West Mifflin Area School District
Attendance Handbook
2026-2027

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Section 1: Attendance Policies & Legal Framework

1.1 Compulsory School Attendance Requirements

- **Compulsory School Age:** In Pennsylvania, compulsory school age is defined as the period of a child's life from when their parents elect to have them enter school (which must be no later than 6 years of age) until they turn 18 years of age.
- **Enrollment Mandate:** A child who reaches age 6 on or before September 1 must enroll and attend school, or begin a compliant home school program that same year. Any student under 18 years of age must comply with these compulsory guidelines.
- **Kindergarten Attendance & Withdrawal:** The Pennsylvania Supreme Court (*Commonwealth v. Kerstetter*) ruled that compulsory school attendance laws apply to children under age eight once parents choose to enroll them in a public school kindergarten program. However, if a parent formally withdraws their child from kindergarten prior to reaching the compulsory age of six, they are no longer subject to these requirements for that period.
- **Statutory Exceptions:** Students of compulsory school age are required to attend a day school taught in the English language, except in specific legal scenarios:
    - **Ages 14–15 Permitted Service:** Children aged 14 or 15 who hold approved permits to engage in farm work or domestic service in a private home.
    - **Age 16 Lawful Employment:** Children aged 16 who are regularly engaged in useful, lawful employment (defined as 35 or more hours per week) and possess a valid employment certificate.
    - **Alternative and Accredited Schooling:** Attendance at an accredited day/boarding school, a private trade or business school (with appropriate superintendency approvals), or a church-run religious school providing at least 180 days or 900 hours (elementary) / 990 hours (secondary) of annual instruction.
    - **Inability to Profit:** Children who have been examined by an approved psychological professional and identified as unable to profit from further public school attendance, upon excusal by the school board.

1.2 Defining and Categorizing Absences

- **Presumption of Unlawful (Unexcused) Status:** All student absences are treated as unexcused until the school district receives a valid, written explanation from a parent, guardian, or medical professional.
- **Lawful (Excused) Absences:** Pennsylvania law recognizes an absence as lawful when a student is prevented from attending school for mental, physical, or other urgent reasons. Valid reasons include:
    - Personal illness or urgent family emergencies (e.g., a death in the family or severe house emergency).
    - Direct dismissal during school hours by a certified school nurse or school administrator.
    - Professional health care, therapy sessions, or medical/dental appointments rendered by a licensed practitioner (students should attend school before or after the appointment whenever possible).

- Formal court appearances or hearings related to the student's involvement with a county children and youth agency or juvenile probation.
- Job interviews or college visits for secondary students.
- Pre-approved religious holidays or religious instruction (limited to a maximum of 36 hours per school year).
- Approved family educational tours or trips.

1.3 Family Educational Trips Policy

- **Approval Authority:** The School Board allows students to be excused for non-school-sponsored educational tours or trips if a written request is submitted by the parent or guardian at least five (5) school days prior to the trip. The student's participation must be formally approved by the Superintendent or a building principal designee.
- **Duration Restrictions:** Educational trips are strictly limited to a maximum of five (5) school days. Requests that exceed 5 days will be heavily scrutinized and determined based on the student's current attendance history and academic standing.
- **Blackout Dates:** Unless an emergency arises, educational trips will not be approved during standardized testing periods (such as PSSAs or Keystone Exams) or during final exam blocks.
- **Academic Requirement:** To receive an excused status, the student is required to write a comprehensive summary of the educational benefits of the trip and turn it in directly to the principal upon returning to school (this requirement is optional for elementary students).

Section 2: Attendance Thresholds, Interventions, & Truancy

The West Mifflin Area School District implements a rigorous step-by-step protocol to monitor student absenteeism, engage families early, and resolve truancy barriers. Both excused and unexcused absences count toward total limits.

2.1 Absence Caps and Medical Mandates

- **The 10-Day Limit:** West Mifflin Area School District students are strictly limited to a maximum of ten (10) cumulative absences per full school year, whether those absences are verified by parent notes or are unexcused.
- **Physician's Note Requirements:** Once a student accumulates ten (10) total absences of any kind, a formal "Principal Letter" is issued to the household. For all subsequent absences beyond this 10-day limit, the district will require an official excuse signed by a licensed physician in order for the absence to be categorized as lawful.

2.2 Truancy Classifications

- **Truant:** A student is legally classified as "truant" as soon as they incur three (3) or more unexcused/unlawful school days of absence during the current school year.

- **Habitually Truant:** A student is legally classified as "habitually truant" when they accumulate six (6) or more unexcused/unlawful school days of absence over the course of the current school year.

