

## FORT NELSON SECONDARY SCHOOL

### ATTENDANCE POLICY AND PROCEDURES (08-05-30)

(This policy was developed with input from students, staff, and the PAC/SPC)

#### **Philosophy and Background**

At FNSS, we educate and support our students to help them realize their unique and full potential, and live purposeful lives. We recognize that in order to achieve this we must establish a partnership with our students and their parents or guardians. Despite all our best efforts to encourage success, a student's actions can severely impact this process. One major area of concern is attendance.

We believe that the essence of our educational programs occur in classrooms with skilled teachers. Explanations, clarifications, discussions, opportunities for feedback, and group tasks are invaluable components of an effective learning environment. That is why our policy regarding attendance is that students are expected to attend all classes that they are registered in every day. The foundations of this attendance policy are the following:

- The British Columbia School Act
- The BC Ministry of Education Performance Standards for Social Responsibility
- School District No. 81 Policies 5010 (Attendance) and 5210 (Student Behavior and Discipline)
- FNSS 'Top Ten' Standards for Student Behavior

The general goals of the school's attendance policy are to

- increase student success by promoting daily attendance, and
- help students develop responsibility in preparation for attendance expectations in their future careers

#### **Attendance Policy**

Developing effective attendance habits requires the cooperation of students, parents, the school, and the community. We must work together to promote, carefully monitor, and encourage regular attendance. Attendance is a necessary component of student success in school. A review of our data from previous years clearly indicates that poor attendance is linked to poor achievement.

An absence is an absence regardless of the reason, as are lates. Each absence or late results in a lost learning opportunity in the classroom, which may not be regained.

As per FNSS Attendance Procedures, parents/guardians are requested to call or provide a written explanation to the school office (774-6958) for all student absences or lates. If late for any class, students must sign in at the office for a 'late slip' immediately and proceed promptly to class.

## **ATTENDANCE CRITERIA FOR EXTRA CURRICULAR PARTICIPATION**

The goal of the specific attendance criteria and procedures relating to extra curricular activities and events is to raise the sense of ‘social responsibility’ of our students by linking the privilege of participating in these to meeting school attendance expectations.

**In order to participate in extracurricular school activities / events (ie. dances, school field trips, team sport/club trips, etc.), students must demonstrate that they are meeting school expectations for Social Responsibility by meeting the criteria for attendance**

(see below). In addition, **students must be in full attendance on the day of a school activity/event in order to participate** (ie. attend a school dance or go on a fieldtrip).

For the purposes of determining eligibility to participate in extracurricular activities / events, lates and absences are calculated per term, and then that tally is ‘reset to zero’ at the end of each term. Students will therefore have an opportunity to regain their status as ‘FNSS citizens in good standing, demonstrating social responsibility’ each term, and will be encouraged and supported to increase their efforts to improve their attendance.

**NOTE:** It is the responsibility of students and their parents to monitor student attendance (lates and absences) to ensure that they are maintaining their eligibility to participate in extra curricular activities/events.

### **CRITERIA for Meeting FNSS Attendance Expectations:**

1. **10% or fewer absences overall from term classes** is meeting expectations (absent for 23 blocks or fewer out of approximately 225 blocks per term)
2. **10% or fewer absences per class per term** is meeting expectations (absent for 6 blocks or fewer in any one class)
3. **5% or fewer lates per term** is meeting expectations (late for 12 blocks or fewer out of approximately 225 blocks per term)

In determining the above criteria, the committee took into account the following types of absences:

1. Student illness
2. Failure to attend presentation, assembly or TAG (‘homeroom’) class
3. In or around school but not in class
4. Any other absence not meeting the criteria for school approval
5. Medical or “Specialist” appointments
6. Death in the immediate family
7. Observance of a religious holiday
8. Family emergency

9. Personal Safety Issue
10. Work related absence
11. Sleeping In
12. Transportation Issue
13. Childcare/babysitting for parent
14. Trip or Holiday without a school approved plan
15. Non school sanctioned activity/event

**NOTE:** School sponsored activities/events or school sanctioned community activities/events are excluded from the attendance expectations criteria when determining eligibility for student participation in extracurricular activities/events.

