

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.

**Revised
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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, cited only as examples, 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'.

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Students continue to appeal to the Board for 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 those local events. It has become apparent that the protocols for the submittal and processing of those requests remains unclear for many students and parents.

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Stakeholder-informed school district guidelines should include best practices and protocols addressing principal, student and parent/guardian roles and responsibilities relative to excused absence requests made under Policy 5200, 'reasonable excuses for time missed at school'. These guidelines would serve to clarify and communicate the identified process for all involved parties e.g. requirement of parent/guardian permission, follow-up student assignments, and confirmation of aligned learning goals and standards to the event/activity.

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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 all stakeholders with clear guidelines and resources to assist in policy implementation.

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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) gather feedback from student leaders, teachers, parent representatives, school site administrators, district personnel, and the School Board Attorney for the purpose of informing and identifying best practices and protocols for administrators to utilize when vetting any and all related requests pertaining to the section entitled 'reasonable excuses for time missed at school' under *Policy 5200 Attendance*;

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b) develop and ensure guidelines include best practices and protocols addressing principal, student and parent/guardian roles and responsibilities relative to excused absence requests made under Policy 5200, 'reasonable excuses for time missed at school', e.g. requirement of parent/guardian permission, follow-up student assignments, and confirmation of aligned learning goals and standards to the event/activity; and

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c) provide follow up to the Board and/or recommendations no later than the April 2020 School Board meeting.