

ATTENDANCE POLICY ALL GRADE LEVELS

Fall River Public Schools' goal is to ensure that every student attends school regularly and is actively engaged in their learning. Attending school regularly has a huge impact on a student's academic success and helps them feel better about school—and themselves. Families play a key role in building this habit from Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade, so that students learn right away that going to school on time, every day is important. Developing the skill of consistent attendance is something that will help students succeed in college and in the workplace.

While some absences are unavoidable due to health problems or other circumstances, when students miss too much school— regardless of the reason – it often causes them to fall behind academically. Your child is less likely to succeed if he or she is chronically absent—which means missing 18 or more days over the course of an entire school year. Research shows:

- Children chronically absent in kindergarten and 1st grade are much less likely to read at grade level by the end of 3rd grade.
- By 6th grade, chronic absence is a proven early warning sign for students at risk for dropping out of school.
- By 9th grade, good attendance can predict graduation rates even better than 8th grade test scores.

Absences can add up quickly. A child is chronically absent if he or she misses just two days every month!!

We don't want your child to fall behind in school and get discouraged. Please ensure that your child attends school every day and arrives on time. Here are a few practical tips to help support regular attendance:

- Make sure your children keep a regular bedtime and establish a morning routine.
- Lay out clothes and pack backpacks the night before.
- Ensure your children go to school every day unless they are truly sick.
- Avoid scheduling vacations or doctor's appointments when school is in session.
- Encourage your child to join meaningful after-school activities, including sports and clubs
- Notice and support your children if they are showing signs of anxiety, such as headaches or stomach aches. Listen to their concerns, and if needed, ask school counselors, teachers or other school staff for help.
- Develop back-up plans for getting to school if something comes up. Call on a family member, neighbor, or another parent to take your child to school.

Let your school know how we can best support you and your children so they can show up for school on time, every day. We want your child to be successful in school! If you have any questions or need more information, please contact your child's school.

Attendance Information for All Levels Pre-K to 12

Regular attendance in all classes, every day, is essential for student growth and life-long achievement. Regular school attendance is linked to higher graduation rates, lower drop-out rates, higher college attendance rates and higher paying jobs. It is therefore most important that a specific set of expectations be established to ensure a clear understanding of the conditions under which a student may have an allowable absence. All absences **must be** verified with proper documentation. Failure to submit proper documentation will result in an unexcused absence.

Parents/guardians have a **legal responsibility** to ensure their child attends each school calendar day.

It is a high priority for the Fall River School District to monitor attendance and address the reasons why some students are chronically absent. In addition, it is the mission of the Fall River School District to work with families and community partners to ensure students arrive at school on time, every day, ready to learn.

Chronic Absenteeism

A student who misses more than 10% of school due to excused and unexcused absences is considered chronically absent. (e.g. school is in session for 30 days and the student is absent a total of 3 or more excused and unexcused days)

- **Chronically absent students** may be ineligible to move from one grade to the next. Circumstances surrounding promotion or retention will be considered by the school principal on an individual basis.

Attendance Officers, Adjustment Counselors (SACs), Counselors, administrators, teachers, and school staff support schools in improving attendance, preventing truancy and intervening in cases of chronic truancy. FRPS staff communicate by telephone, letters or home visits with parents/guardians of children who are chronically absent. They work with community partners, such as the Family Resource Center or the Department of Children and Families (DCF), to offer support to families and assist them in getting their children to school every day, on time. School Attendance Officers are mandated to take parents or students to court if truancy continues and children are being denied a consistent and comprehensive education.

State Laws Regarding Attendance

The following State Laws outline the responsibilities of parents/guardians for monitoring and preventing children's absences from school:

- The Commonwealth of Massachusetts states that parents are required to ensure children between the ages of 6 to 16 attend school. (Chapter 76, section 19 of the MA General Laws)
- Parents/guardians must provide the school with accurate contact information and must inform the school regarding the reason for a child's absence. (Chapter 76, section 1A of the MA General Laws)
- Educational professionals are mandated to report to the Department of Children and Family (DCF) their belief that a child is suffering from educational neglect.

