

2204 Attendance / Truancy

Adopted: 04/15/2026

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Purpose: The Board requires that school age students enrolled in Innovative Arts Academy Charter School ("Charter School") attend school regularly, in accordance with state laws. Regular attendance is an important factor in educational success, and the Board supports a comprehensive approach to identify and address attendance issues. The educational program offered by the school is predicated upon the presence of the student and requires continuity of instruction and classroom participation in order for students to achieve academic standards and consistent educational progress.

Authority: Attendance shall be required of all students enrolled in the Charter School during the days and hours that school is in session, except that authorized Charter School staff may excuse a student for temporary absences upon receipt of satisfactory evidence of mental, physical, or other urgent reasons that may reasonably cause the student's absence. The Board shall establish and enforce attendance requirements, in accordance with applicable laws and regulations, Board policy and administrative procedures. This policy complies with compulsory attendance laws and allows the school to determine when an enrolled student has an unexcused absence. The policy also complies with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Definitions:

- **Absence:** The nonattendance of a student on those days and partial days school is in session.
- **Compulsory School Age:** The period of a child's life from the time the child enters school as a beginner, which shall be no later than the age of six (6) years, until the age of eighteen (18) or graduation from a regularly accredited, licensed, registered or approved high school, whichever occurs first. A child who has attained the age of 6 on or before September 1 must enroll and attend school or begin a home school program that year.
- **Cumulative Absences:** Days of absence that contribute to the allotted number of days a student is absent.
- **Noncumulative Absences:** Days of absence that do not contribute to the specified number of cumulative days. Such absences include days missed due to:
 - Suspensions from school.

- Illness verified by an acceptable written physician's statement submitted within three (3) school days of a student's return to school from an absence. Any absence for which an acceptable written physician's statement is submitted is not included in the number of days permitted for accepted parental statement.
- Death in the family from date of death until two (2) days after the funeral unless otherwise extended by the building principal.
- Official religious holidays observed by the student's religious group.
- Authorized school-sponsored activities.
- Preapproved educational trips or tours up to five (5) school days.
- Preapproved college visits up to three (3) school days.
- **Regular Attendance:** Attending school each day during which school is in session. Students are to attend all sessions unless properly excused by school authorities.
- **Tardiness:** The absence of a student at the time any morning or afternoon session begins provided the student is in attendance before the close of that session. Excessive lateness negatively impacts academic performance.
- **Truancy/Truant:** Occurs where a student subject to compulsory school attendance has incurred three (3) or more school days of unexcused absences during the current school year.
- **Habitually Truant/Habitual Truancy:** Occurs where a student subject to compulsory school attendance has incurred six (6) or more school days of unexcused absences during the current school year.
- **Attendance Improvement Program (School-based or community-based attendance improvement program):** A program designed to improve school attendance by seeking to identify and address the underlying reasons for a child's absences. The term may include an educational assignment in an alternative education program, provided the program does not include a program for disruptive youth established pursuant to Article XIX-C of the Pennsylvania Public School Code.
- **School Attendance Improvement Conference (SAIC):** A conference where the child's absences and reasons for the absences are examined in order to improve attendance, with or without additional services.

- **School Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP):** A written document detailing the outcome of the SAIC, including accessing supports, outlining responsibilities, and monitoring performance.
- **Excused Absence / Lawful Absence:** An absence that is approved by the Charter School and the parent/guardian. Conditions constituting reasonable cause for absence include:
 - Illness, including if a student is dismissed by designated Charter School staff during school hours for health-related reasons.
 - Obtaining professional health care or therapy service rendered by a licensed practitioner of the healing arts in any state, commonwealth or territory.
 - Quarantine.
 - Family emergency.
 - Recovery from an accident.
 - Required court attendance. Absences that require a student to leave school for court hearings related to involvement with a county children and youth agency or juvenile probation may not be categorized as unlawful.
 - Death in the family.
 - Participation in a project sponsored by a statewide or countywide 4-H, FFA or combined 4-H and FFA group, upon prior written request.
 - Participation in a musical performance in conjunction with a national veterans' organization or incorporated unit for an event or funeral, with required signed excuse provided by said organization or incorporated unit prior to absence.
 - Observance of a religious holiday observed by a bona fide religious group, upon prior written parental/person in parental relation request.
 - Nonschool-sponsored educational tours or trips, if required documentation is submitted, participation is approved, and supervision is acceptable. The district/Board may limit the number and duration of such trips.
 - College or postsecondary institution visit, with prior approval. The Board may limit the number and duration of such visits.
 - Other urgent reasons that may reasonably cause a student's absence, as well as circumstances related to homelessness, foster care and other forms of educational instability. Urgent reasons shall be strictly construed and do not permit irregular attendance. Absences caused by homelessness must not be counted as unexcused absences.

