



Lowell Public School Committee *Special Meeting Agenda*

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| Date: | February 23, 2022 |
| Time: | 6:30PM |
| Location: | <p>City Council Chamber, 375 Merrimack Street, 2nd Floor, Lowell, MA 01852</p> <p>Members Of The Public May View The Meeting Via LTC And Those Wishing To Speak Regarding A Specific Agenda Item Shall Register To Speak In Advance Of The Meeting By Sending Email To The Superintendent Indicating The Agenda Item, A Phone Number And Email Address So We Can Provide A Zoom Link To Access The Meeting. Email Address Is Mpalazzo@Lowell.k12.Ma.us If No Access To Email You May Contact Us At 978-674-4324. All Requests Must Be Submit It Before 2:00 PM On The Day Of Meeting.</p> |

1. SALUTE TO FLAG

2. ROLL CALL

3. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

3.1. Consideration Of Temporary Adjustment To The Student Attendance Policy

Documents:

1. FINAL COVER LETTER_ REQUEST TO PAUSE ATTENDANCE POLICY 02.11.22.DOCX.PDF
2. CURRENT RETENTION_PROMOTION_ATTENDANCE POLICIES.PDF
3. REDLINE VERSION RETENTION_PROMOTION_ATTENDANCE POLICIES (1).PDF

4. ADJOURNMENT

Lowell Public Schools • 155 Merrimack Street • Lowell, MA 01852 • P:
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Liam Skinner
Chief Schools Officer
155 Merrimack Street
Lowell, Massachusetts 01852

LOWELL PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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E-mail: lskinner@lowell.k12.ma.us

TO: Dr. Joel Boyd, Superintendent of Schools
FROM: Liam Skinner, Chief Schools Officer
DATE: February 11, 2022
RE: Request for COVID -19 Temporary Adjustment to Current Retention, Promotion and Attendance Policies

COVID-19 has had a direct and significant negative impact on student attendance this school year, leading us to examine the district's retention, promotion and attendance more closely for projected impacts to students as well as fidelity and equitable implementation of policy across schools. Following initial discussions with school and district leaders, I am recommending a temporary adjustment to the following policies to ensure consistency, equity and fairness across schools and to allow for school leaders to consider supports needed to address students' varying needs and barriers that are resulting in high chronic absenteeism and subsequent learning loss:

- IKE-R - PROMOTION/RETENTION POLICY, MIDDLE SCHOOL
- 2021-22 LOWELL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT HANDBOOK, ATTENDANCE SECTION, PG 49

These documents are attached. Also attached are recommended adjustments reflected in red font.

Rates of daily attendance in our schools have tracked rates of COVID-19, with student attendance significantly adversely impacted by the pandemic. In the second quarter of the current school year, a preliminary calculation of the district average daily attendance (ADA) was 84%, a decrease from 90% in the first quarter. In contrast, for several years prior to the pandemic annual ADA was 94%. In addition, our current year-to-date chronic absenteeism rate is estimated at 43%. Nearly half of these chronically absent students experienced excused absences due to Covid-19 quarantine. However, even when adjusted for excused absences, it is clear that attendance has decreased from pre-pandemic times.

These temporary adjustments will allow school leaders to consider supports that address our increased absenteeism. They will also enable a thorough review of the current data and barriers to attendance in order to develop a comprehensive plan that directs resources to educational recovery for future years. I am also recommending that a larger policy discussion on retention, promotion and attendance policies be held prior to the start of the 2022-23 school year.

File: IKE - PROMOTION AND RETENTION OF STUDENTS

The administration and teaching staff shall strive to create plans of instruction and instructional organization to provide maximum opportunity for each student to progress through school according to his/her own needs and abilities without the stigma of failure or retention.

In general, students will be promoted or retained in accordance with the following;

1. Pupils shall be entitled to promotion upon satisfactory completion of the work of the previous years. Such promotion shall be made only in September except with the approval of the superintendent.
2. The conditions of paragraph 1 shall apply to private schools of Lowell which have been approved by the State Board of Education and which shall maintain a course of studies equivalent to that of the public schools.
3. The conditions of paragraph 1 shall also apply to pupils of public or private schools of equal grade or quality in any other city or town.
4. Satisfactory completion of junior high studies shall entitle a pupil to a diploma of graduation and admittance to the high school.
5. In any case of admittance, promotion, demotion, and placement, final disposition of the case will rest with the superintendent except in those cases requiring a vote of the school committee.

Adopted: July 9, 1975

IKE - R PROMOTION/RETENTION POLICY

Middle Schools

The administration and teaching staff will provide a challenging educational environment in order to maximize the opportunity for each student to progress through middle school according to his/her own needs and abilities without the stigma of failure or retention.

