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Committee Members

Laura Clancey, Chair

Molly McCullough, Vice-Chair

Jermaine Johnson

Administrative Representative

Helen A. Friel, Ed.D.

Yeu Kue, Ed.D.

OFFICE OF THE
CLERK OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE
WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS
20 IRVING STREET
WORCESTER, MA 01609

AGENDA #3

The Standing Committee on GOVERNANCE AND EMPLOYEE ISSUES will hold a virtual and/or in-person meeting:

on: March 28, 2023

at: 5:00 p.m.

in: Room 410 of the Durkin Administration Building

ORDER OF BUSINESS

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL

III. GENERAL BUSINESS

gb 2-6 Administration

(January 4, 2022)

To consider input from the School Committee's student representatives to create more single use bathrooms, limit the locking of bathrooms and enhance the HVAC and heating systems.

gb 3-50 Clancey

(January 20, 2023)

To review and update, if necessary, the Voluntary Controlled Transfer Policy.

gb 2-294 Clancey

(November 4, 2022)

To review current policy regarding service and support animals in school and make any necessary changes.

gb 2-119 Novick

(March 31, 2022)

To consider a one-year alteration to the district policy limiting excused absences to 7 days, in light of quarantine requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic.

gb 2-176 Clancey

(May 25, 2022)

Request that the Administration review and update the Attendance Policy, if necessary.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Helen A. Friel, Ed.D.
Clerk of the School Committee

STANDING COMMITTEE: **GOVERNANCE AND EMPLOYEE ISSUES**

DATE OF MEETING: March 28, 2023

ITEM: Administration (January 7, 2022)

To consider input from the School Committee's student representatives to create more single use bathrooms, limit the locking of bathrooms and enhance the HVAC and heating systems.

PRIOR ACTION:

1-20-22 - The students provided their suggestions on what the School Committee could do to address the issues.

Facilities

Create more single use bathrooms, limit the locking of bathrooms and enhance the HVAC and heating systems. Ms. Novick stated that keeping bathrooms locked and denying access to a single use bathroom are civil rights issues. She suggested creating a policy by referring that portion to the Standing Committee on Governance and Employee Issues. Superintendent Binienda stated that reason that the bathrooms are locked is for school safety. She also stated that the plans for the new Doherty Memorial High School include a swipe key for students to be able to access single bathrooms. Mayor Petty made the following motion:

Request that the Facilities portion of the survey be referred to the Standing Committee on Governance and Employee Issues.

On a roll call of 7-0, the motions were approved.

BACKUP:

STANDING COMMITTEE: **GOVERNANCE AND EMPLOYEE ISSUES**

DATE OF MEETING: March 28, 2023

ITEM: gb 3-50 Clancey

(January 20, 2023)

To review and update, if necessary, the Voluntary Controlled Transfer Policy.

PRIOR ACTION:

2-2-23 On a voice vote, the motion to refer to the Standing Committee on Governance and Employee Issues was approved.

BACKUP:

Annex A (2 pages) contains a copy of the current Voluntary Transfer Policy

Annex B (2 pages) contains a copy of the proposed Voluntary Transfer Policy

Voluntary Controlled Transfer Policy

I. Conditions for Out-of-District Transfers

It is the policy of the Worcester Public Schools that students shall attend schools based upon neighborhood district lines. Exceptions to this policy are allowed under the “Voluntary Controlled Transfer Policy” which permits transfers to other elementary, middle and high schools or to citywide magnet schools under the following conditions:

