

ADMINISTRATION

LWCS BP# 2023-005

TITLE: FMLA LEAVE

POLICY:

Qualifying Reasons for FMLA and Military Family Leave

In accordance with the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, as amended, ("FMLA"), eligible staff members may take up to twelve (12) work weeks of job-protected, unpaid leave, or substitute appropriate paid leave if the staff member has earned or accrued it, for the following reasons:

- A. the birth and/or care of a newborn child of the staff member, within one (1) year of the child's birth;
- B. the placement with the staff member of a child for adoption or foster care, within one (1) year of the child's arrival;
- C. the staff member is needed to provide physical and/or psychological care for a spouse, child, or parent with a serious health condition;
- D. the staff member's own serious health condition makes him/her unable to perform the functions of his/her position; or
- E. any qualifying exigency (as defined in applicable Federal regulations) arising out of the fact that the staff member's spouse, son, daughter, or parent is on covered active duty (or has been notified of an impending call or order to covered active duty) in the Armed Forces ("Qualifying Exigency Leave"). Covered active duty means duty during deployment with the Armed Forces to a foreign country.

In addition, an eligible staff member who is a spouse, son, daughter, parent, or next of kin of a covered service member may take up to a total of twenty-six (26) work weeks of job-protected, unpaid leave, or substitute appropriate paid leave if the staff member has earned or accrued it, during a "single twelve (12) month period" to provide physical and/or psychological care for the covered service member ("Military Caregiver Leave"). A covered service member is defined as (1) a member of the Armed Forces, including a member of the National Guard or Reserves, who is undergoing medical treatment, recuperation, or therapy, is otherwise in outpatient status, or is otherwise on the temporary disability retired list, for a serious injury or illness; or (2) a veteran who is undergoing medical treatment, recuperation, or therapy for a serious injury or illness and who was a member of the Armed Forces (including a member of the National Guard or Reserves) at any time during the period of five (5) years preceding the date on which the veteran undergoes that medical treatment, recuperation, or therapy. Serious injury or illness for purposes of Military Caregiver Leave is defined as an injury or illness incurred by a covered service member in the line of duty on active duty in the Armed

Forces (or existed before the beginning of the covered service member's active duty and was aggravated by service in the line of duty on active duty in the Armed Forces) and that may render the service member medically unfit to perform the duties of his/her office, grade, rank, or rating. In the case of a veteran, the injury or illness could have manifested itself before or after the member became a veteran. The "single twelve (12) month period" for leave to care for a covered service member with a serious injury or illness begins the first day the staff member takes leave for this reason and ends twelve (12) months later, regardless of the twelve (12) month period established below for general FMLA leave. During the "single twelve (12) month period", an eligible staff member is limited to a combined total of twenty-six (26) work weeks of unpaid leave for any FMLA-qualifying reason. (Only twelve (12) of the twenty-six (26) work weeks total may be for a FMLA-qualifying reason other than to care for a covered service member.)

Eligible Employees

Staff members are "eligible" if they have worked for the School Board for at least twelve (12) months, **and** for at least 1,250 hours over the twelve (12) months prior to the leave request. All full-time administrative employees are deemed to meet the 1,250 hour requirement. Months and hours that members of the National Guard or Reserve would have worked if they had not been called up for military service counts towards the staff member's eligibility for FMLA leave. While the twelve (12) months of employment need not be consecutive, employment periods prior to a break in service of seven (7) years or more will not be counted unless the break is occasioned by the staff member's fulfillment of his/her National Guard or Reserve military obligation, or a written agreement exists concerning the Board's intention to rehire the staff member after the break in service.

Twelve (12) Month Period

Twelve (12) month period is defined as a rolling twelve (12) month period measured backward from the date the staff member uses FMLA leave (i.e. the "leave year" is specific to each individual staff member).

