

From the principal's desk...

Last year, we experienced an unusually high rate of absences at Douglass – over 70 students fit into the district's definition of "habitually absent", meaning that they were absent more than 10 days. Below is a message to parents from the National Association of Elementary School Principals regarding student attendance:

Students need to be in school every day to stay on track. Teachers' lesson plans are carefully constructed to introduce new concepts, reinforce them with learning activities, and then move on to new skills and ideas. When children aren't in school, they fall behind. And the more days they miss, the harder it is to catch up. That's where you come in.

Report In. Schools are required to track attendance of every child in every classroom every day. It is essential that you always contact the school if your child is going to be late for class, will need an early dismissal or will be absent.

Get the Work. When you know ahead of time your child will be missing class, give the teachers plenty of notice so they can provide your child with makeup work to do. Be sure that your child follows through—you'll need to be his or her "teacher" on those days, so be available to explain concepts or monitor the work.

If your child is out unexpectedly, due to illness or other reasons, in addition to contacting the school attendance office, make arrangements with your child's teachers to pick up a packet of work/ readings from the school. If the absence will be lengthy (e.g., for surgery), alert the teachers as soon as you know and get updated assignments and work packets as the days go on.

Religious Absences. It is inevitable that some families' important religious observances will fall on school days. Let your children's teachers know early in the year precisely which days your children will not be attending or will need to leave early.

How Sick Is Too Sick? It's impossible to say categorically when a child should go to school or stay home. However, one typical guideline is that a child is usually fine to attend school if his or her fever is under 100° and there is no rash, "pink eye," nausea, or diarrhea. The decision to keep a child home from school is best made between you and your child's health care provider. If the doctor or nurse recommends that your child stay home, find out exactly how long and on what conditions he or she can return to class (e.g., after 24 hours of antibiotics).

Faking It? If your child is complaining of a fever, but you're suspicious, make sure to stay in the room the entire time the child's temperature is being taken. A child complaining of nausea will probably be paler in color and slightly sweaty, and will usually need to vomit more than once. Send your child to school if you don't see a real symptom, knowing that the school nurse will contact you if things change. Also, be alert if your child seems to be "sick" on school days but always rebounds for the weekend.

Vacation Plans. It's tempting to pull your kids from school for a family trip, but it's a bad idea. Why? First, it gives your children the impression that their schooling is not your top priority. And when they miss class work, even if you ask for make-up work to be sent home ahead of time, they can fall behind because they're missing many hours of instructional time each day. Instead of thinking of how you can miss the crowds by taking trips during the school year, think about what it could be costing your child in the long run.

Check Those Appointments. Schedule your kids' doctor and dental appointments for after-school or weekend hours unless there's an emergency. Schedule your children's twice-yearly dental appointment during winter and summer breaks, and schedule school physicals, immunizations, and other routine care for school holidays or summer break.

Finally, remember to show and tell your children that attendance is important—whether it's as a child in school or as an adult on the job. You'll be helping them succeed, both in school and in life.

Your principal,
Jon Wolfer