

Attendance and Punctuality Policy

Regular and prompt attendance is **expected and vital** to each scholar's success at STAR Academy. Attending school every day, on time, and for the full day is a key factor in academic achievement. Tennessee law requires children to attend school daily, and STAR Academy fully enforces MSCS attendance policies and state compulsory attendance laws.

Authorized Pickup & Emergency Contacts

- Students will **only** be released to individuals listed on their **authorized pickup list**. All pickup adults must be prepared to show **photo ID**.
- If someone other than the usual pickup person will be arriving, the school must receive **advance written notice** or confirmation from the parent/guardian.
- Parents must ensure that **emergency contact information is current and accurate**.

Parent Responsibility

It is ultimately the parent/guardian's responsibility to ensure their child attends school on time each day. We ask that appointments and family trips be scheduled outside of school hours whenever possible to minimize absences. If your child must be absent or tardy, you **must provide a written note to the Main Office** explaining the reason, or the absence/tardy will be considered unexcused (remember: **"No note = Not excused."**)

Definition of Excused vs. Unexcused Absences

In accordance with MSCS Policy 6011, only certain reasons are considered **excused absences**:

- **Personal illness or injury** of the student (a doctor's note may be required if absences are excessive).
- **Illness or incapacitation of a family member** that requires the student's help/care (limited to 2 days, unless approved for more).
- **Death of an immediate family member**.
- **Medical or dental appointments** (documentation from the health care provider is required).
- **Observance of a religious holiday** or event consistent with the student's faith.
- **Required court appearances** or legal mandates (court note required).

- **Extenuating circumstances** such as unique family emergencies or extraordinary situations approved by the principal.
- **Deployment of a military parent/guardian:** a student may receive excused absences for a parent's deployment-related events (one day for deployment departure, one day for return, and up to 10 days for rest and recuperation visits during deployment). Prior written request may be required for these.
- **School-sponsored activities or academic competitions** away from campus (with prior approval).

All other absences are generally **unexcused**. Family vacations during school days, sleeping in, traffic, or parent convenience are **not** excusable reasons.

If your child is absent, please **send a note within 2 days (48 hours)** of the student's return to school explaining the absence. An **official note from a medical doctor** is preferred when applicable. The note should include the student's name, your name, dates of absence, and the specific reason. Without a timely note, the absence will be marked unexcused. The school administration reserves the right to require a doctor's note for any absence, especially if absences become frequent.

Tardiness and Early Check-outs

School begins at 8:00 AM. Students arriving after 8:00 AM are considered **tardy**. Students who arrive on campus at 11:00 a.m. or later, without an excused reason, are considered absent for the day and will not be allowed to enter as they are already absent for the day.

We understand that occasional emergencies happen, but **chronic tardiness is not acceptable**. Instruction begins promptly at 8:00 AM; a student who is frequently late misses essential learning and causes disruption on arrival.

- After **5 unexcused tardies in a nine-week term**, the student will receive an **in-school suspension (ISS)**, and the parent will be contacted by an administrator. A pattern of excessive tardies may require a parent-principal conference to create an attendance improvement plan.
- **5 or more unexcused tardies in one term may jeopardize the student's enrollment at STAR Academy.** We take punctuality very seriously as part of our commitment to excellence.
- If your child has a **morning medical appointment**, please try to bring them to school by **10:30 AM** so they can be included in the official attendance and lunch count. Always provide a doctor's note upon arrival to have the tardy excused; without proper documentation, the late arrival will count as an unexcused absence for the morning.

Early Check-outs: We strongly discourage early pick-ups during the school day, as they disrupt learning. If an early dismissal is absolutely necessary (e.g., for a doctor's appointment that cannot be scheduled after school), it must occur **before 1:15 PM** on Monday–Friday. Early check-outs are not permitted after 1:15 PM except for true emergencies. After three (3) unexcused early check-outs in a nine-week period, the parent will receive a communication from the administrative personnel. Plan routine appointments after 3:30 PM whenever possible.

Students will be marked **absent for a half-day** if they check out before or arrive after 11:00 AM. Always sign your child out through the front office and be prepared to show ID. Only persons listed on the student's authorized pickup list will be allowed to check out the student (written permission from the parent is required for any exceptions).

Absence Notification and Makeup Work

If your child is going to be absent, please notify your child's teacher or call the school office that morning to inform us. However, a phone call alone will not excuse the absence – a written note is still required. For extended absences of 2+ days, you may request homework assignments from the teacher via email or through the office.

