

ATTENDANCE POLICY

At Empower Charter School, attendance is a priority because it is crucial to your child's academic success. Empower is a school of choice. Families who actively choose to enroll their children in the Empower Charter School have opted for an educational program that focuses on hands-on, inquiry-based learning, a dual language Spanish program, and a fitness program. This cannot be duplicated outside the classroom environment, which makes your child's daily attendance even more critical for success.

Absence from school hurts not only the student, but also the class. The success of the Empower Charter School environment relies partly upon the strength of the learning community that is developed. When the student is not in school, (s)he is missing out on critical classroom experiences, and the student's classmates are missing out on her/his contributions to the classroom community.

All portions of the school day are equally important to the student's growth and mastery of learning. When students are late to school, they create classroom interruptions, which in turn result in an unsettling experience and loss of learning for the student and her/his classmates. Early departures can also adversely impact the student's success and ability to be a contributing member of the learning community.

Finally, California is a compulsory education state. State law requires parents/guardians of children ages 6 to 18 to send their children to school. Parents who fail to meet this obligation may cause their student to be classified as truant.

Empower acknowledges the need for family time and for times of rest and rejuvenation. The administrative team has taken this into account in planning the school calendar and has included well-considered break times throughout the year. Please refer to the school calendar as a planning guide so that your child is able to be in school each day and receive the maximum benefits of regular participation in his/her classroom.

If a family circumstance arises which impacts your child's ability to be at school, please let your child's teacher or Administrative Assistant know so we can set up an independent study contract. Independent study contracts can be set up for one or more days missed, but need to be arranged in advance. Setting up the independent study contract helps ensure your child keeps up with the learning and also helps the school with funding for attendance. Independent Study Contracts are described in further detail.

Whether the absence is excused or unexcused, the state only provides daily funding to the school if a student is actually at school or an independent study contract was arranged.

The following pages summarize procedures for absences, tardies, and early releases.

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Reporting Absences

- All absences and late arrivals must be verified by a parent/guardian within 3 school days of the last day of the student's absence. Absences remaining unverified after 3 school days will be recorded as unexcused.
- The following methods may be used to verify absences:
 - Phone
 - Written note from parent/guardian
 - Email from parent/guardian
- The information below must be included during verification:
 - Notification date
 - Student's full name
 - Teacher's name and grade
 - Date(s) of absence
 - Reason for absence
 - Name and relationship of the person notifying the school.
- Each day, the school will attempt to verify unresolved absences with a phone call to contact parents/guardians. It is the responsibility of the parents/guardians to contact the school as outlined above.
- When arriving late or departing early, the parent/guardian must sign in through the school office and obtain a tardy slip to admit the child to class or an early release slip to indicate to the teacher that you have already signed the child out for the day. Once the child has been signed in, the child may proceed to class. To limit classroom disruption, once a child has been signed out, an office staff member will send for your student to meet you at the office.
- When students must be signed out by a parent or guardian or by a responsible adult who has been pre-designated by the student's parent/guardian. Empower cannot allow children the liberty to leave campus during the instructional day without properly designated adult accompaniment.

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Absences Allowed by Education Code Law (Ed. Code § 46010, 48205)

•Under California law, excused absences are only designated for:

- Student illness: A child is too ill to attend school if he or she has a contagious condition, a temperature of over 100, symptoms of vomiting or diarrhea, or written orders from a doctor to stay at home. If the child is ill 3 or more consecutive days, the school will require a note from a physician documenting the child's illness and the necessity of having the child stay home from school. Illness of other family members does not result in an excused absence for the student.
- Health/medical quarantine as may be designated by the school, county health department or medical professional.
- Medical appointments or services lasting all day.
- Failure to provide proof of immunization for school enrollment.
- Attending the funeral of an immediate family member to include the student's parent or legal guardian, sibling, grandparent, or any relative living in the household of the student. In such circumstances, one day is allowed; or three days are allowed for travel outside of California. The principal or designee may use their discretion to extend the length of an excused absence for bereavement.
- Upon request by the parent/guardian and the approval of the principal or designee, justifiable personal reasons including but not limited to:
 - appearance in court by student
 - attendance at a funeral service
 - observation of a holiday or ceremony of his/her religion.

•Excused tardies are only designated for medical appointments that cannot be scheduled outside of school hours.