2.3 Step-by-Step District Escalation Procedures

- **3 Consecutive Absences:** The homeroom teacher (or 1st period teacher for High School students) will make a direct contact to check in on the family or immediately notify a school guidance counselor to perform outreach.
- **3 Unexcused Absences:** The district sends a formal 3-Day Warning Letter to the parent/guardian informing them that the child is truant.
- **5 Total Absences (Excused or Unexcused):** The student's homeroom or 1st period teacher sends an official advisory notice to the parents.
- **5 Unexcused Absences: *** The district issues a 2nd Warning Letter to the household.
    - The school's Titan Assistance Patrol (TAP) team dispatches an official invitation to the family to participate in a School Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP).
    - **Students with an IEP:** The TAP team alerts the student's special education case manager to organize an IEP team meeting to review attendance barriers and determine if IEP revisions are necessary.
- **8+ Unexcused Absences:** If unexcused absences continue to accumulate past the SAIP and reach 8 or more days, the district may initiate a formal referral to the local magisterial district judge.

2.4 School Attendance Improvement Conference (SAIC)/ Plan (SAIP)

- **Purpose:** When a student becomes truant, the school must proactively initiate a School Attendance Improvement Conference (SAIC) to identify the root causes of the student's absenteeism and collaboratively design solutions.
- **Plan Development:** The conference results in a written School Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP). This plan is designed in a collaborative, non-threatening manner to support the family and student by coordinating with truancy reduction partners, Student Assistant Program (SAP) teams, or county service agencies to resolve underlying issues like health problems, mental health struggles, or bullying.

Section 3: Attendance Guide for Parents & Guardians

3.1 Strict Timelines for Documentation

- **The 3-Day Rule:** In the event of an absence or tardy, an official written excuse from a parent, guardian, or medical professional must be received by the school within **three (3) school days** of the student's physical return to school.
- **Consequence of Delay:** Failure to submit a valid excuse within this strict 3-day window results in the absence permanently and irreversibly being counted as unexcused/unlawful.

3.2 Required Information on All Excuses

Every submitted excuse note must clearly display the following five pieces of information to be verified by the attendance office:

1. The exact calendar date the excuse note was written.
2. The full legal name and current grade level of the student.
3. The specific date(s) of the student's absence or tardiness.
4. A clear, specific reason for the absence or tardy.
5. The legal signature of the parent or guardian.

3.3 Methods for Submitting Absence Excuses

Parents have multiple accessible pathways to deliver an excuse to the district:

- **Option 1: PowerSchool Parent Portal (Preferred Method)**
    1. Log into your verified parent account via powerschool.wmasd.org/public/.
    2. Navigate to the left-side navigation panel and choose **Forms**
    3. Select the **Student Absence Form**.
    4. Complete all required text fields, ensure the date matches the exact day of absence, and hit submit.
- **Option 2: Hand-Delivered Written Notes**
    - Send a physical parent-signed note or an official doctor's office slip directly to school with your student upon their return.
- **Option 3: Directly Emailing Building Secretaries**
    - High School Secretary: **`cubakovics@wmasd.org`**
    - Middle School Secretary**: `colizzar@wmasd.org`**
    - Homeville Elementary Secretary**: `millermb@wmasd.org`**
    - Clara Barton Elementary Secretary: **`mcelroyk@wmasd.org`**
- **Option 4: Digital Teacher Platforms**
    - Message or send a clear photo of the written excuse via authorized district communication channels (such as ClassDojo, Remind, or Schoology) and request that the homeroom teacher forward it to the main office.
- **Option 5: School Fax Numbers**
    - High School Fax: 412-466-4594
    - Middle School Fax: 412-466-0836
    - Homeville Fax: 412-461-5465
    - Clara Barton Fax: 412-469-3357

3.4 Elementary Attendance Thresholds

For elementary schools, arrival and departure times significantly dictate whether an absence is recorded as a partial or full day.

Classes formally begin at **9:05 AM**

- **Arriving Late:**
    - Arriving between 9:05 AM and 10:40 AM is marked as a Tardy.
    - Arriving after **10:40 AM** is automatically counted as a **half-day absence**.

    - Arriving after **2:00 PM** is automatically counted as a **full-day absence**.
- **Leaving Early:**
    - Leaving school before **2:00 PM** (but after 10:40 AM) is automatically counted as a **half-day absence**.

3.5 Middle School Attendance Thresholds

Similar to the elementary schools, middle arrival and departure times strictly dictate how an absence is classified based on the unique start times of each building.

West Mifflin Area Middle School (Grades 4 & 5)

Classes formally begin at **9:00 AM**.

- **Arriving Late:**
    - Arriving after **10:40 AM** is automatically counted as a **half-day absence**.
    - Arriving after **2:00 PM** is automatically counted as a **full-day absence**.
- **Leaving Early:**
    - Leaving school before **10:40 AM** is automatically counted as a **full-day absence**.
    - Leaving school before **2:00 PM** (but after 10:40 AM) is automatically counted as a **half-day absence**.

