

The Buncombe County Board of Education (“Board”) believes that regular school attendance is of crucial importance for educational achievement, that learning experiences that occur in the classroom are essential components of its learning process, that time lost from class tends to be irretrievable in terms of opportunity for instructional interaction, and, therefore, that each student should attend school every day. The State of North Carolina requires that every child in the State between the ages of seven (7) (or younger if enrolled) and sixteen (16) attend school. Further, the Board affirms that the primary responsibility for regular attendance resides with the parents/guardians and the individual student.

Students are expected to arrive on time and remain in school the full day. Tardies and early dismissals cause students to miss important information and are strongly discouraged. The school attendance team will develop appropriate interventions for students who are chronically tardy or who leave early. Tardies and early dismissals will be considered excused for the same reasons allowed for excused absences listed below in section B. II.

The Board shall adhere to the North Carolina General Statutes pertaining to student attendance except to the extent this policy imposes stricter regulations. Furthermore, the Board is committed to the implementation of a student attendance policy that is nondiscriminatory, discourages dropouts, and encourages regular attendance.

A. ATTENDANCE RECORDS

School officials shall keep accurate records of attendance, including accurate attendance records in each class. Attendance records will be used to enforce North Carolina’s compulsory attendance statutes (G.S. 115C-378 through -383).

B. ABSENCES

I. Attendance Requirements by Grade Level

1. Elementary and Intermediate Schools Grades K-6

Elementary and Intermediate School students in grades K-6 may only have a maximum combined total of fourteen (14) excused and unexcused absences in a school year. Students must be in school one half of the day to be counted as present. Any absences over 14 must be made up in accordance with the school’s Attendance Make-up Program (see 4400-R).

2. Middle School Grades 6-8

Middle School students in grades 6-8 may only have a maximum combined total of fourteen (14) excused and unexcused absences per school year. Any absences over fourteen (14) must be made up in accordance with the school’s Attendance Make-up Program (see 4400-R). Students must be in attendance one half (1/2) of the day to be counted present for the day. For any courses resulting in high school credit, students must follow attendance rules

for High School grades 9-13.

3. High School Grades 9 – 13

i. Semester-Long Courses

Students in grades 9-13 in semester-long courses may only have a maximum combined total of five (5) excused and unexcused absences per semester per class. Absences are considered for each class and students must be present two thirds (2/3) of the class to be counted as present. Absences over five (5) days may be made up in accordance with the school's Attendance Make-up Program (see 4400-R) in order to receive credit.

ii. Year-Long Courses

Students in grades 9-13 in year-long courses may only have a maximum combined total of ten (10) excused and unexcused absences per class. Absences are considered for each class and students must be present two thirds (2/3) of the class to be counted as present. Absences over ten (10) days may be made up in accordance with the school's Attendance Make-up Program (see 4400-R) in order to receive credit.

II. LAWFUL (EXCUSED) ABSENCES

When a student must miss school, the parent or legal guardian must supply documentation regarding the reason for the absence to the school upon the student's return to school. Absences are listed as unexcused until documentation is received. Documentation will not be accepted after thirty (30) days without prior approval from a school administrator or the attendance team.

Absences due to extended illnesses generally require a statement from a physician if there is a history of chronic absences. As soon as a parent anticipates a student's extended absence because of a severe, prolonged, or chronic illness under a physician's care, the parent shall notify the principal. The principal shall make arrangements for homebound/hospital-bound, or other appropriate instruction following procedures outlined by Special Services homebound guidelines.

In the case of excused absences and short-term out-of-school suspensions, the student will be permitted to make up any tests or other work missed. (See also policy 4351, Short-Term Suspension.) The teacher will determine when work is to be made up. The student is responsible for finding out what assignments are due and completing them within the specified time period.

An absence may be excused for any of the following reasons.

1. Personal illness or injury that makes the student physically unable to attend school.
2. Isolation ordered by the local health officer or the State Board of Health.
3. Death in the immediate family.
4. Medical or dental appointment.
5. Participation under subpoena as a witness in a court proceeding.
6. At least two (2) days of excused absences must be allowed each academic year for religious observances required by the faith of a student or a student's parents.
7. Participation in a valid educational opportunity, such as travel or service as a legislative or Governor's page, with prior approval from the principal.
8. Pregnancy and related conditions or parenting, when medically necessary.
9. A student whose parent or legal guardian (a) is an active duty member of the uniformed services, as defined by policy 4050, Children of Military Families; and (b) has been called to duty for, is on leave from, or has immediately returned from deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting will be granted additional excused absences at the discretion of the superintendent or designee to visit with his or her parent or legal guardian.

III. UNLAWFUL (UNEXCUSED) ABSENCES

For students who are entitled to attend public school and who have enrolled in a public school, *unlawful* absence is defined as:

1. A student's willful absence from school with or without the knowledge of the parent;
2. A student's absence from school for any reason other than those listed in Section B under "Lawful Absences"; or
3. When students are not permitted to attend school because they lack proper immunization.

The principal or the principal's designee must notify the parent, guardian, or custodian of his/her child's excessive absences after the child has accumulated three unlawful absences in a school year. After not more than six (6) unlawful absences, the principal or the principal's designee must notify the parent, guardian, or custodian by mail that he or she may be in violation of the Compulsory Attendance Law and may be prosecuted if the absences cannot be justified under the established attendance policies of the State and local boards of education. (G.S. 115C-378)

In the case of unexcused absences, the student will be permitted to make up any tests or other work missed. The teacher will determine when work is to be made up. The student is responsible for finding out what assignments are due and completing them within a specified time period.

