

Introduction

This booklet is a guide to the rights and responsibilities students enjoy in the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). This booklet is only a summary of laws and regulations that affect you. It is not a definitive statement of your rights in any particular situation. For additional information, please read the specific laws, policies, and regulations referenced at the end of each section. MCPS policies and regulations are available on the Internet at www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/policy. In addition, your school's media center and school administrators should have copies of these documents.

State laws, Maryland State Board of Education bylaws, and Montgomery County Board of Education policies and administrative regulations are subject to change and shall supersede the statements and references contained in this publication.

Free Public Education

All students from the ages of 5, by September 1st, through 21 are entitled to a free public education.

All students with disabilities are entitled to a free, appropriate public education from birth through the end of the school year in which the child turns 21 years of age.

References:

Annotated Code of Maryland, Education, Sections 7-101, 8-403

Student Participation

You have the right to make suggestions about courses and their content. Your teachers and administrators will encourage you to do so.

You may work with other students and faculty to select, plan, and conduct assembly programs. The faculty will make every effort to involve students in this process.

You may plan voluntary programs for students that happen before or after school. The principal will support school-sponsored programs and help you find a faculty sponsor. The principal will prohibit these programs only if they violate law or MCPS policy, threaten the health or safety of students, interfere with school activities, or are inconsistent with the school's basic educational mission or are inappropriate for the age and maturity of the audience.

You also may plan programs to be held during the school day as additions or alternatives to the regular school program. Students who organize these programs have the responsibility to ensure that the following take place:

- Topics are appropriate
- Outside speakers are qualified to speak on the chosen topics
- Presentations of controversial issues are balanced

You must get approval from the principal for any such programs. He/she also will ensure that the above guidelines are met.

You have the right and responsibility to participate in creating or changing any MCPS policy that affects you. You can participate through your student government representatives or through other student organizations. The school may involve you by including student government representatives at meetings or by asking you directly what you think about policies. Your principal will inform you of any

changes in policy before they take effect and will make copies of any new policies available to you.

If your parents/guardians should ask that you not participate in classroom activities that are part of the state-required Comprehensive Health Education Curriculum units on Family Life and Human Sexuality and Disease Prevention and Control, alternative activities will be provided to you.

References:

Policy JFA: *Student Rights and Responsibilities*

Regulation JFA-RA: *Student Rights and Responsibilities*

COMAR 13A.04.18.04 Program in Comprehensive Health Education

Rights of Privacy

Your privacy will be respected by school staff. You cannot be required to reveal anything about your personal life or family as part of a classroom activity.

Classroom discussions will focus on the subject you are learning, not on you personally. Sometimes you will talk about personal things in class, such as your feelings or attitudes. Nevertheless, you cannot be required to reveal anything about your family, relationships, problems, or anything else about your personal life. You also will not be required to make any comparisons involving yourself or your family.

MCPS may use audio and video camera surveillance in public locations with posted notification. Any student may be disciplined based on evidence gathered through audio and video surveillance.

References:

Policy JFA: *Student Rights and Responsibilities*

Regulation JFA-RA: *Student Rights and Responsibilities*

Attendance

Except when excused, you must go to your classes and other required activities during the school day. Your attendance will be reported to your parents/guardians on your report card. A student is counted present for a full day if a student is in attendance four hours or more of the school day. A student is counted present for ½ day if in attendance for at least two hours of the school day, but less than four hours.

According to your local school's procedures, if you are absent from school, the school will follow up on your absence.

Excused Absences

You may miss school for the following reasons only:

- Death in your immediate family
- Illness (The principal may require a physician's certificate from the parent/guardian in cases of chronic or extended absences for an illness.)
- Court summons
- Religious holiday
- State emergency
- Hazardous weather conditions (that is, weather conditions that would endanger you on your way to or from school)
- Lack of authorized transportation (for example, if your bus does not show up)
- Permission from your principal

If you miss school for one of these reasons, you must bring a note from your parent/guardian within three school days after your return to school. For example, if you miss school Wednesday and Thursday and then return Friday, you must hand in a note explaining your absence by the following Tuesday. Otherwise, the absence will be considered unexcused. If you are 18 or older or married, you can write your own note. When a student is exercising his/her age of majority rights and is residing as a dependent child with his/her parent/guardian, additional notification of unexcused absences may be sent to the parent/guardian.

