



Attendance Policy with Truancy Interventions

Merit Preparatory Academy

References: 53G-6-206; H.B. 400

PURPOSE

Merit Academy believes that regular school attendance is necessary for academic achievement and is a shared responsibility between student, parent, and the school. Studies¹ have shown when students miss more than 10% of class time, learning and long-term educational outcomes decline sharply.

Students bear a tremendous responsibility in the education process. Students need to be in their classes on time and come prepared to learn (homework completed, necessary books and supplies ready). Whenever students are absent, they have the responsibility to arrange with their teachers for make-up work. However, the classroom experience cannot be duplicated through make-up assignments.

Absenteeism also affects a student's classmates and places a burden on teachers. Teacher time and energy used for re-teaching and preparing make-up materials is taken away from students who attend regularly. Similarly, students who come to class late interrupt learning for those who arrive on time. Parents play an important role by determining which student absences are necessary.

Students may occasionally need to be absent or tardy because of illness, emergencies, funerals, etc. To allow for these unavoidable circumstances, four (4) parent-excused absences are allowed per term, per class, without penalty. Also, a student may be tardy four (4) times per class, per term, without penalty. Any attendance issues beyond this limit will result in no credit being issued in that class for the term until the issues are resolved.

DEFINITIONS

- I. **Truant:** a student who stays away from school without leave or explanation.
- II. **Interventions-** a series of non-punitive and increasingly frequent and individualized activities that are designed to:
 - A. Create a trusting relationship between teachers, students, and parents;
 - B. Improve attendance;
 - C. Improve academic outcomes; and
 - D. Reduce negative behavior referrals.

¹ [School Attendance, Truancy & Chronic Absenteeism: What Parents Need to Know](#)

POLICY

Student Check-in/Check-out and Excusing Absences:

- I. Parents may check-in students and excuse absences by sending a note with their student, sending an email to attendance@meritacademy.org or calling the attendance office at 801-491-7600 from 8 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
- II. When excusing an absence with a note, email, or voice message, parents should include the date of the absence and parent phone number.
- III. Tardies will be excused if they occur on the same day as a pre-approved absence, or occur in conjunction with a school approved activity absence or an excused health appointment absence.
- IV. To minimize classroom disruption, please arrange to check students out between class periods when possible.
- V. When students are checked out of a class early, if they have attended the majority of the class period, they are counted present for that class.
- VI. Student check-out requests are discouraged during the last 20 minutes of the school day as they disrupt the process of the office and classrooms.
- VII. Fraudulent excusing of absences by students will result in school discipline.
- VIII. All unexcused absences are considered trancies.
- IX. Failure to make-up absences, trancies, or tardies will result in a loss of credit for the class.
- X. Pre-approved absences/tardies; School approved activity absences/tardies; and Health appointment absences/tardies do not count against the 4 absence/tardy term limit.

Approved Absences (Not Included in the 4 per term Limit):

- I. **Pre-approved Absence Requests:** Students are strongly encouraged to obtain absence pre-approval for missed classes. This is available for family events such as vacations, funerals, weddings, etc. This requires a short form to be filled out with information from each of the student's teachers. The request will be reviewed by the Attendance Office for final approval. These forms are available in the Attendance Office and should be filled out and turned in **at least one week** prior to the absence(s). Pre-approved absences will still require all classroom work to be made up.
- II. **School Approved Activity Absence:** School approved activity absences and tardies will be marked as approved absences, but work for the class(es) will need to be made up.
- III. **Health Appointment Absence:** Merit Academy strongly encourages guardians to make health appointments for their students outside of school hours whenever possible. However, we acknowledge that may not always be possible. Health appointment absences will be excused with a note from the health care professional.

Excused Absences/ Tardies (Included in the 4 per term Limit)

- I. **Excused Absence:** Parents are encouraged to excuse absences within 10 school days. An unexcused absence will become a truancy if it is not parent excused within that 10 day limit. After the expiration of the initial 10-day period, parents will retain the ability to excuse their

child's absence. However, the parent must excuse it in person with the attendance secretary.

- II. **Tardies:** A student is tardy who arrives late to class within the first 10 minutes of class time. After 10 minutes the student is marked absent. Students who first arrive at school after the school day has started, must check in at the Attendance Office and receive a tardy slip.

Notice of Attendance Issues: Each term, upon reaching the 4th parent-excused absence or 4th tardy, students and parents will receive notification of attendance issues. The 5th absence or tardy will result in an NC in the class or classes in which those absences or tardies have accumulated. Students who exceed 4 excused absences or accumulate more than 4 tardies are required to attend Attendance School or one of the approved alternatives at the discretion of the administration. This is necessary to have the "NC" designation removed and to obtain the academic grade and credit for the class.

