

## Knowing the Rules of Attendance Accounting

With the installation of a tool that will notify parents district-wide of unexcused absences via regular letters starting January 5, 2011, this is a good time to review the statutory requirements for student attendance.

There has been a great deal of discussion in the media recently about attendance and truancy rates in our region highlighting the negative effects on a child's education as well as our school district finances. We would like to offer some information that might help students and their parents/guardians understand the obligations of the Davis Joint Unified School District related to school attendance laws.

When students are absent from school, the State allows the absence to be *excused* for a medical illness, appointments related to health, and other personal reasons listed at the end of this article.\* *Excused* absences carry the right to make up work and a period of time to do that with no penalty. That is why it is essential for parents to inform the school staff of absences. In turn we try to keep parents well informed about their child's attendance via personal calls, automated calling systems, and Parent Connect.

We find that parents and guardians are frequently under the impression that calling in the absence to the school *automatically* excuses the student. It certainly accounts for the student's whereabouts which is paramount to keeping him or her safe. However, it is the *reason* for the absence, *not the parent call* that determines if the absence is excused or unexcused.

Absences are marked "unverified"\*\*\* until we hear from the parent/guardian within 48 hours of the absence. The absence then becomes either excused or unexcused. Other than the specified reasons allowed by the State, all other absences are *unexcused*. If no call is received after two school days, then the "unverified" is an unexcused absence and cannot be changed thereafter. \*\*\* This is not a district decision; it is Education Code and required attendance accounting.

When students are *unexcused*, they do not have rights to make up the missed work, and they are subject to intervention if they accumulate more than three days of unexcused absence (truancy). Education Code requires that the District send a formal letter after three days of unexcused/unverified absence and additional letters for any more truant absences. Therefore, it is also essential to avoid unexcused absences.

Please understand that this effort to determine the status of absences is unrelated to collecting school funding. The State does not fund a single day of student absence for any reason, *not even the excused days*. Keeping track of the reasons for absences is an Ed Code requirement related to compulsory education and the parent responsibility to make sure their child is in school. That is why when parents remove their children from school for vacations, the absences are unexcused and consequences may follow.

When children are ill, we all want them to recover sensibly and avoid infecting others. Likewise, extraordinary situations may occur which require being out of school. However, in the case of an elective absence, we hope parents will weigh the lost instructional time for their child as well as the lost funding (\$43/day) to the school. The district offers short-term independent study to students whose parents are removing them for five or more days. The missed days then become instructional days, the absences are excused, and state funding is allotted for those days so long as *all* the work assigned is completed.

Please call your school if you have further questions or need more information. We want to work together for the benefit of all our students.

\*Excused absences: illness; quarantine; medical, dental, optometry, chiropractic service; funeral for immediate family member, limited to one day in California, three days out of state; jury duty; medical appt for a child in the custody of the student; justifiable reason (court appearance, religious holiday/ceremony, employment conference) with written request of parent/guardian and approved by the principal or designee. *Ed Code 48205*:

\*\* *Unverified*=no parent/guardian communication with the school

\*\*\* *Unexcused*= parent/guardian authorized absence but not for the Ed Code reasons stated above in \*