

Dear Families,

All Franklin Pierce Schools are making a special effort to ensure that every student has what they need in order to attend school regularly. Attending school regularly helps children feel better about school—and themselves. Your student can start building this habit in preschool, so they learn right away that going to school on time and every day is important. Consistent attendance will help children do well in school, and life beyond school.

#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

- Starting in kindergarten, too many absences, whether excused or unexcused can cause children to fall behind in school.
- Students who miss as few as one to two days a month can fall behind. This increases the chance that they will not read or master math at the same level as their peers. Missed days=missed learning.
- By 6<sup>th</sup> grade, high absenteeism is one of three signs that a student may drop out of high school.
- By being present at school, your child learns valuable social skills and has the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with other students and school staff.
- Absences can be a sign that a student is losing interest in school, struggling with schoolwork, dealing with a bully, or facing other potentially serious challenges.
- By 9<sup>th</sup> grade, regular and high attendance is a better predictor of graduation rates than 8th grade test scores.

#### **OUR PROMISE TO YOU**

We know that there are a wide variety of reasons that students are absent from school, from health concerns to transportation challenges. There are many people in our schools prepared to help you if you or your student face challenges in getting to school regularly or on time.

We promise to track attendance daily, to notice when your student is missing from class, communicate with you to understand why they were absent, and to identify barriers and supports available to overcome challenges you may face in helping your student attend school.

#### **WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP**

Set expectations for good attendance. Encouraging regular school attendance is one of the most powerful ways you can prepare your child for success. When you make school attendance a priority you help your child get better grades, develop healthy life habits, avoid dangerous behavior, and have a better chance of graduating from high school.

- Set a regular bedtime and morning routine as well as finishing homework and packing backpacks the night before. Focus on getting a good night's sleep.
- Find out what day school starts and make sure your child has the required immunizations.
- Avoid appointments and travel when school is in session.
- Keep track of your child's attendance.
- Have a back-up plan in place with family members, neighbors, or other parents for getting your child to school in case something comes up.
- Reach out for support. We are here to help! If you need support and resources to address the barriers to school attendance, please connect with your child's teacher, counselor, or the front office staff.

Kind Regards,



**James Hester**

Deputy Superintendent, Franklin Pierce Schools

# Franklin Pierce Schools Attendance Guide

## For Students and Families

Franklin Pierce School District and staff care about the well-being and academic achievement of each of our students. We know that daily attendance is one of the most powerful predictors of school success and on-time graduation. Our goal is to have every student at school on time, every day.

Our goal is for students to miss less than seven (7) days during the school year. We understand students may miss some school; however, those times should be limited. Attendance is so important that each student's attendance data is transferred to his/her permanent records at the end of the school year. Attendance is also recorded on all students' transcripts. We hope the information below will help you understand our attendance policies and procedures.

We must also inform you that districts are still required, under RCW 28A.225.020 and RCW 28A.225.030, to take a series of actions when students accrue absences.

We encourage you to contact your child's school or the district office if you have any questions related to attendance.

### **Excused Absences**

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- Physical health or mental health symptoms, illness, health condition or medical appointment for the student or person for whom the student is legally responsible. Examples of symptoms, illness, health conditions, or medical appointments include, but are not limited to, medical, counseling, mental health wellness, dental, optometry, pregnancy, and behavioral health treatment (which can include in-patient or out-patient treatment for chemical dependency or mental health);
- Family emergency including, but not limited to, a death or illness in the family;
- Religious or cultural purpose including observance of a religious or cultural holiday or participation in religious or cultural instruction;
- Court, judicial proceeding, court-ordered activity, or jury service;
- Post-secondary, technical school or apprenticeship program visitation, or scholarship interview;
- State-recognized search and rescue activities consistent with RCW 28A.225.055;
- Absence directly related to the student's homeless or foster care/dependency status;
- Absences related to deployment activities of a parent or legal guardian who is an active-duty member consistent with RCW 28A.705.010;
- Absences due to suspensions, expulsions, or emergency expulsions imposed pursuant to chapter 392-400 WAC if the student is not receiving education services and is not enrolled in qualifying "course of study" activities as defined in WAC 392-121-107;
- Absences due to student safety concerns, including absences related to threats, assaults, or bullying;
- Absences due to a student's migrant status; and
- An approved activity that is consistent with district policy and mutually agreed upon by the principal (or designee) and a parent, guardian, or emancipated youth.

The school principal (or designee) has the authority to determine if an absence meets the above criteria for an excused absence.

### **Notifying the School to Excuse Absences**

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We miss your student when they are absent and we value their contributions to our school! We ask you to help ensure that your student attends school regularly. If your student is going to be absent, please contact your school's attendance office. The attendance voicemail system is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If prior notice is not possible you may call, send an e-mail, or written note upon the student's return to school.

