

## Student Absences and Lateness – Frequently Asked Questions

*My child missed a day of school – what do I need to do?*

If a student is absent from school, a parent or guardian should send the student in with a written note when they return, or send an e-mail about the absence to [nrhsattendance@nrsd.net](mailto:nrhsattendance@nrsd.net) (the sooner the front office receives a note or e-mail, the better). If a student is absent from school for medical reasons, a parent or guardian should call the nurse's absence line (978-779-2257 x6) **and also follow up with a written note or email to [nrhsattendance@nrsd.net](mailto:nrhsattendance@nrsd.net).**

In the event of a medical absence, why do both? Our school nurses keep track of patterns of student health in the building. A parent/guardian phone call to the nurse helps us know what types of illnesses are going around, and helps the nurses better support students when they are back in the building. If the nurses know that a stomach bug is making the rounds, then they know to look for that when students come down to the health room. In addition, if the nurses know that a student is coming back after a day of being out sick, they are in a better position to support the student if that student shows up in the health room not feeling well.

Nurses are responsible for providing medical support; the front office is responsible for documenting student absences. A note or an e-mail to the front office provides us with documentation so that we can determine if an absence is excused or unexcused (more on that topic below). And if your child was out for a medical appointment, or visited the doctor because of a medical absence, please provide us with a copy of the note from the doctor so that we can code the absence as “medically excused”.

So if your child is out for any reason, make sure that you have sent in a note or an e-mail to document the absence. If your child is out for a medical reason, please make sure you have also called the nurse's absence line. And, if your child was absent due to an injury or hospitalization, please provide the nurses with a note from the physician or discharge paperwork to help facilitate your child's return to school (this is especially true in situations that may impact your child's ability to be successful in classes, such as the effects of a concussion). If your child may need academic accommodations after an extended medical absence, please contact your child's guidance counselor.

*I need to check my child out of school early – what do I need to do?*

If a parent/guardian wishes to dismiss a student before the end of a normal school day, the best way to handle it is to have the student bring a written request to the Main Office at the start of the school day (i.e., a written note from the parent/guardian indicating the time and reason for dismissal). When the student brings in the written request, he/she will be issued a dismissal pass that he/she will show to the

classroom teacher at the time of dismissal. After leaving the classroom, the student should then come to the Main Office and sign out.

If the student is old enough to drive him/herself, then the student can go ahead and leave through the front entrance. Otherwise, the student can wait in the main office until the person transporting the student arrives. If someone other than the parent/guardian is picking the student up, then that person needs to be listed on the student's blue student emergency and health form as an approved emergency contact, or we need written documentation that the person picking up the student has permission to transport the student (this could be a written note or e-mail).

If the student did not bring in a note in the morning, the parent/guardian can e-mail the front office about the dismissal (the [nrhmainoffice@nrzd.net](mailto:nrhmainoffice@nrzd.net) e-mail address goes directly to both of our front office secretaries). If the parent/guardian arrives at school without the school having prior notice that the student would be dismissed, then the parent/guardian should come into the main office, indicate the name of the student being dismissed, and our front office can call the student from class. The parent/guardian would ideally then provide a written note to the front office for our documentation, and have the student sign out before leaving.

If a student is dismissed from school by the school nurse because of a medical situation, the student will wait in the health office until the parent arrives for pick-up. If the student is able to drive, the nurse will receive parent permission prior to allowing the student to leave school. Students leaving school because of a nurse dismissal should still sign out in the main office with a note from the nurse.

*Why does it matter whether an absence is "excused" or "unexcused?" And why does the front office need a written note?*

In order to graduate from high school, a student needs to earn a certain number of credits in specific classes (more specific information about credits and graduation requirements can be found in our Program of Studies, which is available electronically on our website – under the Staff Directory tab, choose Guidance and you will see the link to our Program of Studies). In order to earn credit for an individual class, a student needs to both earn a passing grade in the class AND not amass too many unexcused absences. If a student has more than 7 unexcused absences in a semester-long class, or more than 14 unexcused absences in a year-long class, the student risks losing credit for the class even if he/she passed the class.

