

## Student/Family Policies The Next Step PCS 2020 -2021

### Discipline Policy

#### CODE OF CONDUCT

The Next Step PCS adheres to its Code of Conduct to support our values: Academic Achievement; Collaboration and Respect; Persistence and Responsibility; and Structure and Support. (Appendix B)

Violations of the code of conduct are handled using *Restorative Practices* in line with the severity of the infraction(s). *Restorative Practices* are preventative in nature, are used to repair harm done to the school community, and consequences are considered according to the code of conduct. **Students with and without disabilities follow the same code of conduct**; their disabilities are considered when addressing the code of conduct violation. The sequence of interventions upon code of conduct violations is as follows:

1. In-class intervention by the teacher
2. Out-of-class intervention by the teacher
3. Restorative circle with principal with a written agreement
4. Student Support Team meeting
5. Student Support Team meeting with behavior/attendance intervention plan
6. **Community conference, with potential suspension or expulsion**

Each potential infraction that would warrant any intervention above (1 to 4) is listed on the Code of Conduct (see Appendix B). In most cases, issues are resolved with restorative circles, community conferences, and/or with written agreements before relying on suspensions or expulsions.

#### Suspensions

In the spirit of using *Restorative Practices*, the school refrains from suspending students. Students are sent home for the day, only when they refuse to participate in a restorative circle after they have

committed an infraction. They may return to school the next day and must engage in a restorative conference with the principal before re-entering class. After returning, the students must agree to repair the harm they caused, and it is up to them to come up with the solution to make things better. It can be apologizing for committing an infraction or agreeing not to do it again or coming up with more creative alternative solutions.

The Student Fair Access to School Amendment Act of 2018 says students in grades KG-8 can receive an out-of-school suspension or expulsion, unless the student has willfully caused, attempted to cause, or threatened to cause bodily injury or emotional distress to another person.

### **Expulsions**

The Next Step PCS takes the safety of students and staff very seriously. The only time an expulsion is considered is when:

- Students engage in verbal or physical sexual misconduct that is clearly unwanted and unwelcome (particularly if it is repetitive)
- Students display gang-related behavior or paraphernalia; actively engage in recruitment for their gangs, or cause harm to others as a result of proven gang-related activity on campus
- Students bring weapons to school. These can be knives, machetes, firearms (guns, rifles, automatic weapons, etc.), and or biological weapons (harmful chemicals or substances)
- Students show up under the influence of illegal drugs or substances, and/or engage in the buying or selling of illegal substances on school property
- Students directly bully or threaten the safety of students and staff and refuse to engage in a restorative conference, or students physically assault another student or staff member

### **Appeals Procedure for Students Who are Suspended or Expelled**

A decision to suspend or expel a student will never be made without having a restorative conference with the student and parent/legal guardian. At the restorative conference a decision is made to suspend or expel a student, if they violated any of the infractions listed above, which they do not want to repair via a restorative conversation, or if they violated one of the 5 infractions that warrant an expulsion. After a decision is made to suspend or expel a student,

an appeal process is available to students and parents/legal guardians that do not agree with the consequence (See also “Filing Grievances” under Section 21. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT). Here are the steps to follow if a student/parent or legal guardian wants to appeal a decision to suspend or expel a student:

1. Student and parent/legal guardians must request a meeting with the principal to appeal the decision within three business days after a decision has been made.
2. If the principal is not available, the student and parents/legal guardians can request a meeting with the designee of the principal. The case is then presented to an appointed official outside of the school, who is familiar with restorative practices, and he or she will make the determination to apply the consequence or to withdraw the consequence.
3. If the results of this appeal are not satisfactory or seem unfair to the student, parent/legal guardian, they can request a meeting with the Executive Director for further consideration.
4. In the event that the Executive Director’s decision is still not satisfactory to the student or parent/legal guardian, a request to meet with the Chair of the Board of Directors can be made.
5. A final decision will be made between the Chair of the Board of Directors of The Next Step PCS.

The following is a list of people that students, parents/legal guardians can contact:

Name	Title	e-mail or phone number
Arturo Martinez	Day Program Principal, The Next Step PCS	<a href="mailto:arturo@nextsteppcs.org">arturo@nextsteppcs.org</a> (202) 319-2249
Oscar Ramirez	Evening Program Principal, The Next Step PCS	<a href="mailto:oscar@nextsteppcs.org">oscar@nextsteppcs.org</a> (202) 319-2249
Jonathan Mathis	Executive Director, The Next Step PCS	<a href="mailto:jonathan@nextsteppcs.org">jonathan@nextsteppcs.org</a> (202) 319-2249
Melissa McKnight	Board Chair, The Next Step PCS	<a href="mailto:mmcknight79@gmail.com">mmcknight79@gmail.com</a>

**Code of Conduct – Students with Disabilities (Manifestation Determination Process and Due Process)**

Nothing herein shall exempt a student with a disability from disciplinary action.

