovery from an accident (*a doctor's note is required*)
- Required court attendance (*an excuse from the court is required*)
- Death in family (*family is defined as parent/guardian, grandparent, sibling, child, uncle, cousin or spouse*)
- Participation in a project sponsored by a state-wide or county-wide 4-H, FFA, or combined 4-H and FFA group, upon written request
- College or postsecondary institution visit (*excuse from college is required*).
- Other urgent reasons that may reasonably cause a student's absence related to homelessness and foster care
- Educational trips pre-approved by the appropriate administrator not to exceed a total of five days. The designee may approve extenuating circumstances

- Authorized school-sponsored activities that would require the completion of an SSA card
- Observance of student's religious holiday or religious instructional program (*parents provide a written request for excusal prior to the holiday or instructional program*)

The building administrator may require a doctor's certificate in situations where frequent absences are occurring and/or it appears absences are unexcused and/or unlawful. This requirement may remain in effect for the remainder of the school year.

**A maximum of ten (10) days of cumulative lawful absences verified by parental notification are permitted during a school year.** All cumulative lawful absences verified by parent note beyond ten (10) days will require an excuse from a physician. Students who are legally absent have the opportunity to make up any work missed. It is expected that students complete the work within the time frame allotted by school staff.



**Missing 10%, or about two days each month over the course of a school year, can make it harder to learn to read.**

*Source: Attendance Works*



## EDUCATIONAL TRIPS

A student may be permitted to take, with his/her parents/guardians, a total of five (5) school days. These trips are to be pre-approved and comply with program requirements as described in the Student Handbook. When an educational trip requires an absence of one day from school, an Educational Trip Request Form must be completed and given to the building administrator for prior approval.

Educational trips for the first and last ten (10) days of school and during scheduled testing times (for state-mandated assessments – PSSA, Keystone Exams; final exams) are strongly discouraged and may not be approved during these windows. The testing

calendar is available in your student's school office or on the WASD school calendar.

Educational trips will not be approved for students who are failing their subjects or have unexcused absences. Shopping trips and similar activities will not be approved as educational trips. Parents/guardians are encouraged to contact the student's building administrator for details relating to excused absences for educational trips.



## MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS

Students with an appointment to visit a doctor or dentist during school hours may be excused for the absence if a signed written request is provided by the parent/guardian prior to the event. The written request should include the name of the physician and appointment time. A note from the doctor/dentist must be given to the office upon the student's return to school. If a student does not bring a note to school before leaving for an appointment, the absence will be marked unexcused.

If an appointment becomes necessary at the last minute, the parent/guardian should contact the building to provide authorization for the student to leave school. A note from the doctor/dentist should follow the student's return to school, recognizing the three-day grace period.

Student athletes are strongly encouraged to make appointments after school hours. If



students in extracurricular activities have a doctor's appointment prior to 1:00 p.m., they must return to school before the end of the school day with a note from the doctor/dentist in order to participate in the after-school events or competitions.

## TARDINESS

Tardiness is defined as arriving late to a student's homeroom or class. Tardiness can have a significant negative impact on the learning process. Students must be in their homeroom classes by the starting time of the school. Below are the starting and ending times for the elementary schools, middle school, and high school:

- **Primary Schools** (*Cochran, Hepburn, Jackson*): 9:05 a.m. – 3:35 p.m.
- **Intermediate Schools** (*Curtin, Lycoming Valley*): 8:50 a.m. – 3:20 p.m.
- **WAMS** (*grades 7-8*): 7:45 a.m. – 2:40 p.m.
- **WAHS** (*grades 9-12*): 7:40 a.m. - 2:25 p.m.

**Attending school regularly helps children feel better about school — and themselves.** Start building this habit in preschool so they learn right away that going to school on time,

every day, is important. Eventually **good attendance will be a skill that will help them succeed in high school and college.**

*Source: Attendance Works*

## DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ABSENCES

It is the responsibility of each school to maintain accountability for student attendance. Building administrators are responsible for assuring that all regulations are followed. If there are situations that cannot be addressed at the building level, and/or issues that directly relate to district policy regarding attendance, the District Office will provide guidance.