1. Mandatory Attendance and Truancy

Unexcused absences may include any reasons not covered above. Students are considered truant after the tenth (10th) unexcused absence. Upon the tenth (10th) unexcused absence, a conference is required to develop an attendance improvement plan. Truancy charges may be filed against the student, the parent, or both if unexcused absences continue.

“After 10 accumulated unexcused absences in a school year, the principal or the principal’s designee shall review any report or investigation prepared under G.S. 115C-381 and shall confer with the student and the student’s parent, guardian, or custodian, if possible, to determine whether the parent, guardian, or custodian has received notification pursuant to this section and made a good faith effort to comply with the law. If the principal or the principal’s designee determines that the parent, guardian, or custodian has not made a good faith effort to comply with the law, the principal may notify the district attorney and the director of social services of the county where the child resides. If the principal or the principal’s designee determines that the parent, guardian, or custodian has made a good faith effort to comply with the law, the principal may file a complaint with the juvenile court counselor pursuant to Chapter 7B of the General Statutes that the child is habitually absent from school without a valid excuse.” (NCGS 115C-378(f)) This statute applies to students up to age 16.

C. SCHOOL-RELATED ACTIVITIES

All classroom activities are important and difficult, if not impossible, to replace if missed. Principals shall ensure that classes missed by students due to school-related activities are kept to an absolute minimum. The following school-related activities will not be counted as absences from either class or school:

1. field trips sponsored by the school or Buncombe County Schools;
2. school approved job shadows and other work-based learning opportunities, as described in G.S.115C-47(34a), which are not to exceed two (2) days without prior principal approval;
3. school-initiated and -scheduled activities;
4. athletic events that require early dismissal from school;
5. Career and Technical Education student organization activities approved in advance by the principal; and
6. in-school suspensions/ completions of alternative to suspension program.

Assignments missed for these reasons are eligible for makeup by the student. The teacher will determine when work is to be made up. The student is responsible for finding out what assignments are due and completing them within the specified time period.

D. EXCESSIVE ABSENCES

Class attendance and participation are critical elements of the educational process and may be taken into account in assessing academic achievement. Students are expected to be at school on time and to be present at the scheduled starting time for each class. Students who are excessively tardy to school or class may be suspended for up to two (2) days for such offenses.

The principal shall notify parents and take all other steps required by G.S. 115C-378 for excessive absences. Students may be suspended for up to two (2) days for truancy.

Each principal will establish a school attendance team to monitor school-wide attendance and design interventions to reduce individual student excused and unexcused absences. Schools will collect and review data regularly to make decisions about individual interventions, targeted group interventions, and school-wide incentives for improved attendance. If a student is absent from school for five (5) or more days in a semester, the attendance committee shall consider whether a specific plan to improve attendance is necessary.

The principal or committee shall review other measures of academic achievement, the circumstances of the absences, the number of absences, and the extent to which the student completed missed work when developing a plan. Interventions could include: 1) parent education/counseling sessions; 2) individual/student counseling; 3) referral to appropriate community agencies; 4) positive behavior supports for students and parents; and 5) assigned time to make-up missed work. Students may be required to attend after-school or summer school or mini-mester sessions to make up missed days (See 4400-R).

Parents must receive notification (documentation required) when students have accumulated three (3) unlawful absences. Once a student has been absent for any unlawful reason for six (6) cumulative days, the principal or designee shall notify the student's parents in writing, in accordance with the NC Compulsory Attendance Law. Subsequently an individual attendance intervention plan will be developed through the school based attendance committee in cooperation with the parent, guardian, or custodian.

The Board approved Discretionary Admission of an out-of-district student may be revoked due to excessive absences, tardies, and/or early dismissals. The principal shall recommend the revocation in writing to the Superintendent or designee. When the determination is made, the principal will inform the parent or legal guardian in writing that the Discretionary Admission has been revoked and list the date the student must return to their home district school.

Each school will provide the opportunity for attendance make-up through an Attendance Make-up Program, which may include Saturday school, after school make-up tutoring sessions, Attendance Summer School, or other make-up requirements as identified by the principal and attendance teams. Information about the school's Attendance Make-up Program will be readily available to students and parents in the student handbook, on the school's website, and in the front office. A fee for attendance make-up will be assessed where applicable. See Board Policy 4600, Student Fees, for fee schedule.

E. Other

Occasionally unique or unusual situations arise which are not specifically addressed by this policy. The superintendent, upon written recommendation from the school principal, may authorize alternatives to the policy in order to achieve fairness to the student without weakening the effect of the policy.

F. Non-Promotion

Pursuant to this policy, students failing to meet attendance requirements in any required course for promotion shall neither be promoted nor allowed to participate in promotion exercises.

G. Distribution

A copy of this policy will be available in the student handbook and on the school's website. Paper copies may be requested in the front office. Students transferring from another administrative unit will have attendance policy information provided prior to enrollment, and will be allowed to have absences prorated based on the number of school days remaining in the school year.

Legal References: G.S. 115C-47, -84.2, -288(a), -375.5, -378 through -383, -390.2(d), -390.5, -407.5; 16 N.C.A.C. 6E .0102, .0103; State Board of Education Policies TCS-L-000 through -003; NC Board of Education School Attendance and Student Accounting Manual.

Cross References: Education for Pregnant and Parenting Students (policy 4023), Children of Military Families (policy 4050), Short-Term Suspension (policy 4351)

Adopted: June 6, 2013

Revised: January 9, 2014

REPLACES BCS POLICIES:

- 401 – Attendance – High School – Grades 9-12
- 402 – Attendance – Middle School – Grades 6-8
- 403 – Attendance – Elementary