Serious Health Condition

A serious health condition is defined as an illness, injury, impairment, or physical or mental condition that involves inpatient care or continuing treatment by a healthcare provider. As utilized in this policy, the term "incapacity" means an inability to work, attend school, or perform other regular daily activities due to a serious health condition, treatment therefore, or recovery therefrom. The term "treatment" includes (but is not limited to) examinations to determine if a serious health condition exists and evaluations of the condition. (Treatment does not include routine physical examinations, eye examinations, or dental examinations.)

- A. Inpatient care means an overnight stay in a hospital, hospice, or residential medical-care facility, including any period of incapacity or subsequent treatment

in connection with such inpatient care.

- B. Continuing treatment by a healthcare provider, includes any one or more of the following: 1.) "incapacity and treatment"; 2.) any incapacity experienced by an expectant mother related to pregnancy, or for prenatal care; 3.) any incapacity or treatment for such incapacity due to a chronic serious health condition; 4.) a period of incapacity that is permanent or long-term due to a condition for which treatment may not be effective (e.g., Alzheimer's, a severe stroke, terminal stages of a disease); or 5.) any period of absence to receive multiple treatments (including any period of recovery therefrom) by a healthcare provider or by a provider of healthcare services under orders of, or on referral by, a healthcare provider for a.) restorative surgery after an accident, or b.) other injury or a condition that would likely result in a period of incapacity of more than three (3) consecutive, full calendar days in the absence of medical intervention or treatment, such as cancer (chemotherapy, radiation, etc.), severe arthritis (physical therapy), or kidney disease (dialysis).
1. "Incapacity and treatment" involves a period of incapacity of more than three (3) consecutive, full calendar days, and any subsequent treatment or period of incapacity relating to the same condition, that also involves a.) treatment two (2) or more times, within thirty (30) days of the first day of incapacity, unless extenuating circumstances exist, by a healthcare provider, by a nurse under direct supervision of a healthcare provider, or by a provider of healthcare services (e.g., physical therapist) under orders of, or on referral by, a healthcare provider, or b.) treatment by a healthcare provider on at least one (1) occasion that results in a regimen of continuing treatment under the supervision of a healthcare provider.
 - a. Treatment by a healthcare provider as referenced above involves an in-person visit to a healthcare provider. The first (or only) in-person treatment visit must take place within seven (7) days of the first day of incapacity. The healthcare provider is responsible for determining whether additional treatment visits or a regimen of continuing treatment is necessary within the thirty (30) day period.
 - b. Regimen of continuing treatment includes a course of prescription medication (e.g. antibiotics), or therapy requiring special equipment to resolve or alleviate the health condition (e.g. oxygen).
 - c. A regimen of continuing treatment that includes the taking of over-the-counter medications such as aspirin, antihistamines, or salves; or bed-rest, drinking fluids, exercise, and other similar activities that can be initiated without a visit to a healthcare provider, is not, by itself, sufficient to constitute a regimen of continuing treatment for purposes of FMLA leave.

2. An expectant mother is entitled to FMLA leave for incapacity due to pregnancy even if she does not receive treatment from a healthcare provider during the absence, and even if the absence does not last for more than three (3) consecutive, full calendar days.
 3. A chronic serious health condition is one that: a.) requires periodic visits (i.e., at least twice a year) for treatment by a healthcare provider, or by a nurse under direct supervision of a healthcare provider; b.) continues over an extended period of time (including recurring episodes of a single underlying condition); and c.) may cause episodic rather than a continuing period of incapacity (e.g., asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, etc.). A visit to a healthcare provider is not necessary for each absence, and each absence need not last more than three (3) consecutive, full calendar days.
 4. With regard to permanent or long-term conditions, the employee or family member must be under the continuing supervision of, but need not be receiving active treatment by, a healthcare provider.
- C. Conditions for which cosmetic treatment are administered (e.g., most treatments for acne or plastic surgery) are not "serious health conditions" unless inpatient hospital care is required or complications develop. Ordinarily, unless complications arise, the common cold, the flu, ear aches, upset stomachs, minor ulcers, headaches other than migraines, routine dental or orthodontia problems, periodontal disease, etc., are conditions that do not meet the definition of a serious health condition and do not qualify for FMLA leave.