All other absences or late arrivals are classified as unexcused, even if the parent notifies the school.

Whenever possible, parents are encouraged to schedule medical/dental appointments and family business during school breaks, school holidays, and other non-school times. In the event an absence from school cannot be avoided, the best course of action is to stay in close communication with your child's teachers, and provide an opportunity for the child to make up any missed assignments.

Other Excused Absences: Contracts --Independent Study (CIS)

Independent study contracts may be completed if the student will miss at least 1 school day. Requests to accommodate CIS are approved on an individual basis by the principal or designee.

- Extended educational experiences: To ensure that the student receives attendance and academic credit, the parent/guardian must confer with the student's teacher to receive the work assigned at least one day prior to the absence.
- Serious injury or illness: The principal or designee may request verification of students' condition by a physician. Students with mental health conditions must present verification from a physician and a treatment plan from their therapist. In such cases of medically related extended absence, the principal or designee may meet with the parent(s)/guardian(s) to determine the appropriateness of long-term individualized assignments.

Verification of Illness

The statewide average absence rate for typical childhood illness is 5 days per school year. Anytime a child has a doctor's appointment and/or documentation that requires the child to stay home from school, documentation must be provided to the school office within 3 school days. These absences will be recorded as "excused" and will be taken into account when reviewing the child's total attendance record.

Students who are ill in excess of school guidelines may be required to bring verification of illness from a medical professional on their return to school. If the child is under the regular care of a physician for a serious or chronic condition, or is directed to stay home by a medical professional, verification is to be provided to the school office at the time of the absence. Absences for excessive illnesses that are not verified with official documentation will be marked unexcused and may subject the student and/or parents to School Attendance Review Team (SART).

Chronic Illness

Personal illness which reoccurs on a frequent basis will require a doctor's certification.

If your child has a diagnosed chronic illness, you must provide a physician's authorization in order for these recurrent absences to be excused. Such authorization requires the treating physician to verify the diagnosis and list symptoms that would require the child to stay home from school but not necessitate an office visit. With this authorization, the parent may send a note when the child returns to school listing one or more of the symptoms identified by the physician's report. These absences will be considered excused. Please contact the school office for additional assistance.

Excessive Absence/Truancy Notification (Ed. Code § 48260, 48262)

While Empower maintains high expectations for student attendance, we also recognize that students may miss a few days/hours during the school year due to illness or family emergencies. For this reason, Empower has established guidelines for satisfactory student attendance. In the event that students fall short of these guidelines, written attendance letters will be sent to the student's parent/guardian.

These letters are to reinforce the parent/guardian's awareness of potential attendance problems and represent the first steps in the attendance review process. Subsequent portions of this process may include mandatory SART meetings, development of an attendance action plan, and attendance contracts. Please note that the school will take extenuating/emergency family circumstances into account when interacting with the SART.

If these remedies remain unsuccessful, the parent/guardian may be scheduled to appear before the district's School Attendance Review Board (SARB). A SARB panel is made up of representatives from the school district, along with members of public and community agencies that serve youth and families, such as police and probation officers, medical doctors and others. This panel examines the attendance situation and develops an individual plan with the student and family to end absences. This plan is a legally-binding contract, and the panel does have the authority to recommend a citation to court or referral to the Department of Probation for further attention.

Attendance guidelines have been established as follows:

Unexcused Absences

An unexcused absence is an absence or tardy more than 30 minutes that is not defined as an excused absence.

- If a student incurs 3 unexcused absences, the parent/guardian will receive a letter documenting the child's attendance. An appointment or other form of contact will be made with the child's teacher to identify the cause of such absences and to discuss how the school can work with the family to support the child's success in school, including regular attendance.
- Upon incurring the 5th unexcused absence, the parent/guardian will receive a second letter documenting the child's attendance and an appointment with SART will be scheduled to discuss the child's continued absence and develop an attendance improvement plan for the student.
- Upon incurring the 7th unexcused absence, the parent/guardian will receive a phone call setting up a meeting with SART. At the meeting, a third letter documenting the child's attendance will be given. An attendance contract will be given as well.

- Upon incurring the 10th unexcused absence, the parent/guardian will receive the SART violation letter, indicating that the district may be contacted to set up a SARB hearing. Parent/guardian may receive notification for a SARB hearing, which states the student as a habitual truant and contains the scheduled appointment with the district SARB.

