



Waskom Middle School

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Dr. Scott Bailey

Principal

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Mr. Cox;

I am writing to request respectfully that you and the Board consider the following attendance-related policy changes at the next regularly scheduled meeting. To wit:

Item 1: FM (LOCAL)

FM (LOCAL) currently reads as follows:

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITY ABSENCES	The District shall make no distinction between absences for UIL activities and absences for other extracurricular activities approved by the Board. A student shall be allowed in a school year a maximum of 17 extracurricular absences not related to post-district competition, a maximum of five absences for post-district competition prior to state, and a maximum of two absences for state competition.
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I am requesting that the Board consider modifying the second sentence of the current policy as follows:

A student enrolled in grades 5-8 shall be allowed a maximum of 12 extracurricular absences, and a student enrolled in grades 9-12 shall be allowed a maximum of 17 extracurricular absences not related to post-district competition. In addition, a student shall be allowed a maximum of five absences for post-district competition prior to state, and a maximum of two absences for state competition.

Rationale: While I value the benefits that participation in extracurricular activities provides to our students, I strongly feel that missing 17 days—or three and a half weeks—of school is too much for middle school students. Importantly, the UIL prohibits students in grades 7-8 from participating in athletic events during the school day, so students will not accrue athletic-related absences in middle school. Thus, even by reducing the allowable number of extracurricular absences to 12, middle school students will in effect be able to participate to a higher degree than high school students. In short, the middle school years are foundational ones, and we need our students present at school in order to properly lay that foundation. Reducing the number of allowed extracurricular absences will help accomplish this without penalizing the students.

Item 2: FEB (LOCAL)

FEB (LOCAL) currently reads as follows:

PARENTAL CONSENT TO LEAVE CAMPUS	A student absent from school for any portion of a school day shall provide a note that describes the reason for the absence. The note shall be signed by the student's parent or, if the student is 18 or older or is an emancipated minor, by the student.
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I am requesting that the Board consider modifying the first sentence of the current policy as follows:

A student absent from school for any portion of a school day shall, *within two days of returning to school*, provide a note that describes the reason for the absence.

Rationale: We file truancy charges based upon the number of unexcused absences a student accrues. Before we file charges, we send a warning letter and, subsequently, file an ASAP referral which is delivered by the constable, usually with no response. Often though, as soon as parents receive notice that charges have been filed, they scramble to turn in notes and excuses, even though the absences in question might have occurred several months ago. According to current policy, which does not place a time limit on submitting excuses, we must accept those notes and drop the charges. This process creates a significant waste of time for all parties involved, including the school offices, the judge's office, and the constable who delivers the notices. Adding the two day time limit as a codified backstop would make the current policy enforceable.

If either, or both, of these recommendations are accepted and approved, then the Student Handbook will also need to be updated to reflect the changes, with updates needed on p. 17 for Item 1 and on p. 10 for Item 2.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. I will be happy to provide more information as needed.

Regards,

Dr. Scott Bailey
Principal
Waskom Middle School