Intermittent and Reduced Schedule Leave

The Superintendent may allow a staff member to take FMLA leave intermittently (i.e., leave in separate blocks of time for a single qualifying reason) or on a reduced leave schedule (i.e., reducing the employee's usual weekly or daily work schedule) for reason (A) or (B) on page one. A staff member is entitled to take FMLA leave on an intermittent or reduced schedule leave when medically necessary as indicated in reasons (C) and (D) on page one. A staff member may also take FMLA leave on an intermittent or reduced-leave schedule for Qualifying Exigency Leave (i.e., reason (E) on page one). Finally, Military Caregiver Leave may be taken on an intermittent or reduced schedule leave when medically necessary. Regardless, the taking of FMLA leave intermittently or on a reduced schedule leave results in the total reduction of the twelve (12) or twenty-six (26) weeks only by the amount of leave actually taken. If the intermittent or reduced schedule leave is foreseeable based on planned medical treatment for the employee, a family member, or a covered service member, the Superintendent may require the staff member to transfer temporarily, during the period the intermittent or reduced schedule leave is required, to an available alternative position for which the staff member is qualified and which better accommodates recurring periods of leave than the staff member's regular position. The alternative position shall have equivalent pay and benefits but not necessarily equivalent duties. The Superintendent may also transfer the

staff member to a part-time job with the same hourly rate of pay and benefits, provided the staff member is not required to take more leave than is medically necessary. Administrative staff members (i.e. individuals whose principal function is to teach and instruct students in a class, a small group, or an individual setting) who request intermittent leave or a reduced schedule leave because of reasons (C) or (D) on page one or pursuant to Military Caregiver Leave and the leave would exceed twenty percent (20%) of the total number of working days over the period of anticipated leave must elect either to:

- A. take leave for a period or periods of a particular duration, not greater than the duration of the planned treatment; or
- B. transfer temporarily to an available alternative position offered by the Superintendent for which the administrative staff member is qualified, and that has equivalent pay and benefits and that better accommodates the recurring periods of leave than the staff member's regular position.

When leave is needed for planned medical treatment, the staff member must make a reasonable effort to schedule the treatment so as not to unduly disrupt the District's operations, subject to the approval of the healthcare provider.

If the Superintendent agrees to permit FMLA leave intermittently or on a reduced schedule leave for reason (A) or (B) on page one, the Board may also require the staff member to transfer temporarily, during the period the intermittent or reduced schedule leave is required, to an available alternative position for which the staff member is qualified and which better accommodates recurring periods of leave than does the staff member's regular position.

Staff Member Notice Requirements (Forms available at the U.S. Department of Labor Website: www.dol.gov)

Staff members seeking to use FMLA leave (including Military Caregiver Leave) are required to provide thirty (30) day's advance notice of the need to take FMLA leave when the need is foreseeable and such notice is practicable. If leave is foreseeable less than thirty (30) days in advance, the staff member must provide notice as soon as practicable - generally, either the same or next business day. When the need for leave is not foreseeable, the staff member must provide notice as soon as practicable under the facts and circumstances of the particular case. Absent unusual circumstances, staff members must comply with the Board's usual and customary notice and procedural requirements for requesting leave. Failure to provide timely notice may result in the leave being delayed or denied, and/or possible disciplinary action.

Staff members must provide "sufficient information" for the Superintendent to determine whether the FMLA may apply to the leave request. Depending on the situation, such information may include that the employee is incapacitated due to pregnancy, has been hospitalized overnight, is unable to perform the functions of the job, that the staff

member or his/her qualifying family member is under the continuing care of a healthcare provider, that the requested leave is for a particular qualifying exigency related to a qualifying family member's covered active duty or call to covered active duty status, or that the leave due to a qualifying family member who is a covered service member with a serious injury or illness. The information may also include the anticipated timing and duration of the leave.

