Mental Health Excused Absences: Overview

Rule Change & Guidance
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

Excused + Unexcused = Chronic Absenteeism
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- A process for outreach and reengagement for students who have been withdrawn due to nonattendance
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
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](https://legal.wa.gov/rules/ch392-010/020).

*This is the only new requirement.*
What did this policy change NOT do?

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<th>What the policy change didn’t do</th>
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<td>Add new resources for schools or communities to increase access to behavioral health services</td>
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<td>Explicitly limit the number of days a student could be excused for mental health reasons</td>
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<td>Remove a school district’s authority to establish board policy to address excessive absenteeism</td>
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<td>Require doctor’s notes or stop districts from requiring them</td>
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<td>Set a state-wide threshold for districts to stop excusing absences</td>
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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 Webinar
August 23 | 3:00pm

New Rules & Guidance
Recommended Practices
WSSDA Model Policy
Get Your Questions Answered

Register Today
Contact Us

Email: MentalHealthAbsences@k12.wa.us

Webpage: OSPI HB 1834 Mental Health Related Absences
Questions

What are you hearing?  What are your interests?
Why this policy change?
Governor Inslee declared a Youth Mental Health Crisis

March 15, 2021

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.
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
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?