In initiating disciplinary procedures applicable to all students, The Next Step PCS must ensure that the special education and disciplinary records of the student with a disability are transmitted for consideration by the person or person(s) making the final determination regarding the disciplinary action. At The Next Step PCS that person is the Principal or his or her designee. Such documentation may include, but not be limited to (with any required permission from parent/legal guardian): the student's current IEP, discipline file, cumulative file, anecdotal records from teachers or other school personnel, reports or recommendations from health or mental health clinicians. The person making the disciplinary decision will use restorative practices as the first disciplinary action. If the student is not willing to participate in a restorative conversation, then the Code of Conduct will apply for the required consequence.

If for any reason, temporary or permanent removal of a student from current placement is necessary, for more than ten (10) school days for disciplinary reasons, a manifestation determination meeting will be needed to determine if the subject behavior is related to the student's disability. If the result of the review is a determination that the behavior of the student with a disability was not a manifestation of the child's disability, the relevant disciplinary procedures applicable to students without disabilities may be applied in the same manner in which they would be applied to students without disabilities

The Next Step PCS must make sure a free appropriate public education is available to all eligible students with disabilities, including students with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school. When a student with a disability is removed from his or her current placement for more than ten (10) school days for disciplinary reasons, The Next Step PCS must continue to provide the specialized instruction and related services that are specified on the student's IEP.

Any interim alternative educational setting in which a student is placed must: (a) Be selected so as to enable the student to continue to participate in the general curriculum, although in another setting, and to continue to receive those services and modifications, including those described in the student's current IEP, that will enable the child to meet the goals set out in that IEP; and (b) Include services and modifications designed to address the behavior that led to the temporary removal from school, so that it does not recur.

If a disciplinary action is contemplated as decided in the manifestation determination meeting for a behavior of a student with a disability, or if a proposed disciplinary action involves removal of a student with a disability from his or her current placement for more than ten (10) consecutive school days:

- (a) Not later than the date on which the decision to take that action is made, the parents/legal guardians must be notified of that decision and of all procedural safeguards accorded by law; and
- (b) Immediately, if possible, but in no case later than ten (10) school days after the date on which the decision to take that action is made, a review must be conducted of the relationship between the student's disability and the behavior subject to the disciplinary action.

Within ten (10) school days of any disciplinary decision to remove a student with a disability from his or her current placement, The Next Step PCS, the parent/legal guardian, and relevant members of the student's IEP Team (as determined by the parent and the The Next Step PCS) must review all relevant information in the student's file, including the student's IEP, any teacher observations, and any relevant information provided by the parents to determine: (a) If the conduct in question was caused by, or had a direct and substantial relationship to, the student's disability; or (b) If the conduct in question was the direct result of The Next Step PCS failure to implement the IEP.

The conduct must be determined to be a manifestation of the student's disability if The Next Step PCS, the parent, and relevant members of the student's IEP Team determine that a condition in either 34 CFR 300.530(e)(1)(i) or (1)(ii), the manifestation determination meeting, was met.

If The Next Step PCS, the parent, and relevant members of the student's IEP Team determine the condition described in 34 CFR 300.530(e)(1)(ii), the manifestation determination meeting was met, The Next Step PCS must take immediate steps to remedy those deficiencies.

In carrying out a review, the IEP Team may determine that the behavior of the student was not a manifestation of such student's disability only if the IEP Team: (a) First considers, in terms of the behavior subject to disciplinary action, all relevant information,

including: (1) Evaluation and diagnostic and results, or other relevant information supplied by the parents of the child; (2) Observations of the student; (3) The student's IEP and placement; and (4) Any other material deemed relevant by the IEP Team, including, but not limited to, school progress reports, anecdotal notes and facts related to disciplinary action taken by administrative personnel; and (b) Then determines that: (1) In relationship to the behavior subject to disciplinary action, the student's IEP, and placement were appropriate and the special education services, supplementary aids and services, and behavior intervention strategies were provided consistent with the student's IEP and placement; (2) The student's disability did not impair the ability of the student to understand the impact and consequences of the behavior subject to disciplinary action; and (3) The student's disability did not impair the ability of the child to control the behavior subject to disciplinary action.

Either before or not later than ten (10) consecutive school days after taking a disciplinary action: (a) If The Next Step PCS did not conduct a functional behavioral assessment and implement a behavioral intervention plan for such student before the behavior that resulted in the suspension described above, The Next Step PCS must convene an IEP meeting to develop an assessment plan to address that behavior; or (b) If the student's parent disagrees with a determination that the student's behavior was not a manifestation of the student's disability or with any decision regarding placement, the parent may request a meeting.

The Next Step PCS must arrange for an expedited hearing, which must occur within twenty (20) school days of the date the complaint requesting the hearing is filed, in any case described in this section when requested by a parent.