School sanctioned community activities/events may include those operated by recognized community organizations to promote healthy recreational practices, such as Minor Hockey, Figure Skating, Cadets, Dance, Swimming, etc. It is the school's expectation that the officials of any such organization will liaise closely with the school office to ensure accurate attendance information is recorded and absences are limited.

Reasons for absences that are approved or sanctioned by the school are considered legitimate and make-up/alternative work may be provided by our teachers. These are:

1. Administrator's discretion regarding extenuating circumstances
2. School sponsored or sanctioned activity/event

**NOTE:** Absences due to vacation time and work may not be considered reasons for additional make-up work to be provided by our teachers.

### **APPEAL PROCESS:**

Students who are not meeting expectations for attendance, and are therefore not eligible to participate in extra curricular activities/events may appeal their exclusion to the Administration by submitting a fully completed ATTENDANCE APPEAL FORM at least ONE WEEK in advance of the event or trip.

Valid reasons for appeal may include unforeseen or extended absences due to serious illness, death, family emergency, or unavoidable medical appointments.

**NOTE:** The Attendance Review Committee did take such special circumstances into consideration when setting the criteria for meeting attendance expectations.

While a parent excuse for lates or absences may preclude classroom or administrative interventions or consequences (ie. counselling, meetings, detentions, suspensions), the criteria for participation in extra curricular activities/events still apply.

## **General Procedures For Parents**

Parents/Guardians are requested to call the school if the student(s) in their care is going to be away, and clerical staff will record accordingly. Students may be required to bring a note from a parent/guardian confirming his/her absence upon their return. Communication between parents, students, and teachers is critical when a student is absent from class. Students are ultimately responsible for this direct communication and for the work they miss during an absence.

## **Helpful Hints For Parents**

- Telephone the office and ask to speak to one of our secretaries. Teachers are usually teaching a class and can't always get back to you right away, but our office staff can find out immediately if your child is where they are supposed to be!
- Keep a copy of your child's timetable, master timetable and bell schedule, and school contact information handy. If you're at work and need to contact the school to follow up on an attendance issue, you're one step ahead!
- Email your child's teachers.
- Check the FNSS Student- Parent Handbook, containing our school calendar, for important dates. If you know when our report cards are issued, ask your son or daughter for them when they get home from school.
- Provide updated and accurate emergency contact information to the school.
- Monitor your child's daily school attendance.
- Maintain contact with your son/daughter's teachers re performance and attendance
- Attend parent/teacher/student conferences as needed.
- Have a good understanding of the school's attendance policy, specifically the difference between an excused and a non-excused absence.
- Contact the school within 30 minutes of start time if a student is going to be absent.
- If requested, send a note that briefly explains the absence, when your student returns to school.

## **When Should Parents be Concerned About Their Child's Attendance?**

Attendance and truancy problems do not usually occur without warning signs. You, as parents/guardians, should be aware of signs that youth often exhibit when they are truant. If one or more of the following circumstances is an observation or concern of yours, truancy may be a contributing factor and should be examined as a possible cause:

- unable to share any details about his or her daily school activities;
- not bringing home any communication in writing or by telephone from the school;
- not motivated to be successful in school;
- having learning difficulties and may be unable to keep up with the rest of the class;

- failing multiple classes;
- arriving home from school earlier or later than the expected time;
- staying out late at night without permission,
- refusing to get up for school or is engaging in prolonged dawdling;
- hanging out with others who are known to skip school;
- showing signs of depression;
- afraid of being bullied, harassed, or fears physical harm;

### **Extended Absences Parent Information and Guidelines**

Each year we are approached by an increasing number of parents who wish to take their child out of school for extended periods of time. Usually this is for reasons associated with family travel plans or family business matters. We do not have a procedure for granting students a “leave of absence.” Rather, it is assumed that parents will make prudent decisions in the best interests of their own child. We are respectful of the fact that many of our students have family members far away, and spending time with them is important.