- Participation in a religious instruction program, upon written request, identifying instruction, dates, and hours, provided the student does not miss more than thirty-six (36) hours per school year, and a statement attesting attendance is submitted after each absence.
- School age children unable to attend school upon recommendation of the school physician and a psychiatrist or school psychologist, or both, and with approval of the Secretary of Education.
- Students receiving tutorial instruction in a field not offered in the district's curricula from a properly qualified tutor approved by the Superintendent, when the excusal does not interfere with the student's regular program of studies.
- **Temporary Excusals/ Lawful Absence:** Students may be temporarily excused from the attendance requirements under the following circumstances:
 - Students receiving tutorial instruction in a field not offered in the Charter School's curricula from a properly qualified tutor approved by the Chief Administrative Officer, when the excusal does not interfere with the student's regular program of studies.
 - Students participating in a religious instruction program, if the person in parental relation submits a written request for excusal, which shall identify and describe the instruction and dates and hours of instruction, the student shall not miss more than thirty-six (36) hours per school year in order to attend classes for religious instruction and following each absence, the person in parental relation shall submit a statement attesting that the student attended the instruction and the dates and hours of attendance.
 - Students unable to attend school for a temporary period due to mental, physical or other urgent reasons in accordance with law.
 - Students unable to attend school upon recommendation of the school physician and a psychiatrist or school psychologist, or both, and with approval of the Pennsylvania Secretary of Education.
- **Unexcused Absence / Unlawful Absence:** An absence from school which is not permitted by this Policy or for which an approved explanation has not been submitted within the time period and in the manner prescribed by Board and/or by the Chief Administrative Officer through administrative regulations. Absences that do not meet the criteria for excused absence shall be permanently considered unexcused.
- **Person in Parental Relation:** A custodial biological or adoptive parent, noncustodial biological or adoptive parent, guardian of the person of a child, or person with whom a child lives and who is acting in a parental role of a child. This term shall not include any county agency or person acting as an agent of the county agency in the jurisdiction of a dependent child as defined by law.

Delegation of Responsibility: The Chief Administrative Officer or designee shall ensure students enrolled in the Charter School comply with state attendance laws and regulations, and shall be responsible for the implementation and enforcement of this policy. The Chief

Administrative Officer or designee shall annually notify staff, students and persons in parental

relation about the Charter School's attendance policy and school rules and procedures governing student attendance, absences and excusals by publishing such information in the Student handbook, Website, and any other efficient method. Written copies should be provided to parents at the beginning of each year and to all new enrollees upon enrollment. The attendance policy should be easily understood and translated for non-English speaking families. The Chief Administrative Officer or designee shall require the signature of the person in parental relation confirming that the policy has been reviewed and that the person in parental relation understands the compulsory school attendance requirements. Schools should have parents sign a form acknowledging their understanding. The Chief Administrative Officer or designee shall develop administrative procedures for the attendance of students which:

1. Govern the maintenance of attendance records in accordance with law. Proper child accounting is mandated by law and shall be strictly adhered to.
2. Detail the process for submission of requests and excuses for student absences.
3. Detail the process for written notices, School Attendance Improvement Conferences, School Attendance Improvement Plans, and referrals to a school-based or community-based school attendance improvement program, the local children and youth agency or the appropriate judge.
4. Ensure that students legally absent have an opportunity to make up work.

In coordination with the Chief Administrative Officer, the Principal shall be responsible for addressing truancy issues through consistent implementation of this Policy and administrative regulations. Designated Charter School employees shall be responsible for preparing and submitting complete and accurate child accounting information, including all unexcused absences directly to the Pennsylvania Department of Education annually through the Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS).

