

Fall River Public Schools

Attendance Policy



Dr. Matthew H. Malone
Superintendent



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Letter from the Superintendent

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Our goal this year is to ensure that every student attends school regularly.

Showing up for school has a huge impact on a student's academic success starting in kindergarten and continuing through high school. Even as children grow older and more independent, families play a key role in making sure students get to school safely every day and understand why attendance is so important for success in school and in life.

We realize some absences are unavoidable due to health problems or other circumstances, but we also know that when students miss too much school— regardless of the reason – it can cause 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!!

Clearly Attendance Matters!

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. Here are a few practical tips to help support regular attendance:

- Make sure your children keep a regular bedtime and establish a morning routine.
- Lay out clothes and pack backpacks the night before.
- Ensure your children go to school every day unless they are truly sick.
- Avoid scheduling vacations or doctor's appointments when school is in session.
- Talk to teachers and counselors for advice if your children feel anxious about going to school.
- Develop back-up plans for getting to school if something comes up. Call on a family member, neighbor, or another parent to take your child to school.

Let us know how we can best support you and your children so they can show up for school on time, every day. We want your child to be successful in school! If you have any questions or need more information, please contact your child's school.

Sincerely,



Matthew H. Malone
Superintendent

Attendance Information for ALL Levels PreK-12

Regular attendance in all classes, every day, is essential for student growth and life-long achievement. Regular school attendance is linked to higher graduation rates, lower drop-out rates, higher college attendance rates and higher paying jobs. It is therefore most important that a specific set of expectations be established to ensure a clear understanding of the conditions under which a student may have an allowable absence. All absences must be verified with proper documentation. Failure to submit proper documentation will result in an unexcused absence.

Parents/guardians have a legal responsibility to ensure their child is in school every day school is in session. It is a high priority for the Fall River School District to monitor attendance and address the reasons why some students are chronically absent. In addition, it is the mission of the Fall River School District to work with families and community partners to ensure students arrive at school on time, every day, ready to learn. ***A student who misses more than 10% 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 ROLE OF THE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE OFFICER

School Attendance Officers support schools in improving attendance, preventing truancy and intervening in cases of chronic truancy. School Attendance Officers communicate by telephone, letters or home visits with parents/guardians of children who are chronically absent. School Attendance Officers 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.

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.

Attendance Information for ALL Levels PreK-12

TRUANCY

- A student is 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, and require the indicated documentation:

- Absences with a valid doctor's note specifying the dates to be excused
- Sick visits with a doctor's note specifying the date of the appointment
- Routine medical appointments with a doctor's note specifying the date of the appointment (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.)

PLEASE NOTE:

Doctor's notes will be accepted when submitted to the school nurse within 2 weeks following an absence. Doctor's notes are legal documents and may not be tampered with or altered in any way. School officials are authorized to verify all information presented.

Excused absences will be permitted under the following circumstances, and require the indicated documentation:

- Death in the immediate family (parental note required)
- Religious holidays as determine by the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) (parental note required)
- Legal matters that involve the student: A note from a court officer or copy of the summons must be provided and filed in the office.

SUSPENSIONS

Students who are absent due to external suspensions are expected to make up missed assignments, homework and tests.

Family vacation days that DO NOT coincide with school vacation days are not excused absences.

Elementary School Attendance Policy

Please also refer to Attendance Information for All Levels PreK-12 on Pages 4 and 5.

Good attendance is an essential component of a student's education. Therefore, it is important that a specific set of expectations be set forth to insure a clear understanding of the conditions under which a student may be absent. All absences must be verified with proper documentation. Failure to do so will result in an unexcused absence. ***Every absence from class or school will be considered unexcused until proper documentation is presented at the proper time. A student who misses more than 10% of school due to excused and unexcused absences is considered chronically absent. (e.g. school is in session for 30 days and student is absent 3 or more excused and unexcused days)***

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.

MAKEUP WORK

Work missed due to an absence shall be made up in a timeframe established by the classroom teacher. Teachers have at least 24 hours to provide students with any makeup work. Pre-established deadlines (papers, projects, homework) must still be completed on-time by student. It is the responsibility of the student to make up all work missed because of absence.

TARDIES

A student who is not in his/her school at the start of the school day is considered tardy. Five tardies (without a doctor's note) will be considered an unexcused absence.

Any school delays declared by the superintendent will not count as a tardy for students

DISMISSALS

All requests for early dismissals must be submitted in writing and given to the principal or designee at the start of the school day or, if possible, give the school 24 hour notice. 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. Five early dismissals (without a doctor's note) will be considered an unexcused absence.

Middle School Attendance Policy

Please also refer to Attendance Information for All Levels PreK-12 on Pages 4 and 5.

Good attendance is an essential component of a student's education. Therefore, it is important that a specific set of expectations be set forth to insure a clear understanding of the conditions under which a student may be absent. All absences must be verified with proper documentation. Failure to do so will result in an unexcused absence. ***Every absence from class or school will be considered unexcused until proper documentation is presented at the proper time. A student who misses more than 10% of school due to excused and unexcused absences is considered chronically absent. (e.g. school is in session for 30 days and student is absent 3 or more excused and unexcused days)***

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.*

Excused absences will be permitted under the following circumstances, and require the indicated documentation:

- DESE approved religious holidays (parental note required)
- Death in the immediate family (parental note required)
- Suspensions (noted on Absentee List) mandated by State Law.
- Documented student illness (Please refer to page 5 of this policy)
- Attendance at a school-sponsored activity
- Legal matters that involve the student: A note from a court officer or copy of the summons must be provided and filed in the office.

