

4.7—ABSENCES

If any student's Individual Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan conflicts with this Policy, the requirements of the student's IEP or 504 Plan take precedence.

Education is more than the grades students receive in their courses. Important as that is, students' regular attendance at school, whether in person or virtually, is essential to their social and cultural development and helps prepare them to accept responsibilities they will face as an adult. Interactions with other students and participation in the instruction within the classroom enrich the learning environment and promote a continuity of instruction which results in higher student achievement.

Absences for students enrolled in virtual courses shall be determined as follows:

- A student will be assigned a demerit if the following is observed:
 - A student demonstrates no effort or engagement with their daily virtual instruction.
 - Teachers will review the progress of their virtual students each Tuesday morning. Demerits for lack of attendance will be assigned based on the student's progress and effort from the previous week.
 - If a student has done poorly on assignments from the previous week but has shown attempts to complete the tasks, no attendance demerits will be assigned.
 - If a student has done poorly on assignments but attended small group sessions online, no attendance demerits will be given.
 - If a student has completed all tasks satisfactorily but has not attended small group sessions, no demerits will be assigned.
 - A student fails to participate in core class instruction meetings done online.
 - A student fails to participate in any small group meetings done online. However, if a student shows mastery of assignments and assessments but does not attend small group meetings, no demerit will be assigned.
 - A student fails to complete any assigned assessments, whether teacher or district required.
 - If a student earns 2 demerits, then the student is marked absent for the entire week corresponding to the demerits. Principals have the discretion to change these absences at a later date, if warranted.
- For clarification, an excused absence would be an absence where communication has been made by the parent to the school to provide documentation for the student's absences (sick, doctor/dentist appointments..., etc.)
- The school will address the lack of attendance in the following manner:
 - When a student accumulates one or two demerits in one week, the virtual student's classroom teacher calls/emails to check on the student.
 - When the student accumulates three demerits, the virtual student's classroom teacher attempts another phone call home.
 - When the student accumulates five demerits, the virtual student's teacher alerts the principal and school counselor. The building principal, or their designee, calls home.
 - When the student accumulates seven demerits, district representative(s) will make a home visit. Regardless of whether the home visit personnel successfully talks to the

student's parent or guardian, a certified letter is sent to the home. Students who continue to collect attendance demerits will be dropped from virtual instruction and reinstated in physical classes. If the student does not return to physical classes by the 3rd day after the certified letter was delivered, the school will file a FINS based on failure to comply with the compulsory attendance statute.

- Building/district administrators have the authority to modify these procedures due to extenuating circumstances.
- Demerits do not have to be assigned consecutively for school action to take place. However, attendance demerits will be reset to zero at the beginning of each semester.

Excused Absences

Excused absences are those where the student was on official school business or when the absence was due to one of the following reasons, which is documented by a written statement from the parent or legal guardian to the principal or designee within five (5) days upon his/her return to school:

1. Student's illness when medically documented or approved by the principal.
2. Death or serious illness in their immediate family;
3. Observance of recognized holidays observed by the student's faith;
4. Attendance at an appointment with a government agency;
5. Attendance at a medical appointment;
6. Exceptional circumstances with prior approval of the principal;
7. Participation in an FFA, FHA, or 4-H sanctioned activity;
8. Participation in the election poll workers program for high school students.
9. Absences granted to allow a student to visit his/her parent or legal guardian who is a member of the military and been called to active duty, is on leave from active duty, or has returned from deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting. The number of additional excused absences shall be at the discretion of the Superintendent or designee.
10. Absences granted, at the Superintendent's discretion, to seventeen (17) year-old students who join the Arkansas National Guard while in eleventh grade to complete basic combat training between grades eleven (11) and (12).
11. Absences for students excluded from school by the Arkansas Department of Health during a disease outbreak because the student has an immunization waiver or whose immunizations are not up to date.
12. Parental permission for any reason not covered, above, not to exceed five (5) such days per year, provided the parent has contacted the attendance office, by note or phone call, the day the absence occurs.
 - a) For the purposes of elementary school attendance, parent permission days will be counted in the form of five (5) a.m. and five (5) p.m. absences.
 - b) No more than five (5) of either a.m. or p.m. absences will be excused as parental permission.
 - c) Absences for parental permission shall not be granted in conflict with semester examination schedules.

Students who serve as pages for a member of the General Assembly shall be considered on instructional assignment and shall not be considered absent from school for the day the student is serving as a page.

Unexcused Absences

Absences not defined above or not having an accompanying note from the parent; legal guardian; person having lawful control of the student; or person standing in loco parentis, presented in the timeline required by this Policy, shall be considered as unexcused absences. Students with fifteen (15) unexcused absences in a course in a semester may not receive credit for that course. At the discretion of the principal after consultation with persons having knowledge of the circumstances of the unexcused absences, the student may be denied promotion or graduation. Excessive absences shall not be a reason for expulsion or dismissal of a student.

When a student has five (5) unexcused absences, his/her parents, legal guardians, persons with lawful control of the student, or persons standing in loco parentis shall be notified. Notification shall be by telephone or by regular mail with a return address.

Whenever a student exceeds ten (10) unexcused absences in a semester, the District shall notify the prosecuting authority and the parent, legal guardian, person having lawful control of the student, or persons standing in loco parentis shall be subject to a civil penalty as prescribed by law.

It is the Arkansas General Assembly's intention that students having excessive absences be given assistance in obtaining credit for their courses. Therefore, at any time prior to when a student exceeds the number of unexcused absences permitted by this Policy, the student, or his/her parent, legal guardian, person with lawful control of the student, or person standing in loco parentis may petition the school or District's administration for special arrangements to address the student's unexcused absences. If formal arrangements are granted, they shall be formalized into a written agreement which will include the conditions of the agreement and the consequences for failing to fulfill the agreement's requirements. The agreement shall be signed by the student, the student's parent; legal guardian; person having lawful control of the student; or person standing in loco parentis, and the school or District administrator or designee.

Students who attend in-school suspension shall not be counted absent for those days.

Days missed due to out-of-school suspension or expulsion shall be unexcused absences; provided, however, that days missed due to out-of-school suspension shall be excused for academic purposes only (i.e., school may be made up).

The District shall notify the Department of Finance and Administration whenever a student fourteen (14) years of age or older is no longer in school. The Department of Finance and Administration is required to suspend the former student's operator's license unless he/she meets certain requirements specified in the statute.

Legal References: A.C.A. § 6-4-302
 A.C.A. § 6-18-209
 A.C.A. § 6-18-220
 A.C.A. § 6-18-222
 A.C.A. § 6-18-229
 A.C.A. § 6-18-231
 A.C.A. § 6-18-507(g)

A.C.A. § 6-18-702

A.C.A. § 6-28-114

A.C.A. § 7-4-116

A.C.A. § 9-28-113(f)

A.C.A. § 27-16-701

Division of Elementary and Secondary Education Rules Governing Distance and
Digital Learning

Additional Reference: ASBA Model Policies

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