1. There must be space available in the receiving school.
2. Elementary, middle and high schools having a minority percentage greater than the citywide average on October 1 of each year will adhere to the following restrictions:
 - a. Minority students will not be allowed to transfer into a school which has a minority percentage greater than the citywide average on October 1 of each year.
 - b. Majority students will not be allowed to transfer out of a school except in the case where the sending school is in compliance and the receiving school is out of compliance as a result of having a minority percentage greater than 15 percentage points above the citywide minority percentage.
 - c. All students, both minority and majority, shall be eligible to attend citywide magnet schools and secondary magnet schools. In order to exercise this eligibility, the magnet school must be in compliance.
3. Elementary, middle and high schools having a minority percentage less than the citywide average on October 1 of each year will adhere to the following restrictions:
 - a. Majority students will not be allowed to transfer into a school which has a minority percentage less than the citywide average on October 1 of each year.
 - b. Minority students will not be allowed to transfer out of a school except in the case where the sending school is in compliance and the receiving school is out of compliance as a result of having a minority percentage less than 15 percentage points below the citywide minority percentage.
 - c. All students, both minority and majority, shall be eligible to attend citywide magnet schools and secondary magnet schools. In order to exercise this eligibility, the magnet school must be in compliance.
4. Voluntary transfer requests will be considered for properly documented medical disabilities and other unique circumstances.
5. Spanish Bilingual, Structured English and Special Education Programs are offered in certain schools. Any student requiring these services will be enrolled in the school that will meet their assessed needs.
6. When a student changes residence and would enter grade 6, 8 or 12, they may finish the year in that school provided that they is a resident of Worcester and has received the out-of-district principal’s permission to remain in that school.
7. Students who enroll in an out of district magnet program or the Worcester Technical High School must complete the year in the out-of-district school.

II. Procedures for Applying for a "Voluntary Transfer"

1. Applications and a policy statement are available at the Parent Information Center or the Office for Instruction and School Leadership:
 - a. Parent Information Center: (508) 799-3194
 - b. Burncoat/South Quadrants (508) 799-3264
 - c. Doherty/North Quadrants: (508) 799-3221
 - d. *Technical Quadrant: (508) 799-3499

*Applications for Worcester Technical High School may be obtained in all secondary guidance offices or at the Technical School Admissions Office.

2. The application must be filled out and returned to the appropriate office. Parent Information Center or the Office for Instruction and School Leadership.
3. A written approval or denial will be sent to the home of the caregiver and copies will be forwarded to the principals of both the sending and receiving schools.
4. A copy of the application and the approval or denial letter will be kept on file in the Office for Instruction and School Leadership.

III. Hardship Appeals Process

If the caregiver disagrees with the decision of the Office for Instruction and School Leadership, an appeal must be filed before the first day of the school year. A maximum of two weeks will be allowed to appeal the decision in writing to the Chairperson of the Hardship Appeals Board, Parent Information Center, 768 Main Street, Worcester, MA 01610.

The board will review each case referred to it and make timely decisions relative to the disposition of the appeal. A copy of the decision will be sent to the caregiver and the Office for Instruction and School Leadership. Proceedings of the Hardship Appeals Board will be recorded and maintained by personnel in the Office for Instruction and School Leadership.

Voluntary Controlled Transfer Policy

I. Conditions for Voluntary Transfers

It is the policy of the Worcester Public Schools that students shall attend schools based upon neighborhood district lines. Exceptions to this policy are allowed under the "Voluntary Controlled Transfer Policy" which permits transfers to other elementary, middle and high schools or to citywide magnet schools under the following conditions:

1. There must be space available in the receiving school. By August 15 of each year, the Principal of each school building will report the number of available seats in each grade after retaining seats for possible move-ins. Families must submit a Voluntary Transfer Application by April 1st of the current school year to be considered for Voluntary Transfer for the following school year, and students will be assigned to the transfer school unless the number of applicants exceeds the available seats, in which case the school will hold a lottery to select applicants and contingent upon specialized programming being offered in the receiving school should the student require such services. Any sibling of a student enrolled in a transfer school through this program will have preference for acceptance into the transfer school.
2. Due to the limited availability of seats, transfers are not guaranteed.
3. Students residing in Worcester shall have priority for Voluntary Transfers over students attending the Worcester Public Schools through school choice.
4. The District will comply with state laws and regulations addressing racial imbalance as appropriate. See MGL Chapter 71 Sections 37C and 37D.
5. Majority students will not be allowed to transfer into a school that has 15 percentage points below citywide demographic average as of October 1st.
6. Majority students will not be allowed to transfer out of their school if their school has 15 percentage points above citywide demographic average as of October 1st.
7. Voluntary transfer requests will be considered for properly documented medical disabilities and other unique circumstances such to address safety, bullying or harassment.
8. Students who are admitted to a school pursuant to the Voluntary Transfer process are entitled to remain at their new school until the student completes all grades in the school, so long as the student remains a resident of Worcester, and does not exhibit chronic absenteeism or chronic tardiness due to transportation challenges.
9. Students who are accepted for voluntary transfer shall not receive transportation to the school unless the student receives specialized transportation as a related service pursuant to an IEP or a 504.
10. Spanish Bilingual, Structured English and Special Education Programs are offered in certain schools. Any student requiring these services will be enrolled in the school that will meet their assessed needs as according to the student's IEP team or language needs team

