



FAIRFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Student Attendance, Truancy and Chronic Absenteeism Parent Handbook

Updated: May 2023

This page has been left blank intentionally.

Table of Contents

<i>FPS Board of Education Attendance Policy Quick Reference Guide.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Frequently Asked Questions.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>FPS Board of Education Attendance Policy 5113: Attendance/Excuses/Dismissal.....</i>	<i>7</i>

FPS ATTENDANCE, EXCUSED ABSENCES & TRUANCY POLICY



EXCUSED ABSENCE



Absences one through nine shall be considered “excused” when a child does not attend school and appropriate documentation/notification are provided by the parent/guardian due to any reasons that the student’s parent or guardian approves, within ten school days of the student’s return to school.

UNEXCUSED ABSENCE

A student’s absence from school shall be considered unexcused unless:

- The absence meets the definition of an excused absence and meets the documentation requirements; or
- The absence meets the definition of a disciplinary absence, which is the result of school or District disciplinary action and are excluded from these State Board of Education approved definitions



CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM



An enrolled student whose total number of absences at any time during a school year is equal to or greater than ten percent of the total number of days that such student has been enrolled at such school during such school year.

EXTRAORDINARY EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Family vacations do not qualify. For a student to qualify:

- Learning objective related to student’s course work or plan of study
- An opportunity not ordinarily available to the student
- Grade and developmentally appropriate
- Include content highly relevant to the student



RELEASE OF STUDENT DURING SCHOOL DAY



Request for release of a student during the school day originating outside the schools must be handled by administration. Students who become ill during the school day may be excused by the school nurse. No student may be permitted to leave school at any time other than at regular dismissal without the approval of the student’s parent/guardian.

TRUANCY

Identify a student as “truant” when the student has four unexcused absences in any one month or ten unexcused absences in any school year.



HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDANCE



Students enrolled in a Fairfield high school who exceed the permitted number of unexcused absences from school or class may lose credit for that class or classes as specified in the Student/Parent Handbook of each high school.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is considered an excused absence?

A: For absences one through nine, an absence shall be considered “excused” when a child does not attend school and written or verbal notification is provided by the student’s parent/guardian. The reasons for a student’s absence can be any reason that the student’s parent or guardian approves. After the ninth absence, It is marked unexcused until documentation is provided to the school (e.g., doctor’s notes, family emergency/death, observance of religious holiday or court mandated appearance).

Q: What is considered an unexcused absence?

A: A student’s absence from school shall be considered “unexcused” unless the absence meets the definitions, listed below in policy 5113, for an “excused” absence, including the documentation requirements; or if the absence is the result of school or District disciplinary action.

Q: How is loss of credit calculated in High School?

A: Only unexcused absences and unexcused tardies count toward loss of credit. Unexcused absences Count as 1.0 and unexcused tardies count 0.2 toward the total number of days absent. Loss of credit for a Semester class is five (5) absences and a full year class is ten (10) absences. Saturday detentions will be assigned to students with multiple unexcused absences and tardies.

Q: How many absences can my child have before they are considered chronically absent?

A: Your child is considered chronically absent if they are absent 10% of the total number of days in school has been in session for that school year.

Q: What do I need to do if I receive a letter about my child’s absences?

A: Please feel free to reach out to your child’s school with any questions or concerns.

Q: Will my high school student be able to graduate if they are absent more than ten times?

A: Possibly. Students and their parents/guardians should contact their House Dean to find out the process.

Q: Is there a way to appeal an unexcused absence?

A: After the ninth absence, subsequent absences can only be excused when the required documentation is provided (e.g. doctor’s notes, family emergency/death, observance of religious holiday or court mandated appearance).

Q: When my student is sent home ill by the school nurse, it is an excused absence but does it ‘count’ toward chronic absenteeism?

A: All absences whether excused or unexcused count toward the student’s absenteeism.

Q: If my student meets the definition of chronically absent due to treatment of a chronic disease, is there a way to opt out of getting the letters sent home?

A: Yes, please contact your school nurse and they will facilitate the opting out process.

Q: If my child is receiving homebound instruction, are they considered absent?

A: No, your child will be marked accordingly in Infinite Campus.

Q: Can homework be provided ahead of time if I plan a vacation outside of the district scheduled school vacations/days off?

A: No, work cannot be provided to students until they return from traveling.

Q: How many hours does my child need to remain in school to be considered a full day of attendance and not be counted as an absence?

