

# MERIT ACADEMY

## ATTENDANCE POLICY OVERVIEW

One criterion of a student's success in school is regular and punctual attendance. Frequent absences may lead to poor academic work, lack of social development, and possible academic failure. Regular attendance is of utmost importance for school interest, social adjustment, and scholastic achievement. No single factor may interfere with a student's progress more quickly than frequent tardiness or absence.

According to state law, it is the obligation of every parent or guardian to ensure that every child under his or her care and supervision receives adequate education and training and, if of compulsory attendance age, attends school. Continuity in the learning process and social adaptation is seriously disrupted by excessive absences. In most situations, the work missed cannot be made up adequately. Students who have good attendance generally achieve higher grades, enjoy school more, and are more employable after leaving school.

For at least these reasons, the Merit Academy's Board of Directors believes that a student must satisfy two basic requirements in order to earn full class credit:

- Satisfy all academic requirements, and
- Exhibit good attendance habits as stated in this policy.

Absences may be classified as either excused or unexcused. In accordance with the law, Merit Academy may impose appropriate penalties that relate directly to classes missed while unexcused. The administration shall develop regulations to implement appropriate penalties. Students and parents or guardians may appeal any penalties imposed as set forth in the regulation.

### Classifications of Absences

#### **Excused absences**

Excused absences are defined as:

- Absences because of temporary illness or injury
- A student who is absent for an extended period due to physical, mental, or emotional disability
- A student who is pursuing a work-study program under the supervision of the school
- A student who is attending any school-sponsored activity

- Absences related to funerals or loss to the family
- Absences by those who are in the custody of court or law enforcement authorities
- Absences with prior notice, not to exceed 10 days over the school year.
- Absences determined by school administration to be excusable, such as doctor's appointments, appointments with outside agencies, and suspensions/expulsion. A doctor's note is required for illnesses lasting longer than 3 consecutive days in order to be excused.

Excessive excused absences will require verification from the appropriate doctor, dentist, agency, etc. Parents or guardians must notify the appropriate attendance office within 48 hours (excluding weekends) when their child will not be in school. When the absences have been deemed excused by school administration, students are expected to make up work and will be allowed 2 school days to make up work for each day of absence. For example, if a student is absent for 2 days, he or she will be allowed 4 days to make up work. Students under a block scheduling system will be allowed two school days to complete make up work for each day of school they missed. All major projects are due on the day specified. Out-of-school suspensions will not count as absences, and work may be made up for partial credit only, unless the building administrator has determined otherwise.

Absences because of doctor's appointments, outside agency appointments, or juvenile court appearances may be considered excused with appropriate documentation of the appointment. The absences may be considered unexcused until the appropriate documentation has been provided to the school's administration. At that time, the school's administration may deem the absences to be excused. If appropriate documentation of the appointment is not provided to the school, the absence may remain as unexcused.

All students will be allowed no more than 10 days of excused absences per school year. Absences for elementary school students will be documented in half day increments. Absences for secondary school students will be documented in class periods. Once students have exceeded the approved number of excused absences, and there are more absences, written documentation from a practitioner or agency may be required in order for the absences to not only be considered excused, but to also address the reasons for the excessive absences. The absences may therefore be considered unexcused until the appropriate documentation is provided to the school's administration.

### **Prearranged Absences**

Family vacations during school time are strongly discouraged, as they are counted towards total student absences which may exceed the specified limit and may become unexcused absences. Vacations should be planned for times when school is not in session. Parents are encouraged to follow the district approved calendar for scheduled breaks. A written request for a prearranged absence should be made at least a period of time equal to the

length of time the student will miss school and presented to the school's administration. For example, a one day absence would require a one day notice. All assignments are due prior to the period of absence unless otherwise specified by a teacher. Excused or pre-arranged absences in excess of the district designated number of allowable absences may become unexcused.

### **Weather**

Parents and guardians are expected to take the responsibility for determining whether it is safe to send their child to school due to severe weather. When the district makes the decision to close school, or have a delayed start to the school day due to severe weather, the student will not be penalized for the duration of the closure.

### **School-sponsored Activities**

Absences incurred when students miss class because of participation in school field trips, musical performances, student conferences, or other school-related activities will be considered excused. Teachers and administrators will be provided with a list of students participating in such activities at least 48 hours in advance. Assignments are to be completed and turned in prior to a school sponsored trip unless otherwise specified by a teacher. Administrators or teachers may refuse a student the right to participate if academic, behavioral and attendance expectations are not being met.