An excused absence due to illness requires formal medical documentation and must be presented to the school nurse **within 2 weeks following the absence**. Doctor's notes will not be accepted after 2 weeks have passed.

MAKEUP WORK

Work missed due to an absence shall be made up in a timeframe established by the classroom teacher. Pre-established deadlines (papers, projects, long-term assignments) must still be honored. It is the responsibility of the student to inform the teacher of any absence and to make up all work missed because of absence. Failure to do so may result in a failing grade due to insufficient or unsatisfactory academic performance.

LONG TERM ILLNESS (3 days or more) necessitates a homework request by the student's parent/guardian. Teachers will be notified by a guidance counselor or the vice-principal in such cases.

SPECIAL NOTATIONS

On the sixth unexcused absence from a class, a student will receive an F6 or a 64 for the term. In cases where academic performance is less than 64, the actual grade for that term will be an F, along with whatever numerical grade the student earned.

*In extraordinary cases, a student with demonstrated proficiency who is in jeopardy of failing a class or being promoted due to receiving an F6 from chronic absenteeism may appeal the decision to the principal. The principal's decision will be final.

Middle School Attendance Policy (continued)

TARDIES

Three unexcused tardies to a class will equal one unexcused absence from that class.

A tardy to school will result in a tardy or absence to a class or classes, depending on the student's arrival time.

Any school delays declared by the superintendent will not count as a tardy for students.

DISMISSALS

All requests for early dismissals must be submitted in writing and given to the principal or designee at the start of the school day or, if possible, give the school 24 hour notice. 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. Five early dismissals (without a doctor's note) will be considered an unexcused absence.

ABSENCE - NOTIFICATION VERIFICATION

On the day a student is absent, it is the responsibility of a parent or guardian to telephone the school office prior to 9:30 am to give a valid reason for the absence.

High School Attendance Policy

Please also refer to Attendance Information for All Levels PreK-12 on Pages 4 and 5.

Good attendance is an essential component of a student's education. Therefore, it is important that a specific set of expectations be set forth to insure a clear understanding of the conditions under which a student may be absent. All absences must be verified with proper documentation. Failure to do so will result in an unexcused absence. ***Every absence from class or school will be considered unexcused until proper documentation is presented at the proper time. A student who misses more than 10% of school due to excused and unexcused absences is considered chronically absent. (e.g. school is in session for 30 days and student is absent 3 or more excused and unexcused days)***

Excused absences will be permitted under the following circumstances, and require the indicated documentation:

- DESE approved religious holidays (parental note required)
- Death in the immediate family (parental note required)
- Suspensions (noted on Absentee List) mandated by State Law.
- Documented student illness (Please refer to page 5 of this policy)
- Attendance at a school-sponsored activity
- Legal matters that involve the student: A note from a court officer or copy of the summons must be provided and filed in the office.

An excused absence due to illness requires formal medical documentation and must be presented to the school nurse **within 2 weeks following the absence**. Doctor's notes will not be accepted after 2 weeks has passed.

MAKEUP WORK

Work missed due to absences shall be made up in a timeframe established by the classroom teacher. Pre-established deadlines (papers, projects, long-term assignments) must still be honored. It is the responsibility of the student to inform the teacher of any absences and to make up all work missed because of absence. Failure to do so may result in a failing grade due to insufficient or unsatisfactory academic performance.

LONG TERM ILLNESS (3 days or more) necessitates a homework request by the student's parent/guardian. The teacher will be notified by a guidance counselor or the vice-principal in such cases.

SPECIAL NOTATIONS

- On the sixth unexcused absence from a class, a student will receive an F6 or a 64 for the term. In cases where academic performance is less than 64, the actual grade for that term will read F, along with whatever numerical grade the student earned.
- **Seniors:** Because the fourth term is shorter for Seniors, the fourth absence from a class will result in an F4 or a 64 for that term.

*In extraordinary cases, a student with demonstrated proficiency who is in jeopardy of receiving an F6 from chronic absenteeism may appeal the decision to the principal or designee. The principal's decision will be final.

High School Attendance Policy (continued)

TARDIES

Three unexcused tardies to class will equal one unexcused absence in that class.

A tardy to school will result in a tardy or absence to a class or classes, depending on the student's arrival time.

Any school delays declared by the superintendent will not count as tardies for students.

DISMISSALS

All requests for early dismissals must be submitted in writing and given to the principal or designee at the start of the school day or, if possible, give the school 24 hour notice. 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. Five early dismissals (without a doctor's note) will be considered an unexcused absence.

ABSENCE-NOTIFICATION VERIFICATION

On the day a student is absent, it is the responsibility of a parent or guardian to telephone the vice principal's office prior to 9:30 am to give a valid reason for the absence.

ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL

The alternative high school will adhere to this policy with the exception of the Special Notations section. In place of this, we will implement strategic interventions with students and families that address individual needs.

Attendance Policy Acknowledgment



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I have read the Fall River Public Schools' Attendance Policy and understand that my daily attendance is directly related to my learning and success. I further understand to achieve academic success I must not have excessive absences to school. I agree to communicate with my parent/guardian, teachers, counselors and staff if any issues arise that prevent me from attending school.

Signature of Middle or High School Student

I have read the Fall River Public Schools' Attendance Policy and understand that my child's daily attendance is directly related to their learning and success. I further understand to achieve academic success my child must not have excessive absences to school. I agree to communicate with my child's teachers, counselors and staff if any issues arise that prevent my child from attending school.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

