



#208-21

Commonwealth of Virginia
Virginia Department of Education
Superintendent's Memo #208-21

DATE: August 6, 2021
TO: Division Superintendents
FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction
SUBJECT: **Guidelines for Granting Excused Absences for Civic Engagement**

The *Guidelines for Granting Excused Absences for Civic Engagement* to any middle-and high-school student were developed in response to [House Bill 1940](#) (Rasoul) and [Senate Bill 1439](#) (McClellan) enacted by the 2021 Virginia General Assembly. These bills amend and reenact § [22.1-254](#) of the *Code of Virginia* as follows:

“K. Subject to guidelines established by the Department of Education, each school board (i) shall permit one school day-long excused absence per school year for any middle school or high school student in the local school division who is absent from school to engage in a civic or political event and (ii) may permit additional excused absences for such students who are absent for such purposes.”

The *Code of Virginia* § 22.1-254 addresses compulsory attendance and exemptions to compulsory attendance, and the *Code of Virginia* § [22.1-258](#) addresses truancy and the intervention process. [Chapter 730](#) of the *Administrative Code of Virginia* contains the *Regulations Governing the Collection and Reporting of Truancy-Related Data and Student Attendance Policies* and consists of three sections; [8VAC-20-730-10](#) establishes definitions as it relates to the attendance policies and the collection and reporting of truancy;

[8VAC-20-730-20](#) establishes the unexcused absence intervention process and responsibilities; and [8VAC-20-730-30](#) establishes data collection and reporting requirements.

8VAC20-730-10 defines an excused absence as “...an absence of an entire assigned instructional school day with a reason acceptable to the school administration that is provided by the parent. If circumstances permit, the parent should provide the school administration with the reason for the nonattendance prior to the absence. Examples of an excused absence may include, but are not limited to, the following reasons: funeral, illness (including mental health and substance abuse illnesses), injury, legal obligations, medical procedures, suspensions, religious observances, and military obligation.”

Pursuant to § 22.1-254 of the *Code of Virginia*, a reason for an excused absence includes engagement in a civic or political event. There is a range of definitions for the term **civic engagement**. Generally, civic engagement refers to the ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community’s future. It may take the form of individual or collective actions designed to promote the quality of life in a community, through either political or non-political processes. This includes political activism, environmentalism, and community and national service. Participation in civic engagement provides students with an opportunity to learn firsthand processes in which they can have a voice in democracy and in communities. Civic engagement activities can include, but are not limited to, legislative visits, campaigning, peaceful protests, awareness walks, advocacy efforts, and volunteering or community service. The decision to participate in a civic engagement activity is made between the student and their parent/guardian.

School divisions shall establish local policies and guidelines as they relate to granting one excused absence per school year for middle-and high-school students to engage in civic or political activities. These policies and guidelines may require a parent/guardian to prearrange the excused absence a certain number of days in advance of the absence and/or provide a description or documentation of the civic or political engagement activity. School divisions may grant more than one excused absence for civic or political activities.

For more information

The Virginia Department of Education provides guidance to school divisions related to attendance interventions via training and technical assistance resources (e.g., [Chronic Absenteeism Learning Modules](#), [Chronic Absenteeism Webinars](#), [Chronic Absenteeism FAQs](#)). For more information, contact Quyen Duong, Student Services Specialist, Office of Student Services, by email at Quyen.Duong@doe.virginia.gov, or by telephone at (804) 786-0720.

JFL/QD/rge