11. When a student changes residence and would enter grade 6, 8 or 12, they may finish the year in that school provided that they are a resident of Worcester and has received the out-of-district principal's permission to remain in that school. Students who enroll in an out of district magnet program or the Worcester Technical High School must complete the year in the out-of-district school.

II. Procedures for Applying for a "Voluntary Transfer"

1. Applications and policy are available at the Parent Information Center.

III. Applications for Worcester Technical High School (WTHS)

These applications may be obtained in all secondary guidance offices, the Technical School Admissions Office, the Office for Instruction and School Leadership, as well as the Parent Information Center. The application process is as follows:

1. The application must be filled out and returned to the Office of Instruction and School Leadership.
2. A written approval or denial will be sent to the home of the caregiver and copies will be forwarded to the principals of both the sending and receiving schools.
3. A copy of the application and the approval or denial letter will be kept on file in the Office for Instruction and School Leadership.
4. If the caregiver disagrees with the decision, an appeal must be filed before the first day of the school year. A maximum of two weeks will be allowed to appeal the decision in writing to the WTHS Chairperson of the Appeals Board for at 20 Irving Street, Worcester, MA 01609.
5. The board will review each case referred to it and make timely decisions relative to the disposition of the appeal. A copy of the decision will be sent to the caregiver. Proceedings of the Appeals Board will be recorded and maintained by personnel in the Office for Instruction and School Leadership.

STANDING COMMITTEE: **GOVERNANCE AND EMPLOYEE ISSUES**

DATE OF MEETING: March 28, 2023

ITEM: gb 2-294 Clancey

(November 4, 2022)

To review current policy regarding service and support animals in school and make any necessary changes.

PRIOR ACTION:

11-10-22 On a voice vote, the motion to refer to the Standing Committee on Governance and Employee Issues was approved.

BACKUP:

Annex A (4 pages) contains the Service Animal Policy Guidance

Annex B (4 pages) contains the WPS Emotional Support Dog Policy

WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOL'S POLICY ON SERVICE ANIMALS IN SCHOOLS

Overview

The purpose of this statement is to explain Worcester Public Schools' ("the District") policy regarding the permitted use of service animals within the District. The District does not discriminate against individuals with disabilities, including those who require the assistance of service animals. The District will comply with Massachusetts and federal laws concerning the rights of persons who use service animals and will permit such animals on school premises and on school transportation in a manner consistent with the law.

Definition of a Service Animal

Massachusetts law limits the definition of service animal to a dog that accompanies an individual with a sensory and or physical disability. The ADA defines service animals as "any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability." Examples of performative tasks include but are not limited to assisting individuals who are blind or have low vision with navigation and other tasks, alerting individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to the presence of people or sounds, providing nonviolent protection or rescue work, pulling a wheelchair, assisting an individual during a seizure, alerting individuals to the presence of allergens, retrieving items such as medicine or the telephone, providing physical support and assistance with balance and stability to individuals with mobility disabilities, and helping persons with psychiatric and neurological disabilities by preventing or interrupting impulsive or destructive behaviors.

Service animals are not pets, nor are they emotional support animals. An emotional support animal is a dog whose sole function is to provide emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship do not qualify as service animals.

