

Fall River Public Schools Attendance Policy All Grade Levels

WHY DOES ATTENDANCE MATTER?

Fall River Public Schools' goal is to ensure that every student attends school regularly and is actively engaged in their learning. Regular attendance supports academic success, strengthens connections to school, and helps students build confidence in themselves and their abilities.

Families play an important role in building these habits from Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12, so that students learn that going to school on time for the full day, because all day, every day, is important.

Developing consistent attendance habits helps prepare students for success throughout their educational journey and beyond in college, careers, and the workplace. While some absences are unavoidable due to illness or other circumstances, missing too much school—regardless of the reason—can make it more difficult for students to stay connected to learning and make academic progress.

Under Massachusetts law, chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of the school year, including both excused and unexcused absences, based on a student's membership days enrolled. For example, a student enrolled for the full 180-day school year would be considered chronically absent after missing 18 days. A student enrolled for 90 days would be considered chronically absent after missing 9 days. Students who are chronically absent may require additional support to remain on track academically and socially.

Research shows:

- Students with strong attendance in the early grades are nearly twice as likely to be proficient readers by 3rd grade as students who were chronically absent for multiple years.
- By 6th grade, chronic absence (missing 10%, or 2 days each month) is one of three signs that a student may drop out of high school.
- By 9th grade, attendance is one of the strongest predictors of graduation—often a stronger predictor than 8th grade test scores.

Absences can add up quickly. A child is chronically absent if they miss 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.

Sources: Attendance Works and the U.S. Department of Education. For more school attendance information, please visit the following school webpage:

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

National Association of School Nurses. Resources: Health and Practice Topics: Attendance.

<https://www.nasn.org/nasn-resources/resources-by-topic/attendance>

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.
- 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

Absence Notification DEPENDING ON PLATFORM being USED

On the day a student is absent, it is the responsibility of a parent or guardian to contact 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 application to communicate with our schools directly. All FRPS families will receive an automated message via email, text, or 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.

Chronic Absenteeism

A student who misses 10% or more of school due to BOTH 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 as 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 or designee on an individual basis.

Child Requiring Assistance (CRA)

Massachusetts state law (G.L. c. 119, § 21) defines a [child requiring assistance](#) as “a child between the ages of 6 and 18 who: (i) repeatedly runs away from the home of the child's parent, legal guardian or custodian; (ii) repeatedly fails to obey the lawful and reasonable commands of the child's parent, legal guardian or custodian, thereby interfering with their ability to adequately care for and protect the child; (iii) repeatedly fails to obey the lawful and reasonable regulations of the child's school; (iv) is habitually truant; or (v) is a sexually exploited child.” A CRA Application may be filed in Juvenile Court by a parent/guardian or school official to address habitual truancy and/or other issues specified in state law.

Dismissals

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. Students under age 18 may not excuse themselves from school or arrange their own dismissal. Requests for early dismissal must be initiated by a parent/guardian and approved through the school's established dismissal procedures.

Parent Dismissal: 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 notice. A nurse visit alone does not constitute a dismissal and does not automatically excuse additional absences. If a parent/guardian chooses to pick up a student after a nurse visit, the absence will be recorded as a parent dismissal.

Nurse Dismissal: All requests for dismissal due to illness or emergency must be processed through the school nurse or administration. A nurse dismissal occurs when the school nurse determines, *based on professional assessment and applicable public health guidance*, that a student is unable to safely remain in school or requires removal due to illness or injury. The nurse documents the reason for dismissal and notifies appropriate school personnel, including the attendance office. Absences following a nurse dismissal are generally excused for the day of dismissal and may extend *based on Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) communicable disease guidance*. Continued absence beyond expected exclusion periods may require additional documentation from a healthcare provider.

Excused Absences

An absence is considered excused when a student misses school for reasons that are accepted by the school. Documentation is required for absences to be excused :

- Student illness, injury, or mental health concerns with a valid note from a licensed medical or mental health provider specifying the dates to be excused, provided within two weeks of the absence. Notes can be shared digitally via ParentSquare and/or a hard copy delivered to the student's attendance monitor or school nurse. Altered or edited documents will not be accepted.

Medical Documentation: When medical documentation is unclear, incomplete, or inconsistent, the school nurse may contact the healthcare provider's office to clarify or verify information necessary to support safe return to school. This may include confirmation of dates excused, return-to-school instructions, and re-evaluation needs.

Communication is limited to information necessary to support student health and educational access.

