

Mental Health Related Absence Media Toolkit

Background

In the 2022 Legislative session, [House Bill 1834](#) was passed. The bill instructed OSPI to include mental health as an excused absence due to illness, health condition, or medical appointment in [WAC 392-401-020](#). This policy change took effect August of 2022 prior to the 2022-23 school year. In collaboration with a student advisory, including youth from the Legislative Youth Advisory Council, OSPI created a guidance document for schools to follow when implementing the new rule in their respective districts.

Some of the feedback OSPI had received from schools since the new rule took effect last year is that schools have struggled on communicating this new rule change. Some of the concerns shared are how to promote the rule change to students and parents, how to track the absence, and what to do if a students take a high number of mental health absences.

With the success of the student advisory group assisting in the creation of the [HB 1834 guidance document](#), OSPI wanted to work with another group of students to assist in creating a media toolkit to share with districts that helps them communicate this new rule.

Student Voice Network at Association of Washington State Leaders

In April 2023, OSPI contracted with the Association of Washington State Leaders (AWSL) after gauging interest in this project with their existing student body to help create a media toolkit. Ten students expressed interest in this project and work began in mid-April 2023.

The kick-off meeting was held April 13th. The group of students were given the history of the new rule change, the student advisory group, the creation of the guidance document and why OSPI was interested in a media toolkit.

Creating the media toolkit

The toolkit was broken out into three buckets:

- Video
 - Interviews with peers, school staff/counselors, parents, or mental health therapists.
- Social Media
 - Flyers
 - Posters
 - Resources for professional services
- Handouts
 - Q&A



- Inserts for student handbooks.
- One-pagers that condense the guidance document.
- Suggestions on how students can spend their mental health day.

Each student who took part in creating this toolkit was given the autonomy to decide which bucket of work they wanted to work on.

There are over 20 videos that the AWSL student group created that range from interviews with their peers, teachers, school, and mental health counselors. The videos cover a range of topics such as why a mental health absence is needed for students, why mental health treatment is just as important as physical health treatment, and how students can address their mental health needs. The videos range in length and can be used in several ways, such as social media clips, new student orientation, or in health class.

There are numerous social media flyers and handouts that have been created. Some of the social media flyers have a fillable option so districts and schools can enter their attendance line phone number and/or email and school name.

The handouts can be printed and inserted in student handbooks. They can also be given to new students and parents that further promote the rule and give background on how it was passed and the importance of destigmatizing mental health.

Questions

If you have any questions on this toolkit, please email mentalhealthabsences@k12.wa.us.