

# WEBUTUCK CENTRAL SCHOOLS

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Dear Wildcat Families,

We hope this letter finds you and your families doing well this summer! The matter of this letter is urgent and, as such, should be considered as some required summer reading for our parents and guardians.

Every day a student is absent is a lost opportunity for learning. Too many absences not only directly affect achievement for the absent student, but it can also disrupt learning for the entire class. Research shows that students who consistently miss school are at risk of lower academic achievement, failure/retention, and even dropping out of school altogether.

Bringing awareness to the issue of chronic absenteeism, and providing information and resources to parents can help improve student attendance and, consequently, student achievement. We saw during the pandemic how important it is for all students to be learning in-person from their teachers and alongside their classmates. The bottom line is this: *If your child is healthy, they should be in school.*

## **Attendance Matters**

Most children miss a few days of school each year without long-term consequences. However, when they miss many days, the effects are always negative. The New York State Education Department classifies a student as being “chronically absent” when they miss 10 percent of school days, and it is different from truancy, which counts only unexcused absences.

We have 180 days of school each year. Thus, students who miss 18 or more days are now classified as chronically absent by the State Department of Education. That works out to less than 2 days per month over the course of a 10 month school year. Over the course of a student’s school career, missing 10 percent of school days would equate to missing one and one half YEARS of instructional time.

## **What Can Families Do?**

Attending school regularly helps children feel better about school and themselves. Start building this habit in preschool so they learn right away that going to school on time, every day is important. Good attendance will help children do well at all levels, from high school to college and, ultimately, in their careers.

### **Here are some important tips to adopt and follow:**

- Avoid scheduling vacations when school is in session. They are considered unexcused absences.
- Build regular routines for bedtime and the morning.
- Lay out clothes and pack backpacks the night before and, if possible, have students shower/bathe before bed.
- Talk about the importance of regular attendance and about how your child feels about school.
- Don’t permit your child(ren) to miss school unless your child is *truly sick*. Use a thermometer to check for a fever. Remember that stomach aches and headaches may be signs of anxiety. If your child seems anxious about going to school, talk with teachers, your building principal, school counselors, or other parents for advice on how to make him/her feel comfortable and excited about learning.

- Avoid medical appointments when school is in session. Don't forget, we have Open Door right on the campus of EBIS/WHS. If you haven't signed your child up for this service, here is the number: (914) 632-2737. If you need to schedule an appointment during the school day, bring your child(ren) to school before or after the appointment.
- Keep a chart recording your child's attendance at home. At the end of the week, talk with your child about what you see and, perhaps, build in a reward system for perfect attendance at the end of each month.
- Develop back up plans for getting to school if something comes up. Ask a family member, neighbor, or another parent for help.
- Seek support from school staff or community groups to help with transportation, health problems, or no safe path to school.
- Sign up for Parent Portal and get connected with access to grades, attendance, and homework assignments.
- Do not ask your teen to help with babysitting or household errands during the school day.
- If you are going through challenges related to acquiring health care, lack of food, poor transportation or unstable housing, you can look for support from the school and community.

**Here are some IMPORTANT facts:**

- Chronic absenteeism begins as early as pre-kindergarten.
- Absences can be a sign that a student is losing interest in school, struggling with school work, dealing with a bully, or facing some other potentially serious difficulty. Ask questions if your child seems to be avoiding school by claiming to be sick too often.
- Compared to children with average attendance, chronically absent students gained 14% fewer literacy skills in kindergarten and 15% fewer literacy skills in 1st grade.
- Children chronically absent in kindergarten and 1st grade are much less likely to read at grade level by the end of 3rd grade.
- By 6th grade, chronic absence is one of three early warning signs that a student is more likely to drop out of school.
- By 9th grade, student attendance is a better predictor of graduation than 8th grade test scores.
- Bringing awareness to the issue of chronic absenteeism, and providing information and resources to parents can help improve student attendance and, consequently, student achievement.

In closing, attendance and punctuality are supremely important to every student. Consider this: a student who misses just 10 days of school, or one day per month for each month of the school year, has missed two full weeks of school and missed over 80 different lessons. At 40 minutes per lesson, that's 3,200 minutes of lost instructional time. If we look at other areas of life, would the basketball player who has 3,200 less minutes in the gym be better or worse off from the competition? Would the heavy machine operator who has missed 3,200 minutes of training be in line for the promotion? The point here is this: there are clear, damaging ramifications to missed time in both of the examples given; how much more is student learning impacted by unnecessary lost time in the classroom?

We look forward to seeing everyone back to school this fall. Additionally, each building has a newly formed attendance committee that will actively be working with all families and staff this year. Moreover, we have an attendance secretary, Mrs. Trisha Lawrence, who will be overseeing our absences. Finally, please be sure to look at each building's handbook for specific, board of education approved attendance policies. Let's make the 2023-2024 school year a great school year! .

Sincerely,

Mr. Knuschke - Principal WHS

Mr. Pascale - Principal EBIS

Ms. Hengen - Principal WES