Guidelines:

Compulsory School Attendance Requirements: All students of compulsory school age who are enrolled in the Charter School shall be subject to the compulsory school attendance requirements. A student shall be considered in attendance if present at any place where school is in session by authority of the Board; the student is receiving approved tutorial instruction, or health or therapeutic services; the student is engaged in an approved and properly supervised independent study, work-study or career education program; the student is receiving approved homebound instruction; or the student's placement is instruction in the home.

Students may be excused from attendance at schools under certain conditions upon request and with required approval, including students enrolled in nonpublic or private schools, students attending college part-time, students in home education or private tutoring in accordance with law, approved students aged 15 who hold a permit to engage in farm work or domestic service in a private home, approved students aged 14 who have completed the highest elementary grade engaged in farm work or domestic service under permit, and students aged 16 working 35 hours or more each week in useful and lawful employment with a valid employment certificate; and children who have been examined by an approved psychological professional and identified to be unable to profit from further public school attendance and excused by the State Board of Education.

Parental Notice of Absence / Submitting Excuses: Absences shall be treated as unexcused/unlawful until the Charter School receives a written excuse explaining the absence, to be submitted within three (3) days of the absence. Parents and students should submit the written explanation within the defined time period. If a written excuse is not provided within the defined time, the absence will be permanently counted as unlawful. Reasonable allowance should be made to accept the parent's explanation prior to initiating compulsory attendance proceedings if a parent is neglectful or fails to provide notification in a timely fashion.

A maximum of ten (10) days of cumulative lawful absences verified by parental notification shall be permitted during a school year. All absences beyond ten (10) cumulative days shall require an excuse from a licensed practitioner of the healing arts.

Absences for three (3) or more days for trips and tours may require temporary absence permits and are limited to no more than five (5) days in any school year. A written request from the person in parental relation is required five (5) days in advance for all absences of this nature. The person in parental relation shall complete an application for a temporary absence permit in person at the building principal's office.

Unexcused/Unlawful Absence: Absences which do not meet the criteria indicated above shall be permanently considered unexcused/unlawful. An out-of-school suspension may not be considered an unexcused absence.

Parental Notification (Unexcused): Charter School staff shall provide prompt notice to the person in parental relation upon each incident of unexcused/unlawful absence. This is intended to alert stakeholders and create an early response. Information shared should be factual and non-threatening, with the primary goal of improving attendance.

Excessive Lateness / Early Dismissals: Students who are excessively late negatively impact their academic performance. A student is considered late if they arrive after 8:00 a.m. Students who have excessive early dismissals also negatively impact their academic performance. An early dismissal is defined as any dismissal prior to 1:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

- **Every five (5) unexcused late instances will equal one (1) unexcused absence.**
- **Every five (5) unexcused early dismissals will equal one (1) unexcused absence.**

Excused reasons for lateness or early dismissal mirror those for excused absences.

Impact on After-School Activities / Athletics: If a student arrives after 10:00 a.m., they will not be allowed to participate in after-school activities or athletic events for THAT day. If a student incurs more than ten (10) unexcused latenesses or early dismissals in a quarter, they will not be allowed to participate in after-school activities or athletic events for the remainder of that quarter.

Enforcement of Compulsory Attendance Requirements:

Student is Truant (3 unexcused absences): When a student has been absent for three (3) days during the current school year without a lawful excuse, Charter School staff shall provide a Three (3) Day Unexcused Absence Letter, sent to the household address on file with the office. Notice shall be sent to the person in parental relation who resides in the same household as the student within ten (10) school days of the student's third unexcused absence. The notice shall:

1. Be in the mode and language of communication preferred by the person in

relation.

2. Include a description of the consequences if the student becomes habitually truant.
3. Include notice to the person in parental relation that a child who is habitually truant may not transfer during the school year to a cyber charter school unless a judge determines that the transfer is in the best interests of the child
4. Include resources available to assist the child and the person in parental relation with returning the child to compliant compulsory school attendance and opportunities for further academic recovery in response to the truant behavior.
5. When transmitted to a person who is not the biological or adoptive parent, also be provided to the student's biological or adoptive parent, if the parent's mailing address is on file with the school and the parent is not precluded from receiving the information by court order.