- Without a warrant, School Attendance Officers may apprehend truants found wandering, and return them to school.
- If truancy persists, School Attendance Officers are mandated to file a Child Requiring Assistance application with Juvenile Court. If a student is in elementary school, a criminal complaint for Failure to Cause School Attendance will be filed against the parent. (<http://www.mass.gov/courts/selfhelp/family/cra.html>)
- Families that receive benefits under Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children are subject to specific attendance requirements.

Truancy

- A student is considered truant when he/she has an unexcused absence.
- A parent/guardian note does not excuse an absence if the absence does not meet the criteria to be excused.

Excused absences will be permitted under the following circumstances, and require the indicated documentation:

- Absences with a valid doctor's note specifying the dates to be excused.
- Routine medical appointments with a doctor's note specifying the date of the appointment (Wellness visits should be scheduled after school hours or at the beginning or end of a school day so students can still be in school for as much of the school day as is possible.)
- Death in the immediate family (accompanied with a parental note).
- Religious holidays as determined by the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (including parental note).
- Legal matters that involve the student (must provide a note from the court officer of copy of the summons and will be filed in the school office)
- Quarantine as mandated by school nurse or public health officials

Every absence from class or school will be considered unexcused until proper documentation is presented at the proper time.

Please Note

Doctor's notes will be accepted when submitted to the school nurse within 2 weeks following an absence. Doctor's notes are legal documents and may not be tampered with or altered in any way. School officials are authorized to verify all information presented.

Absence-Notification

On the day a student is absent, it is the responsibility of a parent or guardian to telephone your child's school within the first 90 minutes of the school day to give a valid reason for the absence

Make-up work

No student shall lose academic credit for any excused absence when missed assignments and tests are satisfactorily completed within a reasonable period of time. Work missed due to absences shall be made up in a timeframe established by the classroom teacher.

- Middle and High School only: It is the responsibility of the student to inform the teacher of any absences and to make up all work missed because of absence. Failure to do so may result in a failing grade due to insufficient or unsatisfactory academic performance.

Suspensions

Students who are absent due to out-of-school suspensions will be provided work and expected to complete all assignments.

Family Vacation

Family vacation days that DO NOT coincide with school vacation days are not excused absences.

Tardies

A student who is not in his/her school at the start of the school day is considered tardy. Any school delays declared by the superintendent will not count as a tardy for students. Frequent or chronic tardiness shall result in a parent–school conference to determine whether additional action is necessary.

For a school day to be counted towards a student's attendance he/she must be present for 50% or more of the school day. Anything less will be counted as an absence. Students will still be able to access their school work and classes and receive credit for their work.

Dismissals

All requests for early dismissals must be submitted in writing (written note or email) and given to the principal or designee at the start of the school day or, if possible, give the school 24 hour notices. Teachers are teaching students up to the final dismissal time. While early dismissals are discouraged, it is recognized that emergencies sometimes arise. Frequent or chronic early dismissals shall result in a parent –school conference to determine whether additional action is necessary.

Middle and High School Only Related Policy portion:

Impact on Grades/D4 Policy

- After the 4th unexcused absence of a class during a term, a student's grade will be lowered to a 65(D4) unless they participate in the attendance buyback initiative listed below. Students who have earned a grade lower than a 65 will continue to earn their actual academic grade.
 - Schools on a trimester schedule will have the option of adjusting the D4 to a D5 so that the absence ratio in the policy is consistent with that of schools on a term/quarterly schedule

- In extraordinary cases, a student with demonstrated proficiency who is in jeopardy of receiving an D4 due to the attendance policy may appeal the decision to the principal or designee. The principal's decision will be final.

Attendance Buyback Initiative

Students who are in danger of or who have hit their 4th unexcused absence (D4) in any term can request a buyback.

The student must request a buyback form from their grade office vice principal and are responsible for returning the form to the grade office once it is complete. A buy-back takes 5 consecutive days to complete. During the duration of time the student is on a buyback they must:

- Have 100% attendance
- Be on time to school and all classes (No Tardies and No Dismissals)
- Complete ALL work on time
- Show positive classroom and school-wide behavior

If the student successfully completes the agreed upon expectations, one absence will be excused and entered into their attendance record as excused (buy-back). Students may buy-back a maximum of two absences per term.

