



Truancy Policy and Program Description

Introduction:

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (“Pennsylvania” or “the state”) defines compulsory school age as the period of a child’s life from the time the child’s parents elect to have the child enter school and which shall be no later than six years of age until the child reaches 18 years of age. The term does not include a child who holds a certificate of graduation from a regularly accredited, licensed, registered, or approved high school. Furthermore, a student who is of 16 years of age who is regularly engaged in any useful and lawful employment or service during the time the public schools are in session, and who holds an employment certificate issued according to the law is exempt from compulsory attendance. A student is “truant” if the student is subject to compulsory school laws and has incurred three or more school days of unexcused absences during the current school year. A student is “habitually truant” if the student is subject to compulsory school laws and has incurred six or more school days of unexcused absences during the current school year.

As a public charter school in Philadelphia, Boys’ Latin of Philadelphia (“Boys’ Latin” or “the school”) participates in Project Go, a truancy prevention program supporting charter schools and led by the Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office (“DAO”).

This policy is designed to improve student attendance in partnership with students, parents/guardians, and truancy reduction partners.

Response to Truant Students:

Truancy Warning Notification Letter:

Within 10 school days of a student’s third unexcused absence, the school attendance officer or their designee sends a written truancy warning notification letter to the student’s parent/guardian, in the preferred language of the parent/guardian, to inform them of their student’s truant status and the actions that will follow in the event their student becomes habitually truant.

School Attendance Improvement Conference:

If a student continues to accrue absences after the truancy warning notification letter has been sent, the school attendance officer or their designee invites the student and their parent/guardian to a School Attendance Improvement Conference (“SAIC”), giving advance written notice and documenting at least two attempts to notify the parent/guardian via phone. The following individuals are invited to the SAIC: the student, the student’s parent/guardian and other support figures, school principal (or designee), school counselor or social worker, members of the Individualized Education Program (“IEP”) or 504 Service Agreement (“504 Plan”) team (if applicable), and recommended services providers (if applicable). Please note that the parent/guardian may refuse the participation of individuals external to the school. During the SAIC, participants work collaboratively to develop a School Attendance Improvement Plan (“SAIP”) to support the student’s improved attendance by identifying the barriers to school attendance and the action steps each party to the SAIP has agreed to take to eliminate the barrier(s). Please note that non-attendance information may be shared during the SAIC and, if so, is shared in a factual, non-threatening manner. Please also note that the school shall hold the SAIC as scheduled regardless of the participation of the student and/or the student’s parent/guardian. In such an event, the school attendance officer or their designee shall share the SAIP with the student and their parent/guardian.

If the student has an IEP, a meeting of the IEP team is convened before and separate from the SAIC to conduct a manifestation determination review (“MDR”). If the MDR finds that the student’s truancy is the result of the student’s disability, the IEP should be used to address the behavior. If the MDR finds that the student’s truancy is not the result of the student’s disability, then the SAIC proceeds as normal.

When the SAIP is in place, if a student is subsequently, unlawfully absent, at any point within the school year, the school attendance officer or their designee sends an official notice of the unexcused absence to the student’s parent/guardian via certified mail, which informs them that the SAIP has been violated and further action will be initiated.

The school attendance officer or their designee tracks the interventions listed in the SAIP, maintains detailed information regarding the student’s attendance, and continues to document all attempts to contact the student’s parent/guardian to address the student’s truancy. The school shall allow at least two weeks to elapse before taking additional steps. Please note that depending on the barriers identified and the action steps agreed to, more time may be required and, if so, shall be communicated to all relevant parties.

Response to Habitually Truant Students:

First Referral to Project Go:

If, after the SAIC has been held, a student reaches a total of six or more unexcused absences and school-based interventions have failed, the school attendance officer or their designee submits a first referral for the student to Project Go via the first referral spreadsheet. Upon receiving the first referral spreadsheet, Project Go produces and sends an initial warning letter via first class mail to the parent/guardian of the student. Project Go sends a soft copy of the letter to the school attendance officer for the student’s file.

