



BOARD POLICY 206A: STUDENT ATTENDANCE

STUDENT ATTENDANCE POLICY

Regular school attendance is a primary factor in a student's successful academic and social development and lays the groundwork for a successful and productive life beyond school. Frequent absences of pupils from regular classroom learning experiences disrupt the continuity of the instructional process.

EXCUSED VS. UNEXCUSED ABSENCES

EXCUSED ABSENCE

An excused absence is any absence that is documented for official business. Examples include, but are not limited to: court dates, death in family, doctor or dentist appointments, etc. Excuses of this kind must be documented on official letterhead or back to work slips from a doctor, court, or other professional. Hand-written notes or parent notes will not be accepted as proof of official business. In addition, suspensions will be counted as excused absences. Students will also be excused for participation in a project sponsored by an organization eligible for Pennsylvania Agricultural Fair Act grants (such as FFA for 4-H), to participate in a musical performance for an event or funeral with a national veterans' organization, or if health or sanitation laws or regulations prevent a student from attending school.

UNEXCUSED ABSENCES

An unexcused absence is any other kind of absence from school. Examples include, but are not limited to: sickness, family trips, etc. **While parents should still send a note to school explaining the absence in order to mitigate truancy, parent notes do not excuse absences.** The Head of School is authorized to develop a system of consequences for attendance. See below for the School's Truancy Policy and Procedures.

Pennsylvania regulation requires that we remove any student from the roll who has accumulated 10 consecutive unexcused absences. A certified letter will be sent to notify parents of their child's removal from the school roll.

BOARD POLICY 206B: TRUANCY

A student is considered truant after 3 truant absences. A child is considered habitually truant after 6 or more truant absences. To avoid truant absences, students must always bring a parent note explaining their absence when they return to school. The standards to avoid a truant absence are less strict than those to have an absence excused. However, while a parent note may be used to avoid a truant absence, the School must still determine that the absence was for a legitimate reason. Parent notes can only be used to prevent up to 6 truant absences per year. After 6 absences with parent notes, any further such absences will be considered truant.

Within 10 days of a student's third truant absence, Freire will notify the student's family of the child's violation of compulsory school attendance. The notification will be sent in writing to the person in parental relation with the child who resides in the same household as the child. When transmitted to a person who is not the biological or adoptive parent, the notice will also be provided to the child'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 will:

- Include a description of the consequences that will follow if the child becomes habitually truant
- Be in the mode and language of communication preferred by the person in parental relation

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

After a student reaches 6 unexcused absences, the School will hold a School Attendance Improvement Conference to address barriers to a student's attendance. The School will send a second notice to the family as described above which will additionally include notice of the conference. Neither the child nor the person in parental relation may be legally compelled to attend the conference, but Freire strongly urges both to participate. The conference must occur even if the person in parental relation declines to participate or fails to attend the scheduled conference after written notice sent in advance and attempts to communicate via telephone. Freire reserves the right to provide notice and subsequently hold a conference at its discretion regardless of whether a student has yet accumulated 6 unexcused absences.

The conference should ideally engage the student, family, school, and all participants involved in the student's life to explore possible solutions to increase the student's school attendance. In the case of a follow-up conference after a student has already been referred to the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, Truancy Court, or Family Court, the conference will also include a representative from the appropriate office. Maintaining open communication between the student and adults will facilitate positive outcomes.

The purpose of the conference is to discuss the cause(s) of the truancy and to develop a mutually agreed upon plan to facilitate regular school attendance. The conference provides both parties with the opportunity to identify, understand, and explore all issues contributing to the student's truant behavior. Participation by the student and family is an integral component for this conference. In addition, representatives from relevant and/or involved community-based agencies, community and school services, and school personnel should be invited to participate, as needed. During the conference, a Student Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP) shall be developed cooperatively with the student and other meeting participants.

Issues to be addressed at the conference should include but not be limited to:

- Appropriateness of the student's educational environment
- Possible elements of the school environment that inhibit student success
- Student's current academic level and needs
- Social, emotional, physical, mental, and behavioral health issues
- Issues concerning family and home environment
- Any other issues affecting the student's attendance

The participants in the school-family conference should work collaboratively to conduct a holistic assessment to determine the reason(s) the student is exhibiting truant behavior. Every member should have a vested interest in and responsibility for determining an appropriate plan to assist the student to succeed both socially and academically. This conference should also provide an opportunity to ensure that both the student and the family clearly understand the School's attendance requirements and the legal ramifications of not adhering to the state's compulsory attendance requirements. This methodology promotes full understanding and appreciation of the root causes of truancy as well as the resultant personal and societal impacts when truant behavior is not adequately addressed.

The School may not take further legal action to address unexcused absences until the conference has occurred. The outcome of the conference must be documented in a SAIP. The SAIP must be documented on an official form substantially similar to one developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. This plan substantiates efforts made by the school, the family and other vested third parties to assist the student in addressing and resolving school attendance issues.

LEGAL CONSEQUENCES FOR SUSTAINED TRUANCY

Freire must report incidences of truancy to the Pennsylvania Department of Education and may report them to the School District of Philadelphia's Office of Attendance and Truancy, the Philadelphia District Attorney, the Philadelphia Family Court, and/or the Philadelphia Department of Human Services. Families may be required to appear at court hearings or be assigned a case worker who will make home visits. Parents or guardians convicted of violating compulsory attendance can be fined, required to complete an appropriate course, or perform community service. In order to support legal proceedings conducted under Pennsylvania's truancy law, Freire will document all truant absences, all outreach efforts made, any conferences held, and any interventions pursued.