

District reinterprets state attendance law

maddie ramos | editor-in-chief

Excused or unexcused absences, it doesn't matter anymore. A rule referred to as the 90 percent policy will now be more strictly enforced by the district.

"The law states that students have to be in attendance 90 percent of the time," principal Randall Woods said. "What that means is the student has to be physically in the class to be accounted for. In the past, the district has said that if the student is on a school trip or out for a school excused activity, they were still accounted for. Now, any absence where the student was not physically in his or her chair in the class, counts toward loss of credit."

During the fall semester, students can miss eight days before losing credit. Because the spring semester is longer, students can miss up to 10 days before having to appeal for credit.

For every class missed, students are required to attend tutoring in the classroom before or after school, or during lunch. Woods said that the rule has not been changed but the application of it has been reinterpreted.

"We've always had an Attendance Review Committee (ARC) and recently added an intervention team," Woods said. "We have to make sure that we can help the students that are close to loss of credit."

The ARC is made up of three teachers and an administrator. When students exceeds absence limit, they will be notified of their absences with a letter informing them to appear in front of the committee, with proof that class time has been made up in tutoring. Woods said that he has not received any positive feedback and hopes that it does not affect student participation in activities.

CONDITIONS FOR AWARDING CREDIT

SOURCE: EPISD.ORG

- ✓ Completing additional assignments, as specified by the ARC or teacher
- ✓ Maintaining the attendance standards for the rest of the semester
- ✓ Attending tutorial sessions as scheduled, which may include Saturday classes or before- and after-school programs
- ✓ Attending a flexible school-day program
- ✓ Taking an examination to earn credit
- ✓ Attending summer school



"I don't want it to change what we do," he said. "It is having an effect on the different events we can do. We've had conversations about whether or not to do the things we've always done because of how it will affect the students. For instance, we normally send the cheerleaders and the band to the middle schools for Red Ribbon week, but this year we sat down and had to think about whether or not to send them."

An English teacher for 24 years, Laura Muñoz said while she will abide by the policy, she doesn't like the idea of allowing students with unexcused absences to make up work.

"The way it's set up, kids get to make up work regardless of the time or the circumstances," Muñoz said. "If I have my class rules about make-up work, the student can always find a way to come back and make me the responsible party. It doesn't help the students at all because it will teach them to expect the same thing in society, and society won't cater to them. It's going to be a slap in the face."

Senior Salvador Mendoza said that he is especially worried about spring semester because of his participation in speech and debate, as well as one act play, for which he missed almost a full week when the group traveled to state last May.

"Seniors are at a disadvantage," Mendoza said. "For those of us who are out for school events, the rule could keep us from graduating with our class, and that's just unfair. We might barely miss the mark, and because we did well in competition, we could lose our credit."

Teachers will now have to keep track of the assignments students miss in a separate log to ensure that when and if the assignment is made up, it is accounted for.

French teacher Christy Erler says it is unfair to penalize students for participating in school activities.

"We as teachers are supposed to be creating the well-rounded student," Erler said. "Now, the changes to this rule are preventing students from doing exactly that. Our job is to prepare students for after high school, and they're being punished for participating. I'm not sure why the district is choosing to adhere to this law so strictly. School sanctioned events, or even being in the counseling center are legitimate absences for students. Field trips, for example, are supposed to be an opportunity to enrich what's going on in the classroom, but we're punishing students for taking advantage of those opportunities, and that's just not right."