When a student has an **excused absence**, they will be given the opportunity to make up missed work without penalty. The student will have at least the same number of days they were absent to complete and submit makeup work (for example, if absent 2 days, the student gets 2 days to make up work). It is the student's responsibility (with parent support) to check with teachers about any missed assignments or tests. For **unexcused absences**, makeup work may be given at the teacher's discretion; however, unexcused absences may result in zeros for missed work. Regular attendance is always the best policy.

Truancy Prevention and Consequences

STAR Academy, in coordination with MSCS, works to prevent truancy (unlawful or unexcused absences) through early intervention. **Truancy** is defined as an absence without valid excuse – this includes missing an entire school day or skipping any part of the school day without permission.

To prevent truancy, we will utilize progressive interventions when students begin to accumulate unexcused absences:

- **After 3 unexcused absences** (total, not necessarily consecutive), the school will notify parents by phone or letter and may schedule a meeting to discuss attendance concerns and develop a plan. You may also receive an Attendance Notice reminding you of the importance of regular attendance.

- **After 5 unexcused absences**, the student is considered *habitually truant* under Tennessee law. MSCS policy requires that we notify the parent/guardian in writing that the student has five unexcused absences and is now subject to the district's **progressive truancy interventions**. These interventions may include an individualized attendance contract, counseling, or other supports to improve attendance. The notice will also warn that continued unexcused absences could result in a referral to juvenile court. (Note: The five unexcused days **do not** have to be consecutive.)
- **Referral to Truancy Court:** If interventions fail and unexcused absences continue beyond the initial interventions, the case may be referred to the MSCS School Attendance Review Team and ultimately to Juvenile Court for truancy. We view legal action as a last resort, but MSCS will pursue it when necessary in compliance with T.C.A. §49-6-3007.

Additionally, per our attendance policy, if a student is absent **ten (10) school days** without excuse, the student will be considered excessively absent and **will be dropped from our enrollment**. After 10 unexcused absences, we are required to report the case for truancy prosecution under state compulsory attendance law. This means the case could be referred to Juvenile Court and even to the District Attorney's office for legal action for educational neglect. We hope to never reach that point with any STAR family – please communicate with us and work together on any attendance issues before they escalate.

Finally, please note that if a student accumulates excessive absences (excused or unexcused) that impact academic progress, the school may require a doctor's note for each subsequent absence or take other steps to ensure the student does not fall behind. Excessive absences can also factor into retention decisions (see **Promotion and Retention** section).

Special Attendance Circumstances

- **Illness During the School Day:** If a scholar becomes ill during the day, the school nurse or office will contact the parent/guardian to pick the child up. Please ensure we have updated emergency contacts in case you are unreachable. Sick students must be signed out through the office.
- **Hospital/Homebound Services:** If a student has a serious medical condition requiring them to miss school for an extended period (10 or more consecutive days), the parent should contact the school about applying for homebound instruction through MSCS. A doctor's certification will be required for eligibility.
- **Homeless Students:** Students who are experiencing homelessness (as defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act) have special protections regarding attendance and enrollment. **Homeless students will be provided the same free, appropriate public education as other students**, and will not be penalized for attendance issues related to their housing situation. If your family lacks a fixed, regular,

and adequate nighttime residence, please inform our school counselor or principal. We will connect you with the MSCS Homeless Liaison. Homeless students have the right to **immediate enrollment** even without normally required documents, the right to continue attending their school of origin if in the child's best interest, the right to transportation assistance, and the right to receive comparable services (including meals and Title I support). These rights will be explained and honored without delay.

- **Students in Foster Care:** If a student is in foster care, they are entitled to stability in school placement. We will coordinate with the Department of Children's Services to ensure foster children can remain in their school of origin when feasible, or to enroll immediately in our school if they enter foster care in our zone. Additionally, MSCS policy requires schools to notify the Department of Children's Services if a foster child is at risk of a suspension of 10 days or more or if a petition is filed for truancy or expulsion, so that the child's caseworker is involved in the process.

School Arrival and Dismissal Procedures

STAR Academy Charter School is a Car-Rider Only Campus – No Transportation Services Provided

Safety, efficiency, and respect are the priorities for our arrival and dismissal routines. These procedures are designed to maintain a secure and structured environment for our scholars. We ask that all parents and guardians follow the established guidelines to ensure every child enters and leaves campus safely and calmly each day. **Patience, punctuality, and cooperation are expected.**

Morning Arrival Procedures

- **Drop-Off Window:** School doors will **open promptly at 7:30 AM**. Students may not enter the building before that time.