The principal also may allow you to miss school for work or another activity if your parent/guardian (or you, if you have reached the age of majority) has asked permission five school days in advance. The principal usually will excuse you if you miss school to do one of the following:

- Visit a college campus
- Participate in a college orientation program
- Interview for a job
- Work as part of an approved cooperative education program
- Participate in short-term, full-time work

Family vacations usually are not excused. If unusual circumstances arise, however, the principal may excuse the absence.

Unexcused Absences

An absence that is not excused according to the above conditions is an unexcused absence. If you are late to class three times without valid excuses, that counts as one unexcused absence in the class. If you miss a day of school and are not excused, you will have an unexcused absence in each class you miss. Students on block schedule should check their local school attendance policy concerning the calculation of unexcused absences and loss of credit. When you have five unexcused absences in one class, you will not get credit for the class that semester. Every school will take, at minimum, the following actions if you get unexcused absences in a class:

- First unexcused absence—The teacher warns you.
- Second unexcused absence—The teacher warns you again.
- Third unexcused absence—The principal sends a letter to your home requesting a parent conference.
- Fourth unexcused absence—The teacher warns you,

indicating that one more unexcused absence will result in loss of credit for the class. When feasible, the school contacts your home again.

- Fifth unexcused absence—The school informs you and your parents/guardians that you will lose credit for the semester. You will receive an LC (Loss of Credit) and will get no credit for the semester.

Three unexcused instances of tardiness equal one unexcused absence.

The principal may refuse you to participate in extracurricular activities on a day that you have an unexcused absence.

The above actions are minimums. Individual schools may have additional rules about unexcused absences.

Anyone involved may ask for a conference to talk about particular absences or loss of credit. The conference may include you, your parents/guardians, and appropriate school staff. It will focus on why you have unexcused absences.

Work Missed During an Absence

You are responsible for making up any work you miss during an absence, regardless of the reason for the absence. If the absence is excused or is a result of a suspension, your teacher will help you make up your work. If the absence is unexcused, your teacher does not have to help you make up the work you missed, give you a retest, or give you an extension on work that was due. Even though the teacher does not have to help you get credit for missed work, you still have to make up the work so that you can complete the rest of the course.

References:

Policy JFA: *Student Rights and Responsibilities*
Regulation IKA-RA: *Grading and Reporting*
Regulation IOA-RA: *Gifted and Talented Education*
Regulation IQB-RA: *Extracurricular Activities*
Regulation JEA-RA: *Student Attendance*
Regulation JFA-RA: *Student Rights and Responsibilities*
Maryland Student Records System Manual
MCPS High School Course Bulletin

Loss of Credit

If you have five unexcused absences in a class, you will lose credit for the class and receive a failing grade for the semester. For the marking period in which you lose credit, a failing grade will be used in calculating your marking period average. The failing grade will be counted in your grade point average. If you lose credit in a class, you may petition the teacher to restore credit. Your school counselor can help you do this.

To petition for restoration of credit, tell your teacher, in writing, the reasons why you think you should get credit and how you propose to earn it. The teacher will review your reasons and make a recommendation to the principal, who will then decide whether to restore your credit. If you still are denied credit, you then may petition the principal directly. Give him/her your reasons in writing and he/she will respond within 10 days. The appeal procedure is described in the Appeals-Complaint Procedure—Due Process section (page 11).