We also encounter parents who wish to excuse their child from school for extended periods of time due to social, emotional, medical, or other personal reasons. Regardless of the reason, however, difficulties arise when parents wish to have some sort of reassurance that their child will not be “behind” in their work when they return. If a student misses school for extended periods of time, he or she will be likely be “behind” in at least some aspects classroom work and may have difficulty achieving course outcomes.

Students may well have other cultural or travel experiences that contribute to their overall development, but the many varied daily classroom lessons and activities they will miss may not be duplicated. Missed instructional time cannot necessarily be “made up” unless lessons are re-taught.

Although teachers will do their best to help students get “caught up”, they are, generally speaking, not in the position to provide make-up assignments for students who have extended absences due to family vacations. The decision to provide “make-up” or alternate work may depend to some extent on the student’s attendance, work habits and effort prior to the absence. It is up to the student to make arrangements with each teacher well in advance of the date of the absence. This may consist of the student attending tutorials outside of instructional time when the teacher is available to meet with student, or doing alternative assignments on the student’s own time.

Students who are away for extended periods due to medical, social, or emotional issues May be referred to the District Hospital-Homebound Program as a means of meeting their needs in a more effective way.

## **Administrative Responsibilities for Encouraging Satisfactory Student Attendance**

- Establish attendance goals and oversee the school attendance program.
- Monitor daily student attendance and ensure accurate attendance data collection.
- Promote attendance incentives.
- Recognize parents and community partners.
- Respond to chronic truants (following the established procedures).
- Implement and maintain a successful school attendance support program.

## **General Information for & Responsibilities of Teachers for Encouraging Satisfactory Student Attendance**

1. Teachers will send home interim reports on all students at the mid-point of the first term of each semester, and will include attendance on each interim report.
2. Daily assessment will be part of a student's overall evaluation. Daily assessment also assists in designing future educational activities and benefits students who are in class participating, learning, and engaging.
- 3 Teachers should be aware that intervention by administrators, counselors, or support staff does not replace teacher-parent contact. It is merely a supplemental measure to promote good attendance.
4. Teachers are expected comply with the established attendance procedures for lates and absences. Our attendance record is viewed as a legal document, and it is imperative that it be kept up to date and accurate. Note that students are not considered dropped from a course until their name no longer appears on your BCesis class list.
5. It is important that teachers follow school procedures for unexcused absences. PLEASE DO NOT REFER A STUDENT WITHOUT TAKING THE NECESSARY PRELIMINARY STEPS.
6. Positive Attendance Strategies for Teachers:
  - Ensure that all students realize the importance of good attendance as a life skill.
  - Make every class 'count' and worthwhile for students to attend.
  - Follow up on all absences promptly and consistently by contacting parents
  - Reward good attendance (by individuals or the class).
  - Keep in regular contact with parents.
  - Discuss the importance of attendance with students.

## **Staff Strategies To Improve Student Attendance**

- Make students and parents/guardians feel welcome. Make a point to say hello to every parent, guardian, and/or student you see in the halls and outside. Make it your business to know their names.
- Create an environment that helps students feel successful in something, no matter how small it may seem.
- When students are absent, immediately talk to their parents/guardians -- not their answering machines. Make a personal phone call in the evening, or call parents or guardians at work during the day.
- When students are absent, immediately talk with them about why they were gone. Let them know you are aware, and that you care that they are at school.
- Reward and recognize good attendance, not just perfect attendance. Post large signs announcing the daily attendance for the day. Find ways to publicly reward individuals, classes, or even the whole school when student attendance increases or meets set goals.
- Make your class a place where kids feel safe and respected. The Social Responsibility performance standards are relevant and apply to all of us.