As per Board policy no. 204, the Superintendent or designee shall annually notify students, parents/guardians and staff about the district's attendance policy by publishing it in the student handbook, parent newsletters, district web site and other efficient methods. School rules and procedures governing student attendance, absences and excusal will be shared annually with these stakeholders.

### WRITTEN NOTIFICATIONS FOR ABSENCES

WASD has implemented the following guidelines for monitoring attendance and

providing written notification to parents/guardians about their student's absences.



### Lawful Absences

- After a student has ten (10) lawful absences (excuses consist of approved lawful absences), a Doctor's Excuse Required Letter is sent to the parent/guardian. Subsequent absences that do not have an accompanying doctor's note will be considered unlawful.
- Students must be in school by 11:00AM to participate in extra-curricular activities unless medically excused.
- The written excuse is to be submitted within three (3) days of the absence.



**By 6th grade, absenteeism is one of three signs that a student may drop out of high school. By 9th grade, attendance is a better predictor of graduation rates than 8th grade test scores.**

*Source: Attendance Works*



## Unlawful Absences

Absences are treated as unlawful until the school receives a written excuse, which is to be submitted within three (3) days of the absence. After three (3) days, the absence will remain unlawful. Any period of five (5) consecutive absences or more requires a medical excuse from a physician within three (3) days of the student returning to school.

- After a student has three (3) unlawful absences, the school sends an Unlawful Absence Letter (the first official notice), which includes: dates of the three unlawful absences (or accumulated school time missed) and invitation to attend a School Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP) conference within (10) school days of the third absence.
- The SAIP meeting is to resolve the issue. All parties (student, parent/guardian, school staff, etc.) sign the SAIP at the conclusion of the meeting.
- Any additional unlawful absences (four or

more) that occur after the SAIP meeting may result in a referral to a school-based or community-based attendance improvement program or file a citation with the appropriate magisterial district judge against the student or the person in parental relations who resides in the same household as the student.

## School-Family Conference and Student Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP)

Pursuant to the BEC 24 P.S. 13-1327, schools are required to notify the parent/guardian regarding the need for a joint conference upon the third unlawful student absence. The SAIP (Section IV(A)(3) BEC 24 P.S. 13-1327) is developed cooperatively with involved stakeholders through a school-family conference.

The school-family conference engages all participants involved in the student's life to explore possible solutions to increase the student's school attendance. Maintaining

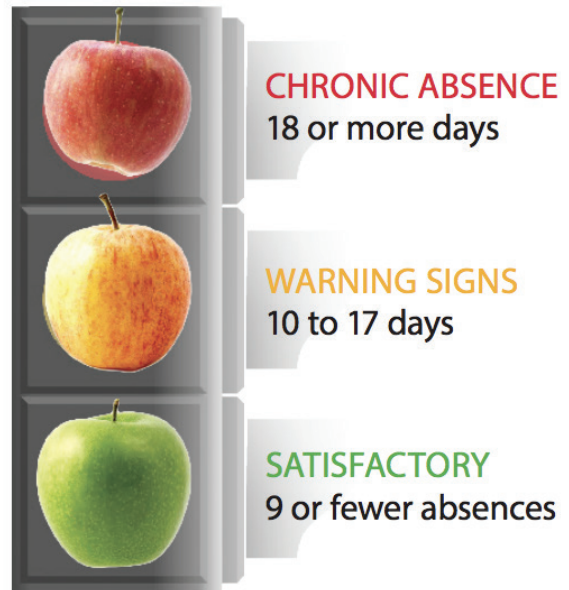
open communication between the student and adults will facilitate positive outcomes. The purpose of the school- family conference is to discuss the cause(s) of the truancy and to develop a mutually agreed upon plan to assure regular school attendance. The school-family conference provides all individuals the opportunity to identify, understand, and explore all issues contributing to the student's truant behavior.