In reviewing a decision with respect to the manifestation determination, the hearing officer must determine whether The Next Step PCS has demonstrated that the child's behavior was not a manifestation of such child's disability.

A disciplinary hearing officer may recommend the removal of a student with a disability from his or her current placement for not more than forty-five (45) days if the hearing officer: (a) Determines that The Next Step PCS has demonstrated by substantial evidence that maintaining the current placement of such child is substantially likely to result in injury to the child or to others; (b) Considers the appropriateness of the child's current placement; (c) Considers

whether The Next Step PCS has made reasonable efforts to minimize the risk of harm in the student's current placement, including the use of supplementary aids and services; and (d) Determines that the interim alternative educational setting meets the requirements described in the placement hearing above.

In recommending the removal of a student with a disability from his or her current placement to an alternative education setting for disciplinary reasons, the hearing officer must apply the standards set out in the hearing where the recommendation was made to remove the student from not more than forty-five (45) days above.

When a parent requests a hearing regarding a disciplinary action to challenge the interim alternative educational setting or the manifestation determination, the student must remain in the interim alternative educational setting pending the decision of the hearing officer or until the expiration of the time period provided (i.e., 45 days), whichever occurs first, unless the parent and The Next Step PCS agree otherwise.

If a student is in an interim alternative educational setting for disciplinary reasons and school personnel propose to change the student's educational placement after expiration of the interim Alternative Setting for disciplinary reasons, during the pendency of any proceeding to challenge the proposed change in placement, the student must remain in the current placement (the student's placement prior to the interim alternative educational setting), except if the placement is dangerous for the student, as outlined below.

If school personnel maintain that it is dangerous for the student to be in the current placement (placement prior to removal to the interim alternative education setting) during the pendency of the due process proceedings, The Next Step PCS may request an expedited hearing.

A student who has not been determined to be eligible for special education and related services under this part and who has engaged in behavior that violated any rule or code of conduct of The Next Step PCS, may assert any of the applicable protections provided for in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, as amended, if The Next Step PCS had knowledge (as determined in accordance below), that the student was a student with a disability before the behavior that precipitated the disciplinary action occurred.

The Next Step PCS is deemed to have knowledge that a student is a student with a disability if: (a) The parent of the student has expressed concern in writing (unless the parent is illiterate or has a disability that prevents compliance with the requirements contained in this clause) to supervisory or administrative personnel of The Next Step PCS, or a teacher of the student, that the student is in need of special education and related services; (c) The parent of the student has requested an evaluation of the student; or (d) The teacher of the student or other personnel of The Next Step PCS has expressed specific concerns about a pattern of behavior or performance of the student to the Coordinator of Special Education or to other The Next Step PCS personnel.

The Next Step PCS is deemed not to have knowledge that a student is a student with a disability if: the parent of the student has not allowed an evaluation of the child pursuant to 34 CFR 300.300 through 300.311 or has refused services under Part B of the IDEA; or the student has been evaluated in accordance with 34 CFR 300.300 through 300.311 and determined to not be a child with a disability under Part B of the IDEA.

If The Next Step PCS does not have knowledge that a student is a student with a disability prior to taking disciplinary measures against the student, the student may be subjected to the same disciplinary measures applied to children without disabilities who engaged in comparable behaviors.

If a request is made for an evaluation of a child during the time period in which the student is subjected to disciplinary measures under this chapter, the evaluation must be conducted in an expedited manner.

If the student is determined to be a student with a disability, taking into consideration information from the evaluation conducted by The Next Step PCS and information provided by parents, The Next Step PCS must provide special education and related services in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, as amended, except that, pending the results of the evaluation, the child must remain in the educational placement determined by school authorities.

Nothing in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, as amended, shall be construed to prevent D.C. law enforcement and judicial authorities from exercising their responsibilities with



regard to the application of federal and state law to crimes committed by a child with a disability.

Nothing in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, as amended, shall be construed to prohibit The Next Step PCS from reporting a crime committed by a student with a disability to appropriate authorities. In reporting a crime committed by a child with a disability to appropriate authorities, The Next Step PCS must ensure that copies of the special education and disciplinary records of the child are transmitted for consideration by the appropriate authorities to which it reports the crime.

## **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

### **Purpose:**

Strong attendance at The Next Step PCS is vital to academic success. Students are expected to come to school on time every day ready to learn to achieve their goals.

There is evidence that a direct relationship exists between attendance and academic success. The more students are present, on time and in the classroom; the more opportunities they have to achieve their goals. We also understand that from time to time it is inevitable to be absent. The attendance policy outlines expectations regarding daily attendance, tardiness and accountability related to absences for both day and evening programs.

