

# SPIRIT LAKE SCHOOLS

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## Proposed Handbook Changes - School Year 2024- 25

### ATTENDANCE

**Elementary & Middle School:** Attendance has been a focus for Spirit Lake Community Schools. Poor attendance can influence whether children read proficiently by the end of third grade or are below benchmark. Missing only 2 days a month equals missing an entire year of school by graduation. By 6th grade, chronic absence becomes a leading indicator that a student will drop out of high school. Lastly, when students improve their attendance rates, they improve their academic prospects and chances for graduating. It is important that students are at school and on time. The basic overview of the plan is below. Please use [this link](#) to read the complete details on this new attendance policy, including the notifications.

1. Students who exceed 25 absences in a school year will participate in summer school the following summer, with a maximum of 2 absences allowed during the summer program. To count for a full day of attendance, the student needs to be at school for no less than a half day.
2. The structure of the summer school program has been revamped for the upcoming summer session. It will span an 8-week period, with classes being held 3 times a week for the mornings of Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. If needed, transportation will be provided.
3. Failure to attend summer school or surpassing the 2-day absence limit during summer school will result in retention of the grade they were in.
4. There are exemptions to the above criteria (read in [full link](#)) and are subject to administrative discretion based on the circumstances.

**High School:** Starting in the fall semester of 2024-25, students will be dropped from their semester course on or after their 12th absence per period. This is a change from previous years when the threshold was 15 absences per semester class. To support our students and ensure they remain on track, school administration will notify parents at the 4th, 8th, and 12th absence to brainstorm interventions and possible solutions. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation as we strive to improve student attendance and success.

For the purposes of the policy, the following reasons for absence are exempt and will not count towards the total absences, potentially impacting credit: hospitalization or other extended treatment verified by a medical doctor, extended illness (such as mononucleosis) that is verified by a medical doctor, absence for mandatory court proceedings, absence to attend a religious service or ceremony, absence for approved college visits, absence to attend a funeral, absence for a school sponsored activity, absence due to school imposed in-school or out-of-school suspension, and other absences at the discretion of the HS administration.

## **CELL PHONE USE**

A new procedural change regarding cell phone usage at Spirit Lake High School will be implemented in the 2024-25 school year to enhance our learning environment. Students will be required to turn in their cell phones upon entering each class. Teachers will have designated areas for students to securely place their phones. If a student refuses to turn in their phone or if the phone becomes an issue at school, parents and guardians will be contacted by school administration to address the situation. We believe this change will minimize distractions, better engage students in the learning process and allow students to focus on their education. We appreciate your support in this initiative.

## **HIGH SCHOOL COURSEWORK COMPLETION DATE**

We are implementing a new procedural change regarding participation in the graduation ceremony for seniors during their last semester at Spirit Lake High School. Starting this year, seniors who fail any 2nd semester course necessary for graduation will not have the opportunity to take part in the graduation ceremony. This change is being made to emphasize the importance of academic achievement and ensure that all graduates have successfully completed their required coursework within the necessary timelines. We encourage all seniors to stay focused, seeking assistance as needed early enough to ensure they meet the necessary requirements for graduation.

## **VACCINATIONS**

Iowa Code 139A.8 requires all students enrolling in an Iowa school to submit proof of immunizations using an Iowa Dept of Public Health certificate of immunization or a provisional certificate, unless a valid certificate of religious or medical exemption has been submitted. Iowa Code further states that applicants without proper evidence of immunization or exemption are not entitled to enrollment in an elementary or secondary school. This applies to the first day of a child's attendance throughout their enrollment in school.

Because Iowa law requires parents and guardians to assure their children obtain the legally required immunizations, students must have the required Iowa vaccines and doses: Diphtheria/Tetanus/Pertussis, Polio, Measles/Rubella, Hepatitis B, Varicella, and Meningococcal to be enrolled. Please note the list and timeline immunizations are needed is explained in each building handbook. Returning students will not be allowed to attend school without up to date vaccinations, a valid provisional is obtained or a religious or medical exemption is filed. New students to the district will not be allowed to start classes until their immunization records have been reviewed and approved as up to date.