The District's Responsibility

The District shall not assume or take custody of, or responsibility for, the care of feeding of any service animal. The owner or person having custody and control of the animal shall be liable for any damage to persons, premises, property, or facilities caused by the service animal.

Safety

A service animal must have a harness, leash, or other tether, unless either the handler is unable because of a disability to use a harness, leash, or other tether, or the use of a harness, leash, or other tether would interfere with the service animal's safe, effective performance of work or tasks, in which case the service animal must be otherwise under the handler's control.

If, in the opinion of the building Principal or their designee, any service animal is not in the control of its handler, or if it is not housebroken, the service animal may be excluded from the school or program. The service animal can also be excluded if it presents a direct and immediate

threat to others in the school. The parent or guardian of the student having custody and control of the animal will be required to remove the service animal from the District premises immediately. Any animal not covered under the ADA service animal definition can be asked to leave District premises.

If any student or staff member assigned to the classroom in which a service animal is permitted suffers an allergic reaction to the animal, the person having custody and control of the animal will be required to remove the animal to a different location designated by the Principal (or designee) and an alternative plan will be developed with appropriate District staff. Such plan could include the reassignment of the person having custody and control of the animal to a different classroom.

No service animal will be permitted on school premises without proof of current rabies vaccination and without prior discussion with the Director of Special Services.

The Superintendent of Schools or their designee shall be responsible for developing procedures to accommodate a student's use of a service animal in District facilities and on school transportation.

Reference: ADA Regulations, 28 CFR Part 35 (as amended, 2010); Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); The Rehabilitation Act of 1973; M.G.L. c. 272, § 98A

Protocol for Service Animal Policy

1. All requests for an individual with a disability to be accompanied by a service animal must be addressed in writing to the Office of Special Education and Intervention Services at 20 Irving Street, Worcester, MA 01609, and must contain required documentation of animal vaccinations. This written request must be delivered to the Director of the Special Education at least 10 business days prior to bringing the service animal to school or a school function. A challenge to the determination regarding the qualification of the dog may be appealed to the Director of Special Education.

2. Removal of a Service Animal: A school administrator may ask an individual with a disability or their parents to remove a service animal from a school building, a classroom, school property or from a school function if any one of the following circumstances occurs:
 - the animal is out of control and the animal’s handler does not take effective action to control it;
 - the animal is not housebroken;
 - the animal’s behavior or presence poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others;
 - the animal’s presence would “fundamentally alter” the nature of the service, program, or activity or is disruptive. Examples may include, but are not limited to, research labs, areas requiring protective clothing, and food preparation areas; and
 - animals not covered under the ADA service animal definition can be asked to leave a District facility or program. Questions related to the use of service animals on school property should be directed to the Director of Special Education.

3. The District shall not ask about the nature or extent of a student’s disability, but to determine whether an animal qualifies as a service animal, the District may inquire if the animal is required because of a disability and what work or task the animal has been trained to perform. The District shall not require documentation, such as proof that the animal has been certified, trained, or licensed as a service animal.

4. If the student arrives at school with a service animal and previous approval has not been obtained, the parents/guardians will be immediately notified and requested to come to the school to retrieve the service animal until it can be determined that the presence of the dog in school is in compliance with the law and policy. The service animal will remain with the child until the parent/guardian removes the service animal from school property. The service animal will not be separated from the child.

5. Owners of a service animal must provide annual proof that the animal has been immunized against diseases common to dogs, including the following vaccinations: DHLPPC (Distemper, Hepatitis, Leptospirosis, Paroinfluenza, Parvovirus, and Coronavirus), Bordetella, and Rabies.

6. All service animals must be spayed or neutered; treated for, and kept free of, fleas and ticks; and be kept clean and groomed to avoid shedding and dander.
7. Owners of a service animal are liable for any harm or injury caused by the animal to other students, staff, visitors, and/or property.
8. The animal must be “required” for the individual with a disability.
9. The animal must be “individually trained” to do work or a task for the individual with a disability.
10. In the event access is granted, the school should consider and establish the following:
 - a rest place for the dog (such as a crate in a quiet place);
 - rest times for the dog (gym, lunch, and recess are especially difficult school periods for a service dog to successfully endure);
 - emergency evacuation plan;
 - fire drill plan/participation; and
 - an alternate accommodation/plan in the event the dog is not able to accompany the disabled child to school due to illness, injury, or death.
11. Any questions about the Worcester Public School’s policy or procedures with regard to service animals should be directed to the Director of Special Education.

