



November 9, 2016

Dear Tahoma Parent:

Regular school attendance is a key to student success. Every day in the classroom provides rich learning experiences and opportunities for students to ask questions, observe and get help from teachers. This year, Tahoma School District and all Washington public schools are making a special effort to ensure that students fully benefit from their education by reducing absences. Attending school regularly helps children perform better and provides them with an important future-ready skill that will translate well as they move on to higher education and careers.

Washington students have the second-highest absentee rate in the nation and Tahoma students have higher absence rates than in many surrounding school districts. Legislators have introduced new attendance requirements that are designed to help families whose children experience frequent or chronic absenteeism. We want to work with you to ensure that your student is getting the most from his or her school experience.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Starting in kindergarten, too many absences (excused and unexcused) can cause children to fall behind in school.
- Missing 10 percent (or about 18 days) increases the chance that your student will not read or master math at the same level as their peers.
- Students can still fall behind if they miss just a day or two days every few weeks.
- Being late to school may lead to poor attendance.
- Absences can affect the whole classroom if the teacher has to slow down learning to help children catch up.
- By 6th grade, absenteeism is one of three signs that a student may drop out of high school.
- By being present at school, your child learns valuable social skills and has the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with other students and school staff.
- Absences can be a sign that a student is losing interest in school, struggling with school work, dealing with a bully or facing some other potentially serious difficulty.
- By 9th grade, regular and high attendance is a better predictor of graduation rates than 8th grade test scores.
- Regular attendance is a Future Ready skill that translates to post-high school education and careers.

WHAT WE NEED FROM YOU

We value your student's contributions to their school and we miss them when they are not present. We would like you to help ensure that your student attends regularly. We understand that there will be times when your student will miss school for very good reasons, such as illness. If your student is going to be absent, please contact the attendance office at your child's school to let us know about the absence.

OUR PROMISE TO YOU

We promise to track attendance daily, to notice when your student is missing from class, communicate with you to understand why they were absent, and to identify barriers and supports available to overcome challenges you may face in helping your student attend school.

Our goal is for all our students to have good attendance (missing 8 or less days of school per year) and that none of our students have chronic absence (missing more than 18 days per year).

We also know there are extenuating circumstances that happen in families that impact attendance and we are committed to working together with families to deal with those challenges.

SCHOOL POLICIES AND STATE LAWS

In an effort to support reduction of chronic absenteeism in Washington state, our legislature has changed parts of the law that govern expectations for school districts. As a result, some of our school policies and procedures have changed. State law for compulsory attendance, called the Becca Bill, requires children from age 8 to 17 to attend a public school, private school, or a district-approved home-school program. Children that are 6- or 7-years-old are not required to be enrolled in school. However, if parents enroll their 6- or 7-year-old, the student must attend full-time.

<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28A.225>

If your student has two unexcused absences in one month, state law (RCW 28A.225.020) requires we schedule a conference with you and your student to identify the barriers and supports available to ensure regular attendance. School staff work with parents to develop a plan that may require an assessment to determine how to best meet the needs of your student and reduce absenteeism.

In elementary school after five excused absences in any month, or ten or more excused absences in the school year, the school district is required to contact you to schedule a conference or workshop at a mutually agreeable, reasonable time with at least one district employee, to identify the barriers and supports available to you and your student. A conference is not required if your student has provided a doctor's note or pre-arranged the absence in writing, and the parent, student and school have made plans so your student does not fall behind academically. If your student has an Individualized Education Plan or a 504 Plan the team that created the plan needs to reconvene.

If your student has seven unexcused absences in any month or ten unexcused absences within the school year, we are required to file a petition with the juvenile court, alleging a violation of RCW 28A.225.010, the compulsory attendance laws. The petition may be automatically stayed and your student and family may be referred to the Tahoma Community Truancy Board, or you and your student may need to appear in juvenile court. If your student continues to be truant you may need to go to court.

We notify parents when absence is 10% or more days in a month and after three months of 10% or greater absence will work with parents and students to develop an attendance contract. For more information on attendance rules, please visit this web page: http://www.tahomasd.us/pages/Tahoma_School_District_409/For_Families/School_Attendance

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Set a regular bed time and morning routine for your student.
- Prepare for school the night before, finishing homework and getting a good night's sleep.
- Make sure your child has the required immunizations.
- Don't let your student stay home unless they are truly sick. Keep in mind complaints of a stomach ache or headache can be a sign of anxiety and not a reason to stay home.
- Avoid appointments and extended trips when school is in session.
- Develop back-up plans for getting to school if something comes up. Call on a family member or another parent.
- Track your student's attendance. Missing more than 9 days could put your student at risk of falling behind.
- Talk to your student about the importance of attendance.
- Talk to your students' teachers if you notice sudden changes in behavior. These could be tied to something going on at school and signal that the student needs help.
- Encourage meaningful after-school activities, including sports and clubs.

We appreciate the partnership we have with parents and know that the success of all our children is a shared value. Please contact your building principal, assistant principal, or dean of students if you have concerns about attendance for your child. We will continue to provide updates to parents with specific information about the attendance of your child if we reach any of the absence thresholds specified by state law and our Tahoma policies.

Sincerely,

Dawn M. Wakeley
Executive Director Teaching and Learning