Meeting begins at 8:17am

Today’s agenda includes discussion about attendance. Assistant Principal, Nick Wold, to join, as well as a teacher, Kati McConn, to discuss how attendance impacts the classroom.

Attendance presentation by Principal Wold

Big picture: when state changes policy, we have to make changes locally. Difficult to implement. For state it may be black and white, but for us it is more gray.

We want students to be here.

Attendance data on Mercer Island has not been great. But since new rules, the data for this quarter is much better. Best it’s been for the last five years. Currently, about 3.5% of students are absent for at least 50% of the day. *(see data attached to end of minutes)* Translates to approximately 53 students in a population of approximately 1500.

Ellis Hazard is on staff to work with students who have significant issue with absences. We don’t want to take a punitive approach. We just want to understand what issues these students are dealing with and why they are absent.

Most students who are regularly absent are unexcused.

Vacation absences are unique and varied. Some families take extended vacations that take students out for a long period.

Tardies are also an issue. When a student is tardy, that disrupts class. Currently tracking 38 students who have many tardies to understand what is happening.

Comment: would be helpful to have a breakdown of the absence data to understand the specific reasons (illness, vacation, school trip).

Kati McConn addresses impact on school.

Discussed one example: a former student would be absent every time an assessment was scheduled. Each time, a week later it would be changed to an excused illness.

There is a five day window after an absence in which parent can provide a note to get it excused. Per school board policy, this can be a written note, a phone call, or an email. Sometimes parents have been told a note is required, but a phone call or email is okay.
Comment: there’s no place on the website telling parents where they email or call to provide information regarding absences.

Impacts in classroom from absences:

- Applies whether absence is excused or unexcused
- Lots of content in classroom that can’t be replaced through notes of classmates or schoology
- Don’t have the opportunity to work one to one with student who is making up work at home
- Students who struggle the most are the ones with habitual absences. Students missing on days of assessments tend to do the worst on those assessments.
- Other students are also impacted (e.g., in groupwork, other students feel let down or feel they have to do more of the work; can create resentment)
- When student misses assessment, teacher can’t give work back to other students until the absent student takes the assessment. So it delays feedback to all students.
- Teachers are impacted
  - Gradebook may not accurately reflect the student’s mastery of the subject. May be more reflective of whether they are present.
  - Often both student and teacher are put in position of trying to make up for the missing work.
  - Teacher might have to spend extra hours on working with a specific student.

Comment: Is it helpful for parents to let teacher know in advance.

Ms. McConn: love it when I know in advance. Allows me to put some structure in place to mitigate the impact of missing class. Helpful to put initiative on student to approach teacher before and ask what they can do before the absence to make up ahead of time.
Comment: Sometimes there are trips that require students to be absent, whether its family vacations or college visits. Can't avoid taking student out but now they will have unexcused absence.

Mr. Wold: Contact us. We will work with families on a case by case basis. Working in advance to notify teachers of pre-planned absence is key. Do pre-work if possible so that student comes back caught up.

Comment: message from school may be missing the concept that, if you are absent, take the steps you need to prepare ahead of time.

Mr Wold will update attendance webpage to provide helpful information for steps to take when you know your student will be absent.

Ms Puckett: working with staff to understand how different teachers treat unexcused absences (i.e. what are their policies for making up work). Some teachers allow students to make it up; others don’t.

For information on website, click on Families tab, then select Attendance.

Some parents will excuse an absence no matter what, even if student skips. Other parents don’t. Teachers may be reluctant to reach out to parents of students who habitually miss assessments when those parents repeatedly excuse the absences.

Comment: Sounds like the message should be that parents are actually hurting their students more by allowing them to skip assessment and do it later.

Comment: Could create PSA type announcements about the importance of attendance.

Comment: Would be helpful to be more aware and mindful of when tests are happening.

Ms Puckett: Important to be aware of information on Skyward. Ask student what test/assessments they have coming up each week. Many parents are thoughtful about when they take students out for appointments – schedule on off period, end of day, beginning of day, assess whether they can more easily skip one class over another.

Believe using more technology to track attendance and tardies will have positive benefits.

Working with IT specialist to develop a work around attendance tracking system using ipads that is less expensive than the system under consideration last spring.
Question: If you know about an upcoming absence, is it required to use Whammo, or just a suggestion?

Ms Foster: Whammo is not technically a requirement but is highly suggested.

Ms Puckett: School is trying to be reasonable and work with families.

Departments are now working to determine policies regarding how they treat excused vs unexcused absences. Suspect that different departments will have different policies.

If a student has more than 10 absences (either excused or unexcused), then student is at risk of not being able to get credit. But this is determined on a case by case basis.

Other topics of interest?

Question about volunteer hours prior to 9th grade year. Should student get credit for hours prior to the start of Freshman year.
Appendix
Attendance Data October 2019

During the month of October, all six schools had better student attendance than last year for the same month!

• Island Park
  o October 2019- average weekly absence rate= 2.1%
  o 2018 average weekly absence rate in October= 7.1%

• Lakeridge
  o October 2019- average weekly absence rate= 2.5%
  o 2018 average weekly absence rate in October= 7.2%

• Northwood
  o October 2019- average weekly absence rate= 2.8%
  o 2018 average weekly absence rate in October= 7.8%

• West Mercer
  o October 2019- average weekly absence rate= 2.5%
  o 2018 average weekly absence rate in October= 7.2%

• IMS
  o October 2019- average weekly absence rate= 3.3%
  o 2018 average weekly absence rate in October= 5.0%

• MIHS
  o October 2019- average weekly absence rate= 3.5%
  o 2018 average weekly absence rate in October= 5.2%