

Please carefully read the following information about South Carolina School Attendance Laws and the Fort Mill School District's Guidelines for student attendance. The Fort Mill School Board believes that attendance is a key factor in student achievement, and any absence from school represents an educational loss to the student. However, the board also recognizes that some absences from school are unavoidable and has established an attendance policy which allows for absences in inevitable circumstances.

POLICY: Students are expected to attend school each day in accordance with the approved school calendar. Any student who misses school must present a written excuse, signed by a parent/guardian, or the medical professional who treated the child and the absence will be considered **LAWFUL**. The maximum number of days that may be recorded as **LAWFUL** absences with parent notes will be **FIVE** per school year at the elementary/middle school levels and **TWO** per semester in high school. If a written excuse is not turned in within **THREE** days after the child is back in school or is without acceptable cause, the absence will be considered unexcused and **UNLAWFUL**. The maximum number of days that a child is allowed to miss in one school year (or semester for credit bearing courses) is a total of **TEN**, regardless of type. When a student is absent more than a total of **TEN** days, the Board has designated the school principal to approve or disapprove of any additional absences. In addition, attendance is an important factor that is used in promotion/retention decisions for children.

Children will be considered lawfully absent when:

- ✓ They are *ill* and their attendance in school would endanger their health or the health of others, and can provide a written excuse from a medical professional.
- ✓ There is a **death or serious illness in their immediate family**—with proper documentation (i.e. bulletin, death notice, obituary, etc).
- ✓ There is a recognized **religious holiday** of their faith and it has been pre-approved by the school principal.
- ✓ They are participating in sanctioned **school activities**.
- ✓ The student is **suspended** from school.
- ✓ There is a necessary **medical or legal appointment** that cannot be scheduled during non-school hours—with proper documentation.

Lawful absences will allow students to make up missed work.

Children will be considered unlawfully absent when:

- ✓ They have **exceeded the five** days that may be excused with **a parent note**.
- ✓ A student is absent **without acceptable cause** with or without knowledge of his/her parents.
- ✓ They are out of town on trips or **vacations**.

**** Please note: In order to participate in extracurricular activities or sports, children must be in attendance at least one half of the school day on the day of the event.****

Parents will be notified daily when their child is absent from school via the school messenger system (by phone and/or email depending on preferences of the parent and/or school). Attendance letters will be generated from the District Attendance Office and mailed home when children have accrued **FIVE, SEVEN and TEN UNLAWFUL ABSENCES**.

SEAT TIME FOR CREDIT BEARING COURSES: In order to receive credit for a high school course, a student must attend at least **85 out of 90 school days** for a semester long class. Any student who is absent from a course block or the entire school day, must present a written excuse, signed by a parent/guardian, or the medical professional who treated the child and the absence will be considered **LAWFUL**. The maximum number of days that will be recorded as **LAWFUL** absences with parent notes will be **TWO PER SEMESTER** at the high school level. If a written excuse is not turned in within **THREE** days after the child is back in school or is without acceptable cause, the absence will be considered unexcused and **UNLAWFUL**. The maximum number of **UNLAWFUL** days that a child is allowed to miss in one semester is **FIVE**. **A student will be denied credit and fail due to attendance when they have accrued SIX UNLAWFUL absences in a class.** When a student is absent more than a total of **TEN** days per semester, the Board has designated the school principal to approve or disapprove of any additional absences. In some instances, students may be eligible for Attendance Recovery Sessions to meet the minimum seat time requirements and recover a credit denied due to excessive absences. Eligible students will be notified by school administration and provided with the opportunity to enroll in the program.

TRUANCY: After **THREE CONSECUTIVE** or **FIVE** total **UNLAWFUL ABSENCES** are accrued, *South Carolina State Law R 43-274* identifies a child (between the ages of 6 and 17) as **TRUANT**. It also requires that school officials enter a discipline/incident report in the student’s permanent record and report the truancy status to the State of SC. Parents will receive a letter when their child has been identified as truant and will be contacted for an attendance conference with a school administrator. The purpose of this conference is to identify the reasons for the child’s absences and complete a Student Attendance Intervention Plan (SAIP) to develop interventions to ensure regular student attendance. In the event of continued unlawful absences after the SAIP meeting, the child/family may be referred to York County Family Court and/or the Department of Social Services.

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM: Beginning in the 2017-2018 school year, school districts within our state are required to identify students who are chronically absent to the State Department of Education as part of the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act. According to the United States Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights (OCR), an absent student is one who misses 50% of the instructional day for any reason regardless of whether the absence is excused or unexcused. 50% of the school day is 203 minutes at the elementary level, 215 minutes at the middle school level and 195 minutes at the high school level. Using this definition of absent, OCR requires states to report the number of students in each school and district who are absent at least 10% of the time enrolled. The total number of chronically absent students will be included in both school and district report cards and reported to OCR. In order to facilitate the flow of information, the SC State Department of Education has standardized attendance coding and minute by minute tracking in PowerSchool for all schools throughout the state.