A: A child must be in school for at least half of the instructional day in order to be considered a full day of attendance.

Q: Are the two mental health days extra from the nine days students receive each year?

A: No, the mental health days are included in the nine days students receive each year and cannot be taken consecutively.

Q: If my child is chronically absent, will they have to repeat their current grade level?

A: Not necessarily. It depends on the number of absences and the impact on the student's achievement during the school year.

Q: Does a vacation qualify as an extraordinary educational opportunity as defined in BOE policy?

A: No, vacations are not considered an extraordinary educational opportunity.

FPS Board of Education Attendance Policy 5113

Fairfield Public Schools
Board of Education
Policy Guide

Students

ATTENDANCE / EXCUSES / DISMISSAL

5113 (a)

Attendance

Connecticut state law requires parents to cause their children, ages five through eighteen inclusive, to attend school regularly during the hours and terms the public school is in session. Parents or persons having control of a child five years of age have the option of not sending the child to school until ages six or seven. Mandatory attendance terminates upon graduation or withdrawal with written parent/guardian consent at age seventeen.

A student is considered to be “in attendance” if:

- A. Present at his/her assigned school, and/or
- B. Participating in an activity sponsored by the school (e.g., field trip).

A student is considered “in attendance” if present at his/her assigned school, or an activity sponsored by the school (e.g., field trip) for at least half of the instructional school day. Students serving an out-of-school suspension or expulsion are reported as “absent” except for each day that the student receives alternative education programming for at least half of the instructional school day.

Classroom learning experiences are the basis for public school education. Time lost from class is lost instructional opportunity. The Board of Education requires that accurate records be kept of the attendance of each child, and students should not be absent from school without parental knowledge and consent.

Definitions

Chronically absent child: An enrolled student whose total number of absences at any time during a school year is equal to or greater than ten percent of the total number of days that such student has been enrolled at such school during such school year.

Absence: An excused absence, unexcused absence, or disciplinary absence, as those terms are defined by the State Board of Education.

District chronic absenteeism rate: The total number of chronically absent children in the previous school year divided by the total number of children under the jurisdiction of the Board of Education for such school year.

Students

ATTENDANCE / EXCUSES / DISMISSAL (continued)

5113 (b)

School chronic absenteeism rate: The total number of chronically absent children for a school in the previous school year divided by the total number of children enrolled in such school for such school year.

Mental Health Wellness Day – A school day during which a student attends to such student's emotional and psychological well-being in lieu of attending school. Two non-consecutive mental health wellness days are permitted to any student enrolled in grades kindergarten through grade twelve when permission by the student's parent/guardian is documented at the student's school, regardless of the number of absences the student has accrued in the school year. Mental health wellness days will not be included in reporting of referrals to truancy. Mental health wellness days will count as an absence in determining chronic absenteeism.

Remote Learning – Instruction by means of one or more Internet-Based software platforms as part of a remote learning model as may be authorized by the Fairfield Board of Education in accordance with applicable law.

Excused Absence

For absences one through nine, an absence shall be considered "excused" when a child does not attend school and appropriate documentation and notification are provided by the student's parent/guardian approving the absence, due to any reasons that the student's parent or guardian approves, within ten (10) school days of the student's return to school.

For the tenth absence and all absences thereafter, a student's absences from school are considered excused, with notification within ten (10) school days of the student's return for the following reasons:

- A. Student illness (must be verified by a licensed medical professional to be deemed excused, regardless of the length of the absence);
- B. Student's observance of a religious holiday;
- C. Death in the student's family or other emergency beyond the control of the student's family;
- D. Mandated court appearances (documentation required);

Students

ATTENDANCE / EXCUSES / DISMISSAL (continued)

5113 (c)

- E. The lack of transportation that is normally provided by a district other than the one the student attends (no parental documentation required);
- F. Extraordinary educational opportunities pre-approved by District Administration and to be in accordance with Connecticut State Department of Education guidance.
- G. Quarantine or Isolation
- H. Up to two (2) non-consecutive mental health wellness days.

A student's absence from school shall be considered unexcused unless:

- A. The absence meets the definition of an excused absence and meets the documentation requirements; or
- B. The absence meets the definition of a disciplinary absence, which is the result of school or District disciplinary action and are excluded from these State Board of Education approved definitions.

