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Update to the Absence Policy

It is important for every student attending the Willoughby-Eastlake School District to attend school every day. Missing too much school has long-term, negative effects on students, such as lower achievement and lower graduation rates.

Beginning with the 2017-2018 school year, all Ohio School Districts must measure absences in hours, rather than days, and must adhere to new laws regarding student discipline, as a result of House Bill 410. The new law substantially changes the truancy law and requires school districts to prepare and implement policies that emphasize intervention strategies for habitually truant students.

The new law eliminates the concept of "*chronic truancy*" and instead categorizes students into two distinct categories; "*habitually truant students*" and/or "*excessively absent students*". The school district must send written notification to the parent or legal custodian of any student who meets the definition of the above categories.

In December 2016, the Ohio General Assembly passed House Bill 410 to encourage and support a preventative approach to excessive absences and truancy. After careful review, the Willoughby-Eastlake School District is implementing guidelines contained in House Bill 410 in order to help support academic success of our students and partner with families to identify and reduce barriers to regular school attendance.

Beginning with the 2017-2018 school year the following changes will take place.

A. Changes in the Definition of ***Truancy and Excessive Absences***

- The definition of "***habitually truant***" will be changed from days to hours. The new definition is:
 - Absent 30 or more consecutive hours *without a legitimate excuse*
 - Absent 42 or more hours in one school month *without a legitimate excuse*
 - Absent 72 or more hours in one school year *without a legitimate excuse*
- The definition of "***excessive absences***" is
 - Absent 38 or more hours in one school month *with or without a legitimate excuse*
 - Absent 65 or more hours in one school year *with or without a legitimate excuse*

If a student is “*habitually truant*” our district will follow these guidelines to work with the student and their families.

1. Within **7 school days** of the triggering absence, our absence intervention team will notify the family in writing.
2. Within **10 school days** of the triggering absence, the student will be assigned to an absence intervention team that will include two district representatives and the child’s parent or guardian. If families are not responsive to at least three good faith attempts by the district to engage them in the absence intervention team process, the district may file a report to the county children services agency for abuse or neglect.
3. Within **14 school days** after the assignment of the team, a student-centered absence intervention plan will be developed with and for the student containing an agreed-upon strategy for getting the student to school every day and may provide supportive services to families that could include counseling, education and parenting programs, mediation, or intervention programs available through juvenile authorities.
4. If the student does not make progress on the plan within **61 days** or continues to be excessively absent, the district will file a complaint in the juvenile court.

Willoughby-Eastlake City Schools mission statement is to “improve student achievement” and that requires a good attendance record on the part of the student. We are confident that these changes will help increase attendance rates and help students’ progress in mastering knowledge and skills necessary to graduate from high school prepared for higher education and the workforce.

Other changes that are implemented due to House Bill 410 related to student discipline include:

- Students cannot be suspended, expelled or removed from school solely due to excessive absences or truancy.
- Students are permitted to make up missed work due to out-of-school suspensions.
- Students may be required to participate in community service or an alternative consequence for the number of hours equal to the time left on a suspension in a school year.