West Mifflin Area Middle School (Grades 6, 7, & 8)

Classes formally begin at **8:00 AM.**

- **Arriving Late:**
    - Arriving after **10:40 AM** is automatically counted as a **half-day absence**.
    - Arriving after **2:00 PM** is automatically counted as a **full-day absence**.
- **Leaving Early:**
    - Leaving school before **10:40 AM** is automatically counted as a **full-day absence**.
    - Leaving school before **2:00 PM** (but after 10:40 AM) is automatically counted as a **half-day absence**.

3.6 High School Attendance Thresholds

Similar to the elementary and middle schools, high arrival and departure times strictly dictate how an absence is classified based on the unique start times of each building.

West Mifflin Area High School (Grades 9-12)

Classes formally begin at **7:20 AM.**

- **Arriving Late:**
    - Arriving after **10:24 AM** is automatically counted as a **half-day absence**.
    - Arriving after **12:47 PM** is automatically counted as a **full-day absence**.
- **Leaving Early:**
    - Leaving school before **8:46 AM** is automatically counted as a **full-day absence**.

- Leaving school before **12:15 PM** (but after 8:46 AM) is automatically counted as a **half-day absence**.

3.7 Standard Definitions for Unexcused Absences

To ensure absolute alignment across all district campus tiers, the following common scenarios are strictly categorized as **invalid/unexcused** reasons for a student missing school or arriving late:

- Oversleeping
- Missing the school bus
- Family vacations that were not formally pre-approved via an educational trip request form
- Direct truancy or skipping classes
- Personal shopping trips
- Any physician or medical excuse that is deemed falsified or legally invalid

Section 4: School Bell Schedules (2026–2027)

4.1 West Mifflin Area High School

Regular Daily Schedule

- **Period 1:** 7:20 AM – 8:01 AM (41 mins)
- **Period 2:** 8:05 AM – 8:46 AM (41 mins)
- **Period 3:** 8:50 AM – 9:34 AM (44 mins)
- **Period 4:** 9:38 AM – 10:19 AM (41 mins)
- **Period 5:** 10:23 AM – 11:04 AM (41 mins)
- **Period 6A (Lunch/Class):** 11:08 AM – 11:38 AM (30 mins)
- **Period 6B (Lunch/Class):** 11:42 AM – 12:12 PM (30 mins)
- **Period 6C (Lunch/Class):** 12:16 PM – 12:46 PM (30 mins)
- **Period 7:** 12:50 PM – 1:31 PM (41 mins)
- **Period 8:** 1:35 PM – 2:15 PM (40 mins)

4.2 West Mifflin Area Middle School

Middle School operations utilize distinct bell schedules customized by grade bands and district operational delays.

Regular Schedule Grades 6-8

- **Homeroom:** 8:00 AM – 8:11 AM
- **Period 1:** 8:14 AM – 8:57 AM
- **Period 2:** 9:00 AM – 9:43 AM
- **Period 3:** 9:46 AM – 10:29 AM
- **Period 4: (Grade 6)** 10:32 AM – 11:02 AM

- **Period 4: (Grade 7-8)** 10:32 AM – 11:15 AM
- **Period 5: (Grade 6)** 11:05 AM – 11:48 AM
- **Period 5: (Grade 7)** 11:18 AM – 11:48 AM
- **Period 5: (Grade 8)** 12:04 PM – 12:34 PM
- **Period 6: (Grade 6-7)** 11:51 AM – 12:34 PM
- **Period 6: (Grade 8)** 12:04 PM – 12:34 PM
- **Period 7:** 1:45 PM – 2:30 PM
- **Period 8:** 2:30 PM – 3:15 PM
- **Period 9:** 3:15 PM – 3:35 PM

Regular Schedule Grades 4-5

- **Homeroom:** 8:42 AM – 8:52 AM
- **Period 1:** 8:55 AM – 9:37 AM
- **Period 2:** 9:40 AM – 10:22 AM
- **Period 3:** 10:25 AM – 11:07 AM
- **Period 4:** 11:10 AM – 11:52 PM
- **Period 5:** 11:55 PM – 12:37 PM
- **Period 6:** 12:37 PM – 1:22 PM
- **Period 7:** 1:25 PM – 2:07 PM
- **Period 8:** 2:10 PM – 2:52 PM
- **Period 9:** 2:55 PM – 3:30 PM

4.3 Homeville Elementary School

- **Arrival/Homeroom Window:** Doors open at 8:40 AM.