When the school in which a child is enrolled receives no notification of the child's absence from a parent/guardian or other person having control of the child, a reasonable effort shall be made by school personnel to notify by telephone, email, or mail such parent/guardian or other person having control of the child.

Extraordinary Educational Opportunity

Family vacations do not qualify for extraordinary educational opportunities.

For a student to qualify for an extraordinary educational opportunity, the opportunity must:

- A. Be educational in nature and must have a learning objective related to the student's course work or plan of study;
- B. Be an opportunity not ordinarily available to the student;
- C. Be grade and developmentally appropriate; and
- D. Include content that is highly relevant to the student; while some opportunities will be relevant to all students, others will contain very specific content that would limit their relevance to a smaller group of students.

Students

ATTENDANCE / EXCUSES / DISMISSAL (continued)

5113 (d)

All requests and submissions for approval of extraordinary educational opportunities must:

- A. Contain the signature of the parent/guardian;
- B. Include an outline of the learning objective of the opportunity and include detail as to how the objective is linked to the student's coursework or plan of study; and
- C. Include additional documentation, where available, about the opportunity;
- D. Be submitted to the student's building principal in writing prior to the opportunity, but no later than ten (10) school days prior to the opportunity except in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the building administrator;
- E. Be reviewed by district administration prior to final approval by the building administrator to the parent.

The building principal shall provide a response in writing and include the following:

- A. Either approval or denial of the request;
- B. Brief reason for any denial;
- C. Any requirements placed upon the student as a condition of the approval;
- D. The specific days approved as excused absences for the opportunity; and
- E. The understanding that the building administrator may withdraw its approval if the opportunity is cancelled or the student fails to meet the agreed-upon requirements of the approval;
- F. All decisions of the building principal relating to the extraordinary educational opportunity shall be final;
- G. Approval for an extraordinary education opportunity is determined on a case-by-case basis and the analysis of individualized factors. An opportunity approved for one student may not be approved for another.

Unexcused Absence

Board policy with respect to unexcused absences stresses prevention and inquiry leading to remediation of absences. The schools will make all reasonable efforts to keep parents/guardians and students informed as to attendance problems and will make all reasonable efforts to help students improve their attendance when such improvement is warranted. Only when all local resources are exhausted is referral to legal authorities recommended.

Students

ATTENDANCE / EXCUSES / DISMISSAL (continued)

5113 (e)

A student's absence from school shall be considered "unexcused" unless the absence meets the definitions, listed above, for an "excused" absence, including the documentation requirements; or if the absence is the result of school or District disciplinary action.

Chronic Absenteeism

The Board of Education, in compliance with statute, requires the establishment of attendance review teams when chronic absenteeism rates in the District or at individual schools in the District meet the following circumstances:

- A. A team for the District must be established when the District chronic absenteeism rate is 10 percent or higher.
- B. A team for the school must be established when the school chronic absenteeism rate is 10 percent or higher.
- C. A team for either the District or each school must be established when (a) more than one school in the District has a school chronic absenteeism rate of 10 percent or higher or (b) a District has a District chronic absenteeism rate of 10 percent or higher and one or more schools in the District have a school chronic absenteeism rate of 10 percent or higher.
- D. A team for either the District or each school must be established when (a) the special education population of the District or the school has a chronic absenteeism rate of 10 percent or higher, (b) the ELL population of the District or the school has a chronic absenteeism rate of 10 percent or higher, or (c) when any student population disaggregated by race/ethnicity of the District or the school has a chronic absenteeism rate of 10 percent or higher.

The membership of attendance review teams may consist of school administrators, guidance counselors, school social workers, teachers, chronically absent children, parents or guardians of chronically absent children, and representatives from community-based programs who address issues related to student attendance by providing programs and services to truants.

Each attendance review team shall be responsible for reviewing the cases of truants and chronically absent children, discussing school interventions and community referrals for such truants and chronically absent children and making any additional recommendations for such truants and chronically absent children and their parents or guardians. Each established attendance review team shall meet at least monthly.

The District shall utilize the chronic absenteeism prevention and intervention plan developed by the State Department of Education when it becomes available. *(SDE to develop by 1/1/16.)*

Students

ATTENDANCE / EXCUSES / DISMISSAL (continued)

5113 (f)

The District shall annually include in information for the strategic school profile report for each school and the District that is submitted to the Commissioner of Education, data pertaining to truancy and chronically absent children.