If your credit is not restored, there are two questions to be answered. First, do you need credit in the class to graduate? If you do, you may either repeat the class the following

semester or the following year or at night school, Saturday school, or summer school. Second, what will you do for the rest of the year during the class in which you lost credit? That is, if you lose credit in your fourth period class, what will you do during fourth period for the rest of the year? The options are as follows:

- Continue attending the class on an audit basis. If you audit a class, you are required to attend and participate in class activities.
- Drop the class and take a study skills class or other noncredit class in its place, with parent/guardian permission.
- Drop the class and reschedule your classes with parent/guardian permission.

Scheduling another class will depend upon availability. Regardless of whether you audit the class or drop it, you will still receive an LC and a failing grade on your report card for the semester. You must, however, still attend a scheduled class.

Honors, Advanced-Level, and Advanced Placement (AP) Courses

Principals will ensure that all students who have the capability, motivation, or potential to accept the challenge of Honors, AP, and advanced-level courses will be accorded an opportunity to do so. Each school provides responsible open enrollment in Honors, AP, and advanced-level courses for every student who is capable or motivated to pursue a rigorous program and higher-level course work. A profile of student strengths can be determined by conducting a thorough review of the following multiple criteria:

- Mastery of course prerequisites (grade of A, B, or C)
- Parent/guardian recommendations
- Standardized test scores, as appropriate
- Willingness to complete challenging assignments
- Student interest or motivation
- Teacher/counselor recommendations
- Work samples and portfolios

Grading and Reporting

Grading and reporting practices will be fair and meaningful and support rigorous performance standards for all students. Grades will have consistent meaning throughout the school system and be based on grade level and course expectations as outlined in the curriculum. Look for Policy IKA: *Grading and Reporting*, at www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/policy.

In Grades 1–5, grades reflect academic achievement in relation to grade level expectations.

In Grades 6–12, grades reflect academic achievement in relation to course expectations. In middle schools and high schools, teachers implement MCPS Procedures in Grades 6–12 for grading, reteaching/reassessment, and homework. Work turned in after the due date and by the deadline may be lowered no more than one letter grade or 10% of the grade. Work submitted after the deadline will be recorded as a zero. Teachers assign a grade no lower than 50% to a task or assessment. A teacher may assign a zero if the teacher determines the student did not attempt to meet the basic requirements of the task/assessment. Teachers will not award extra credit.

These procedures are available to parents/guardians and students on the MCPS Web site, www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/info/grading and in schools' main offices.

Student Service-Learning (SSL)

All students working toward Maryland State Department of Education diplomas must complete service learning hours in addition to the graduation requirements of enrollment, credit, courses, and competencies. The service-learning hours may be accrued beginning the summer after completing Grade 5. Beginning with the class of 2011, students must complete 75 service-learning hours before graduation. Details of the MCPS student service-learning (SSL) plan may be found at www.mcpssl.org or by contacting the SSL coordinator at any middle or high school.

References:

Annotated Code of Maryland, Education, Sections 13A.03.02.07

Student Government

Participation

You have the right to participate in student government. The student government is accountable to students in the school. Any student legally enrolled in a school, academically eligible, and meeting any criteria set forth in the school constitution may run for and hold office in student government. Students must remain academically eligible to continue to hold office. This means you must maintain at least a 2.0 average and have no more than one failing grade on a report card to hold your elected office. Service learning hours may be earned for participation in student government.

Faculty Support

School staff will support your right to participate in student government. The principal will ensure that the student government gives students a voice in school business.

The student government will have a faculty advisor. Each spring the executive committee of the student government will make suggestions about the faculty advisor to the principal, who will then appoint one to the student government. School staff will help the student government get needed supplies and use of rooms. School staff also will excuse absences for students who miss classes because of student government activities when those activities are approved.

Powers of Student Government

The powers of the student government will be written by students in a constitution, with advice from the school administration. All constitutions must include an article recognizing the final decision-making authority of the principal. The principal will accept the constitution unless it violates law or Board of Education policy or MCPS regulations or would, in the judgment of the principal, substantially interfere with the effective operation of the school. If the principal changes the constitution, his/her reasons will be stated in writing. The students will be given a chance to change the constitution after the principal makes changes. The principal cannot change the constitution after it has been approved by both the students and the principal.