



BOARD POLICY 206A: STUDENT ATTENDANCE

Amended on: 6/11/2014; 6/10/2015, 6/14/2017, 6/12/2019, 5/29/2024, 6/30/2026

STUDENT ATTENDANCE POLICY

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania imposes mandatory school attendance requirements for all public-school students. 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. When a student accumulates excessive unexcused absences, Freire Charter School ("the Charter School") must report incidents 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.

EXCUSED VS. UNEXCUSED ABSENCES

The following policy outlines the definitions, expectations, and procedures related to student absences, including the distinction between excused and unexcused absences, documentation requirements, and the consequences associated with truancy. This policy is established in accordance with Pennsylvania state regulations and is intended to ensure consistent attendance while providing appropriate accommodations for legitimate absences. Students and families are expected to review and comply with these guidelines to support a positive and productive educational experience.

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.

Excuses of this kind must be documented on official letterhead or back to work slips from a doctor, court, or other professional, and brought to school, not emailed, within 5 school days of the absence. Hand-written notes or parent notes will not be accepted as proof of official business.

Other absences that will be excused include suspensions, participation in a project sponsored by an organization eligible for Pennsylvania Agricultural Fair Act grants (such as FFA for 4-H), participation 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.** Parent notes can be used to prevent up to 6 truantries a year. 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 within 5 school days of returning 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

Upon reaching 18 absences, a student may be mandatorily retained, regardless of student's end of year grades, at the discretion of the Head of School. Additionally, if a family chooses to transfer schools during the academic year, a student who is deemed habitually truant will not be eligible to enroll in a cyber charter school per PA law.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

After a student accumulates six (6) unexcused absences, the Charter School shall schedule a School Attendance Improvement Conference (SAIC) to identify barriers to attendance and develop a Student Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP). Written notice of the conference shall be provided to the student's parent/guardian. Although attendance by the student and parent/guardian is strongly encouraged, neither may be legally compelled to attend. The School may conduct a conference even if the parent/guardian declines to participate or fails to attend after reasonable notice and attempts at communication.

The School reserves the right to conduct a SAIC prior to a student reaching six (6) unexcused absences when appropriate. For students with disabilities who are truant or habitually truant, the Student Services team shall address the student's needs in accordance with applicable law, regulations, and Board policy.

The purpose of the conference is to identify the causes of the student's attendance issues and develop a collaborative plan to improve attendance. As appropriate, the conference may include the student, parent/guardian, school staff, and representatives of relevant agencies or service providers.

The Charter 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.

Please note that if a student transfers to Freire during the school year and is determined to have been habitually truant at their previous school, Freire must implement a Student Attendance Improvement Plan upon enrollment to support improved attendance moving forward.

LEGAL CONSEQUENCES FOR SUSTAINED TRUANCY

The School will notify the student's district of residence and/or appropriate authorities when a student is habitually truant and school-based interventions have not resolved attendance concerns, in accordance with Pennsylvania law. 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.