When a staff member seeks leave for a FMLA-qualifying reason for the first time, the staff member need not expressly assert FMLA rights or even mention the FMLA. When an employee seeks leave, however, due to a FMLA-qualifying reason for which the system has previously provided the staff member FMLA-protected leave, the staff member must specifically reference either the qualifying reason for leave or the need for FMLA leave.

Substitution of Paid Leave

The staff member may request to "substitute" (i.e., run concurrently) any of his/her earned or accrued paid leave (e.g., sick leave, personal leave) for unpaid FMLA leave. An employee's ability to substitute accrued paid leave is determined by the terms and conditions of the system's normal leave policy. A staff member electing to use any type of paid leave concurrently with FMLA leave must follow the same terms and conditions of the Board's policy that apply to other employees for the use of such leave. The staff member is always entitled to unpaid FMLA leave if s/he does not meet the Board's conditions for taking paid leave. On occasion, the Board may waive any procedural requirements for taking any of type of paid leave.

If the staff member has not earned or accrued adequate paid leave to encompass the entire twelve (12) work week period of FMLA leave or twenty-six (26) work week period of Military Caregiver Leave, the additional weeks of leave to obtain the twelve (12) work weeks of FMLA leave or twenty-six (26) work weeks of Military Caregiver Leave the staff member is entitled to shall be unpaid. Whenever a staff member uses paid leave in substitution for unpaid FMLA leave/Military Caregiver Leave, such leave counts toward the twelve (12) work week/twenty-six (26) work week maximum leave allowance provided by this policy and Federal law.

District Notice Requirements (Forms available at the U.S. Department of Labor Website: www.dol.gov)

The Superintendent is directed to post the Department of Labor-approved Notice explaining employees' rights and responsibilities under the FMLA. The notice must be posted prominently where it can be readily seen by employees and applicants and shall either be distributed to each new employee upon hiring or be included in employee handbooks or other written guidance concerning benefits or leave rights. Electronic posting is sufficient to meet these requirements.

When a staff member requests FMLA leave or the system acquires knowledge that leave may be for a FMLA purpose, the Superintendent shall notify the staff member of his/her eligibility to take leave, and inform the staff member of his/her rights and responsibilities under the FMLA (including the consequences of failing to meet those obligations). Along with the Notice of Rights and Responsibilities, the Superintendent will attach any medical certification that may be required, and a copy of the employee's essential job functions. If the Superintendent determines the staff member is not eligible for FMLA leave, the Superintendent must state at least one (1) reason why the staff member is not eligible. Such notice may be given orally or in writing and should be given within five (5) business days of the request for FMLA leave, absent extenuating circumstances. When oral notice is given, it must be followed by written notice within five (5) business days. Staff member eligibility is determined (and notice provided) at the commencement of the first instance of leave for each FMLA-qualifying reason in the applicable twelve (12) month period. All FMLA absences for the same qualifying reason are considered a single leave and staff member eligibility as to that reason for leave does not change during the applicable twelve (12) month period. If at the time a staff member provides notice of a subsequent need for FMLA leave during the applicable twelve (12) month period due to a different FMLA-qualifying reason and the staff member's eligibility status has not changed, no additional eligibility notice is required. If, however, the staff member's eligibility status has changed, the Superintendent must notify the staff member of the change in eligibility status within five (5) business days, absent extenuating circumstances.

If the specific information provided by the Notice of Rights and Responsibilities changes, the Superintendent shall, within five (5) business days of receipt of the staff member's first notice of need for leave subsequent to any changes, provide written notice referencing the prior notice and setting forth any of the information in the Notice of Rights and Responsibilities that has changed.

