

PURPOSE: To reintroduce Mental Health Days at MSMS while establishing safeguards to prevent academic misuse and ensure that the policy supports student mental health as intended.

INTRODUCED BY: Johnny Ao and Krish Desai

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE MISSISSIPPI SCHOOL FOR MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE SENATE:

SECTION ONE (REASONING):

Mental health days existed in the previous academic year but were removed due to students misusing them. However, the need for mental wellness support remains significant, as MSMS students face high academic rigor, residential stress, and emotional strain. This bill seeks to reinstate Mental Wellness Days with clear, enforceable restrictions that prevent misuse while still allowing students to step away from school for legitimate mental health reasons. By routing requests through the Counseling Center and limiting their use near major academic events, we ensure these days are used as intended—supporting student wellbeing, reducing burnout, and promoting a healthier academic environment.

SECTION TWO (SPECIFIC CHANGE):

On page 43 (PDF page 48) of the student handbook, the following would be changed to:

*This is a brief summation of absences the Mississippi Department of Education deems excused according to Miss. Code Ann. § 37-13-9:

- a. Absences due to authorized school activity. Activities may include field trips, athletic competitions, student conventions, school sanctioned music festivals, and any other similar activity.
- b. Absences due to illness or injury which prevent the student from being physically able to attend school.
- c. Absences resulting from a student being required to isolate ordered by a health care professional.
- d. Absences due to the death or serious illness of an immediate family member (immediate family member defined by MDE as “children, spouse, grandparents, parent, sibling – including stepsiblings).
- e. Absences due to a pre-arranged medical or dental appointment.
- f. Absences due to the students’ required attendance in a court proceeding.
- g. Absences due to religious events essential to ones religion/culture. MDE specifies that approval of absence in this case is within the discretion of the superintendent.
- h. Absences wherein the purpose of the absence is an educational opportunity. MDE specifies that the educational value must be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the superintendent or designee.

- i. Absences due to other “conditions [...] sufficient to warrant the compulsory-school-age child’s nonattendance.” MDE specifies that an excused absence will not be granted to any request with intent to circumvent the spirit of attendance law.
- j. Absences due to attendance of an organized event sponsored by Future Farmers of America (FFA) or the 4-H.
- k. Absences from students serving as a page for the MS House or Senate.

Additional School-Recognized Excused Absences

Mental Wellness Days: Students will be allotted 1 mental health day (MHD) per quarter to support emotional and mental well-being. MHDs may be used for self-care, counseling appointments, or other activities promoting mental health. MHDs must be requested and planned at least two days prior. MHDs cannot be carried over between quarters, and students must follow standard procedures for reporting absences. Abuse of MHDs may result in review by Student Affairs.

On page 118 (PDF page 123) of the student handbook, the following would be changed to:

Students may earn points from a myriad of activities. Please see handout at the beginning of the year for the full list of things students may or may not do to earn points. Additionally, students who experience injuries during the year that may prevent them from completing wellness requirements must speak with their Wellness Coordinator prior to grades being submitted for the current quarter.

MENTAL HEALTH DAYS

Students may request one Mental Health Day (MHD) per quarter through the MSMS Counseling Center to support mental and emotional well-being. MHDs are subject to the following regulations:

- MHDs cannot be taken on the day before or of a quiz, exam, test, major assessment, standardized test, or presentation.

Correct usages of MHDs include:

- Wellness activities like sports
- Taking time to self-study
- Resting in dorms
- Choosing to attend certain classes