

Summary: Response to Public Feedback on DCPS Regulations and Policies

DC Public Schools (DCPS) is committed to ensuring that all students are prepared to achieve in college, career, and life. This spring, DCPS set out to create a new set of policies regarding attendance, graduation, secondary grading, and student promotion toward the goal of ensuring that all policies are supportive, inclusive, and equitable. Through these policies, DCPS aims to set clear expectations about our standards of excellence for students and what supports DCPS will provide along the way. The final policies and regulations were guided by community feedback and informed by stakeholder concerns.

The purpose of this document is to 1) summarize the process that DCPS completed to solicit public feedback; and 2) share the decisions made in the updated policies based on that feedback. This report consolidates major pieces of feedback that were consistently heard and explains the actions that DCPS took in response to the public feedback received.

DCPS appreciates the thoughtful feedback submitted by all stakeholders. In addition to comments regarding regulations and policies, many others provided thoughtful perspectives on operational challenges which are being used to inform our implementation protocols and processes to better serve our students and families. The full list of feedback received from both internal and external stakeholders is available at the bottom of the [DCPS Graduation Excellence Engagement website](#).

Process for Incorporating Community Feedback

Spring Engagement Sessions

In spring 2018, DCPS held more than 20 engagements with a diverse range of stakeholders. These engagements focused specifically on understanding stakeholder perspectives on the topics of attendance, student promotion, secondary grading, and graduation. Through the spring engagement sessions, members of the public, school leaders, students, parents, teachers, DCPS partners, the DCPS Principal Cabinet, the DCPS Parent Cabinet, the DCPS Teacher Cabinet, and education policy experts all provided feedback to guide draft policies and regulations. These public engagement sessions included:

- **Focus groups:** DCPS held focus groups in April and May that were open to the public and provided an opportunity to provide feedback on these policies.
- **Community Forums:** At the April Community Forums, DCPS engaged with community members and received feedback on draft policies.
- **Chancellor Cabinets:** The Chancellor engaged with her Student Cabinet, Teacher Cabinet, Principal Cabinet, and Parent Cabinet to receive their feedback on draft policies.
- **Staff Survey:** DCPS received **more than 100** responses from teachers, counselors, and school leaders through a survey focused on graduation policies.

Summer Public Comment Period

As a result of these spring engagement sessions, DCPS released draft policies and regulations for public comment from June 22 to July 22. These draft policies and regulations incorporated the iterative feedback received in the spring and reflected a commitment to empowering students and families on

their paths to graduation. During the public comment period, DCPS collected more than 200 online comments and hosted two public forums to collect community feedback.

Feedback Summary

Attendance

Spring Feedback: Many stakeholders expressed concerns that the current system of grade reductions and failures due to absence was overly punitive and did not allow students an opportunity to get back on track. Parents and students also expressed that the system did not have enough built-in supports, including early warnings rather than immediate consequences. Stakeholders also shared a wide variety of feedback about potential tardy policies including when students should be marked tardy, and what interventions should be taken for tardy students.

Response to Feedback in Draft Policies and Regulations: In response to the feedback received in the spring, the draft policy and regulations removed the grade reduction at 5 unexcused absences and term failure at 10 unexcused absences. The draft regulations proposed that students will receive a written warning after accumulating 10 unexcused absences in a term and a subsequent written warning after accumulating 15 unexcused absences in a term. In this written warning, students would be notified that they are at risk of receiving a failure due to absence if they accumulate more than 30 unexcused course absences. The draft policies proposed allowing schools the flexibility of creating a tardy policy that fit the needs of their students and staff.

Summer Public Comments: Commenters expressed the need for additional supports for students who are chronically absent and/or tardy, with some commenting these supports should start in early grades. Some commenters expressed concerns that students were able to have up to 30 unexcused absences before failing the course. Some commenters disagreed with any required failure in relation to course absences. Commenters expressed concern with no specified point in time that a student should be considered tardy versus absent. Of those who commented about tardiness, commenters cited concerns about what tardy policies communicate to students regarding expectations, fairness in tardy policies, and the disruption of tardy students on classroom culture and learning. Last, some commenters expressed their appreciation for the proposed changes and what they predicted would be a positive impact on students in special populations (e.g. students with disabilities, highly mobile students, and students experiencing homelessness), whom they saw as disproportionately impacted by prior regulation and policy.

Final Policy and Regulation Decisions: DCPS is committed to working with students and families the opportunity to address attendance challenges before applying automated measures that impact academic standing. In addition, DCPS values the professional judgment of teachers, who are able to assess content mastery and are the professionals in the building charged with determining appropriate grades. DCPS will implement a system of warnings at 10 and 15 unexcused absences to ensure students have opportunities to get back on track and to ensure students understand the expectations and potential consequences regarding attendance. This is a slight modification of the draft regulations, which stipulated that the course warnings would be after 10 and 15 unexcused absences per term. DCPS determined that the notices would be most effective if they were sent after 10 and 15 unexcused absences regardless of when those absences occur. Given that content mastery is unlikely to be possible after 30 unexcused absences, a student will automatically fail the course.

