

Mental Health Excused Absences: Overview

Rule Change & Guidance



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION



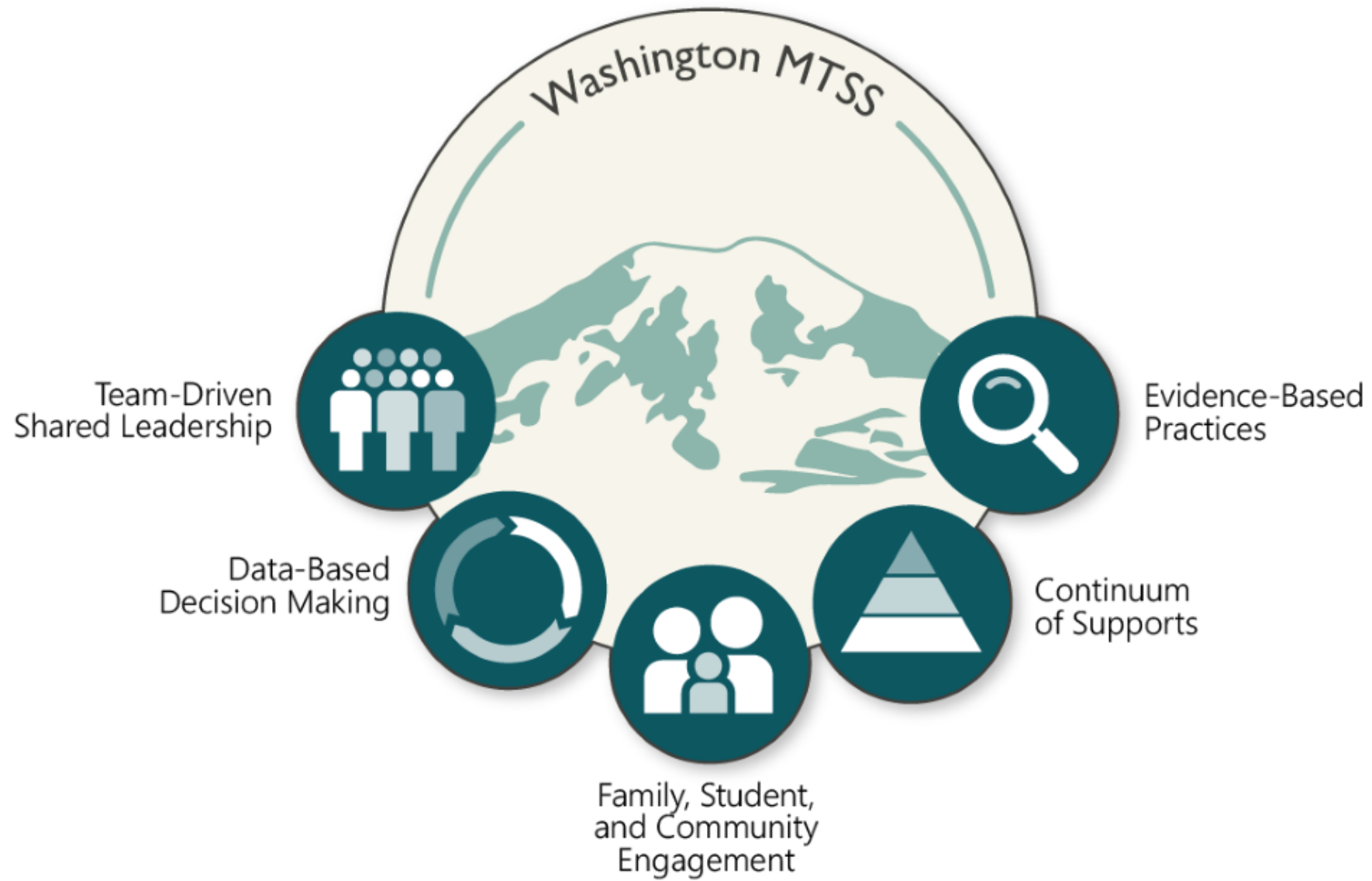
The Why and the How of Attendance

OSPI Attendance Guiding Principles



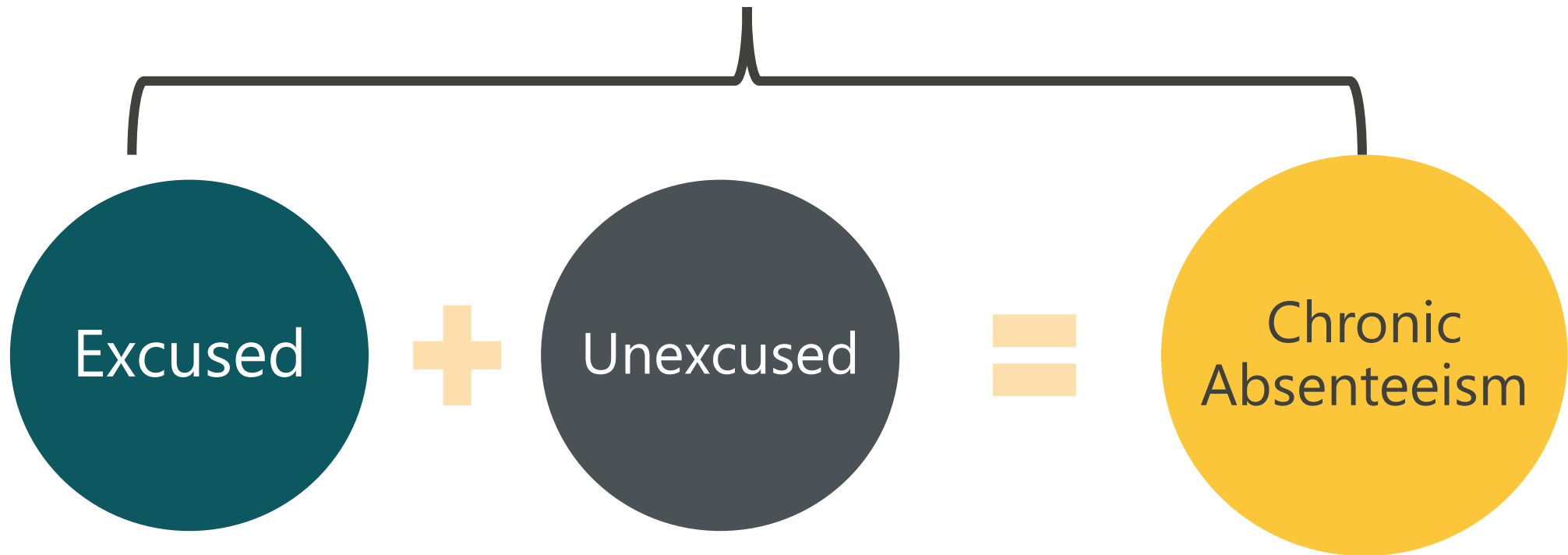
- Attendance is foundational to student learning; it is a **stepping-stone** and a necessary precursor to engagement and mastery
- Absences tells us when a student has **not accessed or had the opportunity to engage in instruction**
- Absences can reflect **inequities** that are caused by or perpetuated by our **systems**
- Absences can signal when a student or family might need more **support**
- Absences are a **signal** to get curious about why students aren't attending
- **Students** and **families** are our best partners to understand the barriers to attendance and how to increase attendance and engagement





What is Chronic Absenteeism?


10% or more of school days = 2 days a month





Mental Health Absence Rule Change

OSPI Rule Authority - Chapter 392-401 WAC



Defines absence from in-person and remote instruction (synchronous & asynchronous)

Defines reasons absences should be excused

Requires daily attendance taking & defines data reporting requirements

Requires districts to use an MTSS as a framework for addressing absences including...