Every year we have students who lose credit in classes because of too many unexcused absences, and every year we have Seniors who risk failing to graduate because poor attendance reduces the number of credits that they earn. For parents/guardians, this means making sure that students do not have too many unexcused absences; on our end, it means we have to be very tight about documenting absences because a student's academic progress and graduation could hang in the balance.

Unless we have some type of note documenting an absence, the absence is coded as “unexcused”. Parents/guardians can write notes to excuse up to 7 student absences over the course of the year, and we do not require a specific justification for the absences. In other words, a parent/guardian can simply write a note that says “Please excuse my child’s absence today”, and it will be coded as Parent Excused (a “P” in PowerSchool). After the seventh parent note, however, the absences start being coded as “unexcused”.

For absences that involve a student illness or medical appointment, a parent/guardian can send in a note from the medical provider, and the absence is then coded as Medical Excused (an “M” in PowerSchool). This is separate from parent excused notes. So, for example, if a parent sends in a note that says “My child was out sick yesterday”, that is coded as a parent excused absence and counts against the seven parent notes; if, however, the student went to a doctor and the doctor wrote a note (and the parent/guardian sends in a copy of the note), then we code the absence as medical excused and it does not count against the seven parent notes. In other words, to count an absence as excused for medical reasons, we need documentation from a health care professional in addition to the parent note, otherwise the absence is coded as parent excused (and, if the parent/guardian happens to be a health care professional, it would need to be from the health care professional that the student met with and not from the parent/guardian).

There are a few other types of absences that are excused and that do not count against the seven parent notes. If there was a death in your family that led to your child being absent, please let us know that in your note or e-mail and that absence will be coded differently (and does not count as a parent excused absence). Absences related to school activities, such as a field trip or college visits, are also counted as separate excused absences. If a student is suspended from school, that is also counted as an excused absence. For more information about excusable absences, please check the Student Handbook.

*What if my child was just late to school – can that be “excused”?*

The school day typically begins at 7:40 AM. Any student arriving to school after 7:40 must check in at the main office and is given a pass to go to his/her first-period class. A student who arrives between 7:40 AM and 8:00 AM is marked tardy to class and late to school, but is considered to be present for their first-period class. A student arriving after 8:00 AM is considered absent from the first-period class because he/she has missed more than 50% of the class.

Each time a student arrives at school between 7:40 and 8:00 (in other words, late to school but still considered present in the first-period class), we keep a record of the lateness. If this occurs five times in a semester, a student receives one after-school detention as a consequence for continued lateness, and a parent note will not excuse a student being late to school. For example, if a student was caught in traffic, overslept, wasn’t feeling well, etc. the student will still be counted as late to school, and that lateness could result in an after-school detention. The only exception would be in a situation in which a

student had an early-morning medical appointment that caused the lateness, and there is documentation for the medical appointment.

If a student rides the bus and the bus is late, then the student will not be counted as tardy. In addition, there may be days that, because of bad weather or traffic conditions, a large number of students are not able to make it to school on time; in those instances, the Principal may elect not to count students as tardy to school. As a general rule, however, students who arrive late to school are considered to be tardy and parents are not able to write a note to excuse that tardiness. If a parent believes that there may be extenuating factors that lead to a student's tardiness—for example, an ongoing medical condition or family circumstance—then the parent should contact the student's administrator proactively to discuss the situation.

A student who arrives after 8:00 is simply considered absent from the class because the student missed more than 50% of the class. A parent may use a parent note to excuse the absence, but this counts as one of the seven parent notes that could be used

*What if my student has study hall first period or last period of the day? Can they come to school late or leave early?*

An upperclassman (Sophomore, Junior, or Senior) who has study hall first period of the day or last period of the day may arrive late or leave early without penalty, so long as the student has a parent note. Parents may write individual notes on days when their child arrives late or leaves early because of a study, or parents may elect to write a "permanent pass" that allows their child to arrive late or leave early without penalty on any day when the student has a first-period or last-period study (this can be especially handy for a student who has a car on campus). Students are not allowed to leave campus during a study hall period that occurs during the school day.