### **Attendance Policy**

The Next Step (TNS) PCS requires students to attend school daily, for 192 days of instruction, each academic year. TNS also requires all students to adhere to the attendance expectations of their particular age group, as outlined below.

- Students of compulsory age (16-17 year-olds) are required by law to attend school according to the duration of the school program. TNS Day Program is 6 hours of duration per instructional day during the academic calendar, from Monday to Friday.

- Students over the age of 18 enrolled in the Day Program are required to attend 5 hours of instruction per day during the academic calendar.
- Students over the age of 18 enrolled in the Evening Program are required to attend 3 hours per instructional day. The TNS Evening Program is 3 hours of duration, per instructional day, during the academic calendar; from Monday to Thursday.
- Students over the age of 25 enrolled in the Evening Program have the option of attending up to 2 additional hours of instruction for a total of 5 instructional hours per day.

Students of compulsory age (16-17 year-olds) are not allowed to miss more than 20 consecutive instructional days per academic year. This includes both *Excused* and *Unexcused* Absences. If a student exceeds the minimum number of permitted absences, the parent or legal guardian will be informed; and the student will be withdrawn for the remainder of the semester. In the *Interventions Section* of the Handbook to follow is a series of interventions will be implemented, however, prior to withdrawal considerations.

Students over the age of 18 are not allowed to miss more than ten absences per semester. Five of those absences can be excused and five can be unexcused. After the 10th absence, students will be informed that they have lost their seat for the remaining of the semester and that they have been withdrawn, with the option to re-enroll in subsequent semesters and or academic years as permitted by the number of seats available. Several interventions are in place to assist students with their attendance before withdrawal is considered, however (refer to the *Interventions Section* below).

Any student who is withdrawn has the option of re-enrolling in subsequent semesters or academic years if seats are available during the enrollment season.

### **Attendance Expectations:**

The Next Step PCS expects all students who enroll in any of its programs to attend school daily for academic, personal, and professional success while school is in session. TNS requires all students to attend school during the entire calendar year to include Semester 1 (September through January), Semester 2 (February through June), and the Summer Session (July). Refer to the school's calendar for specific dates when students are required to attend school, which includes breaks and holidays.

### **School Hours:**

The Next Step PCS offers classes from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Monday-Thursday; and from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Fridays. Students are expected to attend school on a daily basis for the duration of their academic program.

### **Daily Attendance**

Attendance is recorded daily via the CAASS (Access411's Comprehensive Attendance, Administration and Security System). The Attendance and Transportation Coordinator (ATC) and other TNS staff will work closely with students to ensure that they attend school daily. Upon arrival, students are required to scan their TNS ID at the CASS station to document their attendance and time of arrival. Students who do not have their TNS ID with them will have to ask the ATC or the designated person at the CASS station to enter their attendance manually. When a student does not come to school, someone on staff will contact them to ensure they are alright and to remind them that attendance is important for academic success. Automated text and email messages will be sent to all students (and legal guardians or parents of minors) if they do not arrive to school within the 1st hour of the start of the academic program. Subsequent messages will be sent each day a student does not report to school until the student reaches the maximum allowable absences and is withdrawn. A series of interventions are set-up in order to avoid withdrawal, as shown in the next section.

### **Absences**

For students who are considered minors (under the age of 18), parents/legal guardians are encouraged to notify the school of pre-arranged appointments as soon as the dates of such appointments are known. Students who are 18 years old or older are encouraged to follow the same protocol for themselves.

A written or officially issued note providing the dates of and reasons for the student's absence is required the day the student returns to school. The purpose of the note is to determine whether or not the student's absence is excused or unexcused. The attendance and transportation coordinator will determine whether the absence is excused or unexcused based on whether or not the student provides valid documentation upon his or her return. See excused and unexcused absences below.

If a student leaves school without permission, or if he or she fails to return to school after lunch, the parent/legal guardian will be notified, and a restorative conversation will need to take place before the student is allowed back in class.

If an **adult student** leaves school without permission, or if he or she fails to return to school after lunch, the student will be counted absent. A restorative conversation will take place before they are allowed back in class.

**A. Excused absence** means that the student has a formally written document that speaks directly to the date(s) he or she was absent and that document has been submitted to the attendance and transportation coordinator the day on which he or she returns to school. The following conditions represent acceptable reasons for a student's absence to be considered as excused:

- **Illness** – When a student is unable to attend school due to an illness, a note written by the student (age 18 or older), by the parent/legal guardian (under age 18), or by a health professional documenting the illness is required. **Note: An adult student may only write up to 5 excuses due to illness; otherwise a doctor's note is required.**
- **Chronic/Extended Illness** – For students who are absent due to chronic illness, a disability, maternity leave or because of a need for homebound services, the adult student or parent/guardian must complete a **Chronic/Extended Illness Notification Form** with the principal at the beginning of enrollment into The Next Step or upon the onset of the student's condition that affects regular attendance. Documentation from a physician or healthcare provider is required.
- **Prearranged Appointments** – For appointments with the court, social services or other state agencies and appointments with health care providers, official documentation must be presented to the attendance and transportation coordinator.
- **Family Death or Emergency** – For absences because of a death in the family or an emergency beyond the family's control, the adult student or parent/legal guardian must

notify the school and provide documentation for the absence(s).

