

ATTENDANCE —an explanation from Ms. Howard

School hours – 7:35 a.m. to 2:05 p.m.

A small part of my job, as the school's Data Management Technician, is managing the attendance of our students. One of the hardest policies to explain is the attendance policy. Students and parents (and sometimes staff) get confused at what counts and what doesn't count. My goal is to write this explanation well enough to have the reader completely understand the attendance policy.

Attendance in high school **counts more** and **has higher consequences** than in any other school grade level.

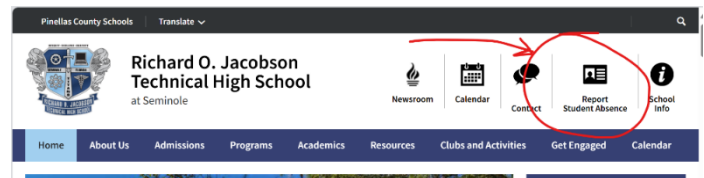
TRUANCY



Let's first discuss truancy. As the system sees it, without parent contact, the student is skipping school. Officially, parents have 48 hours from the actual absence to notify the school. The Pending (PND) codes representing absences will generate the attendance notification system that will call and email you of a possible issue. **Your contact with me must be timely.**

REPORT AN ABSENCE

You may call the office at 727-545-6405 x2007; use the attendance link on our webpage www.TechHigh.pcsb.org (pictured); email me at howarddd@pcsb.org or send in a note with your child upon return to school to authenticate the absence as being excused. **My preference is email.** Voice mail messages can be hard to hear, and you may need to spell your child's last name as, for example, V and B may sound similar.



- PLEASE REMEMBER to use your child's legal first **AND** last name.
- Your child may not excuse the absence. It must come from the parent or legal guardian.
- You do not need to notify teachers of an absence as they don't have the necessary permissions to input the excused absences. Teachers can only input **P** (present); **PND** (absent); and various tardy codes.
- I am the designated person to correct attendance.

UNDERSTANDING FLORIDA'S TRUANCY LAW



The State of Florida has mandated that students have good regular attendance. If the student is habitually truant, the state will revoke the student's driving privilege (or the ability to get a license). Once a driving privilege is revoked (suspended), it takes 30 days of nearly perfect attendance to have the privilege returned through our principal signing the certification to the State of Florida. I will not go back to correct 3 months of parent excuses to prevent the suspension. Habitual truants will be referred to our Child Study Team who reviews problematic student attendance and work together to support our students' successes in school.

DOCTOR'S NOTES



Students out of school for three adjoining days or more should have a doctor's note excusing the absences. Before calling a doctor to get the doctor's excuse note, please call me. Don't spend money when it may not be necessary.

The school board has established that legitimate absences for going to the doctor, dentist, eye doctor or appointments with the courts (along with supporting documentation) are not limited. If your child has a chronic health issue, one letter from a doctor will cover the school year—migraines, chemotherapy, sickle cell disease, etc. Once you submit the letter, I just ask for you to write "letter on file" as I may not remember when you contact me that your child has a letter on file.

ABSENCE VERSUS BEING TARDY



Students are considered tardy to class if they are not in the classroom before the final bell. It may sound finicky, but the body - the physical being - must be in the classroom—not the hallway, not in the restroom—their books and book bag don't count as the student being in class.

The office will write an excused tardy pass to class with documentation of the **legitimate appointment** that happened that morning. The same rules apply for tardiness as they do for absences, car issues and power outages are not legitimate reasons for being late to school. Please don't drag mom into the office with hair curlers, slippers and robe (actually happened) to say, "It's MY fault we overslept!" I empathize but I can't excuse the tardiness.



HALF WAY

Half-way mark determines if the student is present or absent. Tardiness turns into an absence at the half-way mark. Students who arrive late to school - 8:00 a.m. is the transition time from tardy to absent. Students leaving school early during 7th period should leave CLASS after 1:41 to be considered present in class. Leaving the classroom BEFORE 1:41 will change the coding to an absence. PCS policy states students must be present for **more than** half the class to be considered present—no matter what the reason.

ATTENDANCE CODES

There are 27 different codes for attendance in Focus. Here are the ones we use here at Tech High School:

Code	Title	Excused?	Impacts Exams?	
P	Present	Yes	No	Entered by teacher or office
PND	Reason Pending (ABSENT)	No	Yes	Entered by teacher or office
FAM	Family Activity	No	Yes	Any non-medical reason parent is excusing absence
TRA	Transportation Issue	No	Yes	Any non-school bus issue involving transportation.
MDE	Medically excused	Yes	Yes	Student is sick – either by parent note or doctor note
EME	Family Emergency	Yes	Yes	Hospitalization or death of family (not pet)
LEG	Legal/Court	Yes	Yes	Subpoena or attorney letter
ACE	Non-School Activity	Yes	No	Examples: Club or national competitions; membership in county or state leadership boards.
REL	Religious	Yes	Yes	See PCS Code of Conduct
OSS	Out-of-School Suspension	No	Yes	
SCF	School Function	Yes	No	Activity during school hours that pulls students away from scheduled class.
RLC	College Day	Yes	No	There is a form that is submitted for approval 3 days prior to the visit & requires authentication by college official. One per school. See form for further details.
EEX	Exam Exempted	Yes	No	This is the coding teachers enter indicating exemption from semester exams.
TAR	Tardy	No	No	Teachers & office can enter. Tardiness does not count toward exam exemption absence totals.
BTR	Bus Tardy	Yes	No	Teachers & office can enter. This code will also be used for full class period absences due to school bus issues.
EXT	Excused Tardy	Yes	No	Teachers & office can enter. Student presents teacher with either a hall pass or an excused tardy pass.
XTR	Extreme Tardy	Yes	No	Used for program classes that are 90 minutes
OFF	Office	Yes	No	Student was in a school office during that class period.
ERL	Early release	No	No	Student left early with no valid reason after 1:42 p.m.
ERX	Early release excused	Yes	No	Student left for doctor appointment after 1:42 p.m.