Not Seen in Office Notes: Health-related absence notes indicating “not seen in office” or “phone advice given only” will generally be limited to no more than two (2) occurrences per term or three (3) occurrences per trimester, allowing for appropriate short-term illness absences. After this threshold, or when a pattern is identified by the school nurse, the nurse will contact the parent/guardian to discuss concerns and collaborate on next steps, which may include communication with the student’s healthcare provider.

Chronic Illness: Students with documented chronic health conditions are expected to connect with their school nurse and will be supported through individualized planning. The school nurse may also contact a parent when illness patterns suggest a need for further health provider evaluation or follow-up care. This may include concerns of recurring symptoms such as gastrointestinal illness, headaches, fatigue, or other conditions impacting school attendance.

- **Note: Routine medical/dental visits including, but not limited to, physicals, orthodontics, immunizations, or other preventative care, 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 or designee’s discretion for verification)
 - **Note: Students shall be entitled to excused absence(s) for up to THREE SCHOOL DAYS at the time of death or thereabouts. Immediate family shall include parent/guardian, grandparent, child, sibling, or such step-family members. (Principal or designee 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 or designee 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)
- License/permit appointment (with documentation)
- Passport/Immigration appointment (with documentation)

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. A parent/guardian note does not excuse an absence if the absence does not meet the criteria to be excused. Unexcused absences include 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

Students experiencing homelessness, housing instability, foster care placement, or other significant hardships may be eligible for additional attendance supports and protections under federal and state law.

Attendance concerns involving students with disabilities shall be reviewed in accordance with applicable federal and state laws. When attendance difficulties may be related to a student's disability, medical condition, or educational plan, the school may convene the student's IEP or Section 504 team to consider appropriate supports, accommodations, or interventions.

The district recognizes that students may occasionally experience safety-related concerns that impact attendance. School staff will work collaboratively with students and families to address safety concerns, assess needs, and connect students with appropriate supports to facilitate regular school attendance.

Membership Days: The total number of school days a student is enrolled in Fall River Public Schools during the school year, regardless of attendance. Students are considered chronically absent when they miss 10% or more of their membership days, regardless of whether absences are excused or unexcused. For a student enrolled for the full 180-day school year, 10% of their 180 membership days equals 18 days, meaning they are considered chronically absent after missing 18 or more days of school.

Tardies

A student who is not in their 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 student's school day to be marked present and count towards a student's attendance, they must be present for 50% or more of the school day.** *Students will be welcome into the school building at any time during the school day, but anything less than a half day, or 4 hours, will be counted as an absence.*

Truancy

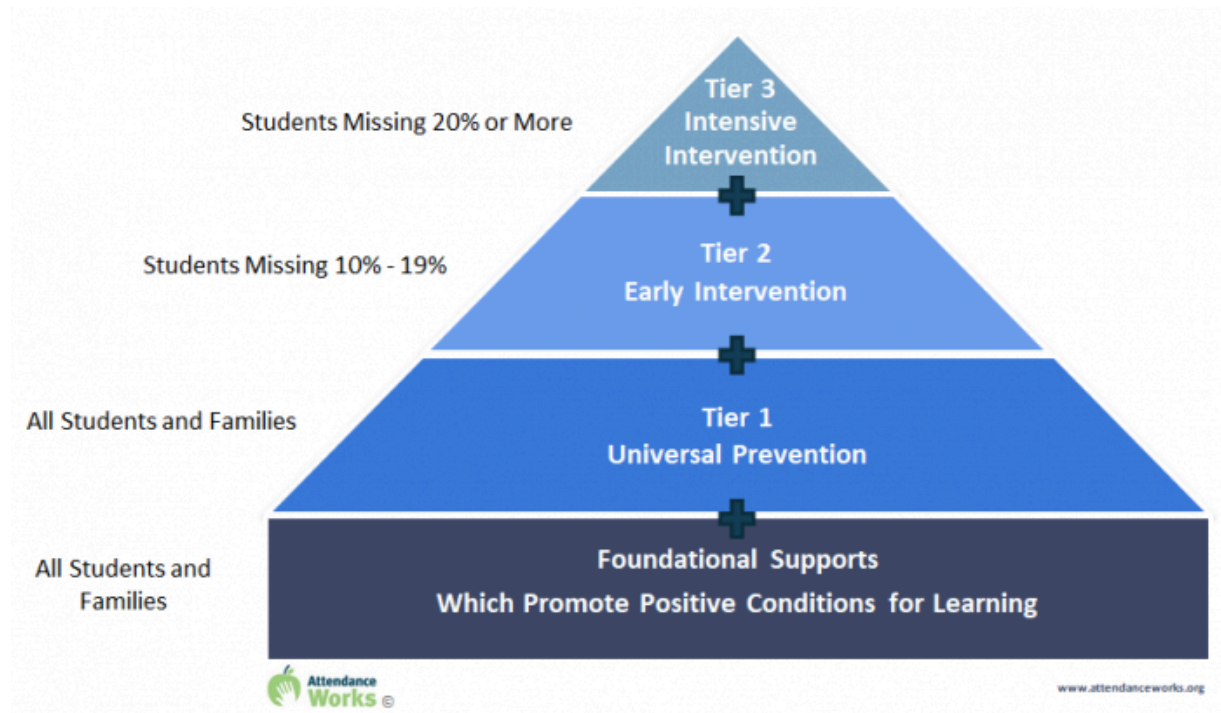
Massachusetts state law (G.L. c. 119, § 21) defines as habitually truant “a school-aged child, not excused from attendance under the lawful and reasonable regulations of such child's school, who willfully fails to attend school for more than 8 school days in a quarter.”