Academics - In order to be promoted to the next grade, middle school students must earn:

1. English and Mathematics:
 - Final passing grade of 65 or better in English.
 - Final passing grade of 65 or better in all Mathematics classes.
 - Students who earn a final grade between 60 and 64 will be provisionally retained and with permission of the principal, must attend Summer School in order to be promoted.
 - Students who earn a final grade below 60 will be retained.
2. Other Core Academic areas - Reading, Writing, Social Studies, Science:
 - Cumulative final average of 65 or better in all academic classes.
 - Students who earn a cumulative, final average between 60 and 64 will be provisionally retained.
 - Students who earn a final grade below 60 will be retained.
3. Allied Arts:
 - Cumulative final average of 65 or better in all other allied arts classes.
 - Students who earn a cumulative final average between 60 and 64 will be provisionally retained.
 - Students who earn a final grade below 60 will be retained.

Grading:

- 1st marking period - A grade no lower than 60 can be given in any subject area.
- Subsequent marking periods - A grade no lower than 55 can be given in any subject area.

Attendance:

- Four [4] or more excused or unexcused absences per marking period MAY result in a school attendance hearing at the discretion of the principal.
- Unexcused absences of between 16-25 days for a school year will result in Retention/Provisional Promotion in Middle School and may result in grade retention in Elementary School.
- Unexcused absences over 25 days will result in retention.

Retention/Provisional Promotion:

- Summer School, when budgeted and with Principal approval, is a requirement for students who meet the stipulated grade and absence criteria. A Failure Intervention Plan will be developed at the school level for students in danger of failing one or more classes in lieu of Summer School.
- A child can take no more than two [2] academic courses in summer school.
- A child may have no more than three (3) absences during the summer school program.

2021-22 Lowell High School Student Handbook, Attendance Section, Page 49

Lowell High School has high expectations for student attendance. Grades earned in any course shall reflect the student's daily participation as well as the fulfillment of other academic requirements as established by the teacher. The learning experience that takes place in the classroom environment or on the virtual platform with your peers is a meaningful and essential part of the classroom structure. Time lost from class, in terms of opportunity for interaction amongst students and teachers, is irretrievable. Moreover, each classroom is a community in which students are expected to play an active daily role as a member of Lowell High School's larger community, as reflected in our mission. Therefore, daily classroom attendance (in-person or remote) is considered to be an integral part of each student's course of study.

We expect every student to:

- Attend school every day that school is in session, including remote learning sessions
- Be on time for every class, and arrive prepared to learn to include logging in on-time to participate in remote learning.

Steps to Ensure Earning Course Credit:

- The school committee policy allows for no more than 8 unexcused absences per semester.
- A student is obliged to fulfill the course requirements as established by the teacher's room management plan and school committee policy.
- A student must make up the work missed during absences in accordance with this agreement.
- It is the student's responsibility to arrange to make up work due to absences within five (5) days after the absence.
- Teachers must provide makeup work within these time constraints at the request of the student. Extenuating circumstances that may make it difficult to complete work within a five-day period, such as hospitalization, should be discussed with the House Dean and guidance counselor.

Definition of Absence

An absence is a day or series of days missed from school. Every reasonable attempt will be made to contact parents after each absence. When a student is absent from school, an automated attendance call is made to the home. Attendance warning letters are mailed to the home or emailed to the parent on the 4th and 6th absences whether the absence is excused or not.

Attendance Failure

A student who has been absent for more than eight (8) days in a semester and is passing the course, will receive No Credit (NC) for the course unless official documentation is provided to the house office excusing the absences.

Excused Absences

- Illness of the student—requires original doctor’s note indicating dates excused
- Hospitalization of the student—requires hospital/doctor’s note
- Disability of the student such that the disability precludes the student from attending school—requires medical documentation (Physician’s Statement)
- Court proceedings—requires court documents
- Other official proceedings—documentation required
- Pre-approved school sanctioned events (Senior college visits*)—letterhead
- Death of a family member—death notice
- Religious holidays
- All school suspensions (both in and out)

* Junior and Senior college visits a maximum of three (3) days for the year

Submit all paperwork to the House Office via email or fax.

Important Notice

Parent notes will only ensure a student can make up missed classroom work because it documents that the student was not truant, however absences covered by parent notes are not considered excused absences. For any absence to be considered and recorded as “excused,” official documentation as noted above must be provided.

Students and parents are urged to maintain regular communication with the house office staff to keep them informed about any concerns they may have about academic, health or social issues that may impact your class attendance whether in-person or remote.

Family vacations are NOT considered excused absences.

Please be aware that the Department of Education requires that all school systems have 180 days of school each school year. The official school calendar at the beginning of this handbook has five (5) possible snow days included in the calendar. If the school system has more than five unscheduled school closings, the additional days will be added to the end of the school year so that the school system is in compliance with the 180-day requirement. These added days count as regular school days. Students are required to attend these days and no dispensation will be given for students with summer travel plans.

File: IKE - PROMOTION AND RETENTION OF STUDENTS

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3. The conditions of paragraph 1 shall also apply to pupils of public or private schools of equal grade or quality in any other city or town.
4. Satisfactory completion of junior high studies shall entitle a pupil to a diploma of graduation and admittance to the high school.
5. In any case of admittance, promotion, demotion, and placement, final disposition of the case will rest with the superintendent except in those cases requiring a vote of the school committee.