Worcester Public Schools Emotional Support Dog Policy

Emotional Support Dogs, which can be called social-emotional assistance dogs, or comfort dogs, and therapy dogs, are not service animals as defined by Massachusetts law or Title II or Title III of the American Disabilities Act. This policy addresses these non-service dogs who provide companionship, comfort and affection and sometimes help with depression, anxiety, and certain phobias, but do not have special training to perform tasks that assist people with disabilities. This policy also addresses therapy dogs who provide people with therapeutic contact to improve their physical, social, emotional, and/or cognitive functioning.

An Emotional Support Dog may only be brought into a Worcester Public School or any of its affiliated programs or facilities at the sole discretion of the Superintendent or their designee. Other emotional support animals are not permitted in the Worcester Public Schools. All requests shall be submitted to the Superintendent in writing. The Superintendent or their designee reserve the right to request documentation supporting all requests. Such documentation may include documentation from a physician, psychiatrist, social worker or other mental health professional describing the need for an Emotional Support dog and documentation from a veterinarian that the Emotional Service dog is in good health and up-to-date on all vaccinations as required by local ordinances and regulations.

If a request for Emotional Support Dog is granted by the Superintendent or their designee, the owner of the Emotional Support Dog is responsible for ensuring that the Emotional Support Dog does not unduly interfere with school activities and is solely responsible for any damage to persons or school property caused by the Emotional Support Dog.

Protocol for Emotional Support Dog Policy

1. All requests to bring an Emotional Support Dog onto the Worcester Public Schools property or to activities or events must be in writing and approval must be received **prior** to the dog attending school activities or events or being present on school property. An Emotional Support Dog may only be brought into a Worcester Public School or any of its affiliated programs or facilities at the **sole discretion** of the Superintendent or his or her designee. The Superintendent or his or her designee may withdraw approval for the Emotional Support Dog **at any time** at his or her **sole discretion**.
2. The request shall be submitted for approval each school year and/or whenever the handler wishes to use a different Emotional Support Dog.
3. The requestor must provide the following documentation prior to receiving approval:
 - i. For individuals (as opposed to groups or organizations) requesting to bring an Emotional Support Dog onto the Worcester Public Schools property or to activities or events, such individuals must submit current documentation (not more than one (1) year old) on letterhead from a licensed mental health professional stating: (1) the person has a mental health-related disability listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV); (2) having the dog accompany the person is necessary to the person's mental health or treatment; (3) the individual providing the assessment of the person is a licensed mental health professional and the person is under his or her professional care; and (4) the date and type of the mental health professional's license and the state or other jurisdiction in which it was issued.
 - ii. Evidence from a veterinarian of the dog being up-to-date with required vaccinations, including rabies and receipt of a clean bill of health.
 - iii. Appropriate licensure from a local dog licensing authority.
 - iv. Affirmation that the dog has regular flea prevention treatment and will be well-groomed while on school property or at school activities/events.
 - v. Evidence that the owner has liability insurance which would cover any damages or injuries caused by the dog's presence at school, school activities/events.
 - vi. Statement that the owner is responsible for any damages caused by their dog.
 - vii. Evidence that any Emotional Support dog servicing as a therapy dog has received a therapy dog certification from a national therapy dog organization (e.g. the American Kennel Club, Intermountain Therapy Dog, Pet Partners, Bright and Beautiful, or such other therapy dog registering organization as determined appropriate by the Superintendent or his or her designee) if the dog will serve as a therapy dog in school. Exceptions may be made for therapy dogs undergoing training by the Worcester Police Department to serve as a therapy dog for the benefit of the schools.
4. The Emotional Support Dog must be obedient, calm as well as affectionate and friendly to strangers.

