

School studies attendance policy change

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Current policy of reducing student grades due to attendance to be eliminated

Seeking to avoid reducing students' grades due to attendance, a JR/SR high attendance committee has drafted a new policy for consideration.

Teacher Kyle Bules reported from the six-teacher committee at the Jan. 19 Re-1J school board meeting.

He noted the group has looked at policies of area schools and drafted a new policy to help prepare Holyoke students to be more work-force ready.

Bules pointed out the draft policy makes attendance a behavior issue and not an academic one.

Supt. Bret Miles noted appreciation for this grassroots effort of the teachers to put together a proposal. They'll continue to work on the outline and when they feel their recommendation is final, Miles will work with them to put the ideas into policy wording.

It's the intent to bring a policy for board approval in order to be effective for the 2010-11 school year.

Miles said the policy intent is to send the message that students are supposed to be in school. Appreciation was noted for the layers of support in the approach to better attendance.

Bules explained a six-teacher attendance committee will meet twice a month to review all

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student attendance and tardiness. They will specifically look at students with excessive absences and tardiness and will then schedule meetings or take action with those students.

School-related absences are not included in the count. The definition of unexcused and excused absences are proposed to change from current practice.

The new proposal defines unexcused absence as one that has been confirmed by the parent, but that the attendance committee has deemed inappropriate/inexcusable.

An excused absence is one that has been confirmed by the parent and that the attendance committee deems unavoidable or appropriate.

Process outlined

In the process rubric for student attendance, absences are defined by each period the student is absent. The school secretary will document the absences and reasons for them.

After five absences in a class period, the committee will send a letter to the parent and assign a committee member for that student. The letter will outline the policy, state number of absences of the student, note consequences if the student continues to be absent and outline steps that will be followed in case of further absences.

After six absences, the secretary/principal will alert the committee of a “red zone” student.

After seven absences, the committee will schedule and meet with parents, student and principal to review and sign an attendance contract. Parents will be made aware of consequences of continued absences.

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After eight to nine absences, students will be monitored. Committee members will check in with the student as a gentle reminder of the contract they and their parent have signed. Additionally, a school representative, local police department and local social services will make a home visit.

After 10 absences, the committee will reconvene to determine the action to be taken. Options include: 1. continue contract due to unavoidable absences, 2. appointed school rep will take legal action against parent, or 3. after all other options have been exhausted, committee will deem contract breach and the result will be no credit given for that semester per class period.

An attendance contract, written after students have reached seven absences in any single class, will include the following:

—an agreement the student will not continue to miss any class.

—the student will turn in all missing work related to their prior absences and agree to turn in all future homework.

—an agreement the student will not have any minor or major write-ups for behavior issues.

Court process defined

After 10 absences in one class, if the committee opts to appoint a school rep to take legal action against the parent, the following process will be followed:

—Papers will be filed with the county.

—Parent is served legal papers indicating they need to appear in court.

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—School rep is allowed to make recommendations to the court regarding student compliance to attending school.

Various options are available to the school rep for recommendations to the court. These include fines, community service (parent or child), social service intervention, alternative education options, etc.

Tardy policy change proposed

Included in the attendance draft policy presented by Bules is a change in the tardy policy.

In the new proposal, tardiness is cumulative throughout the day, week and semester. Currently, tardies accumulate in each class period.

All tardiness is considered unexcused except by teacher's note from one class to another, in the draft proposal.

School service will be the consequence for tardies. It can be served after school, at the next school event or the next first-Friday inservice day. Consequences proposed for tardiness follow:

Step 1—3rd tardy, 30 minutes of school service.

Step 2—6th tardy, 45 minutes of school service.

Step 3—9th tardy, 60 minutes of school service. It is possible for a student to serve 75 minutes of service if they haven't already served the original 30 minutes and pick up their 6th tardy.

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10th tardy equates to truancy and refers to the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) discipline matrix for one day in-school suspension/service (ISS/S).

11th tardy—repeat steps 1-3.

20th tardy—three days ISS/S.

21st tardy—repeat steps 1-3.

30th tardy—five days ISS/S.

31st tardy—referral to attendance committee for further disciplinary action.

Failure to serve school service time will result in one day ISS/S.

ISS/S would consist of working on academic assignments from teachers in the morning and doing school service in the afternoon.

Editor's Note: Three additional stories from the Jan. 19 Board of Education meeting may be found elsewhere in this edition of The Holyoke Enterprise.