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AND TRUANCY: Chronic absenteeism is not the same as truancy. Although there is some overlap, the definition and types of absences considered are not completely the same.

| | Chronic Absenteeism | Truancy |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| Definition | Any student in K-12 who misses 50% or more of the instructional day for any reason for 10% (or more) of the enrollment period. | A student between the ages of 6-17 who has accumulated 3 consecutive or a total of 5 or more unexcused/unlawful absences during the academic year. Continued unexcused absences after the truancy intervention process begins may result in referral to family court and/or the involvement of the Department of Social Services. |
| Types of absences included | All types of absences contribute to chronic absenteeism, including days when a student is not present for 50% of the school day. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Excused absences - Unexcused absences - Suspensions - Tardy arrivals and early dismissals | Only full day unexcused absences contribute to a truancy designation for the academic year. |

*If you have any questions regarding the Fort Mill School District’s attendance policy:
Please consult www.fortmillschools.org , or the District Attendance Officer at 803.548-2527.*

Below are responses to the most commonly asked questions regarding the Fort Mill School District's Attendance Policy.

1. **I told my child to inform his teacher that he was absent because he was sick. Do I have to send in a written note?** Yes, a written note is required every time your child is absent from school. The note should include your child's name, homeroom teacher/grade, parent name, a detailed explanation of the reason that he/she was absent from school, and a parent signature. Each year, elementary and middle school students may have up to five days can be excused with a parent note. High school students may have up to two days excused with a parent note each semester. All days in excess of these limits, without acceptable reason or an excuse from a medical professional, will be considered unlawful.
2. **What happens if our family has planned an out of town trip that will require my child to miss school?** Out of town trips, vacations and cruises are not acceptable reasons for lawful absences, and the days will count towards truancy.
3. **How many days is my child allowed to miss school because of sickness?** Only five days will be excused for illness with a parent note in elementary and middle school, and two days per semester at the high school level. Additional days may be excused with acceptable documentation from a medical professional or service provider. In the event of a serious medical issue or illness, please consult the child's school to explore the potential for homebound instruction.
4. **My son/daughter missed the bus. Is this an excused absence?** No. If your child misses the school bus and subsequently misses an entire day of school the day will not be considered an excused or lawful absence.
5. **My child was absent from school because of a death in the family, are the two days for the funeral services excused?** Yes, the child will be excused for "bereavement" in the event of a death of an immediate family member. Upon return to school, please include a copy of the death notice, obituary or program from the funeral services along with your written excuse.
6. **One of my children is sick, are his/her siblings able to be excused from school because of the medical appointment?** No, your child's absence may be excused only if they are sick and not if a parent or sibling is ill. The absence will be considered unlawful, and may lead to truancy.
7. **I took my child to the doctor, but I forgot to get a medical excuse note when we were in the office. Is it too late to submit the excuse?** No, please make every possible effort to secure a medical excuse note whenever your child is seen and misses any part of the school day. When in doubt, please request a note from the doctor's office as potential documentation. If you forget to get a note, please contact the provider's office and explore the possibility of having an excuse faxed or sent directly to the school.
8. **We have already had 5 days excused with a parent note; can my child be excused for any additional days this year?** Unfortunately, the Fort Mill School District policy only allows for a total of five days (two per semester at the high school level) excused with a parent note. Additional days without acceptable documentation will not be considered lawful absences.
9. **My child was seriously injured and is physically unable to attend school. What are the options?** In the event that your child is battling a significant illness, enduring a prolonged hospital stay, surgery or is physically unable to attend school, they may be eligible for homebound instruction with the approval of a medical professional. Please contact your child's guidance counselor to explore this option and determine if it is in the best interest of your child to pursue homebound instruction during the period of illness.
10. **I signed my child out, why is the absence listed as unexcused?** Absences will only be considered excused or lawful if they meet one of the guidelines established by the school board. Parents are unable to excuse their children from school if the absence is not due to one of the established acceptable reasons. If a child misses more than 50% of the school day, it will be recorded as an absence when calculating chronic absenteeism.
11. **I know that the law dictates that 5 or more unexcused absences meets the definition of truancy, but if I tell the school why my child was out, does it really impact their educational record?** We appreciate communication regarding the reasons why a student is absent. However, if the reason for the absences is unlawful and the days absent are not excused, the truancy will be indicated on their permanent record. Attendance is a factor considered for students who are at risk of retention.

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