### **Unexcused Absences**

An unexcused absence is defined as an absence that is not covered by one of the foregoing excused absence exceptions. Each unexcused absence shall be entered on the student's record. The parents or guardians of the student receiving an unexcused absence will be notified by the district of the unexcused absence whenever possible. When students accumulate 3 days or more of unexcused absences, a letter will be sent to the parents and guardians notifying them of the school's concern. If after a further period of time, there is no significant improvement in the student's attendance, or the student's attendance continues to accrue in unexcused absences for a total of 5 days, the parents or guardians will receive another notification in writing. If upon further days of unexcused absences totaling 7 days, the district will file a notice of non-compliance with the attorney's office and Teller County courts. Finally, if the student continues to demonstrate unexcused absences which have accrued to 10 days, the school will file a petition with the attorney's office and Teller County courts. When a petition gets filed, the student is mandated to appear in truancy court.

In accordance with state law, students with excessive absences may be designated as "habitually truant" and shall be reported to the Colorado Department of Education. When a student demonstrates excessive unexcused absences, the student, parents and school working together are to determine the cause of the absences. The school may use site-based teams to address academic and behavioral concerns, use an attendance contract with the student and parent or guardian; make referrals to outside agencies if

deemed appropriate to remediate the causal factors for the unexcused absences. In accordance with the law, the district may impose academic penalties which relate directly to classes missed while unexcused. The administration shall develop regulations to implement appropriate penalties. Students with unexcused absences are expected to make up work and will receive partial credit towards the earned grade.

Any student who has been absent from class for 10 or more consecutive days of unexcused absences in any one school year, except for reasons of expulsion, out-of-district placement, excused long term illness and death shall be considered a “dropout” and shall be reported to the Colorado Department of Education by the district. However, if the student returns back to school by re-enrolling, is in attendance at the end of the school year, enrolled in another school with appropriate proof of enrollment including an approved home school program, online school program, or appropriate proof of enrollment in another school district, such student is not considered a dropout and shall not be reported as such.

Students and parents or guardians may petition the Board of Education for exceptions to this policy or the accompanying regulations provided that no exception shall be sustained if the student fails to abide by all requirements imposed by the board as conditions for granting such exception.

### **Tardiness**

Tardiness is defined as the appearance of a student without proper excuse after the scheduled time that a class begins. Because of the disruptive nature of tardiness and the detrimental effect upon the rights of the non-tardy student to uninterrupted learning, penalties shall be imposed for excessive tardiness. Parents or guardians shall be notified of all penalties regarding tardiness. Students with excessive tardies to class or who habitually leave school early for reasons other than those listed under reasons for excused absence, may be placed on an attendance contract and/or referred for truancy proceedings. A student who has excessive tardies may be designated as “Habitually Tardy” and the administration may impose penalties associated with such designation.

In an unavoidable situation, a student detained by another teacher or administrator shall not be considered tardy provided that the teacher or administrator gives the student a pass to enter his next class. Teachers shall honor passes presented in accordance with this policy.

General procedures for penalties for tardiness or leaving school early as defined as an “early out” are as follows:

- On the fourth tardy and early out, the teacher will contact the parent or guardian.
- On the fifth tardy and early out, or an accumulation of five tardies for any and all classes, a referral may be written, the student may have an administrative

conference and may receive disciplinary consequences, and the parent will be notified. At that time, the student will be notified of the consequence for further incidences of tardiness.

Upon accumulation of 10 tardies and early outs, the student will have an administrative conference and may receive further disciplinary consequences. At that time parents/guardians will be called and an administrative conference will be held to establish an attendance contract. The contract will include the consequences for further occurrences of tardiness, including a possible designation of being "habitually tardy". After this conference, the behavior will be considered "insubordination," and consequences will be assigned accordingly including a referral for truancy. This exhibit supports Board policies JH, JH-R and JHB. The following criteria is set forth to maintain established protocol regarding the number of unexcused absences a student has and is aligned with the procedures that are enacted accordingly. Parents are encouraged to review their child's attendance on a regular basis.

Absences are measured and recorded at the secondary level in period absence increments while absences at the elementary school level are measured and recorded in half-day increments. The set number of absences varies according to the level of the school (i.e. elementary, middle and high school). However, the procedures set forth are aligned with the same number of "days" regardless of the school level. For example, due to the block schedule at a high school, a student may miss 16 periods (i.e. 4 days) with unexcused absences before their parents receive a letter, yet an elementary student may miss eight half-days (i.e. 4 days) of unexcused absences before their parents receive a letter.

