

Dr. Lawrence S. Feldman, Board Member

SUBJECT: SCHOOL BOARD POLICY 5200, ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: ACADEMICS, INNOVATION, EVALUATION & TECHNOLOGY

LINK TO STRATEGIC

BLUEPRINT: SAFE, HEALTHY AND SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

School Board Policy 5200 Attendance outlines attendance requirements adopted by this School Board as required by and in compliance with Florida State Statute 1003.21 through 1003.29 and with applicable provisions of the Florida Administrative Code. The Board's comprehensive policy defines and addresses attendance, truancy, and record-keeping, among other related matters. It also outlines "reasonable excuses for time missed at school," and clearly delineates no less than 13 instances and/or categories under which an absence or time away from school may be deemed as excused. Four of the thirteen listed categories provide principals the authority to determine whether the 'significant community event', 'school sponsored event', or 'educational enrichment activity that is not a school sponsored event' constitute a 'reasonable excuse to miss school'. The four referenced instances noted in the policy are as follows:

E. Other absences with prior approval of the Principal.

G. Significant community events with prior permission of the Principal. When more than one (1) school is involved, the Region Superintendent will determine the status of the absence.

J. School-sponsored event or educational enrichment activity that is not a school-sponsored event, as determined and approved by the Principal. The student must receive advance written permission from the Principal. Examples of special events include: public functions, conferences, and regional, State, and national competitions.

M. Other individual student absences beyond the control of the parent or student, as determined and approved by the Principal, requires documentation related to the condition.

This particular aspect of the policy has proven to be largely effective as it provides principals with the local control and needed autonomy to make case-by-case decisions that directly affect their students, school community and stakeholders. Moreover, under letter G, as cited above, the policy wisely provides a mechanism for additional region office consideration in determining the status of the absence(s) should a significant community event involve more than one school.

The Board might recall the relevance of this policy during recent months when a highly publicized global youth climate change protest took place on September 20, 2019 during school hours ahead of the United Nations Climate Action Summit. School administrators and districts were inundated with requests from students for permission to attend the event. Similarly, a gun violence demonstration staged on April 20, 2017, following the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, yielded unprecedented levels of student interest in this event which many considered a ‘reasonable excuse to miss school’. Both events were handled effectively by the Miami-Dade County Public School district, in conjunction with its region offices, and were free of significant safety issues. However, in both instances, school site administrators, the school district, and the Board fielded requests for information and clarity regarding the attendance policy, specifically the section addressing ‘reasonable excuses for time missed at school’.

Students continue to appeal to the Board for their assistance in improving the mechanisms by which their requests for participation in meaningful and educationally relevant local events can be thoughtfully vetted. Through correspondence, statements to the media, and direct contact with the Board and District at public hearings, we have heard our students make the case for validating the real world application of acquired skills and experiential learning inherent in activism on behalf of environmental and social justice causes, among others. It is prudent to develop guidelines and resources to assist school site administrators in vetting such requests. School district guidelines should address the policy, best practices, and offer post-event assignments/activities (e.g., reflections, projects, and reports) from students for administrators or their designees to review should they validate an absence approved under subsections G and J of the referenced section of this policy.

With a notable rise in youth activism from an increasingly involved, mobilized and educated student population, it is an opportune moment to review *School Board Policy 5200 Attendance* to ensure best practices continue to be implemented effectively, to consider all stakeholder voices and feedback in informing future practices, and to provide administrators clear guidelines and resources to assist in policy implementation.

This item has been reviewed and approved by the School Board Attorney’s office as to form and legal sufficiency.

ACTION PROPOSED BY

DR. LAWRENCE S. FELDMAN:

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, authorize the Superintendent to:

- a) review *School Board Policy 5200, Attendance*, and related best practices nation-wide;
- b) gather feedback from student leaders, teachers, parent representatives, school site administrators, district personnel, and the School Board Attorney as it relates to the section entitled ‘reasonable excuses for time missed at school’ under Policy 5200 for the purpose of informing possible future practices, policies, and guidelines;

- c) develop and provide guidelines to administrators to assist as they vet student requests to consider 'reasonable excuses for time missed at school';
- d) ensure guidelines include suggestions for post-activity assignments such as reports, reflections, projects when appropriate; and
- e) provide follow up to the Board and/or recommendations no later than the February 12, 2020 School Board meeting.