The school will make (3) attempts to have the full team present for the SAIP development meeting. If the parent/guardian does not respond to the attempts, or if the parent/guardian refuses to attend the meeting, the school team will develop the SAIP and email it to the parent or send a copy home with the student.

The SAIP should include, but not be limited to, the following components as appropriate:

- Identification and provision of appropriate academic supports by the school and/or community organization(s)
- Identification and provision of appropriate social, emotional, physical, mental, and behavioral health support from the school and/or community organization(s)
- Identification of the school environment issues that affect the student's success and solutions to address these issues
- Explanation of the student's strengths and responsibilities related to the SAIP
- Explanation of the family's strengths and responsibilities related to the SAIP
- Clarification of method(s) used for monitoring the effectiveness of the SAIP
- Explanation of the consequences for each stakeholder if the SAIP is not fully

## When Do Absences Become a Problem?



**Note:** These numbers assume a 180-day school year.

*Source: Attendance Works*

- implemented
- Discussion of the benefits for successfully implementing the SAIP
- Follow up and report the outcome of the SAIP

The SAIP substantiates efforts made by the school, family, and other vested third parties to assist the student in addressing and resolving school attendance issues. This comprehensive system of supports and services provides documentation of the "good faith" effort between the school and the student's family should future action be required (e.g., citation to the magisterial district judge. A referral to the county children and youth agency may occur anytime following these citations.).



- School Board Policy no. 204 – *Attendance*
- Relevant Sections from the Law – PA School Code: Sections 1326, 1327, 1333 and 1354
- Educational Trip Request Form – Request for Preapproval
- Doctor’s Excuse Warning Letter (for seven lawful absences)
- Doctor’s Excuse Required Letter (10 lawful absences)
- Unlawful Absence Warning Letter (for first unlawful absence)
- Unlawful Absence Letter (for third unlawful absence - first “official” notice)
- Student Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP)



## CONTACT INFORMATION

### BUILDING PRINCIPALS

#### **Cochran Primary School**

Jim Ellis, Principal: [jellis@wasd.org](mailto:jellis@wasd.org)

Tom Bartholomew, Assist. Principal: [tbarthol@wasd.org](mailto:tbarthol@wasd.org)

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#### **Curtin Intermediate School**

David Michaels, Principal: [djmichae@wasd.org](mailto:djmichae@wasd.org)

Adam Paulhamus, Assist. Principal: [alpaulha@wasd.org](mailto:alpaulha@wasd.org)

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#### **Hepburn-Lycoming Primary School**

Michele Kunkle, Principal: [mkunkle@wasd.org](mailto:mkunkle@wasd.org)

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#### **Jackson Primary School**

John Fetterman, Principal: [jfetterm@wasd.org](mailto:jfetterm@wasd.org)

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#### **Lycoming Valley Intermediate School**

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Ryan Carper, Assist. Principal: [rcarper@wasd.org](mailto:rcarper@wasd.org)

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#### **Williamsport Area High School**

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Alicia Differ, Associate Principal: [adiffer@wasd.org](mailto:adiffer@wasd.org)

Tristin Forney, Principal: [tforney@wasd.org](mailto:tforney@wasd.org)

Kimberly Williamson, Principal: [kswillia@wasd.org](mailto:kswillia@wasd.org)

Matt Fisher, CTE Director: [mfisher@wasd.org](mailto:mfisher@wasd.org)

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#### **Williamsport Area Middle School**

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Kevin Mumbauer, Assist. Principal: [kmumbaue@wasd.org](mailto:kmumbaue@wasd.org)

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### SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

Kelsey Hope (Grades 4-6): [khope@wasd.org](mailto:khope@wasd.org)

Christie Peck (Grades 7-8): [cpeck@wasd.org](mailto:cpeck@wasd.org)

Julie Caringi (Grades 9-12): [jcaringi@wasd.org](mailto:jcaringi@wasd.org)





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