



# HILLTOWN COOPERATIVE CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL

## ATTENDANCE POLICY

Regular school attendance is the foundation for a student's school success, and supports students to develop a sense of belonging, build strong relationships, and benefit from daily experiences and support in the classroom. Parents and caregivers are essential to strong attendance, and are responsible to ensure children attend school regularly and on time. Hilltown follows attendance guidelines set by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

### Definitions

- *Present*: According to DESE's Attendance and Dropout Reporting Guidance, a student must be at school, at a school-related activity, or receiving academic instruction for at least half of the regularly-scheduled school day to be counted as present. "Receiving academic instruction" includes in-person classroom learning as well as tutoring, online or distance learning.
- *Absent*: A student who is not present (as defined above) is considered absent from school.
  - Excused absences include:
    - personal illness or quarantine;
    - personal or family crisis;
    - observance or practice of a religious holiday;
    - medical appointments or counseling sessions that cannot be made outside of school hours;
    - legal matters requiring a personal appearance; and
    - weather so inclement as to endanger the health or safety of the child; and
    - suspensions or expulsions in or out of school.
  - Unexcused absences include:
    - family or individual trips;
    - oversleeping or other delays that result in tardiness;
    - any absence that is not reported by a parent/guardian through set procedures; and
    - any medical absence requiring documentation from the student's medical provider where this documentation has not been provided.

- *Tardy*: A student who arrives at school after 8:20 a.m. is considered absent until arrival. Occasional student tardiness for events such as medical appointments may be unavoidable. Chronic, unplanned tardiness affects the student's ability to engage in morning routines, and is disruptive to classes.
- *Chronic Absence*: DESE defines chronic absenteeism as missing ten percent or more of the total days enrolled at a school (e.g., absent 10 school days when enrolled for 100 school days thus far in a school year).
- *Habitually Truant*: 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."

### **Reporting Absences**

Parents/guardians are expected to inform the school of a student absence by 8:20 a.m. either by emailing [attendance@hilltowncharter.org](mailto:attendance@hilltowncharter.org) or calling the school at 413-529-7178 and leaving a message on the attendance voice mail (option 2, or press 0 to speak to someone). Teachers are expected to communicate absences to the Hilltown administrative staff member responsible for attendance no later than 8:30 a.m.

The Hilltown administrative staff member responsible for attendance, or designee, will contact caregivers at all known phone numbers if the school has not yet heard from a parent/guardian by 9:00 a.m. That staff member will communicate all known absences to teachers by 10:00 a.m. HCCPS may request documentation from a healthcare provider if a student is absent for more than five (5) consecutive days due to illness.

### **Home-school Communication Regarding Absences**

Student absence totals for the year are always available in the Hilltown Portal, and are included on all trimester progress reports (typically distributed in December, March, and June). The director of teaching and learning will send a separate letter with fall and spring progress reports to the parents/guardians of any student who meets the definition of chronically absent (see above). In addition, the director of teaching and learning will reach out by email or telephone to the parents/guardians of students who have met or exceeded this threshold, and have not sufficiently communicated with school administrators and/or teachers regarding the absences. Attendance concerns will be shared with the director of administration and the academic support coordinator in writing after each trimester.

### **Consequences Related to Absence**

Students who are absent on a school day as defined above may not participate in after-school or extracurricular programs on the day of absence. Significant interference in a student's

educational progress due primarily to absence, and not related to a documented disability, may result in grade retention.

### **Attendance Supports**

For students with attendance concerns that are contributing to challenges in making expected educational progress, the director of teaching and learning will discuss the student's case at a Student Support Team meeting, at which time the team will identify and assign a trusted adult advocate/liaison to build a relationship with the student and their family in support of improving school attendance.

For students with medically necessary absences as documented by a signed Physician's Affirmation of Need for Temporary Home or Hospital Education for Medically Necessary Reasons, the director of teaching and learning will design a home/hospital plan to provide the opportunity to make effective educational progress.

### **Administrative Actions to Address Attendance Concerns**

In extreme cases where attendance supports have not been successful, HCCPS may, in its sole discretion, pursue the following actions:

- Referral to a Family Resource Center or other community-based resource
- File a "Child Requiring Assistance" complaint with the District Court
- File a 51A report with Department of Children and Families