Total Absences (excused and unexcused)

- Once a student incurs 5 total absences, an initial letter will be sent to parents/guardians alerting them to their child's attendance record. The letter will request that parents/guardians contact their child's teacher to discuss the reason for these absences and to develop a plan for attendance improvement.

- After incurring 10 total absences, a second letter will be sent to parents/guardians requiring a meeting with the SART. A plan will be established to improve the student's attendance, and any subsequent absences for illness will require a doctor's verification.

The principal or designee can, at any time, request consultation and intervention by the SART for habitual absence or truancy issues.

Excessive Late Arrivals or Early Departures

As indicated throughout this document, attendance is an issue Empower takes very seriously.

Students who are regularly arriving late to school or leaving early are also at risk of poor academic performance. For students who are habitually missing a portion of the instructional day, notification letters will be sent as outlined above, following the thresholds outlined below:

- Students incurring 6 tardies will receive an attendance update letter.

- Students incurring 9 tardies will receive a letter requesting a meeting with the child's teacher. An attendance improvement plan will be discussed.

- Students incurring the 12th tardy will generate the need for a review of parents' attempts to implement the attendance improvement plan as agreed by parents, teacher and principal. Upon recommendation of the principal, Empower's SART will become involved in the review of student attendance, which may include a meeting with the student's parents/guardians.

- Subsequent attendance issues may be referred to Empower's SART.

Families are also reminded that the Empower curriculum embraces a wide variety of integral subject matter and teachers spend a significant amount of time to ensure that all portions of the school day are equally important to the student's growth and mastery of learning. When a student leaves early, the student is missing out on integral learning experiences, which adversely impact the student's success and her/his ability to be a contributing member of the learning community.

Accordingly, if a student develops patterns of early departure, parents will be scheduled to meet with the teacher, principal, and the SART to develop an attendance improvement plan.

Again, our goal is to have your child in school for each full day of instruction.

Students Classified as Truant.

Truant students and their parents are in violation of California law and are subject to prosecution and other penalties. When school attendance is a problem, parents may be requested to accompany their child to school and attend classes with the child as a part of the student's attendance improvement plan. Parent participation in the child's classroom can reinforce understanding of what the child is missing each day that the child is not in school.

When a student is truant or has excessive absences, the parents and the child may also be required to meet with Empower's School Attendance Review Team (SART). This Review Team is appointed by the principal and may include the principal (or designee), a credentialed teacher, and attendance clerk. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the child's attendance record and to consider options for the child's regular participation in an educational program.

If a child's school attendance does not improve after such counseling or meeting, or if the parents fail to attend a required attendance review meeting, the parents and the child may be referred to the district SARB. The parent is advised in advance that SARB has the authority to refer non-responsive cases to the District Attorney's Office for prosecution through the court system. Students 12 years of age and older may be referred to the Juvenile Court for adjudication.

First and foremost, Empower's goal is to educate children. We, and our students, cannot be successful in this endeavor if children are not in class on a regular basis.

Options for Students Unable to Attend School

Students who are unable to attend school for an extended period of time due to serious injury or illness may be eligible to receive independent study contracts during the period of absence.

Children who are absent due to shorter term illness should rest and recuperate so that they may return to school as soon as they are able. When reasonable, parents are encouraged to work with teachers to support the student's completion of missed work within a practical period of time. An independent study contract may be arranged.

While families are asked to arrange for vacations and non-medical absences during school breaks, holidays, and other non-school periods, if you know your child must be absent, please contact the teacher or principal in advance for assistance in obtaining makeup schoolwork for your child and arranging an independent study contract.

If your child is regularly unable to attend school or participate in scheduled classroom activities for reasons that are not health related, a conference should be scheduled between the parent and

principal to determine if Empower is the most appropriate academic placement for your student.

Dis-enrolling Students

A student is dis-enrolled when a parent/guardian notifies the school that their child is no longer attending the school or if an official request for transfer is made by another school.

When students are not dis-enrolled as described above but stop attending, the office staff will take the usual steps outlined above to verify the absences. After 10 days of consecutive unverified absences and no communication from the parent/guardian, the student will be removed from the school roster. The date of dis-enrollment will be the student's last day of attendance at the school.