5. The Emotional Support Dog will not be permitted in unauthorized areas within and outside of the school building.
6. When using an Emotional Support Dog in a school setting, the dog must always be under the control of the handler with either a harness or a leash no longer than four (4) feet, unless holding such a leash would interfere with the therapy dog's safe, effective performance of its work or tasks. The handler shall maintain control of the therapy dog at all times and shall not tether the therapy dog to any individual or object. The school is not responsible for providing the handler or for handling the dog.
7. The handler and Emotional Support Dog will wear appropriate identification identifying them as a registered handler and therapy dog.
8. The owner of the Emotional Support Dogs is responsible for any damages caused by the dog.
9. The handler of an Emotional Support Dog is responsible for the supervision and care of the dog while on school property or school activities or events including feeding, exercising, and cleaning up after the dog.
10. The handler shall remove the Emotional Support Dog to a separate area as designated by the school administrator in such instances where any student or school employee who suffers dog allergies or aversions is present in an office, hallway, or classroom.
11. For groups or organizations (as opposed to individuals) bringing an Emotional Support Dog onto the Worcester Public Schools property or to activities or events, the following requirements apply:
 - i. Volunteer handlers shall sign themselves and their therapy dog in upon arrival at any school and shall sign both out on departure from the building. Handlers who are school district staff or a Worcester School Resource Officer shall sign their therapy dog in upon arrival and sign him/her out on their departure.
 - ii. The handler shall not charge a fee for the work they perform with the therapy dog, shall not borrow money or personal items, or receive any personal gratuity, gift, or tip, such as money or jewelry from students in the district.
 - iii. The handler shall confirm whether or not there will be any other therapy dog(s) on site prior to scheduling any visit with a therapy dog and shall take steps with appropriate staff to ensure that the dogs do not engage inappropriately while on school property. When multiple therapy dogs are engaged in a planned activity on school district property, the handlers shall ensure that the dogs have an opportunity to greet each other prior to entering the school building. Once inside the building, the handlers shall ensure that the dogs are each on a four (4)-foot leash, given work space at least eight (8) feet from each other, and are given no opportunity for contact or socialization with each other while working.

12. The ADAA permits a student with a disability who uses a service animal to bring the animal to school and the district's Service Animal Policy applies to service animals.

STANDING COMMITTEE: **GOVERNANCE AND EMPLOYEE ISSUES**

DATE OF MEETING: March 28, 2023

ITEM: Clancey (May 25, 2022)

Request that the Administration review and update the Attendance Policy, if necessary.

PRIOR ACTION:

6-2-22 - Superintendent Binienda requested, effective June 3, 2022, that the School Committee waive the 14 Unexcused Absences Policy (no credit rule) for the school year 2021-22.

Member Clancey made the following motion:

Request that the policy regarding 14 Unexcused Absences (no credit rule) be waived due to the COVID virus for the school year 2021-22. On a roll call of 7-0, the motion was approved.

Vice-chair Johnson made the following motion:

To reconsider the vote to waive the 14 Unexcused Absences (no credit rule) with an effective date of June 3, 2022. On a roll call of 0-7, the motion to reconsider the vote to waive the 14 Unexcused Absences (no credit rule) with an effective date of June 3, 2022 was denied.

It was moved and voice voted to refer the item to the Standing Committee on Governance and Employee Issues.

1-31-23 Dr. Morse provided an update on the policy. She stated that the intent was to have a consistent one across the district. She highlighted that a designated caregiver would provide notification, either in person or in writing, regarding the reason for the student's absence, removing the requirement of a doctor's note. Chair Clancey recommended the following amendments:

1. Under the section on Attendance Notification, include "3. Caregiver on record can view their child's absences online through Infinite Campus."
2. Under the section Student Not Living with Parent or Guardian that "...adult member of the household..." be changed to "Caregiver on Record".

Chair Clancey motioned to approve the Attendance Policy as amended. On a roll call of 3-0, the motion was approved.