The Principal or his/her designee of any elementary or middle school located in a town/city designated as an alliance district may refer to the children's truancy clinic established by the Probate Court serving the town/city, a parent/guardian with a child defined as a truant or who is at risk of becoming a truant. *(An attendance officer or a police officer shall deliver the citation and summons and a copy of the referral to the parent/guardian.)*

Release of Student During School Day/Dismissal

The Board recognizes the need for students to be in school for the full instructional day. It is encouraged that early dismissal should be requested only in emergency or unusual situations.

Request for release of a student during the school day originating outside the schools must be handled by the administration to ensure maximum provisions for the safety and welfare of the student.

Students who become ill during the school day may be excused by-the school nurse. School personnel will notify parent/guardian to arrange transportation.

No student may be permitted to leave school at any time other than at regular dismissal without the approval of the student's parent/guardian. If a court official with legal permission to take custody of a child, or if a police officer arrests a student, the parent/guardian should be notified of these situations by the administration.

Truancy

The Board of Education must provide each child with a continuing education which will prepare the student to assume adult roles and responsibilities. Therefore, regular attendance and punctuality are expected from all children enrolled in our schools. By statute, responsibility for assuring that students attend school rests with the parent(s)/guardian(s) or other person having control of the child. Every effort must be made to keep absences and tardiness to a minimum. To assist parent(s)/guardian(s) and others in meeting this responsibility, the Board of Education has developed the following procedures regarding students ages five (5) to eighteen (18) inclusive.

Students

ATTENDANCE / EXCUSES / DISMISSAL (continued)

5113 (g)

- A. Notify parents/guardians or other person having control of each child enrolled, ages five
 - a. (5) to eighteen (18) inclusive, in writing, of the obligations of the parents/guardians pursuant to student attendance (C.G.S. 10-184).
- B. Obtain from each parent/guardian or other persons having control of an enrolled child a telephone number or other means of contacting such parent/guardian or other person during the school day.
- C. Establish a system for monitoring student's individual absences/tardies.
- D. Notify, by telephone, email, or mail the parent(s)/guardian(s) or other such person(s) whenever a child fails to report to school on a regularly scheduled school day and no indication has been received by school personnel that the child's parent/guardian or other person is aware of the student's absence.
- E. Identify a student as "truant" when the student has four (4) unexcused absences in any one month or ten (10) unexcused absences in any school year.
- F. Hold a meeting with appropriate staff and the parent/guardian or other person having control of the child identified as a "truant" within ten (10) days of such designation to review the reasons for the truant behavior and to evaluate the situation.
- G. When a student is truant, the Superintendent or designee shall provide notice to the student's parent or guardian of information concerning the existence and availability of the 2-1-1 Infoline program and any other available services.
- H. Referral will be made to the PPT to determine whether or not an educational evaluation is appropriate.
- I. Provide for the coordination of services and refer enrolled students who are truants to community agencies providing child and family services.
- J. Beginning July 1, 2023, when a student is truant, an appropriate school mental health specialist, as determined by the District, shall conduct an evaluation of the student to determine if additional behavioral health interventions are necessary for the well-being of the child. "School mental health specialist" means any person employed by the District to provide mental health services to students, including but not limited to a school social worker, school psychologist, trauma specialist, behavior technician, board certified behavior analyst, school counselor, or licensed professional counselor.
- K. Where the documented implementation of these procedures does not result in improved outcomes despite collaboration with the parent/guardian, the Superintendent or designee may, with written parental consent, refer a student who is truant to a Youth Service Bureau.

Students

ATTENDANCE / EXCUSES / DISMISSAL (continued)

5113 (h)

A student who is identified as a “truant” may be subject to the following consequences:

- A. Promotion to the next grade may be contingent upon the student successfully completing a summer school program.
- B. The student may be retained in the same grade in order to acquire the skills necessary for promotion to the next grade level.