Following the first referral, the school attendance officer or their designee shall continue to monitor the student’s attendance and communication with the student’s parent/guardian. Additionally, the school shall allow the student’s parent/guardian at least 10 days from the date of the initial warning letter to contact the school attendance officer.

Second Referral to Project Go:

If a student’s unexcused absences continue to accrue following the first referral to Project Go, the school attendance officer or their designee shall submit a second referral for the student to Project Go by submitting the second referral spreadsheet with a copy of the student’s SAIP and attendance log. Project Go reviews the second referral and, if it accepts the second referral, proceeds with a family conference for the student. Project Go coordinates the date and time of the family conference with the school attendance officer, and then sends notice of the family conference to the student’s parent/guardian by mail and email at least two weeks in advance of the conference. Project Go sends a soft copy of the family conference letter to the school attendance officer for the student’s file. Before the family conference, Project Go calls the student’s parent/guardian to remind them about the conference at least three days in advance of the conference.

Please note that Project Go hosts two types of family conferences. The first type is the group family conference, which is held for informational purposes, includes multiple families of truant students, runs 60 to 90 minutes in length, and is best suited for students and families that have been referred for truancy for the first time. The second type is the individual family conference, which allows for more in-depth discussion regarding barriers to school attendance, includes one family, and runs 30 minutes in length.

The following individuals attend the family conference: Project Go team member(s), school attendance officer, student, student’s parent/guardian, and other relevant school staff. Project Go facilitates the conference and documents the results of the conference. During the conference, the school attendance officer presents a written attendance record including dates and days of absences via hard copy for in-person meetings and soft copy for virtual meetings.

After the family conference, the school attendance officer or their designee (1) investigates, documents, and ensures the validity of all unexcused and excused absences; (2) continues to document in writing all contacts concerning attendance between the school and the parent/guardian of the student; and (3) ensures the accuracy of the attendance record. After the family conference, Project Go (1) emails a copy of any documentation to the school attendance officer and the student's parent/guardian; (2) checks in with the school, student's parent/guardian, and/or student on the agreed upon date which shall be at least 30 days after the family conference; and (3) completes any agreed upon referrals to other agencies.

Regional Truancy Court Referral:

If a student continues to accrue unexcused absences after Project Go's intervention, the school refers the student to Regional Truancy Court ("RTC") via Project Go. Please note that in order to be referred to RTC, a student must have accrued at least 10 unexcused absences during the current school year. The school attendance officer submits the student's SAIP, parent/guardian contact log, attendance record for the current school year, attendance record for the previous school year (if applicable), and report card to Project Go. Project Go refers the student to RTC by submitting the aforementioned documents. Once the referral is made, the student and their parent/guardian are assigned a case manager from a truancy provider unless the family is already active in the Philadelphia Department of Human Services ("DHS") or a community umbrella agency ("CUA").

Project Go communicates the hearing date to the school. The student, the student's parent/guardian, school attendance officer or other school personnel, Project Go team member, and truancy caseworker must attend the hearing. Possible outcomes of RTC are:

- Continued, which means that another hearing is scheduled.
- Discharged, which means that the case is closed because the student's attendance has improved or a loss of jurisdiction.
- Transferred, which means that the case is transferred to Family Court.

Throughout the RTC process, the school continues to monitor the student's attendance and supports the student and their parent/guardian.

Truancy and Disciplinary Action:

Boys' Latin students shall not receive exclusionary consequences for truant behavior. More specifically, the school shall not expel or suspend (out-of-school) a student or reassign or transfer a student to an alternative education for disruptive youth ("AEDY") program for truant behavior and these actions shall not be included in a SAIP. Please note that an in-school suspension is not considered a disciplinary reassignment. Additionally, the school shall hold an SAIC prior to any referral of a student to a legal entity.