EXCUSED VERSUS UNEXCUSED

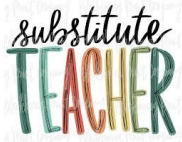
It is very important to understand there is no difference between excused or unexcused absences in Pinellas County Schools. Both allow students to make up classwork and get full credit for the classwork. Refer to the above table on which reasons count toward exam exemption totals.

CHECKING FOR ACCURACY



Parents and students should periodically check Focus for errors in attendance. Timely challenges are important. The responsibility for monitoring attendance falls back onto the parent and our student. Our Focus system sends voice messages about absences and email messages after 4 p.m. daily.

If you find an error in a single class period, **your child** should go FIRST to the teacher who reported the absence. Our student should just say, *"Yesterday, I was present, but I was notified that I was absent from your class."* Teachers' authorization window to make corrections of errors is just 24 hours. After that, the teacher must send me an email to correct any errors. If after your child talks to the teacher and you still see the absence, please contact me as your advocate. All corrections should be made within **a few days** of detecting the error. I am not comfortable about challenging an absence that goes back weeks or months later. Compare challenging old attendance to your family dinner. Do you remember what you had for dinner Wednesday three weeks ago? Imagine a teacher with 180 students trying to recall attendance from a month ago.



Errors when there is a substitute teacher can be more complicated. I would suggest for students who are quiet or question if the sub heard his/her response is to go to the sub to make sure the attendance was modified before leaving class. The regular teacher can't change sub attendance.

EXAM ATTENDANCE

Some classes permit exempting an exam if the student has good grades and good attendance.

- Courses that have a state test (EOC) or Advanced Placement (AP) courses require students to take the exam.
- Students must have a "C" or better for each of the two quarters to exempt and
- Have less than five absences (no more than four days absent) for the **semester** in the class.
- Tardiness totals do not count toward exam absence totals.

LOG SHEETS

At Tech High School we have three logs which I use to modify attendance – **Tardy Log**; **Permission to Leave (PTL) Log** and the **Dual Enrollment/On-the-Job Training (DE/OJT) Log**. I use these logs to update attendance daily. Every student who arrives late or leaves early is REQUIRED to sign one of these log sheets.

- These logs are kept for three (3) years, and these documents may be subject to subpoena by the court.
- Students' handwriting can be difficult to read. It is important that our students clearly write both the last and first legal name.
- Tardy log asks the reason. For students tardy because of the school bus, the bus number (which will be verified) should be in the reason. If the student is late because of a doctor's appointment or lab work, we need documentation from the facility.
- PTL Log asks the reason and a return time in case the student is returning to school from the doctor's appointment. Most common reasons are sick (nothing more specific needed); doctor; or family reasons (parent is releasing early).

DISMISSING EARLY FROM SCHOOL

Mrs. Burcham and I are the only support staff in the office for Tech High School. Some days, especially before a holiday, it can be chaotic and stressful to accommodate all the requests to dismiss early. Our students who work in the office are not permitted to release students unless the parent comes into the office. Mrs. Burcham or I are the individuals who take parent calls.

- **Preferred Method** - Write a note which should include your child's legal first and last name, date, reason for leaving (for coding purposes) and time to leave. These notes may be submitted by your child to the office before school starts. We will write the PTL pass and have your child sign out in the morning using the later time. Your child simply shows the teacher the pass, shows the person at the front desk the pass and walks out our front door (as the log was signed in the morning).

- Email Mrs. Burcham (burchamc@pcsb.org) and I (howarddd@pcsb.org) early in the day for a later in the day release. We will write a pass for your child to come up to the office at the specified time to be released.
- Call me. If you call in the morning for a later in the day release. As with the email, a pass will be sent. The flaw with emails and calls is we must be here or in our office to receive the information.

Problematic times

- During your child's lunch time it is problem-prone time to dismiss. We have people monitoring our students at lunch. We normally broadcast the student's name on the radio for the staff to look for your child. Students may be in our cafeteria, in our patio area, in tutoring rooms for lunch help or with a teacher who shares the same lunch period. We are not permitted to use the PA system as half the population of students are in class. The best solution for these impromptu dismissals is to have you text your child to meet you in the office.
- Another problematic time is the last 20 minutes of school. We frequently get calls that the parent is almost to the school and needs his/her child dismissed for a doctor's appointment – most often these calls come in the final minutes of school.

Finally, students who arrive late or leave early **MUST** leave through the front office doors.

- Students are prohibited from using the gates during school hours.
- South facing cafeteria doors sound a loud alarm when opened during school hours.

This was a lengthy explanation. I'm here to help and, most likely, will be your primary contact with Tech High School. If you have any questions, please give us a call. ***We are... Tech High!***



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