

Response to Family Vacation
Meeting of Board of School Directors on April 28, 2015

Some people may have heard the stories recently of a parent who was upset about our school policy that essentially states that if you take your child out of school for a family vacation, the child's absence will be deemed an unexcused absence by the school district.

Let me be clear at the outset. I fully support our principal Ms. Marbury. Moreover, I fully support the administration and our district policy.

I also agree with the notion that children may enjoy significant educational experiences on family vacations. However, I don't think that means the decision to take a child out of school to go on such a vacation should be an excused absence.

As parents, it is our responsibility to understand the rules at our children's school and the school district rules and policies. In addition, and more broadly, I believe it is our job as parents to make sure that our children understand the importance of rules, that rules should be followed, and that there are consequences for breaking rules.

There may be perfectly good reasons for us to break rules at times. With respect to this specific rule, a parent may believe that a certain trip will be a worthwhile experience for their children, and thus decide to pull their children out of school to go on such a trip. I have made that decision more than once for my own children, and would make it again if the right opportunity or circumstances presented themselves to me. However, each time I made that decision, I knew what the school district's policy was and understood that I would receive a letter from the school district advising me that my children's absences were unexcused. I have in fact received such letters. Even as a board member. And it doesn't bother me one iota when I receive such a letter. I understand that the school district is doing its job.

I fully understand that the public schools have an obligation to educate all of our children and to do so in accordance with the school law. I also understand that schools must administer their policies in a fair and non-discriminatory way so that the policies are applied evenly across the board. School districts cannot and should not, in my opinion, be arbiters of what vacations are worthy of pulling your children out of school for and which ones are not. Imagine the disputes that would

ensue. It's up to an individual family to decide whether a particular trip is worth taking their children out of school. And when that happens, it's the school district's obligation to let the parents know what the law and policies are - and what the potential consequences are if the policies are abused.

Raymond McGarry, Esquire
President
Abington Board of School Directors