Additionally, as a result of the feedback received by DCPS staff, students, and families, DCPS has included a standardized definition and protocol to address tardiness at the secondary level in its attendance policy. In order to develop these standards, DCPS distributed a survey to DCPS secondary principals to collect their input. The tardy policy is designed to help students reinforce positive habits around timeliness; create equitable policies across schools; and to identify students who are in need of additional support regarding tardiness.

The policy specifies that students will be marked tardy if they arrive in class 5 minutes or more after the official start of the period. Per the DCPS secondary tardy policy, students will be allowed to enter their scheduled course regardless of what time they arrive. Teachers should make every effort to make the students feel welcome. There is no point in a class period that a tardy will convert to an absence and multiple tardies do not equal an absence. Students must always have access to make-up work. A student should never be suspended due to being tardy.

Graduation, Promotion, and Retention

Spring Feedback: Stakeholders shared that DCPS should provide students with additional supports on their path to graduation and that there should be a clear system to record and monitor progress toward graduation. DCPS also received feedback that the requirements regarding organizations where community service could be completed were too limited.

Response to Feedback in Draft Policy and Regulations: Starting in School Year 2018-2019, the 100-hour requirement of community service in DCPS may be completed at 501(c)(3)s, schools, federal or local agencies, or other organizations as long as it is non-paying voluntary service for the benefit of the community. The service shall not be performed during the hours the student is required to be in class. The service cannot be of a political nature.

Summer Public Comments: Commenters shared mixed feedback about the value of community service and whether 100 hours is an attainable goal. Others commented that community service opportunities are valuable, but that the requirements should be broadened to allow for various types of community service.

Final Policy and Regulation Decisions: DCPS is committed to providing all students with the supports that they need to be successful and to ensuring that all students understand where they are on the path to graduation. Starting in School Year 2018-2019, DCPS will send notifications to potential graduates at the end of term 2 and term 3 during their potential graduation year to ensure that students and families understand whether they are on track.

The final DCPS policy will be consistent with the draft policy in its efforts to broaden the types of organizations that are appropriate for DCPS community service requirements. This broadening of the requirements was informed by the feedback received at both stages of stakeholder engagement.

In addition, the final DCPS policy allows for students to accumulate up to 25 hours of community service during their 8th grade year, as long as the hours are completed with the intention of applying them toward the graduation requirement, and that the activity is approved by the student's school. By allowing students to begin to accumulate community service hours applicable toward graduation one year earlier than the previous policy allowed, DCPS is providing additional opportunities to students for whom collecting 100 hours of community service was a challenge.

Grading

Spring Feedback: Stakeholders expressed the importance of having systems in place to support students' mastery, particularly for those students who are off track. Stakeholders also expressed an interest in having clarity around make-up work policies as well as increased flexibility that allows students to make up work. Stakeholders also expressed a need for increased clarity around the expectations for students.

Response to Feedback in Draft Policies and Regulations: In both policy and regulation, DCPS proposed removing the grade reduction at 5 unexcused absences and term failure at 10 unexcused absences and replacing those with warning letters at 10 days and 15 days of unexcused absences. In both policy and regulation, students will continue to receive a course failure after accruing more than 30 unexcused absences. DCPS also will require all schools to create a make-up work policy that allows students to make up work regardless of whether their absence is excused or unexcused.

Summer Public Comments: Commenters stated the policies are difficult to understand and community members would benefit from a parent-friendly format. Commenters believe the policies should be shared widely so all community members have access. Additionally, commenters believe the new policies should be communicated to students and structures should be set up to support students in understanding the new policies. Regarding make-up work, commenters expressed mixed opinions on the value of make-up work and if it should be used as an intervention for missed class time. Some commenters believe that there should be a district wide make up-policy. Others believe that should be set at the school level.

Final Policy and Regulation Decisions: DCPS believes it is essential to communicate the new policies in a way that is accessible to families, who are critical partners in the success of all students. DCPS will be releasing "Pre-K to Graduation: A Policy Guide for Families," for School Year 2018-2019, which will include frequently-asked questions received from families during the spring and summer 2018 engagements. The family-facing documents will be distributed in hard copy to schools and accessible on the DCPS website in multiple languages.

DCPS is committed to providing all students with multiple opportunities to make up work and demonstrate mastery. When students miss class, teachers must provide students with an opportunity to make up work. Each DCPS school must create a school-wide make-up work policy that includes a reasonable period of time for completion of make-up work that will be shared with all students at the beginning of the year. Teachers should follow standard grading procedures when grading make-up work.

For information regarding the final decision on the failure due to absence policy, please see the attendance section above.

Stakeholder Appreciation

Thank you to the many students, families, partners, and staff members who attended engagement sessions and submitted online comments regarding the policies and regulations. The feedback that you shared shaped these policies and will continue to influence the implementation of these policies in School Year 2018-2019 and beyond. These updated regulations and policies, as well as the implementation work, will help to ensure that every DCPS student feels loved, challenged and prepared to thrive in life.