

Oct. 12, 2017

Dear Finneytown Families,

I am writing to share some very important changes to school attendance laws in Ohio. They are evidence of the importance state legislators – and certainly educators – place on students being in school every day, and on the impact daily attendance has on student achievement and social interaction.

For FLSD, these changes mean updating our policies, practices and student handbooks. For our staff and for parents, they also mean more forms, letters and requirements when a student is considered a habitual truant, which I'll define below. **Families who send their children to school every day will save themselves – quite frankly – a burdensome amount of communication and paperwork, and they will save the school district a great deal of time that could be devoted to instructional matters.** As you read through the changes, keep in mind that sending your child to school every day will help your child be successful *and* will spare you this volume of state-mandated communication.

Attached to this letter are details of what the new state law requires, a list of excused absences by Finneytown board policy, and three quick tips on how you can help our district deal with these new attendance demands. Thank you for reading them. In closing, I want to stress a few very important changes:

- First, the state now requires reporting student attendance by hours instead of days (which means **student absence accumulates minute by minute**, rounding to the nearest hour).
- Second, the state has set stringent standards for what it deems a “habitual truant.” A habitual truant is a student with unexcused absences for 30 or more consecutive hours; 42 or more hours in a month; or 72 hours or more in a year. (Since the average school day is 6-6.5 hours, 30 hours is equal to four to five days’ absence, or an accumulation of time over several days. In other words, **habitual truancy builds quickly.**)
- Third, while in the past FLSD’s practice was to allow students up to five days per quarter for family vacation – which were not reported as truancy – **our district no longer has that option.** Now these hours of absence and all hours of absence, whether excused or unexcused, will count toward habitual truancy. This includes the time a student is suspended from school.

Thank you in advance for partnering with us on this very important issue. If you would like to discuss the new state requirements, call me at 728-3700 or to contact your building principal.

Respectfully,

Superintendent Terri Noe

New state mandates for how and when school districts must contact parents of habitually truant students:

1. If a student is absent for 38 hours, excused or unexcused, in one school month, the district must send home a letter stating that it is the parents' or guardians' responsibility to send the child to school. If absences continue, families will be required to provide a physician's note noting the illness and day(s) the physician has excused the child from attending school.
2. If a student is absent for 54 hours, excused or unexcused, the district should send a letter warning that the student is approaching 72 hours of absence, which will trigger an absence intervention team (AIT) to meet and an absence intervention plan (AIP) to be created. This letter is optional but serves as an additional reminder for parents.
3. If a student is absent 65 hours, excused or unexcused, the district must send a letter stating that it is the parents' responsibility to send the child to school, and that a **physician's note will be required for any additional absences.**
4. If a child is deemed habitually truant – using the benchmarks in the accompanying letter – the district must form an AIT and develop and follow an AIP. If families don't comply, **a complaint will be filed with the courts.**
5. The Absence Intervention Team must include a parent or guardian, a school district representative, and another district representative who knows the student. A counselor, psychologist or public-agency representative may be included.
6. The Absence Intervention Plan developed by the team must identify the causes of absences and decide on interventions.
7. All of the above information must be reported to the state.
8. If the plan is not successful, the **student and parent must be referred to the court system.**

Excused absences, as defined by FLSD board policy:

- Personal illness (A written physician's statement verifying the illness may be required.)
- Illness in the family necessitating the presence of the child.
- Quarantine of the home.
- Death in the family.
- Necessary work at home due to absence or incapacity of parent(s) or guardian(s).
- Such good cause as may be acceptable to the superintendent of schools.
- Medically necessary leave for a pregnant student in accordance with Policy 5751.
- Observation or celebration of a bona fide religious holiday.
- Out-of-state travel (up to a maximum of four days per 24 hours per school year that the student's school is open for instruction) to participate in a *district-approved enrichment or extracurricular activity*.
 - Any classroom assignment missed due to the absence will be completed by the student.
 - If the student will be absent for 24 or more consecutive hours when the student's school is open for instruction, a classroom teacher will accompany the student during the travel period to provide the student with instructional assistance.

How families can help Finneytown Schools deal with new state attendance requirements:

Please send your child to school every day unless he or she is sick.

If your child must be absent, call to notify the school and send a note when your child returns to school.

If your child goes to the doctor, or has a court appointment or other scheduled appointment, send a note from the doctor or court stating that your child was there, along with the date and time.