

ATTENDANCE POLICY ALL GRADE LEVELS

Why Attendance Matters?

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 that going to school on time, every day is important. Developing the skill of consistent attendance will help students succeed in their academic career as a student and through 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.

For more school attendance information, please visit the following school webpage:

- <https://www.fallriverschools.org/departments/attendance-support>

Attendance Information for All Levels Pre-K to 12

FRPS is dedicated to supporting students and their families through a range of support staff:

- Attendance Officers
- Adjustment Counselors (SACs),
- Guidance Counselors,
- Administrators
- Teachers
- Parent Community Facilitators
- School support staff

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.

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

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. Approved by SC 11.08.21 2
- 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.

Definitions:

Chronic Absenteeism

A student who misses 10% or more 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)

- The state of Massachusetts DOES NOT recognize or differentiate between excused or unexcused absences; *an absence is an absence*.
- Fall River Public Schools monitors student attendance so that ALL STUDENTS remain **under 17** excused or unexcused absences for the school year.
- **18 or more**, excused or unexcused absences, in a school year designate your student chronically absent with the state of Massachusetts.
- 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.

Truancy

- A student may be 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:

- Student illness or injury with a valid doctor's note specifying the dates to be excused
 - *Note: Well 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 (parental note required/Principal discretion for verification)
 - *Note: Students shall be entitled to excused absence(s) for up to **THREE SCHOOL DAYS** at time of death or thereabouts. Immediate family shall include parent/guardian, grandparent, child, sibling, or such step-family members. (Principal discretion can approve additional time as needed)*
 - *In the case of the death of an aunt, uncle, niece, or nephew an absence of ONE calendar day to attend the funeral. (Principal discretion can approve additional time as needed)*
- Religious holidays as determined by the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) (parental note required)
- Court/Legal summons (student's name must appear on the summons)
- School approved activities
- College visits (documentation required)

What are unexcused absences:

An absence is considered unexcused when a student misses school for reasons that are not accepted by the school, with or without parent permission. Unexcused absences including the following:

- Attending parent/guardian appointments
- Attending parent/guardian court summons
- Family travel/vacation
- Staying home to take care of siblings or other family members
- Missing the school bus
- Sleeping late
- Weather-related absences other than when the district has canceled school
- Undocumented illness/injury

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. Families are also encouraged to use the Parent Square to communicate with our schools directly.

All FRPS families will receive an automated message via email, text, phone (Parent Square) when their child is marked absent from school within a timeframe, as determined by the Superintendent, after the official start to the individual school day.

Suspensions

Students who are absent due to out-of-school suspensions will be provided work and expected to complete all assignments. Absences due to suspension are considered excused but still count against a student's chronically absent total.

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.

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 Attendance Policy portion:

Impact on Grades/D4 Policy

- After the 4th unexcused absence of a class during a term at our traditional middle schools and Durfee High School, 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.
 - Community Schools (Doran/HLCS) on a trimester schedule will follow the D5 policy so that the absence ratio in the policy is consistent with that of schools on a term schedule.
- In extraordinary cases, a student with demonstrated proficiency who is in jeopardy of receiving an D4 or D5 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 at our traditional middle schools and Durfee High School who are in danger of or who have hit their 4th unexcused absence (D4) in any term can request a buyback.
 - Students at our community schools (Doran/HLCS) who are in danger of or who have hit their 5th unexcused absence (D5) in any term can request a buyback.
- The student must request a buyback form from a school-based administrator and are responsible for returning the form back to their school-based administrator when it is complete.
- A buy-back takes 5 consecutive days of being present

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

PARENTS AND GUARDIANS SHOULD EXPECT TO HEAR FROM SCHOOL TEAMS. When a student is absent from school, the school staff will make every effort to find out why the student is absent. Each school shall follow the outlined tiered approach to supporting students who are absent from school.

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

Tier 1:

- All Students: Daily automated calls regarding attendance from schools via Parent Square.
- 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.
- Any student absent for 2 consecutive days, without communication by parent/guardian, in addition to the automated call should expect to hear from school staff to discuss absences.
- **Students Absent Three Consecutive Days:** 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 contact is not made OR once a student has been absent for 10% of the school year, a referral will be made to the school Student Support Team or Attendance Team for a personal student intervention and incentive plan to foster school attendance.

- If the actions listed above are unsuccessful and/or absences continue, the following actions will be taken.

Tier II:

Students Absent Four Consecutive Days (Unaccounted For): When the Attendance Officer/SAC/school counselor is able to meet with student(s) and family, a personal student intervention and incentive plan to foster school attendance will be created.

- 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 unable to meet with the student and family, a Tier III referral will be made.

Tier III:

Students Absent Five Consecutive Days (Unaccounted For):

- At the request of building leadership, SROs may conduct safety and wellness checks for unaccounted students. (This is mandatory for students who have not made contact or have not been seen for 5 consecutive school days.)
- Staff may 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 students.

Should All School Interventions Fail:

Attendance officers may 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 in a 6 month period.

School Attendance Officers can initiate court action in the form of a CRA on middle and high school students (up to age 16) with:

- 9 or more unexcused absences in a quarter
- 11 or more unexcused absences in a trimester

Remote/ Hybrid Attendance Policy

In the event that hybrid learning is allowed and required due to a state of emergency Fall River Public Schools must implement remote or hybrid learning, ALL students will be expected to be active participants in all classes, every day. If we cannot move safely to 100% full in-person learning, we will remain in the hybrid or remote 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.