Suspension

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.

MTSS SUPPORTS

The district recognizes that attendance challenges may result from health concerns, disabilities, family circumstances, housing instability, transportation barriers, mental health needs, or other factors outside of a student's control. Fall River Public Schools is committed to partnering with families to identify supports that promote consistent school attendance and student success.



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

- Attendance Officers
- Attendance Monitors
- School Adjustment Counselors (SACs)
- SEL Liaisons,
- Guidance Counselors,
- Administrators,
- Teachers,
- Parent Community Facilitators,
- School Nurses, and
- School support staff.

FRPS staff communicate every day via the ParentSquare platform and/or telephone with students who are absent from school. FRPS staff may send letters or conduct home visits with parents/guardians of children who are chronically absent or absent for three consecutive days.

Tier 1 - Universal Approach

Daily automated calls regarding attendance from schools via Parent Square. 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.

Tier 2 - Targeted Intervention

Students and families who demonstrate patterns of chronic absenteeism and either were chronic during the previous school year and/or are showing similar patterns in the current year; students who show some success in responding to attendance outreach/incentives but remain at-risk month to month.

Interventions May Include:

- Regular contact by the student's Attendance Monitor
- Parent & School Attendance Meetings
- School-based attendance Incentives
- Student Support Meetings/SEL Team Consult
- Home Visits
- Attendance SEL Group

Tier 3 - Individualized Support

Students and families who show patterns of non-attendance year after year and do not respond to daily outreach, incentives, etc. Students/families who require regular follow-up.

Interventions may include:

- Regular contact by the school's Attendance Officer
- Parent & School Attendance Meetings
- Individualized Attendance Incentive
- Student Support Meetings/SEL Team Consult
- Home Visits
- Attendance SEL Group
- Court Referral

RESPONSE TO CONSECUTIVE ABSENCES

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 for 3+ consecutive days, the parent/guardian can expect:

Three Consecutive Days: In addition to the automated call, the student will receive a call from the student's Attendance Monitor 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. 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 contact is not made, a referral will be made to the school Attendance Officer and may include the request of a home visit wellness check.

Four Consecutive Days: If the building administrator/attendance officer continues to be 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. If the Attendance Officer is unable to meet with the student and family, a referral will be made to the Principal and School Resource Officer (SRO).

Five Consecutive Days: At the request of building leadership, SROs will 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. 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) have 7 unexcused days 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 OR 11 or more unexcused absences in a trimester depending on school schedule.

MISSING WORK

Students who are absent from school, whether the absence is excused or unexcused, shall be provided a reasonable opportunity to make up missed assignments, assessments, and coursework in accordance with school procedures. Teachers will work with students to establish timelines for completion of missed work whenever practicable.

HEALTH AND SAFETY STANDARDS DURING A STATE OF EMERGENCY OR OTHER EXIGENT CIRCUMSTANCES

MGL 603 CMR 27.08 - Upon a declaration by the Governor that an emergency exists which is detrimental to the public health, or upon a determination by the Board that exigent circumstances exist that adversely affect the ability of students to attend classes in a safe environment unless additional health and safety measures are put in place, the Commissioner, in consultation with medical experts and state health officials, shall issue health and safety requirements and related guidance for districts.

In the event that hybrid learning is allowed and required due to a state of emergency as identified in MGL 603 CMR 27.08, ALL students will be expected to be active participants in all virtual 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.