- **Religious Observances** – Absences due to observances of religious holidays should be pre-arranged by the adult student, or parent/legal guardian and the attendance and transportation coordinator should be notified.
- **Exceptional Circumstances** – The principal may approve pre-arranged absences for situations in which an exemption from attendance appears to be in the best interest of the student and his or her family:
  - Severe injury
  - Moving to a new residence (including unexpected homelessness)
  - Travel due to adjustment of immigration status
  - Passport and/or identification renewal

Prior to the student's absence, the **adult student** or parent/legal guardian must complete the **Request for Exceptional Circumstance to Attendance Form**. The adult student or parent/legal guardian will document the rationale for the absence and date(s) of absence. The principal will provide the approval or non-approval on the form. In documented extenuating circumstances, the principal may approve an absence after the fact as exempt from the sanctions of the attendance policy.

For those circumstances which cause the student to be absent and prior request for approval is not possible, the adult student or parent/legal guardian must complete the **Request for Exceptional Circumstance to Attendance Form** as soon as the student knows about the potential absences, and needs to submit a valid note excusing the absence. Upon return to school, the student must bring a valid excuse for the absences, if they have not already submitted one.

**B. Unexcused Absence** means that a student has failed to report to school and/or provide proper notification or documentation to the principal or attendance and transportation coordinator. **After their 10th absence**, adult students are permitted to write up to five (5) excuses starting on their 11th absence, not to exceed 5 total excuses. Students will be required to bring their excuse note the very day they return to school, after they have been absent.

The following explanations (not exhaustive) will not be accepted as excused absences:

- Running late to school
- Failure to attend or departing field trips without permission
- Work obligations
- Child Care of siblings or extended family members

When students who are under 18 years of age are absent without an excuse after 10 school days, the attendance monitor alerts their service provider, who then refers the students to a community-based agency.

When a student reaches 15 unexcused absences and is under 18, the attendance and transportation coordinator sends a referral form with the appropriate documentation to the Court Social Services Division of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia and the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) Juvenile Section DC Superior Court and The Next Step waits for court intervention before withdrawing, consistently following up with the student and their parent to encourage attendance. Withdrawing or unenrolling a student of compulsory school age (under 18) will not take place, unless the student has accumulated 20 consecutive unexcused full days of school.

When an **adult student** over 18 reaches 10 unexcused absences, the attendance and transportation coordinator makes a recommendation for withdrawal. If the student is non-attending and reaches 10 unexcused absences, the attendance and transportation coordinator makes a recommendation for withdrawal and sends a letter home to the student stating that they have been withdrawn. Students withdrawn due to excessive absences are welcome to reapply for the following semester and they start the new semester with an attendance support plan.

## **Attendance Procedures**

### **Day Program**

A full school day schedule at The Next Step is from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm, Monday through Friday. Students are required to be present during the full school day, which is defined as the entirety of the instructional hours regularly provided on a single school day. A part time day schedule is available for adult students, from 9:00 am to

1:00 pm. Both full and part time students are required to be in class by 9:00 am. All students that enter the building are required to pass through security. Students are required to check-in daily by swiping their ID cards at the scanning station to verify attendance. Students who fail to check-in will be counted as absent and that absence will be documented as unexcused. Students are not permitted to swipe ID cards for other students who may be late or absent.

Students who are not in class by 9:00 am are considered to be late to school. Once they enter the building, a pass will be printed at the scanning station and students should take that pass to go to class. Students who arrive late are offered a school issued breakfast. Students are given 5 minutes to eat breakfast in the cafeteria and are then expected to report to class. Teachers collect tardy passes directly from students and document tardiness in *Schoology*.

Adult students who arrive after 9:15 am will be given a warning the first time they arrive late. The second time they arrive late, a restorative conversation will take place with the attendance and transportation coordinator and/or with the principal. On the 5th tardy, the student will be asked to go home for the day. They will be asked to return the next day, but before they are permitted to go to class, they will be required to have a Restorative conversation with the attendance and transportation monitor and/or with the principal. On the 10<sup>th</sup> tardy another restorative conference will take place and an attendance contract will be drafted. If the student does not meet the terms of the contract, withdrawal from school will take place, and the student will be allowed to re-enroll for the next semester or the next school year, whichever comes first.

### **Evening Program**

The Next Step evening program schedule is from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm, Monday through Thursday. Students are required to be on time and in class by 6:00 pm. All students that enter the building follow the same security procedures as the day program.

