



Selah School District No. 119

ATTENDANCE 2020-2021

PURPOSE/BACKGROUND

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) filed an emergency rule updating the definition of absence for the 2020–21 school year. The rule, WAC 392-401A, is effective beginning August 13, 2020. Soon, OSPI will initiate a formal rulemaking to adopt a permanent rule. The emergency rule includes:

- Definition of absence from remote instruction
- Daily attendance taking
- An expanded list of excused absence categories specific to the COVID-19 pandemic
- A new non-truancy absence code
- The provision of tiered supports for students accruing absences

Attendance is a critical building block for student learning. If students are not present, they cannot engage in learning. Attendance is a leading indicator of equity that signals when students might need additional support and areas for system and school improvement.

The statutory purpose for establishing attendance and absence definitions is to make certain that educators have access to meaningful data in order to ensure student safety and reduce chronic absenteeism. This rule affirms this purpose by ensuring educators have the information they need to provide supports to students. Attendance practices are not punitive in nature and should not be used as such.

A further purpose of this rule is to establish the minimum criteria of the attendance system that each school district must implement in the 2020–21 school year as required by the State Board of Education in its newly adopted definition of instructional hours under WAC 180-16-200(4).

SUMMARY OF THE RULE

Definition of Remote Learning Absence:

The emergency rule defines a remote absence as when a student is not participating in planned instructional activities on a scheduled remote learning day. The rule provides examples of what student participation could look like in order to be counted as present, including, but not limited to:

- Daily logins to learning management systems;
- Daily interactions with teacher(s) to acknowledge attendance (including messages, emails, phone calls, or video chats); or
- Evidence of participation in a task or assignment.

Student presence is determined by engaging in planned asynchronous or synchronous activities. If a student does not engage or demonstrate participation in any way, the student would be marked as absent. The new definition most closely approximates in-person learning by establishing when a student has been exposed to a remote learning activity, as opposed to completing or mastering a concept. When a student is not engaging in any way with a class or activity, it tells us something different than when a student is engaging or attempting to engage; a student who is not engaging at all requires a different response from school staff.

The rule does not change the definition of in-person absence.

Daily Attendance Taking:

The emergency rule establishes that districts must take daily attendance for all students participating in remote and in-person learning.

Daily attendance data is a leading indicator that provides frequent and actionable data to inform educators and schools of barriers students are facing. It can signal a need for additional support or flag where the student is experiencing challenges with our system(s). This signal is even more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic, where responding to weekly contact or a less frequent data point is not sufficiently responsive to address inequities and barriers for students furthest from educational justice and resources.