A process for outreach and reengagement for students who have been withdrawn due to nonattendance



House Bill 1834 (2021-22)

OSPI was required to:

- Categorize, in rule, a student absence from school due to a mental health reason, as an excused absence due to illness, health condition, or medical appointment
- Develop the rule, and guidance to implement the rule, in consultation with a student advisory group and the GATE Advisory
- Have the rule in place for the 2022-23 school year

Adopted Rule Language (WAC 392-401-020) Effective August 1, 2022

Absences due to the following reasons must be excused:

(a) Physical health or mental health symptoms, illness, health condition or medical appointment for the student or person for whom the student is legally responsible. Examples of symptoms, illness, health conditions or medical appointments include, but are not limited to, medical, counseling, mental health wellness, dental, optometry, pregnancy, and behavioral health treatment (which can include in-patient or out-patient treatment for chemical dependency or mental health);



What did this policy change do?

Added a new reason that an absence must be excused in [WAC 392-401-020](#)

This is the only new requirement.



What did this policy change NOT do?

Add new resources for schools or communities to increase access to behavioral health services

Explicitly limit the number of days a student could be excused for mental health reasons

Remove a school district's authority to establish board policy to address excessive absenteeism

Require doctor's notes or stop districts from requiring them

Set a state-wide threshold for districts to stop excusing absences



What are some state efforts to address the mental health crisis?

HB 1664: increase funding for school counselors, nurses, social workers and psychologists in K12

HB 1890: Children and Youth Behavioral Health Work Group to convene a strategic advisory group to develop a state plan

ESSER Funding: State-wide staffing at ESDs for prevention intervention specialists

What is the purpose for the rule change?

Creates consistency in excusing mental health related absences across the state to reduce a punitive approach

Makes clear that mental health is as significant as physical

Continue to address stigma surrounding mental health





Committed to
learning from
Implementation

Continued Areas of Impact

Student's families allow for a mental health excused absence

Stigma and Individualized notions of wellness responsibility

Data collection protocols and interpretation

Systems level supports for absences & mental health wellness



Mental Health Absence Guidance

[HB 1834 Mental Health Related Absences webpage](#)

[Mental Health Related Absences: Guidance to Support Implementation of House Bill 1834 \(August 2022\)](#)

[Mental Health Absence Explainer \(June 2022\)](#)

Email:
MentalHealthAbsences@k12.wa.us



Mental Health Excused Absences



Mental Health Excused Absences Webinar August 23 | 3:00pm

New Rules & Guidance

Recommended Practices

WSSDA Model Policy

Get Your Questions Answered

[Register Today](#)



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Contact Us



Email:

MentalHealthAbsences@k12.wa.us



Webpage:

[OSPI HB 1834 Mental Health
Related Absences](#)



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Questions



What are you hearing?



What are your interests?





Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Connect with us!



k12.wa.us



facebook.com/waospi



twitter.com/waospi



youtube.com/waospi



medium.com/waospi



linkedin.com/company/waospi



Why this policy change?

Governor Inslee declared a Youth Mental Health Crisis

March 15, 2021



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION



STATE OF WASHINGTON
— OFFICE OF GOVERNOR JAY INSLEE —

EMERGENCY PROCLAMATION OF THE GOVERNOR

21-05

Children and Youth Mental Health Crisis

National Precedent

Other states have passed similar policies including:

Minnesota,
Utah,
Oregon

Arizona,
Colorado,
Connecticut,

Maine,
Nevada,
Utah, and
Virginia





Youth Advocacy led to Passage of HB 1834

The Washington State
Legislative Youth Advisory
Council (LYAC) and other youth
advocates worked with
legislators to pass the bill



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Covered in Guidance

Background and Purpose:

- Mental health and reengagement purpose
- OSPI Attendance background
- House Bill 1834 background

Core Components:

- Definitions for Assessing Mental Health Absences
- Systems and Strategies for Addressing Mental Health Absences: Action Steps for Districts and Schools
- Action Steps for School Districts
- Possible Thresholds for Responding to Excessive Excused Absence



Other Topics in Guidance

Special Considerations:

- Section 504
- Special Education (IDEA)
- Home Hospital

Frequently asked questions

- What happens when a parent or guardian will not support a student's excused absence for mental health reasons?
- Can students excuse their own absences?
- Does this rule change district data reporting to OSPI?
- Does this rule change how school districts record absences?