DISTRICT RESPONSE WHEN A STUDENT MISSES SCHOOL

When a student is absent from school, the school staff will make every effort to find out why the student is absent. Each school has a tiered approach to supporting students who are absent from school.

Unaccounted for Students - Students who are absent for three consecutive days (this includes fully remote or hybrid students).

Chronic Absenteeism - Massachusetts defines Chronically Absent as missing at least 10% of days enrolled (e.g., 18 days absent if enrolled for 180) regardless of whether the absences are considered excused, unexcused and/or for disciplinary reasons.

- Chronically absent students may be ineligible to move from one grade to the next. Circumstances surrounding promotion or retention will be considered by the school principal on an individual basis.

When a student is absent from school, the parent/ guardian can expect:

- **All Students:** Daily automated call regarding attendance from schools via School Messenger.
- **Any Students with Historically Poor Attendance/Chronic Absenteeism:** In addition to the automated call, the student will receive a call and/or email from school-based staff for the purpose of information gathering, messaging around the importance of regular attendance, and to seek a commitment to attend beginning the next school day.
- **Students Absent Two Consecutive Days:** In addition to the automated call, the student will receive a call from school-based staff for the purpose of information

gathering, messaging around the importance of regular attendance, and to seek a commitment to attend beginning the next school day.

- **Students Absent Three Consecutive Days (Unaccounted For):** In addition to the automated call, the student will receive a call from a building administrator for the purpose of information gathering, messaging around the importance of regular attendance, and to seek a commitment to attend beginning the next school day.
 - If the building administrator makes contact with the family and receives an update, a plan is created for re-engagement.
 - If contact is not made and/or a plan for re-engagement is not created, OR once a student has displayed a pattern of non-engagement for four or more non-consecutive days, a referral will be made to the school Student Support Team or Attendance Team for an intervention plan.

If the actions listed above are unsuccessful, the following actions will be taken (Tier II):

- **Students Absent Four Consecutive Days (Unaccounted For):** In addition to the automated call, a call will be made by a building administrator or the Attendance Officer who will make plans for a home visit, as soon as possible, for the purpose of re-engagement.
 - If the building administrator/attendance officer is unable to reach the student or family and the student is still unaccounted for, an unscheduled home visit will be made by the Attendance Officer, and potentially SAC or school counselor.
 - If the Attendance Officer/SAC/school counselor is able to meet with student(s) and family, a re-engagement plan will be created. The student will then be referred to building-based tiered intervention to maintain engagement and monitoring.
 - If the Attendance Officer/SAC/school counselor is unable to meet with the student and family, a Tier III referral will be made.

When Tier II attempts to reach a student have failed and/or the school is otherwise unable to re-engage:

- At the request of building leadership, SROs will conduct safety and wellness checks for unaccounted for students. (***This is mandatory for students who have not made contact or have not been seen for 5 consecutive school days.***)
- Staff can file a 51A with DCF (this is not mandatory, but an option to be considered by the administrative team).
- Attendance officers can make additional unannounced home visits to the homes of unaccounted for students.
- Attendance officers can file an Adult Failure to Cause School Attendance complaint against the Parent/ guardian when elementary students (6 yrs old and up) with 7 unexcused days or 14 half days in a 6 month period.
- School Attendance Officers can initiate court action in the form of a CRA on Secondary Students (up to age 16) with more than 8 unexcused absences in a quarter, 11 unexcused absences in a trimester or 16 unexcused absences in a semester.

Remote/ Hybrid Attendance Policy

In the event that Fall River Public Schools must implement remote or hybrid learning, ALL students will be expected to be active participants in all classes, everyday. If we cannot move safely to 100% full in-person learning, we will remain in the hybrid model for as long as

necessary. If a student is absent from class, the school will seek to implement the protocols described in the “**DISTRICT RESPONSE WHEN A STUDENT MISSES SCHOOL**” section of the district attendance policy.