2-16-23 Mayor Petty motioned to accept the Report of the Standing Committee and to refer gb 2-176 to the Standing Committee on Governance and Employee Issues.

BACKUP:

Annex A (4 pages) contains the proposed Attendance Policy as amended

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Overview:

In accordance with state Laws, the Worcester Public Schools recognizes and enforces that every child, between the ages of six and sixteen, must attend school. School personnel and caregivers must work together to ensure that all students, Pre-Kindergarten through grade 12, attend school every day, and on time, during the 180-day pupil calendar.

School attendance is a priority for the Worcester Public Schools. Students' academic, social, and emotional growth and development depend upon students' daily attendance, classroom participation, and exposure to high-quality teaching and learning. The daily interactions between teachers and students are irreplaceable components of the learning experience. In addition, daily attendance and punctuality habits acquired during schooling are essential skills in adulthood life, and it begins as early as the pre-school years. Students who are chronically absent from school impact their own learning and the school community as a whole. Schools can take the following steps to address absenteeism:

School Attendance

Chapter 76, section 1 of the Massachusetts General Laws states that all children between the ages of six and sixteen must attend school. In addition to this law, Worcester has an attendance policy and should make sure that parents and caregivers are familiar with it.

The school recognizes that there are legitimate reasons for being absent from school, such as illness. In accordance with state law, to the extent that excused absences do not exceed seven days or 14 half-days in a six-month period, documented absences that fall within these limits may be excused. Eligible students who require modifications to the attendance policy due to a qualifying disability may seek accommodations through a 504 Plan or IEP.

Absences for any reason other than illness must be pre-arranged. School officials will not grant permission for a student to leave the school for any reason during the school day until a parent/guardian has been informed. Absences and tardies are part of a student's permanent record.

Excused Absences

The following is a list of documented absences which will not count toward retention or loss of credit:

- Family bereavement (parent/caregiver note required)
- Religious holiday (parent/caregiver note required): The student has a sincerely held religious belief and that school attendance would interfere with their religious observances.
- Illness (or a medical appointment) absences with written or other (phone call, e-mail) communicated verification from the parent/caregiver or the student's treating physician's office. In instances of chronic or irregular absences reportedly due to illness, the administration may request a doctor's note or other documentation from the

student's treating health care provider and may seek consent to communicate with the health care provider. For absences of five consecutive days or more, the student must report to the nurse on the day of return with documentation from the student's treating health care provider and/or parent note.

- Hospitalization: The caregiver must submit to the school discharge papers from the hospital documenting the student's hospitalization.
- School-approved field trips (including a limited number of athletic events to be designated by the administration) the appropriate form signed by the parent granting permission and teacher approval.
- Representation of Worcester Public Schools in a school-related activity.
- Suspension for violation of the school disciplinary code.
- Court appointment with official court time and date verification.
- For Grade 12 and 11 students ONLY: College interview/visit documented on college Letterhead (limit of 6 between Junior and Senior year).
- School field trips

Documented Absence:

Students who wish to have an absence documented must present the required documentation when they return to school but no later than 7 school days following their absence.

Please be advised that absences without documentation will count as unexcused absences.

Examples of UNDOCUMENTED ABSENCES (not a complete list):

- Truancy
- Tardy to school/class (20 minutes late)
- Class cutting
- Illness without documentation
- Family vacations, trips, obligations, etc.
- Unnecessary absences from class as determined by an administrator.
- Non-school related extracurricular events
- Any form of "Skip Day"

Special Note: Any student who is twenty minutes late for class or who is dismissed twenty minutes before the end of the class will be considered to have an undocumented absence unless the tardiness/dismissal falls in the category of documented absence.

Upon receipt of a physician's written order verifying that any student enrolled in the Worcester public schools must remain at home or in a hospital on a day or overnight basis, or any combination of both, for medical reasons and for a period of not less than fourteen school days in any school year, the student may be eligible to receive home or hospital instruction. For more information refer to Home Hospital instruction on page 62.