Regular Schedule

- **Homeroom:** 8:40 AM – 3:35 PM
- **Period 1:** 9:05 AM – 10:00 AM
- **Period 2:** 10:00 AM – 10:45 AM
- **Period 3:** 10:45 AM – 11:30 AM
- **Period 4:** 11:30 AM – 12:15 PM
- **Period 5:** 12:15 PM – 1:00 PM
- **Period 6:** 1:00 PM – 1:45 PM
- **Period 7:** 1:45 PM – 2:30 PM
- **Period 8:** 2:30 PM – 3:15 PM
- **Period 9:** 3:15 PM – 3:35 PM

Regular Lunch Rotations

- **Kindergarten (K) Lunch:** 11:00 AM – 11:30 AM
- **1st Grade Lunch:** 11:40 AM – 12:10 PM
- **2nd Grade Lunch:** 12:15 PM – 12:45 PM
- **3rd Grade Lunch:** 12:45 PM – 1:15 PM

4.4 Clara Barton Elementary School

- **School Opening/Homeroom Window:** 8:35 AM – 9:05 AM.

Regular Day Rotations & Dismissals

- **K Lunch:** 11:30 AM – 12:00 PM
- **2nd Grade Lunch:** 12:15 PM – 12:35 PM
- **Walker Student Dismissal:** 3:30 PM
- **Bus Student Dismissal:** 3:35 PM

Section 5: School Calendar Highlights (2026–2027)

5.1 Notable Semesters and Dates to Remember

August 18, 2026 District Meet and Greet
August 20, 2026 First Day of School for Students
September 7, 2026 Labor Day — No School
October 22, 2026 End of the 1st Nine Weeks Grading Period
October 28, 2026 Parent-Teacher Conferences (Grades K-3) — No Students
October 29, 2026 Parent-Teacher Conferences (Grades 4-12) — No Students
November 3, 2026 Voting Day — Remote Learning Day
November 11, 2026 Veterans Day — No School
November 26, 2026 Fall Break Begins — No School
December 24, 2026 Winter Break Begins — No School
January 11, 2027 End of the 1st Semester / 2nd Nine Weeks Grading Period
January 12, 2027 Teacher In-Service Day — No Students
January 18, 2027 Martin Luther King Jr. Day — No School
February 15, 2027 President's Day — No School
March 18, 2027 End of the 3rd Nine Weeks Grading Period
March 19, 2027 Teacher In-Service Day — No Students
March 26, 2027 Spring Break Begins — No School
May 20, 2027 High School Commencement / Graduation
May 26, 2027 Last Day of School for Students (End of 4th Nine Weeks)

5.2 State Testing Blackout Windows

Families are reminded that educational travel requests will not be approved during these critical testing timelines:

- **Winter Keystone Testing (Wave 2):** December 7 – December 18, 2026 *(Subject focus: Algebra, Biology, Literature)*
- **PSSA Testing (English Language Arts - Grades 3-8):** April 26 – April 30, 2027
- **PSSA Testing (Math, Science, and Make-ups - Grades 3-8):** May 3 – May 7, 2027

- **Spring Keystone Testing:** May 17 – May 28, 2027 *(Subject focus: Algebra I, Biology, Literature)*

Section 6: Support for Students Experiencing Educational Instability

6.1 Policy 251 & The McKinney-Vento Act

In compliance with Federal and State mandates (Policy 251 & the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act), West Mifflin Area School District removes all educational barriers for children experiencing homelessness, foster care placement, or overarching educational instability.

- **Definition of Homelessness:** This includes children or youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. It encompasses those living in shared "doubled-up" housing due to economic hardship, temporary shelters, cars, public parks, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, or migratory settings.
- **Immediate Enrollment Rights:** Homeless and unstable youth have the right to immediate enrollment in school, even if they lack typical required records such as proof of residency, immunization/medical logs, birth certificates, or academic transcripts.
- **School of Origin Continuity:** Students have the right to remain in their "school of origin" (the school they attended when permanently housed or last enrolled) for the entire duration of their temporary housing displacement to maintain academic stability. If a student completes the final grade level of a building, they transition seamlessly into the designated receiving school at the next grade level within that feeder pattern.

6.2 District Protections and Support Services

- **Point of Contact:** The school Board formally designates the **Home and School Visitor** to act as the official district liaison and point of contact for families experiencing instability.
- **Absence Protections:** Absences caused directly by homelessness, shelter transitions, or transportation disruptions connected to instability **must not** be counted as unexcused/unlawful absences.
- **Dispute Resolution:** If an enrollment or placement dispute arises, the student must be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought pending a full, final resolution of the complaint by a McKinney-Vento coordinator or the courts.
- **Graduation & Credit Flexibility:** The district liaison will facilitate credit integration and alternative graduation options (such as the Keystone Diploma from the PA Department of Education) for highly mobile students to ensure they are not penalized for shifting school districts. Unstable students with disabilities maintain full special education rights under IDEA and may graduate through credit attainment or fulfillment of their specific IEP goals.