In cases in which a student arrives at school late because of a first-period study hall, the student needs to arrive on-time for his/her first scheduled class or the student will be considered tardy to class. Any student arriving late because of a first-period study hall must check in to the main office when he/she arrives; any student leaving school early because of a last-period study hall must check out in the main office and leave school through the main entrance.

Freshmen are assigned to Freshman Study Skills during an unassigned period, and are not typically allowed to arrive late or leave early. An exception to this rule is days when mid-terms or finals are scheduled; if a student has Freshman Study Skills scheduled during a mid-term or final period, a parent/guardian may sign the student in late or out early without consequence.

Learning Centers are an assigned class, and students may not arrive at school late or leave school early on days when they have a Learning Center class scheduled first-period or last period.

*What about other situations, such as family trips, a skipped class, or an early dismissal because of athletics or extracurriculars?*

Parents are strongly encouraged not to schedule family trips on days when school is in session. As a general rule, days missed because of a family trip are considered to be unexcused absences. Parents who believe that a family trip could/should be considered an educational experience may contact the Principal to request an exception. As a general rule, trips to Disney World or other vacation spots will not be considered excused absences; trips with a strong cultural or learning component may be excusable. Student mission trips or service-oriented trips are oftentimes excusable. In any situation in which a student is going to miss a considerable number of school days, parents and the student are encouraged to get in touch with the grade-level administrator and classroom teachers well in advance of the trip.

In situations in which a student skips a class (i.e., the student is in the building and chooses not to go to class), the absence will be considered unexcused and will also lead to disciplinary consequences. Students who have a personal situation that leads them to not feel comfortable attending a class need to speak to their guidance counselor or grade-level administrator in advance of missing the class (in which case the absence can be excused). We want to support students when they have legitimate reasons for not being able to attend class, but we are much more able to do so when we know in advance.

Finally, there are situations in which students leave school early because of a school-related activity. This oftentimes happens with athletics (for example, a team needing to be excused early because of a schedule athletic event), and can sometimes happen with other extracurriculars (for example, students leaving school early for a DECA competition). In most of those situations, the Athletic Director or extracurricular advisor will send out a list of students beforehand and those students' absences will already be excused, so parents don't need to do anything. If you believe your child has an unexcused absence listed that really should have been excused because of a school event, either you can encourage your child to go speak to the main office or contact the front office directly.

*I got an automated phone call that my student missed one or more classes, but I know they were at school all day—what's the deal?*

We have an automated phone call that goes out in the late afternoon each day to the parents of any students who were marked with an unexcused absence in one or more classes (in PowerSchool this is designated as an "A"). In other words, one or more teachers saw that a student was not in their class, and they recorded the student as being absent in PowerSchool.

In most cases in which a student has an excused absence that we already know about (for example, the student is on a field trip that day), we will have proactively recorded the absence as excused, and the student will not be included on the automated phone call. If a student is out for medical reasons and we already have a parent note or doctor's note, we may be able to change the absence coding prior to the automated phone call going out. But if a student is not in class and we do not already have documentation to mark the student's absence as excused, then they will be included in the automated call.

On occasion we do have students who were appropriately present in their classes, or who had an excused absence that we should already have recorded, but they nevertheless show up on the call list. This can happen for a variety of reasons. There could simply be an error on our part; for example, a student was in the bathroom while the teacher recorded absences and the teacher forgot to make the change when the student returned, or a student's name was inadvertently left off a field trip list. This could also happen because of the timing of an event; for example, if a student was dismissed from the nurse late in the day, the coding of medically excused might not have gotten to our front office in time to make a change in PowerSchool.

Our front office staff does try to review absence lists and flag unusual situations—this is primarily to determine whether or not a student may have skipped a class—but we are not always able to catch situations proactively. In a situation in which a student was incorrectly recorded as being absent, the best first step is for a student to speak directly with his or her teacher(s) about the absence. If the teacher incorrectly recorded the student as absent, they can make a quick change in PowerSchool. If that does not resolve the situation, the student can check with the front office, or the parent can send an e-mail to the front office.