Student Absence Notification Program

The District will notify a student's caregiver daily of a student's absence based on morning attendance via a ConnectEd automated phone call.

Beginning with 5 absences in a school year caregivers will receive an attendance letter via U.S. Mail with each absence. Each Principal or designee shall make a reasonable effort to meet with any student, and that student's caregiver, who has missed five (5) or more unexcused school days of two or more missed periods in the same day in a school year.

The meeting shall be to develop action steps to improve student attendance and shall be developed jointly by the Principal or designee, the student, and the student's parent or caregiver. The parties may seek input from other relevant school staff and/or officials from relevant public safety, health and human service, housing, and nonprofit other local agencies in order to support the child. Multiple and many documented attempts to collaborate and improve attendance will be necessary between the school and home prior to the involvement of The Department of Children and Families (DCF) for absenteeism issues.

Tardiness and Dismissal

A student who is not in their assigned seat at the start of homeroom or class is tardy.

If a student starts school after half of the academic day has passed, then that student will be marked absent from school for that day. The student may not participate in any school activity (e.g., sports, dances, prom) during the rest of that day.

If a student leaves school before half of the academic day has passed, then that student will be marked absent from school for that day. The student may not participate in any school activity (e.g., sports, dances, prom) during the rest of that day.

Attendance Notification to Students and their Caregiver

Parents/caregivers are notified by phone on a daily basis if their child is absent. After five unexcused absences, the principal or their designee will notify the caregiver(s) in writing and, when appropriate, request a meeting to discuss the student's attendance. Caregivers will continue to receive written notification of their child's attendance at every 5th absence from school.

Caregivers and guardians will also receive attendance information through:

1. Interim and attendance progress reports (at five weeks into each marking period)
2. Report cards (every ten weeks). The secondary report cards show students' absences from each class and students' total absences from school
3. Caregiver on record can view student's absences online through Infinite Campus

SPECIAL ATTENDANCE ISSUES

Student Not Living with Parent or Guardian

A student who is not living with a parent or guardian is expected to follow all school policies in the same manner as all other students. Notes (to excuse absences, etc.) should be written by a caregiver on record. If the student lives in a situation where no adult authority is present, arrangements regarding attendance and discipline procedures must be set up by means of a meeting of the student and the assistant principal.

M.G.L. Chapter 76 Section 1.

STANDING COMMITTEE: **GOVERNANCE AND EMPLOYEE ISSUES**

DATE OF MEETING: March 28, 2023

ITEM: Novick (March 31, 2022)

To consider a one-year alteration to the district policy limiting excused absences to 7 days, in light of quarantine requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic.

PRIOR ACTION:

4-7-22 - Member O'Connell Novick stated that students are only allowed seven excused absences and is concerned for the students who have had COVID multiple times. She would like the policy discussed in Standing Committee. Superintendent Binienda stated that she and many principals do not follow that policy due to the pandemic. There is a special code C that is put into the computer to mark a student as absence for COVID reasons.

On a roll call of 7-0, the item was referred to the Standing Committee on Governance and Employee Issues.

8-30-22 - STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE AND EMPLOYEE ISSUES
Ms. Mahoney stated that an absence is an excused one if a student tests positive or has been in close contact with someone who has COVID. Chair Clancey stated that, in the Student Handbook, under the Attendance Policy, it states that:

- under School Attendance - a school district may excuse up to seven day sessions or fourteen half-day sessions in any period of six months.
- under Illness - that the caregiver must submit to the school medical documentation of the illness that requires the student's exclusion from school

She would like the Administration to consider amending the current policy due to the fact that some parents are not able to get their child/ren to the doctors to get a note for school. Ms. Mahoney stated that the Administration has had conversations with the attorneys regarding revamping the Attendance Policy. Dr. Monárrez recommended that the item be held in order for the Administration to seek a legal opinion regarding the Attendance Policy. Chair Clancey made the following motion:

Request that the item be held.

On a roll call of 3-0, the item was held.

9-15-22 SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
The School Committee approved the action of the Standing Committee as stated.

BACKUP:

To be considered with gb 2-176.