



## WOODBIDGE TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

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May 17, 2019

Dear Parents and Guardians:

On Thursday, May 16, 2019, we updated our policy on student attendance, WTSD Policy #5113. This updated policy will take effect September 2019 and is aligned with NJ State Department of Education guidelines. The most significant change in the policy is limiting excused absences for students to only five reasons:

- 1) Religious observances;
- 2) College visits (up to three days per school year for students in grades 11 & 12 only);
- 3) Take Our Children to Work Day;
- 4) Participation in observances of Veterans' Day;
- 5) The closure of a busing district that prevents a student from having transportation to the receiving school.

\*Note that parent notes, family vacations, sick days (including doctor visits), and bereavement days are not considered excused.

The reason for this change is due to the new State regulations on "chronic absenteeism." The State defines chronic absenteeism as being absent at least 10% of the school year. So if a student is absent 18 days or more, he or she is considered chronically absent by the State. The State has added the percentage of chronically absent students to the school report card. Schools with too many chronically absent students are required to implement action plans to decrease absenteeism. We already started some of these initiatives, and the results are encouraging. For example, last school year, as of April 16, 2018, we had 1,420 students who were chronically absent. This year on April 16, 2019 that total dropped to 1,290 out of approximately 12,600 students in grades 1-12 (K students not included).

Although this is a considerable change for our district as a whole, the impact on our individual children is minimal. The change is more of a bookkeeping adjustment for our excused v. unexcused absences, as reported to the State. Please keep in mind that although the State has redefined unexcused absences, *the authority to make educational decisions on the accumulated unexcused absences remains with the district.*

Also included in this new policy is language on the number of days present that elementary and middle school students will need to be considered for promotion. Specifically, students will need to be present for 163 days (less than 18 absences) to be considered for promotion. Please remember:

- 1) Parents are still encouraged to keep your children home if they are sick or if they are grieving;
- 2) The decision for promotion is up to the principal, and there is an appeal process;
- 3) Individual circumstances, such as ongoing health issues or severe illness will be considered on a case-by-case basis;
- 4) If your child is late to school or leaves early, that does not count toward absences; so it is always better for your child to come to school late or leave early rather than miss the entire day.

We believe that this new policy will ultimately help our children achieve. The single most important factor in our children's education is their teacher. If they spend more time together in their classroom, our students will be better prepared for success in college or career.

The 2019-2020 school calendar is posted on the district website. Please try to plan any vacations on non-school days.

If you have any questions, please call either your principal or my office at (732) 602 8472.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Zega", is written over a faint, larger signature that looks like "1438".

Robert Zega, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Woodbridge Schools