

Dear Parents/Guardians,

This year Orin C. Smith Elementary School is making a special effort to ensure that all students fully benefit from their education by attending school regularly. Attending school regularly helps children feel better about school and themselves. Children can start building this habit in preschool so they learn right away that going to school on time, every day, is important. Consistent attendance will help them do well in high school, college, and at work.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Starting in kindergarten, too many absences (excused and unexcused) can cause students to fall behind in school.
- Missing 10% (or about 18 days) per year increases the chance that students will not read or master math at the same level as their peers.
- Students can still fall behind if they miss just a day or two every few weeks.
- Being late to school may lead to poor attendance.
- Absences can affect the whole classroom if the teacher has to slow down learning to help a student catch up on missed classroom instruction.
- By 6th grade, absenteeism is one of three signs that a student may drop out of high school.
- By being present at school, your children learn valuable social skills and have the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with other students and school staff.
- Absences can be a sign that students are losing interest in school, struggling with school work, dealing with a bully or facing some other potentially serious difficulty.
- By 9th grade, attendance is a better predictor of graduation rates than 8th grade test scores.

WHAT WE NEED FROM YOU

We miss your children when they are gone and we value their contributions to our school. We would like you to help ensure that your children attend regularly and are successful in school. If they are going to be absent, please contact us at 360-807-7225.

OUR PROMISE TO YOU

We know that there are a wide variety of reasons that students are absent from school, from health concerns to transportation challenges. There are many people in our building prepared to help you if your children face challenges in getting to school regularly or on time. The Orin C. Smith Elementary school administrators work closely with the school counselor and other district staff to support positive student attendance. We promise to track attendance daily, to notice when students are missing from class, communicate with you to understand why they were absent, and to identify barriers and supports available to overcome challenges you may face in helping them attend school.

SCHOOL POLICIES AND STATE LAWS

It is important that you understand our school policies and procedures, as well as Washington State Law, to ensure children are successful in school. State law for mandatory attendance, called the Becca Bill, requires children from age 8 to 17 to attend a public school, private school, or a district-approved home school program. Children that are 6- or 7-years-old are not required to be enrolled in school. However, if parents enroll their 6- or 7-year-old, they must attend full-time. Youth who are 16 or older may be excused from attending public school if they meet certain requirements.

<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28A.225>

Our school is required to take daily attendance and notify you when your student has an unexcused absence. If students have two unexcused absences in one month, state law (RCW 28A.225.020) requires we schedule a conference with you to identify the barriers and supports available to ensure regular attendance. The district is obligated to develop a plan that may require an assessment to determine how to best meet the needs of students and reduce absenteeism.

In elementary school, after five excused absences in any month, or ten excused absences in the school year, the school district is required to contact you to schedule a conference at a mutually agreeable, reasonable time, with at least one district employee, to identify the barriers and supports available to you and your students. A conference is not required if you have provided a doctor's note, or pre-arranged the absence in writing, and you and the school have made plans so students do not fall behind academically. If students have an Individualized Education Plan or a 504 Plan, the team that created the plan needs to reconvene.

If students have seven unexcused absences in any month or ten unexcused absences within the school year, or are in violation of district policy on excused absences, we are required to file a petition with the Juvenile Court, alleging a violation of RCW 28A.225.010, the mandatory attendance laws. The petition may be automatically stayed and your family may be referred to a Community Truancy Board, or the family may need to appear in Juvenile Court.

At Orin C. Smith Elementary we have implemented the above rules on attendance that will help ensure students are attending regularly. It is important to understand the vital role that parents and guardians play in partnering with the school to achieve the goal of regular attendance.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Set a regular bedtime and morning routine.
- Prepare for school the night before, finishing homework and getting a good night's sleep.
- Find out what day school starts and make sure your child has the required immunizations.
- Don't let students stay home unless they are truly sick. Keep in mind complaints of a stomach ache or headache can be a sign of anxiety and not a reason to stay home.
- Avoid appointments and extended trips when school is in session.
- Develop back-up plans for getting to school if something comes up. Call on a family member, a neighbor, or another parent.
- Keep track of student's attendance. Missing more than nine days could put students at risk of falling behind.
- Talk to your children about the importance of attendance.
- Talk to your student's teachers if you notice sudden changes in behavior. These could be tied to something going on at school.
- Encourage meaningful after-school activities, including sports and clubs.

Sincerely,

Brett Ellingson
Principal

Rachel Dorsey
Assistant Principal

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the attendance policies and procedures of Orin C. Smith Elementary and the Chehalis School District.

Parent Name

Student Name

Date