Options to Resolve Attendance Issues:

- I. **Attendance at Approved Extracurricular Activities:** With Administration approval and Attendance Office acceptance, a student may resolve an attendance issue by participating in a before or after school activity or event. The student must get a signed note from Administration approving the event the student plans to attend **before** the event or activity is held and then take that note, along with verification of attendance, to the Attendance Office after the event or activity has been completed. The Attendance Office will then excuse one absence or two tardies. The Administration or Attendance Office may limit the number of times a student can access this process for attendance make-up purposes.
- II. **Attendance School:** Attendance school is set up to allow students the opportunity to make up assignments and time missed in class.
 - A. Time required to make up the attendance infraction will be at the discretion of the Administration.
 - B. The mode available to the student for making up attendance issues will be at the discretion of the Administration.
 - C. Students are responsible for arranging their schedules for any transportation needs before or after school to participate in Attendance School.
 - D. Students should check with the Attendance Office for the current Attendance School schedule.
 - E. Attendance make-up after school will be offered free of charge during the term in which the excessive absences or tardies occurred. Attendance make-up for previous terms will cost \$10.00 per session. Students will **not** be allowed into paying sessions **without** their **receipt**.
 - F. Students need to bring make-up work to Attendance School. No electronics, note passing, talking, sleeping, etc. will be allowed and will result in dismissal from the attendance session.

Truancies: A Truancy is a confirmed absence from school without parent approval and is determined by the Attendance Office.

- I. Confirmed truancies may not later be excused and will automatically result in an NC.

- II. Students who leave class early or miss class without first being properly checked-out by a parent or guardian, will be considered truant.
- III. Students with a truancy are required to go to Attendance School or approved alternatives at the discretion of administration.
- IV. Multiple trancies will result in students and/or parents being required to meet with the Administration and/or a school counselor.

Truancy Interventions:

- I. Monitor attendance and regularly inform the student and parent of attendance issues.
- II. Meet with the administration and/or counselors, teachers, parents and the student to assess each individual situation and find positive ways to encourage the student's attendance.
- III. Administrators, in collaboration with counselors, teachers, parents, and the student, have the flexibility to make plans, agreements and contracts to encourage student attendance.
- IV. Provide opportunities to make-up missed work through after school, supervised class time; attendance at approved extracurricular activities; or attendance school.
- V. Provide the parent, upon request, with a list of resources available to assist the parent in resolving the student's attendance problems.
- VI. The administration may determine that out of school suspension, referral to attendance court, referral to law enforcement, and/or expulsion from school may be necessary to improve truancy issues.

NC grades: A grade of NC will be given for any class with unresolved attendance issues (required Attendance School sessions not completed). If the NC is not restored by the end of the term, a student has only one week after the term ends before all NC's are calculated into a student's GPA. Once this occurs, students and their guardians must meet with the school counselor to resolve the issue and determine the best course of action.

Attendance Appeals Process: Students and parents may appeal, in writing, any necessary concessions. Appeals are reserved for unusual attendance problems (i.e., medically verifiable illness, etc.). Appeals should be submitted to the Administration as soon as possible.

Excessive Absences: A student may be referred to an administrator when he/she has excessive absences in a class. A meeting between administrators, counselors, parents/guardians and the student will be required. Unresolved, excessive absences will result in further discipline including; attendance school, out of school suspension, referral to attendance court, referral to law enforcement, and/or expulsion from school. Absences in excess of 10 consecutive days require prior attendance office and administrator approval or the student will be withdrawn from Merit Preparatory Academy.

Parent Resources:

English:

https://attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/AW_HS-flyer-1-pager.pdf

https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/toosickforschool_REV.pdf

[http://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/RtP_Attendance\(2\).pdf](http://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/RtP_Attendance(2).pdf)

Spanish:

https://attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/AW_HS-flyer_Spanish.pdf

https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/toosickforschoolspanish_REV.pdf

http://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/RtP_Attendance_Spanish.pdf

Attendance Policy Addendum-

Face-to-face program

Merit Academy will not count a student as eligible if they have unexcused absences during ten consecutive school days. If a student has unexcused absences for ten consecutive days, Merit will make reasonable efforts to contact the parents/guardians of the student and make appropriate arrangements to help the student return and continue attending school. If Merit is unable to contact the parents/guardians, school policy will be followed and the student will be withdrawn from Merit Preparatory Academy.

Nontraditional programs

Distance Learning

Merit will measure online attendance on a weekly basis in compliance with Utah Administrative Code R277-419 in the following way:

1. Student to teacher weekly meaningful dialogue either online, by email, or by parent text or parent phone (unless a student is on an extended leave of absence from the school), and / or
2. Student demonstration of progress on assignments, coursework, assessments or progress toward academic goals during the course of the week.

If a student does not meet either of these, they will be marked absent for the week. If they are marked absent for ten days, and have not met the above criteria in any classes, Merit will make reasonable efforts to contact the parents/guardians of the student and make appropriate arrangements to help the student return and continue their learning. If Merit is unable to contact the parents/guardians, school policy will be followed and the student will be withdrawn from Merit Preparatory Academy.

Sick Students

Face to face students who are diagnosed with Covid-19 will be temporarily switched to distance learning and continuing enrollment will be tracked accordingly. Merit Preparatory Academy will make reasonable accommodations for students who are recovering from Covid-19.

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