Students who are not in class by 6:00 pm are considered late to school. A pass will be printed at the scanning station indicating their time of arrival and students should take that pass to go to class. Late arrivals for evening students are tracked and documented in accordance with the day program. Students who have arrived late are offered a school issued dinner. Students are given 5-10 minutes to eat dinner in the cafeteria and are then expected to report to

class. Teachers collect tardy passes and document tardiness in Schoology. Teachers integrate tardy students into class.

Adult students who arrive after 6:15 pm will be considered tardy and will be given a warning the first time they arrive late. The second time they arrive late, a restorative conversation will take place with the attendance and transportation coordinator or with the principal. After 5 tardies, the student will be asked to go home for the day. On the 10<sup>th</sup> tardy a restorative conference will take place and an attendance contract will be drafted.

### **Early Dismissal**

#### **Day and Evening Programs**

Students are expected to be in school from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm (full time, day), or 6:00 pm to 9:00 (evening) unless they have an early departure pass. Part time students will have a different dismissal time, depending on the schedule each semester. Students under the age of 18 must have permission from their parent or guardian to be granted an early departure from school. Students who request early departure for an appointment or due to illness must get an early departure pass from the attendance and transportation coordinator and scan their IDs on their way out to register time of departure. If the attendance and transportation coordinator is not available, a student may request an early departure pass from the registrar. The attendance and transportation coordinator/registrar document the reason for leaving early.

**Adult students** may request an early dismissal pass for an official purpose, as detailed under “Excused Absence” below. If he or she leaves for any other reason (i.e. work, or other inexcusable reasons) their departure will be counted as an unexcused absence. **Adult students** who leave 15 minutes before their last class ends for the day without an excuse, or without an early dismissal pass, will be given a warning by the attendance and transportation coordinator and/or principal. The second time, they will engage in a restorative conversation with the attendance and transportation coordinator and/or the principal. When the student reaches 10 early departures, without an excuse, a restorative conference will be held and a contract will be drafted.



## Attendance Interventions

All staff are responsible for encouraging daily school and classroom attendance and the attendance and transportation coordinator is responsible for ensuring proper interventions are implemented consistently to support students.

## Intervention Process

**\*\* See table**

## Absences

For students who are considered minors (under the age of 18), parents/legal guardians are encouraged to notify the school of pre-arranged appointments as soon as the dates of such appointments are known. Students who are 18 years old or older are encouraged to follow the same protocol for themselves.

A written or officially issued note providing the dates of and reasons for the student's absence is required the day the student returns to school. The purpose of the note is to determine whether or not the student's absence is excused or unexcused. The attendance and transportation coordinator will determine whether the absence is excused or unexcused based on whether or not the student provides valid documentation upon his or her return. See excused and unexcused absences below.

If a student leaves school without permission, or if he or she fails to return to school after lunch, the parent/legal guardian will be notified, and a restorative conversation will need to take place before the student is allowed back in class.

If an **adult student** leaves school without permission, or if he or she fails to return to school after lunch, the student will be counted absent. A restorative conversation will take place before they are allowed back in class.

**A. Excused absence** means that the student has a formally written document that speaks directly to the date(s) he or she was absent and that document has been submitted to the attendance and transportation coordinator the day on which he or she returns to school. The following conditions represent acceptable reasons for a student's absence to be considered as excused:

- **Illness** – When a student is unable to attend school due to an illness, a note written by the student (age 18 or older), by the parent/legal guardian (under age 18), or by a health professional documenting the illness is required. **Note: An adult student may only write up to 5 excuses due to illness; otherwise a doctor's note is required.**
  
- **Chronic/Extended Illness** – For students who are absent due to chronic illness, a disability, maternity leave or because of a need for homebound services, the adult student or parent/guardian must complete a **Chronic/Extended Illness Notification Form** with the principal at the beginning of enrollment into The Next Step or upon the onset of the student's condition that affects regular attendance. Documentation from a physician or healthcare provider is required.
  
- **Prearranged Appointments** – For appointments with the court, social services or other state agencies and appointments with health care providers, official documentation must be presented to the attendance and transportation coordinator.
  
- **Family Death or Emergency** – For absences because of a death in the family or an emergency beyond the family's control, the adult student or parent/legal guardian must notify the school and provide documentation for the absence(s).
  
- **Religious Observances** – Absences due to observances of religious holidays should be pre-arranged by the adult student, or parent/legal guardian and the attendance and transportation coordinator should be notified.
  
- **Exceptional Circumstances** – The principal may approve pre-arranged absences for situations in which an exemption from attendance appears to be in the best interest of the student and his or her family:
  - Severe injury
  - Moving to a new residence (including unexpected homelessness)
  - Travel due to adjustment of immigration status
  - Passport and/or identification renewal

Prior to the student's absence, the **adult student** or parent/legal guardian must complete the ***Request for Exceptional Circumstance to Attendance Form***. The adult student or parent/legal guardian will document the rationale for the absence and date(s) of absence. The principal will provide the approval or non-approval on the form. In documented extenuating circumstances, the principal may approve an absence after the fact as exempt from the sanctions of the attendance policy.