The notice may include the offer of a School Attendance Improvement Conference (SAIC). If the student incurs additional unexcused absences after issuance of the notice and a SAIC was not previously held, Charter School staff shall offer a SAIC.

School Attendance Improvement Conference (SAIC): When a student has been absent for six (6) days during the current school year without a lawful excuse, Charter School staff will hand deliver a Six (6) Day Unexcused Absence Letter and a Student Attendance Improvement Conference will be scheduled. Charter School staff shall notify the person in parental relation in writing and by telephone of the date and time of the SAIC. The purpose of the SAIC is to examine the student's absences and reasons for the absences in an effort to improve attendance with or without additional services. Schools should work to identify the root cause of absenteeism, which may include homelessness. The following individuals shall be invited to the SAIC:

1. The student.
2. The student's person in parental relation.
3. Other individuals identified by the person in parental relation who may be a resource.
4. Appropriate school personnel. For the Executive source, this team includes the Truancy Officer, School Police Officer, Team Leader, Chief School Director and any other professional employee deemed necessary.
5. Recommended service providers.

Neither the student nor the person in parental relation shall be required to participate, and the SAIC shall occur even if the person in parental relation declines to participate or fails to attend the scheduled conference after notice. The SAIC shall not be delayed pending a response from service providers.

The outcome of the SAIC shall be documented in a written School Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP). The SAIP should include accessing academic and social/health supports from the school and community organizations, an outline of family/parent and student responsibilities, and levels of performance monitoring that include rewards and consequences. The SAIP shall be retained in the student's file. A copy of the Plan shall be provided to the person in parental relation, the student, and appropriate Charter School staff.

The Charter School may not take further legal action to address unexcused or excused absences until the scheduled SAIC has been held and the student has incurred six (6) or more days of unexcused absences.

When a student under age fifteen (15) is habitually truant, Charter School staff must refer the student to a school-based or community-based attendance improvement program or the local children and youth agency. Charter School staff may file a citation in the office of the magisterial district judge in which the Charter School is located against the person in parental relation who resides in the same household as the student.

When a student age fifteen (15) or older is habitually truant, Charter School Staff shall refer the student to a school-based or community-based attendance improvement program or file a citation in the office of the magisterial district judge in which the Charter School is located against the person in parental relation who resides in the same household as the student.

The Charter School may refer a student who is age fifteen (15) or older to the local children and youth agency if the student continues to incur additional unexcused absences after being referred to a school-based or community-based attendance improvement program, or if the student refuses to participate in such program.

Regardless of age, when Charter School staff refer a habitually truant student to the local children and youth agency or file a citation with the magisterial district judge, Charter School staff shall provide verification that the school held a SAIC.

Additional citations for subsequent violations of the compulsory school attendance requirements may only be filed against a student or person in parental relation in accordance with law.

The Charter School shall provide the truant child with a school attendance improvement plan and shall continue to pursue remedies to the child's habitual truancy until the child is no longer truant or is no longer of compulsory school age, regardless of whether the child was enrolled at the Charter School or another charter school, regional charter school, cyber charter school, area career and technical school or school district at the time of truancy.

Disabled Students:

If a truant or habitually truant student may qualify as a disabled student and require special education services or accommodations, the Coordinator of Special Education shall be notified and shall take action to address the Student's needs in accordance with applicable law, regulations and Board Policy.

The appropriate team shall be notified and shall address the student's needs in accordance with applicable law, regulations and board policy for truant or habitually truant students already eligible for an IEP or Section 504 accommodations plan.

Attendance Risk - Exceeding 17 Absences: Students whose cumulative absences, including excused absences beyond the parental notification limit and unexcused absences (including those converted from lateness/early dismissals), substantially exceed seventeen (17) school days may be at risk of not meeting course requirements or state attendance standards necessary for promotion to the next grade level or successful completion of courses. Academic departments and administration shall review student attendance records in cases of excessive absence to determine the impact on academic progress and mastery of content, which may affect grading and promotion decisions.