### **Truancy**

If a student is absent without a signed parental excuse or if the student leaves school or a class without permission of the teacher or administrator in charge, the student shall be considered truant. "Habitually truant" shall be defined as a student of compulsory attendance age who has four unexcused absences during any school month or 10 unexcused absences during any school year. Absences due to suspension or expulsion shall not be counted in the total of unexcused absences.

### **Penalties**

In accordance with law, Merit Academy may impose appropriate penalties that relate directly to classes missed while truant. The administration shall develop regulations to implement appropriate penalties for truancy.

## **Attendance Policy**

Merit Academy requires students to attend school both regularly and on time as to

receive adequate education and training. **Parents must contact the school within 48 hours of an absence (excluding weekends) in order for it to be considered for excusal.** State acceptable reasons for an excused absence include:

- Absences because of temporary illness or injury
- A student who is absent for an extended period due to physical, mental, or emotional disability
- A student who is pursuing a work-study program under the supervision of the school
- Attendance of funeral or loss to family
- A student who is attending any school-sponsored activity
- Absences by those who are in the custody of court or law enforcement authorities
- Absences determined by school administration to be excusable, such as doctor's appointments, appointments with outside agencies, and suspensions/expulsion.

Reported absences that do not fall within the state's excusal parameters will be coded as "parent approved" absences, which are considered "unexcused" absences. **Students with 2 or more consecutive days of state excused absence are required to provide proper documentation from a doctor, dentist, or agency related to the absence.** Additionally, once a student exceeds 10 excused absences in an academic year, the school may require verification of excuse from a doctor, dentist, or agency related to the absence, regardless of the length of absence.

Merit Academy School Board policy requires the following steps as unexcused absences accrue:

- 3 days unexcused absences or a combination of 7 days total absences: parents/guardians will be notified in writing
- 5 days unexcused absences or a combination of 10 days total absences: 2nd letter will be sent out to parents/guardians
- 7 days unexcused absences or a combination of 12 days total absences: A notice of non-compliance will be filed with El Paso County Courts
- 10 days unexcused absences or a combination of 14 total days of absences: A petition that requires the student and guardians to appear in truancy court is filed

Note that days absence is cumulative of all missed periods (16 periods = 4 missed days)

Students may be considered absent to a class if they arrive or leave more than 10

minutes from the scheduled time. **If you feel a teacher has made an attendance error you must contact the registrar within 48 hours to verify the appropriate attendance and request a correction.**

In addition to official letters and notices, students found to be “skipping” school or class periods will be subject to disciplinary action that may include office referrals, lunch detentions, after-school detentions or suspension.

## **Tardies**

Students are considered tardy when they arrive after the allotted passing time. When students arrive after class has already started, it creates a disruptive environment for both the teacher and non-tardy students. As such, students will receive discipline for excessive tardiness. Excessive tardiness occurs when a student is consistently tardy to class. The procedures for penalties for excessive tardiness are listed below:

- 1st Step: If a student is tardy 5 or more times to a single class or accumulates over 10 total tardies (After School Detention)
- 2nd Step: If a student accumulates 15 total tardies or 10 in a single class (2 After School Detentions)
- 3rd Step: If a student is tardy to a single class 15 times or accumulates 20 total tardies (Attendance contract for habitual tardiness)

Non-compliance towards an attendance contract will result in additional disciplinary actions, including loss of privileges and/or suspensions.

Additionally, students arriving more than 10 minutes late to class without an excused pass are considered excessively tardy and may receive an office referral for their truancy. Students missing more than half of the class period may be considered absent for that class period.

## **Reporting an Absence**

Absences must be reported by a **parent/guardian** within 48 hours of the absence (excluding weekends). This can be done by contacting the attendance office via phone: **719-207-8900** or email: [sepperson@merit.academy](mailto:sepperson@merit.academy), or by filling out the **Advance Absence Form located under FORMS on our website:** (insert link to form)

If you fail to contact the school within the necessary time frame, documentation must be provided for any state excusable absences.

If you believe that your student was marked absent by mistake, you must email their teacher and request a correction (ensuring to 'cc' sepperson@merit.academy).

**Again, this correspondence must be made within 48 hours of the absence in question.**