For those circumstances which cause the student to be absent and prior request for approval is not possible, the adult student or parent/legal guardian must complete the ***Request for Exceptional Circumstance to Attendance Form*** as soon as the student knows about the potential absences, and needs to submit a valid note excusing the absence. Upon return to school, the student must bring a valid excuse for the absences, if they have not already submitted one.

**B. *Unexcused Absence*** means that a student has failed to report to school and/or provide proper notification or documentation to the principal or attendance and transportation coordinator. **After their 10th absence**, adult students are permitted to write up to five (5) excuses starting on their 11th absence, not to exceed 5 total excuses. Students will be required to bring their excuse note the very day they return to school, after they have been absent.

The following explanations (not exhaustive) will not be accepted as excused absences:

- Running late to school
- Failure to attend or departing field trips without permission
- Work obligations
- Child Care of siblings or extended family members

When students who are under 18 years of age are absent without an excuse after 10 school days, the attendance monitor alerts their service provider, who then refers the students to a community-based agency.

When a student reaches 15 unexcused absences and is under 18, the attendance and transportation coordinator sends a referral form with the appropriate documentation to the Court Social Services Division of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia and the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) Juvenile Section DC

Superior Court and The Next Step waits for court intervention before withdrawing, consistently following up with the student and their parent to encourage attendance. Withdrawing or unenrolling a student of compulsory school age (under 18) will not take place, unless the student has accumulated 20 consecutive unexcused full days of school.

When an **adult student** over 18 reaches 10 unexcused absences, the attendance and transportation coordinator makes a recommendation for withdrawal. If the student is non-attending and reaches 10 unexcused absences, the attendance and transportation coordinator makes a recommendation for withdrawal and sends a letter home to the student stating that they have been withdrawn. Students withdrawn due to excessive absences are welcome to reapply for the following semester and they start the new semester with an attendance support plan.

### **ATTENDANCE INCENTIVE PROGRAM**

The purpose of the incentive program is to have strong attendance and reach the goal of 80% attendance individually and 80% as a school. Students will be recognized for having perfect attendance weekly and by semester. Students that have perfect attendance for the week will be recognized at the Monday Community Meeting. Their names will be called and one name will be picked at random to receive a \$20 gift card. The prizewinner must be present to receive the gift card and names will be picked at random until the prizewinner is present. Students that have perfect attendance for a semester will receive a \$100 gift card at the opening Community Meeting of the following semester.

### **PASS POLICY**

The purpose of the pass policy is to ensure that students transition smoothly from one place to another and staff can recognize where they are going to optimize the time in the classroom.

### **Tardy Pass**

Students who come to school late, after 9:00 a.m. for day school and 6:00 p.m. for night school will get a tardy pass from the scanning machine, and they will need to take it to their teacher to allow them in class.

### **Early Departure Pass**

Students cannot leave the building without a pass. Students need to request early departure passes from their service providers. The service provider will document the reason and grant the student an early departure pass if appropriate. Students will show the pass to the attendance and transportation coordinator or registrar when leaving and they will document the early departure.

### **Student Support Pass**

Students who need to see a service provider or counselor during class time due to an emergency must obtain permission from their teacher. The teacher will write the students name, reason for referral, and time. The student will give the pass to the service provider or counselor and he/she will write the return time, sign the pass and will tell the student to give the pass to the teacher when they return to class. The service provider or counselor will document the visit.

### **Office Referral Pass**

Students who need to see the Principal or registrar during class time, or students who are sent to the office must have an office referral pass. The teacher will write the students name, reason for referral, and time. The student will give the pass to the Principal or registrar and he/she will write the return time, sign the pass and will tell the student to give the pass to the teacher when they return to class. The Principal will document the visit.

### **Grievance and Complaint Resolution Procedures**

Students, parents, or guardian's may occasionally need to raise a problem or concern with TNSPCS or, in certain instances, file a complaint with the organization. If that is the case, please thoroughly review and follow the steps outlined below. If you do not follow these steps in the order in which they are set out, you will be asked to go back to Step I, Step II, and/or Step III.