Adopted: July 9, 1975

TEMPORARY ~~HE-R~~ PROMOTION/RETENTION POLICY FOR THE 2021-22 SCHOOL YEAR

Middle Schools

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 - Students who earn a final grade between 60 and 64 will be provisionally retained and with permission of the principal, must attend Summer School **and/or meet the expectations of the Failure Intervention Plan** in order to be promoted.
 - Students who earn a final grade below 60 will be **retained provisionally retained and with permission of the principal, must attend Summer School and/or meet the expectations of the Failure Intervention Plan in order to be promoted.**

2. Other Core Academic areas - Reading, Writing, Social Studies, Science:
 - Cumulative final average of 65 or better in all academic classes.
 - Students who earn a cumulative, final average between 60 and 64 will be provisionally retained.
 - Students who earn a final grade below 60 will be retained **and with permission of the principal, must attend Summer School and/or meet the expectations of the Failure Intervention Plan in order to be promoted.**

3. Allied Arts:
 - Cumulative final average of 65 or better in all other allied arts classes.
 - Students who earn a cumulative final average between 60 and 64 will be provisionally retained.
 - Students who earn a final grade below 60 will be retained **and with permission of the principal, must attend Summer School and/or meet the expectations of the Failure Intervention Plan in order to be promoted.**

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Attendance:

- Four [4] or more excused or unexcused absences per marking period MAY result in a school attendance hearing at the discretion of the principal.
- Unexcused absences of between 16-25 days for a school year will result in Retention/Provisional Promotion in Middle School **unless a student meets the expectations of their Attendance Intervention Plan** and may result in grade retention in Elementary School.

- Unexcused absences over 25 days will result in retention **unless a student meets the expectations of their Attendance Intervention Plan and/or Failure Intervention Plan when a student's attendance impacts their academic performance.**

Retention/Provisional Promotion:

- Summer School, when budgeted and with Principal approval, is a requirement for students who meet the stipulated grade and absence criteria **unless a student meets the expectations of the Failure Intervention Plan.** A Failure Intervention Plan will be developed at the school level for students in danger of failing one or more classes in lieu of Summer School.
- A child can take no more than two [2] academic courses in summer school.
- A child may have no more than three (3) absences during the summer school program.

2021-22 Lowell High School Student Handbook, Attendance Section, Page 49

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We expect every student to:

- Attend school every day that school is in session, including remote learning sessions
- Be on time for every class, and arrive prepared to learn to include logging in on-time to participate in remote learning

Steps to Ensure Earning Course Credit:

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- A student must make up the work missed during absences in accordance with this agreement.
- It is the student's responsibility to arrange to make up work due to absences within five (5) days after the absence.
- Teachers must provide makeup work within these time constraints at the request of the student. Extenuating circumstances that may make it difficult to complete work within a five-day period, such as hospitalization, should be discussed with the House Dean and guidance counselor.

Definition of Absence

An absence is a day or series of days missed from school. Every reasonable attempt will be made to contact parents after each absence. When a student is absent from school, an automated attendance call is made to the home. Attendance warning letters are mailed to the home or emailed to the parent on the 4th and 6th absences whether the absence is excused or not.

Attendance Failure

A student who has been absent for more than eight (8) days in a semester and is passing the course, will receive No Credit (NC) for the course unless official documentation is provided to the house office excusing the absences, or **unless a student meets the expectations of their Attendance Intervention Plan and/or Failure Intervention Plan. A Failure Intervention Plan will be developed at the school level for students in danger of failing one or more classes in lieu of summer school.**

Excused Absences

- **Mandatory quarantine due to COVID-19**
- Illness of the student—requires original doctor’s note indicating dates excused
- Hospitalization of the student—requires hospital/doctor’s note
- Disability of the student such that the disability precludes the student from attending school—requires medical documentation (Physician’s Statement)
- Court proceedings—requires court documents
- Other official proceedings—documentation required
- Pre-approved school sanctioned events (Senior college visits*)—letterhead
- Death of a family member—death notice
- Religious holidays
- All school suspensions (both in and out)

* Junior and Senior college visits a maximum of three (3) days for the year
Submit all paperwork to the House Office via email or fax.

Important Notice

Parent notes will only ensure a student can make up missed classroom work because it documents that the student was not truant, however absences covered by parent notes are not considered excused absences. For any absence to be considered and recorded as “excused,” official documentation as noted above must be provided. Absences related to COVID-19 quarantine will be coded as “quarantine absences” and will not be counted toward a students’ unexcused absences as relates to course credit.

Students and parents are urged to maintain regular communication with the house office staff to keep them informed about any concerns they may have about academic, health or social issues that may impact your class attendance whether in-person or remote.

Family vacations are NOT considered excused absences.

Please be aware that the Department of Education requires that all school systems have 180 days of school each school year. The official school calendar at the beginning of this handbook has five (5) possible snow days included in the calendar. If the school system has more than five unscheduled school closings, the additional days will be added to the end of the school year so that the school system is in compliance with the 180-day requirement. These added days count as regular school days. Students are required to attend these days and no dispensation will be given for students with summer travel plans.