

Dear Waterloo Community School Families,

We are excited about the upcoming 2024-2025 school year! As we prepare for another great year at Waterloo Schools, we need to share important updates to our attendance procedures. **These changes, stemming from new State of Iowa legislation (Senate File 2435)**, are designed to support your child's success by making sure they are in school, engaged, and ready to learn every day.

### **Procedures:**

When your child is absent, please continue to call and/or email the school. You are also able to enter your students' absence through the parent portal. This communication is important for everyone to stay informed. When you contact the school, please clearly communicate the reason for your student's absence. If this is not communicated, the absence will be recorded as an unexcused absence. Below is a summary of how attendance and absences will be coded:

#### **1) Present - student is at school or participating in a school activity**

- a) Participation in school activities (fine arts, athletics, robotics, class trip, etc)
- b) Attending college courses, CTE placement
- c) College visits (per guidelines)
- d) In-School Suspension, Detention, etc

#### **2) Absent - Excused**

- a) Medical excusal (doctor note, school nurse, health plan, planned medical treatments)
- b) Excusal by court
- c) Attending religious services or receiving religious instructions
- d) Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 affects attendance

#### **3) Absent - Unexcused**

- a) Any reason not previously listed
- b) Sick, parent confirmed - no medical excusal
- c) Watching athletics competitions, show choir, or other school activities (but not participating)
- d) Absent, parent excused, but no reason given
- e) Family vacation or "out of town"
- f) Car trouble
- g) Out-of-school suspension
- h) Non-school-related activities (gymnastics, hockey, community theater, etc)

### **Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy Defined by Senate File 2435**

"Chronic Absenteeism" is missing more than 10% of scheduled school days or instructional hours, regardless of the reason for the absence (please note the excused absence types listed in #2 above).

"Truancy" is missing more than 20% of scheduled school days or instructional hours.

### **Supports**

The Waterloo Community School District is committed to working with families to ensure support in attending school. Students who miss 12 or more days of school will be required to participate in a school engagement meeting with guardians and school officials to set up an attendance plan. This plan addresses any obstacles that students might be facing, helping them stay connected and engaged. Once a student becomes "truant" or continues to miss school with unexcused absences, the county attorney must uphold truancy laws for compulsory school attendees.

Regular attendance not only helps your child keep up with their schoolwork, but it also allows them to build strong relationships with their teachers and peers, develop important life skills, and feel a sense of belonging within the school community. We're here to support you and your child every step of the way.

If you have any questions or want to talk about your child's attendance, please feel free to reach out to your child's school. We're here to help and are excited to work with you to make this year a fantastic one for your child.

Sincerely,

Sheena Canady, Director of Student and At-Risk Services

Adriane Carlson, Associate Director of Student Services

Hank Huddleson, District Coordinator of Attendance, Truancy & Reengagement

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## Frequently Asked Questions

- **Will we need to get a doctor's note every time our student is sick?**
  - That is not the intent of the legislation. Please continue to notify the school if your child is sick. If seen by a licensed medical practitioner, it is important to get proper documentation, such as a note or an excusal from the practitioner's office. .
- **Are family vacations excused?**
  - According to the legislation, family vacations are not excused. Therefore, they will be coded as "unexcused" and count toward the student's total absences.
- **Will our family be able to miss school to observe a religious holiday?**
  - Yes. This is considered excused within current legislation. It is important to clearly communicate this with the attendance secretary at the school.
- **What steps should I take if my child has a medical condition that may cause frequent absences?**
  - If your child has a medical condition that could lead to frequent absences, it's important to communicate this with the school as soon as possible. Providing a note from a licensed medical practitioner or creating a health plan in coordination with the school nurse can ensure that these absences are documented as excused.
- **What happens if my child reaches the threshold for chronic absenteeism?**
  - If your child reaches the threshold for chronic absenteeism, the school will notify you immediately and continue to monitor attendance. If there are continued absences, the school will contact you to attend a school engagement meeting. This meeting is required and will involve school officials, student(s) and guardians to create an attendance plan aimed at addressing any barriers your child may face in attending school regularly.
- **What should I do if my child feels anxious about attending school?**
  - If your child is experiencing anxiety about attending school, it's important to address this concern early. You can reach out to the school counselor or administration to discuss your child's feelings and explore supportive resources or strategies to help them feel more comfortable and engaged.
- **Can I request homework or classwork for my child if they are absent?**
  - Yes, you can request homework or classwork for your child if they are absent. This helps them stay on track with their studies. Please contact your child's teacher or the school's office to arrange for the materials to be sent home. Any requested missed classwork is expected to be completed.