When the Superintendent has sufficient information to determine that leave is being taken for a FMLA-qualifying reason (e.g. after receiving certification), the Superintendent shall notify the staff member whether the leave will be designated and counted as FMLA leave. Leave that qualifies as both Military Caregiver Leave and leave to care for a qualifying family member with a serious health condition (i.e. reason (C)) must be considered as Military Caregiver Leave in the first instance. This designation must be in writing and must be given within five (5) business days of the determination, absent extenuating circumstances. Additionally, when appropriate, the Superintendent shall notify the staff member whether the employee will be required to provide a fitness-for-duty certification to return to work.

Only one Designation Notice is required for each FMLA-qualifying reason per the applicable twelve (12) month period, regardless of whether the leave taken due to the qualifying reason will be a continuous block of leave or as intermittent or on a reduced schedule leave. If the Superintendent determines the leave will not be designated as FMLA-qualifying (e.g. if the leave is not for a reason covered by the FMLA or the staff member's FMLA leave entitlement has been exhausted), the Superintendent shall notify

the staff member of that determination. If the staff member is required to substitute paid leave for unpaid FMLA leave, or if paid leave taken under an existing leave plan is being counted as FMLA leave, the "Designation Notice" shall include this information. Additionally, the "Designation Notice" shall notify the staff member if s/he is required to present a fitness-for-duty certification to be restored to employment. Further, if the fitness-for-duty certification is required to address the staff member's ability to perform the essential functions of his/her job, that will be indicated on the Designation Notice, and a list of the essential functions of the staff member's position will be included.

If the information provided to the staff member in the Designation Notice changes, the Superintendent shall provide, within five (5) business days of receipt of the staff member's first notice of the need for leave subsequent to any change, written notice of the change.

In the case of intermittent or reduced-leave schedule leave, only one such notice is required unless the circumstances regarding the leave have changed.

Limits on FMLA When Both Spouses are Employed by LWCS

When eligible spouses are both employed by LWCS, they are limited to a combined total of twelve (12) workweeks of FMLA leave during any twelve (12) month period if the leave is taken for reason (A) or (B) on page one, or to care for the staff member's parent who has a serious health condition.

Where the spouses both use a portion of the total twelve (12) week FMLA leave entitlement for reason (A) or (B) on page, or to care for a parent, the spouses are each entitled to the difference between the amount s/he has taken individually and the twelve (12) weeks of FMLA leave for other purposes.

When eligible spouses are both employed by the LWCS, they are limited to a combined total of twenty-six (26) workweeks of Military Caregiver Leave during the "single twelve (12) month period" if the leave is taken for reason (A) or (B) on page one, or to care for the staff member's parent who has a serious health condition, or to care for a covered service member with a serious injury or illness.

Certification

When FMLA leave is taken for either reason (C) or (D) on page one, the staff member must provide medical certification from the healthcare provider of the eligible staff member or his/her immediate family member. The staff member may either:

- A. submit the completed medical certification to the Superintendent; or
- B. direct the healthcare provider to transfer the completed medical certification directly to the Superintendent, which will generally require the staff member to

furnish the healthcare provider with a HIPAA-compliant authorization.

If the staff member fails to provide appropriate medical certification, any leave taken by the employee shall not constitute FMLA leave.

When the need for FMLA leave is foreseeable and at least thirty (30) days notice has been provided, the staff member must provide the medical certification before the leave begins. When this is not possible, the employee must provide the requested certification to the Superintendent within fifteen (15) calendar days after the staff member requests FMLA leave unless it is not practicable under the circumstances to do so despite the staff member's diligent and good faith efforts.

The Board reserves the right to require second or third opinions (at the Board's expense), and periodic recertification of a serious health condition. If a third opinion is sought, that opinion shall be binding and final. The staff member may either:

- A. submit the opinion of the second healthcare provider, and the opinion of the third healthcare provider if applicable, to the Superintendent; or
- B. direct the second or third healthcare provider to transfer his/her opinion directly to the Superintendent, which will generally require the staff member to furnish the healthcare provider with a HIPAA-compliant authorization.