Hewins Early Learning Center	253-298-4675	James Sales	253-298-4200
Brookdale	253-298-3106	Midland	253-298-4506
Central Avenue	253-298-3206	Ford	253-298-3606
Christensen	253-298-3300	Keithley	253-298-4313
Collins	253-298-3406	Franklin Pierce	253-298-3813
Elmhurst	253-298-3506	Washington	253-298-4714
Harvard	253-298-4106	GATES	253-298-4070

**Notification should include:**

1. Name of student
2. Name and contact information of person providing the excuse and their relationship to the student
3. Dates of absence
4. Reason for absence (see above for list of excusable absences)

Adult students (those over eighteen) and emancipated students (those over sixteen who have been emancipated by court action) may notify the school office of their absences with a note of explanation.

**More than Seven Absences - 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Documentation May be Requested**

If a student has missed seven (7) days of school during a school year, our district may require third-party documentation to excuse all future absences, late arrivals, and early dismissals. Qualified third-party documentation includes a note from a doctor, dentist, therapist, psychologist, etc. which lists the specific dates of absence to be excused.

If you cannot take your child to the doctor, you may bring your child to the school health room. If the school nurse determines that your student is too ill to stay at school, the absence will be excused. If a parent or guardian chooses to take a student home after the school nurse determines the student should stay, the absence will be considered unexcused.

**SCHOOL POLICIES AND STATE LAWS**

It is important to understand our school district policies, and procedures, as well as Washington State Law.

State law for mandatory attendance, called the Becca Bill, requires children from age 8 to 17 to attend a public school, private school, or a district-approved home school program. Children who are 6 or 7 years-old are not required to be enrolled in school. However, if parents enroll their 6 or 7 year-old, the student must attend full-time. Youth who are 16 or older may be excused from attending public school if they meet certain requirements. <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28A.225>.

**Elementary School – Excused Absences**

In elementary school, after five excused absences in any month, or ten or more excused absences in the school year, the school is required to schedule a conference with the parent/guardian and child at a time reasonably convenient for all persons included for the purpose of identifying the barriers to the child's regular attendance, and the supports and resources that may be made available to the family so that the child is able to regularly attend school.

To satisfy the requirements of this section the conference must include at least one school district employee such as a nurse, counselor, social worker, teacher, or community human services provider. In those instances regarding the attendance of a child who has an individualized education program, or a plan developed under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, in which case the reconvening of the team that created the program or plan is required.

## **Unexcused Absences**

Any absence from school for the majority of hours or periods in an average school day is unexcused unless it meets one of the criteria above for an excused absence.

- **Parent/Guardian Notification** - The school will notify the student's parent or guardian in writing or by telephone whenever the student has failed to attend school.
- **Three unexcused absences in a month** – When a student has three unexcused absences in one month, state law (RCW 28A.225.020) requires we schedule a conference with the parent/guardian and student to identify the barriers and supports available to ensure regular attendance. The district is obligated to develop a plan which may require an assessment to determine how to best meet the needs of the student and reduce absenteeism. If the parent does not attend the conference, the parent will be notified of the steps the district has decided to take to reduce the student's absences.
- **Pierce County Juvenile Court Stay Petition** - Not later than the seventh unexcused absence in a month without an attendance contract, or fifteenth unexcused absence in a school year, the district is required to file a petition and affidavit with the juvenile court alleging a violation of RCW 28A.225.010. The district, along with the juvenile court may also schedule a community truancy board or attendance summit meeting to reduce future absences.
- **Pierce County Juvenile Court Full Petition** - If above actions are not successful, the district will file a petition with the juvenile court alleging a violation of RCW 28A.225.010 by the parent, student, or parent and student. The parent and student will be required to appear in the Pierce County Juvenile Court.

## **Late Arrival/Tardy**

- Students are expected to arrive to class on time. Teachers take attendance at the beginning of the class. If a student arrives after class begins, the student is required to acquire a tardy pass from the attendance office.
- Tardy is tardy - There is no differentiation between late arrival to school and late arrival to class. Unexcused tardiness will result in progressive discipline.
- A tardy will only be excused if third-party documentation is provided. For example: doctor note, tardy pass from school staff, etc. Excused tardiness will not count toward discipline related to tardiness.
- Parent notification is not acceptable as an excuse for tardiness. Unless it meets the above criteria for an excused absence.
- Remember, loss of class time = loss of learning.

## **Early Dismissal**

An early dismissal will be excused or unexcused using the same rules applied to absences.

## **Request for Planned Excused Absences**

- Extended vacations during the school year or leaving school prior to the end of the school year are highly discouraged because students who miss class lose essential instruction.
- The school principal (or designee) has the authority to determine if an absence meets the criteria for an excused absence. (FPSD Policy 3122 and 3122 P).
- WAC 392-121-108 states if a student is absent for more than 20 consecutive school days, they must be unenrolled by the school, unless (a) a written agreement between the school and parent/guardian deems the absence will not cause a serious adverse effect upon the student's educational progress, or (b) the student is receiving home and/or hospital services.

A parent or guardian must request prior approval for an excused planned absence – forms are available in the school office and on our district website.