- **STEP I: Check the Family Handbook:** As an initial step, please refer to this Family Handbook to see if your concern or issue is addressed before reaching out to TNSPCS staff.
- **STEP II: Communicate with Campus-Based Staff:** If you cannot find the answer in the Handbook, schedule an appointment via cell phone or email **directly** with the faculty or staff person with whom you need to share your concern. Please allow this individual up to 48 hours (during the school work week) to return your call or email.
- **STEP III: Contact Campus-Based Leadership:** If you need further assistance after talking with the teacher or staff member, please contact the **Principal** via email or phone. Only after meeting with the Principal, should you contact Bethesda Manrique, the **Chief Academic Officer**, if your issue has not been resolved. You may contact her via email at [beth@nextsteppcs.org](mailto:beth@nextsteppcs.org) or by phone at 202-319-2249.
- **STEP IV: Contact TNSPCS’s Executive Director:** The final step would be to contact Jonathan Mathis, Executive Director, via email at [jonathan@nextsteppcs.org](mailto:jonathan@nextsteppcs.org) or by phone at 202-319-2249. **We anticipate that only a handful of concerns, if that many, should ever be referred to the Executive Director.**
- **STEP V: Contact TNSPCS’s Board of Trustees:** In the event a complaint has not been resolved through the previous steps, please contact the Chair of TNSPCS’s Board of Trustees, Melissa McKnight, at [mmcknight79@gmail.com](mailto:mmcknight79@gmail.com).

The following is a list of people and contact information that students, parents/legal guardians can contact to file a grievance:

Name	Title	e-mail or phone number
Arturo Martinez	Day Principal, The Next Step PCS	<a href="mailto:arturo@nextsteppcs.org">arturo@nextsteppcs.org</a> (202) 319-2249
Oscar Ramirez	Night Principal, The Next Step PCS	<a href="mailto:oscar@nextsteppcs.org">oscar@nextsteppcs.org</a> (202) 319-2249
Jonathan Mathis	Executive Director, The Next Step PCS	<a href="mailto:jonathan@nextsteppcs.org">jonathan@nextsteppcs.org</a> (202) 319-2249
Michelle McKnight	Board Chair, The Next Step PCS	<a href="mailto:mmcknight79@gmail.com">mmcknight79@gmail.com</a>

## **Non Discrimination Policy**

The Next Step does not discriminate on the basis of a student's race, color, religion, immigration or citizen status, national origin, language spoken, intellectual or athletic ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, sexual orientation, or disability.

## **The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) Notice**

The Next Step adheres to The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99). It is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education.

A parent of a student under the age of 18 or a student who is at least 18 years of age or attending a postsecondary institution at any age ("eligible student") may file a written complaint with regarding an alleged violation of a school's failure to comply with his or her rights under FERPA. A parent of an eligible student generally may not file a complaint under FERPA, as the rights afforded to parents are transferred to the student when he or she becomes an eligible student.

FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their children's education records. These rights transfer to the student when he or she reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level. Students to whom the rights have transferred are "eligible students."

- Parents or eligible students have the right to inspect and review the student's education records maintained by the school. Schools are not required to provide copies of records unless, for reasons such as great distance, it is impossible for parents or eligible students to review the records. Schools may charge a fee for copies.
- Parents or eligible students have the right to request that a school correct records, which they believe to be inaccurate or misleading. If the school decides not to amend the record, the parent or eligible student then has the right to a formal hearing. After the hearing, if the school still decides not to amend the record, the parent or eligible student has the right to place a statement with the record setting forth his or her view about the contested information.

- Parents may opt out of the students directory information being released by completing a “Opt Out” request with the Enrollment team or with the Student Support and Engagement team.
- Generally, schools must have written permission from the parent or eligible student in order to release any information from a student's education record. However, FERPA allows schools to disclose those records, without consent, to the following parties or under the following conditions (34 CFR § 99.31):
  - School officials with legitimate educational interest; ( i.e. a person employed by the agency or school in an administrative, counseling, supervisory, academic, student support services, or research position, or a support person to these positions; or a person employed by or under contract to the agency or school to perform a special task.)
  - Legitimate educational interested are appropriate tasks that are specified in their position description or by a contract agreement. Performing a task related to a student's education. Performing a task related to the discipline of a student. Providing services for the student or the student's family, such as health care, counseling, job placement, or financial aid.
  - Other schools to which a student is transferring;
  - Specified officials for audit or evaluation purposes;
  - Appropriate parties in connection with financial aid to a student;
  - Organizations conducting certain studies for or on behalf of the school;
  - Accrediting organizations;
  - To comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena;
  - Appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies; and
  - State and local authorities, within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific State law.

Schools may disclose, without consent, "directory" information such as a student's name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, honors and awards, and dates of attendance. However, schools must tell parents and eligible students about directory information and allow parents and eligible students a reasonable amount of time to request that the school not disclose directory information about them. Schools must notify parents and eligible students annually of their rights under FERPA. The actual means of notification (special



letter, inclusion in a PTA bulletin, student handbook, or newspaper article) is left to the discretion of each school.

### **Open Meetings Policy**

We will notify our stakeholders by noting which meetings will be open on our school's website, for anyone to see.

### **Admissions Preference Policy**

The Next Step PCS does not have an admissions preference policy.