Truancy Exceptions

- A. A student five (5) or (6) years of age shall not be considered truant if the parent or person having control over such student has appeared personally at the school District office and exercised the option of not sending the child to school at five (5) or six (6) years of age.
- B. Until June 30, 2023, a student seventeen (17) years of age shall not be considered truant if the parent or person having control over such student consents to such student’s withdrawal from school. Such parent or person shall personally appear at the school District office and sign a withdrawal form indicating such consent. Such withdrawal form must include an attestation from a guidance counselor or school administrator from the school that the District provided the parent (or person having control of the child) with information on the educational options available in the school system and community.
- C. Beginning July 1, 2023, a student who is eighteen (18) years of age or older may withdraw from school. Such student shall personally appear in person at the school District office and sign a withdrawal form. Such withdrawal form must include an attestation from a guidance counselor or school administrator from the school that the District provided such student with information on the educational options available in the school system and community.
- D. Beginning July 1, 2023, a student seventeen (17) years of age shall not be considered truant if the parent or person having control over such child withdraws such child from school and enrolls such child in an adult education program pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-69. Such parent or person shall personally appear at the school District office and sign an adult education withdrawal and enrollment form. Such adult education withdrawal and enrollment form shall include an attestation (1) from a school counselor or school administrator of the school that the District has provided such parent or person with information on the educational options available in the school system and in the community, and (2) from such parent or person that such child will be enrolled in an adult education program upon such child's withdrawal from school.
- E. If a parent or guardian of an expelled student chooses not to enroll the student in an alternative program, the student shall not be considered to be “truant.”

Students

ATTENDANCE / EXCUSES / DISMISSAL (continued)

5113 (i)

Readmissions to School Following Voluntary Withdrawal

- A. Except as noted in Paragraph B below, if a student voluntarily withdraws from school (in accordance with *Truancy Exceptions B and D above*) and subsequently seeks readmissions, the Board may deny school accommodations to the student for up to ninety (90) school days from the date of the student's withdrawal from school.
- B. If a student who has voluntarily withdrawn from school (in accordance with *Truancy Exceptions B and D above*) seeks readmissions within ten (10) school days of the student's withdrawal, the Board shall provide school accommodations to the student no later than three (3) school days after the student requests readmissions.

High School Attendance

The purpose of this policy is to encourage school and/or class attendance in order to have students maximize their educational opportunities. Regular, uninterrupted attendance at school and/or class is essential to successful learning.

Students enrolled in a Fairfield high school who exceed the permitted number of unexcused absences from school or class may lose credit for that class or classes as specified in the Student/Parent Handbook of each high school.

Attendance Records

The professional staff of each school shall keep an attendance record of students in their charge.

Regularity of Attendance

Regular, uninterrupted attendance at school and/or class is essential to successful learning. In accordance with Connecticut General Statutes, the Board may appoint one (1) or more persons, who shall be authorized to prosecute for violations of the laws relating to attendance of children and their employment. All warrants issued upon such prosecutions shall be returnable before any court having jurisdiction.

Students

ATTENDANCE / EXCUSES / DISMISSAL (continued)

5113 (j)

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes

10-184 Duties of parents. (as amended by PA 98-243 and PA 00-157)

10-185 Penalty

10-198 a Policies and procedures concerning truants (as amended by PA 00-157, PA 11-136 and PA 14-198)

10-199 through 10-202 Attendance, truancy in general. (Revised 1995 - PA 95-304)

10-220(c) Duties of boards of education (as amended by PA 15-225)

10-221(b) Board of education to prescribe rules.

Campbell v. New Milford, 193 Conn93 (1984).

Action taken by State Board of Education on January 2, 2008, to define "attendance."

Action taken by the State Board of Education on June 27, 2012 to define "excused" and "unexcused" absences.

10-198(b) State Board of Education to define "excused absence", "unexcused absence", and "disciplinary absence".

CT State Department of Education: Guidelines for Implementation of The Definitions of Excused and Unexcused Absences and Best Practices for Absence Prevention and Intervention – April 2023

Section 18 of CT Public Act No 21-46, An Act Concerning Social Equity and the Health, Safety, and Education of Children

Section 19 (a) and (b) of CT Public Act 21-46, An Act Concerning Social Equity and the Health, Safety, and Education of Children

CT PA 22-47 An Act Concerning Children's Mental Health

Connecticut State Department of Education Memorandum, *Mental Health Wellness Days* (January 24, 2022)

Connecticut State Department of Education Memorandum, *Youth Service Bureau Referral for Truancy and Defiance of School Rules* (February 22, 2018)

Students

ATTENDANCE / EXCUSES / DISMISSAL (continued)

5113 (k)

Adopted 8/27/2004

Revised and Adopted 6/11/2013

Revised and Adopted 10/18/2016

Revised and Adopted 10/10/2017

Revised and Adopted 3/9/2021

Revised and Adopted a/20/2021

Revised and Adopted 11/15/2022