

BOARD OF EDUCATION
SUSSEX-WANTAGE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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January 2015

Re: Attendance Policy
Electronic Communication Between Staff and Students Policy
Parent Academy Workshops
Family Math & Reading Nights

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Happy 2015! I hope the new year brings good health and happiness to all our families in the Sussex-Wantage Regional School District. As we embark on the new year, I would like to share some important information about our policies and district events.

We updated several district policies to reflect changes that were recently made to the NJ state administrative code. The Attendance Policy was updated to reflect changes that were made in the NJ state code, as well as to support the district's initiatives to improve student attendance. Research shows that good attendance can significantly improve a student's performance in school. When students are absent from school, they miss valuable exposure to teacher instruction and interaction with peers. Due to its importance, part of the NJ Performance Report of Schools includes each school's attendance rate. The purpose of identifying the school attendance rate is to reduce chronic absenteeism, which is defined as more than 6% of the school population being absent 10% or more of the school year. In other words, out of every 100 students, no more than 6 students should be absent 18 or more days out of 180 school days. That may seem like an extraordinary amount of absences to most of you, but unfortunately, in the 2012-2013 school year, our school district did not meet the performance expectations in this area. All three schools in the district surpassed the 6% threshold. Therefore, in an effort to improve student attendance, the district implemented a program called Every Child, Every Seat, Every Day, which has had a positive effect on student attendance. It is our hope that when the 2013-2014 Performance Report is released in early 2015, we will see an improvement in our attendance rate.

The state also redefined excused and unexcused absences in the NJ state code. There are now three types of absences: 1) excused, which includes religious holidays and Take Your Child to Work Day; 2) unexcused *not counting* toward truancy; and unexcused *counting* toward truancy. When the state determines the district's performance in the area of student attendance, all unexcused absences are included, whether they count toward truancy or not. The purpose of the distinction is for the district's internal procedures to kick in when a student is identified as at risk for failure due to truancy. Therefore, one significant change made to the Attendance Policy reflects the new definitions of unexcused absences. **For example, in the past, a student's absence due to illness could be considered excused if the parent provided a note. In the new policy, for an absence to be considered unexcused not counting toward truancy, a doctor's note will be required. We recognize that the**

vast majority of students will be absent from school due to minor illnesses that do not require a doctor's visit. If your child is typically absent from school a few days a year for relatively minor illnesses that do not require a doctor's visit, then your child's absence rate will be no cause for alarm. In accordance with the state law and new policy, you will be receiving update letters about your child's attendance when it reaches 4, 7, and 10 days. Tardies and Early-Pick Ups from school will also be reported in the notification letters. The district policy and state law are designed to reduce unnecessary absences that have a negative impact on a student's performance in school. Therefore, when those absences accumulate to the point of reaching truancy (defined as 18 days or 10% of the school year), then the school's Intervention and Referral Services Team (I&RS) will take steps to assist the student and family in improving the student's attendance. Please maintain ongoing communication with your child's teacher, school nurse, guidance counselor, and/or principal about your child's attendance so that the I&RS Team will have an understanding of whether or not interventions are necessary to prevent truancy.

Another recent policy, Electronic Communication Between Staff and Students Policy, was adopted to reflect the evolving nature of the digital learning environment. As the district implements Google Apps for Education (GAFE) and other online programs, such as blogs and wikis, students and teachers will be increasingly communicating online. There are federal age restrictions for online social media tools without explicit parental permission, which the district must abide by, so those may be used by teachers to communicate with parents and will not be utilized in the classroom without your consent. The purpose of the new policy is not to limit the use of online tools, but guard against inappropriate conduct between adults and children when using digital media. We encourage you to ask your child about their online activity, read what they are writing online, and monitor the websites they are visiting. The administration and faculty will also increasingly be using social media to communicate with parents and keep you informed about district events. Upgrades are being made to our district website and Realtime student information system to make them more user-friendly and informative for students, parents, and faculty. We hope you enjoy the upgrades and find them useful. Please provide us with feedback on the website to help us continually improve it to meet your needs. Also, please join us on Twitter @SWRegional to receive up-to-the-minute information about district happenings.

This school year, we implemented a series of Parent Academy workshops to help raise awareness of changes in the district curriculum, the Common Core Standards, and PARCC. The workshops are held at the Sussex Middle School at 6:30 p.m. in the auditorium or classrooms. Babysitting will be provided by the Builders Club. The schedule is subject to change, so please check the district website and school calendar for updates. The current dates & topics are listed below. We hope to see you there!

January 15: Google Apps for Education

January 29: Envision Math

March 12: Next Generation Science Standards

March 26: Social Studies Standards

We also would love to see parents and K-5 students in February at the Family Math & Reading Nights at the CE Lawrence and Wantage Schools. They will be held on Thursday nights at 6:30 p.m. at CEL and WES on alternating weeks:

CEL - February 5 - Family Math

WES - February 12 - Family Math

CEL - February 19 - Family Reading

WES - February 26 - Family Reading

Again, I hope 2015 will be a terrific year for the families of Sussex-Wantage. Our school community is a wonderful place to raise and educate children. We look forward to building home-school connections with you to help your child(ren) be happy, healthy, and well-educated in the new year!

Sincerely,

Dr. Jeanne Apryasz, Superintendent