In the event that the staff member fails to provide the medical opinion of the second or third healthcare provider, if applicable, any leave taken by the staff member shall not constitute FMLA leave.

Recertification

Recertification may be required no more often than every thirty (30) days in connection with an absence by the staff member unless the condition will last for more than thirty (30) days. For conditions that are certified as having a minimum duration of more than thirty (30) days, the system will not request recertification until the specified period has passed, except that in all cases the staff member must submit recertification every six (6) months in connection with an absence by the employee. Additionally, the Superintendent may require a staff member to provide recertification in less than thirty (30) days if the staff member requests an extension of leave, the circumstances described in the previous certification have changed significantly, or if the District receives information that casts doubt upon the staff member's stated reason for the absence or the continuing validity of the certification. Finally, staff members must provide a new medical certification each leave year for medical conditions that last longer than one (1) year.

Staff members requesting Qualifying Exigency Leave are required to submit to the Superintendent a copy of the covered military member's active duty orders and certification providing the appropriate facts related to the particular qualifying exigency

for which leave is sought, including contact information if the leave involves meeting with a third party.

Staff members requesting Military Caregiver Leave are required to submit to the Superintendent certification completed by an authorized healthcare provider or a copy of an Invitational Travel Order (ITO) or Invitational Travel Authorization (ITA) issued to any member of the covered service member's family.

The Board authorizes its healthcare provider and/or human resource professional – but not the staff member's direct supervisor – to authenticate or clarify a medical certification of a serious health condition, or an ITO or ITA (i.e. medical certification provided for reasons (C) or (D) on page one or Military Caregiver Leave). Additionally, the Superintendent is authorized to contact the individual or entity named in the Qualified Exigency Leave certification for purposes of verifying the existence and nature of the meeting.

Job Restoration & Maintenance of Health Benefits

Upon return from FMLA leave, the system shall restore the staff member to his/her former position, or to an equivalent position with equivalent pay, benefits, and other terms and conditions of employment. During FMLA leave, the system shall maintain the staff member's current coverage under the LWCS group health insurance program on the same conditions as coverage would have been provided if the staff member had been continuously working during the leave period. If the staff member was paying all or part of the premium payments prior to going on FMLA leave, the staff member must continue to pay his/her share during the leave.

Any leave or return from leave during the last five (5) weeks of an academic term shall be reviewed individually by the Superintendent to minimize disruption to the student's program.

The use of FMLA leave shall not result in the loss of any employment benefit that the staff member earned or was entitled to before using FMLA leave. If a bonus or other payment, however, is based on the achievement of a specified goal such as hours worked or perfect attendance, and the employee does not meet the goal due to FMLA leave, payment shall be denied unless it is paid to an employee on equivalent leave status for a reason that does not qualify as FMLA leave.

A staff member shall have no greater right to restoration or to other benefits and conditions of employment than if the employee had been continuously employed.

Generally, a staff member may not be required to take more FMLA leave than necessary to resolve the circumstance that precipitated the need for leave.

A staff member may not perform work for the system while on FMLA leave. A staff member may not be employed by another employer during FMLA leave.

A staff member who fraudulently obtains FMLA leave is not protected by this policy's job restoration or maintenance of health benefits provisions.

The Superintendent shall prepare any procedures that are appropriate for this policy and ensure that the policy is posted properly. Copies of this policy shall be available to staff members upon request.

ADOPTED: 7/18/2023

LEGAL:

F.S. 110.221

F.S. 1012.61

29 U.S.C. 2601 et seq. (as amended)

29 C.F.R. Part 825

45 C.F.R. Part 160

45 C.F.R. Part 164

National Defense Authorization Act of 2010