Parents are expected to remain with their child(ren) until doors open. Staff supervision is not available before 7:30 AM.

- **Car Line Route:** All car riders must be dropped off through the morning car line at the **designated drop-off zone via Allen Road**. Follow traffic signs and staff directions to ensure an efficient flow of vehicles.

Do not drop students off in the street or parking lot. No student should ever walk across the parking lot or traffic lanes alone.

- **Stay in Vehicle:** For efficiency and safety, drivers should remain in their cars. A staff member or School Resource Officer (SRO) will assist younger students in exiting

vehicles. If your child requires extra time, you may be directed to pull forward out of the flow of traffic. The car line closes promptly at **7:45 AM**.

- *The Allen Road entrance will be closed for security after 8:00 AM. Students arriving late must check in through the main entrance.*
- **No Cell Phones While Driving:** To protect all students and staff, **cell phone use while driving on school property is strictly prohibited**. This includes calls, texting, or using devices in the drop-off or pick-up lines. Please also lower music volume when approaching school staff.

Failure to comply with this safety requirement may result in a citation or restriction from the car line.

- **Follow Staff and SRO Instructions:** Staff and School Resource Officers are stationed to direct traffic, assist students, and ensure safety. Please obey all signals and instructions. At no time should a driver pass other vehicles or deviate from the traffic pattern.
- **Tardy Procedure:** Students are considered **tardy after 8:00 AM**. Frequent tardiness will result in parent notification and disciplinary consequences. See the attendance policy for full details.

By following these procedures, morning arrival runs smoothly and all students can begin the day safely and on time.

Afternoon Dismissal Procedures

- **Dismissal Time:** Regular dismissal begins at **3:15 PM** and ends at **3:40 PM**. All students are expected to be picked up during this window.

Students who are not picked up by 3:45 PM will be marked as late pickups. Continued late pick up will possibly result in a student's attendance at Star Academy being revoked.

- **Car Line Route:** Afternoon pick-up operates through **James Road** for K–8 single students and through **Allen Road** for Pre-K students and multi-student carpools.
 - *James Road entrance:* Use for **K–8 single riders**. Approach from the east (Stage Road) and use hazard lights to signal STAR Academy pickup to traffic officers.
 - *Allen Road entrance:* Used for **Pre-K students and carpools** with siblings. Follow staff directions to ensure your child is guided to the correct pickup area.
- **Student Identification Tags:** Each family receives a **car tag or ID sign** to display on the dashboard or rearview mirror. This allows staff to call your child quickly and keep traffic moving. If you need extra tags or replacements, contact the main office.

- **Pick-Up Zone Procedures:** Students will be loaded into cars from the **passenger (right) side only**. Please ensure that the right side of your vehicle is clear of car seats or other obstructions.
- **No Parking or Walk-Ups:** To maintain safety, **parents may not park and walk up to retrieve students** during dismissal. All pickups must occur through the car line unless you have an authorized appointment in the office.
- **No Conferences During Dismissal:** Staff will not conduct parent-teacher meetings or hold conversations during dismissal. If you need to speak with a staff member, please wait until dismissal has ended or schedule an appointment.
- **No Cell Phones & Campus Speed Limit:** Cell phone use is prohibited during pickup. **The campus speed limit is 5 mph.** Drivers must remain alert and follow all staff and SRO instructions.
- **Late Pick-Up:**
 - Students not picked up by **3:35 PM** will be supervised briefly and marked as **late pickups**.
 - A **15-minute grace period** is extended until **3:45 PM**.
 - Any student still on campus **after 3:45 PM** will be placed in the care of the **School Resource Officer (SRO)** and escorted to the **local police station**, where the child must be retrieved by a parent or legal guardian with proper ID.

⚠ Repeated late pickups may result in administrative action and/or required enrollment in the school's Y-Care program.

Late Pickup Protocol

- **3:30–3:45 PM:** Students not yet picked up will be supervised by staff in a designated dismissal area. Parents will be contacted.
- **3:30 PM:** Students are officially considered **late pickups**. Staff will attempt to reach emergency contacts if the parent cannot be reached.
- **3:45 PM:** Students still on campus will be released to the SRO and transported to the **local precinct**.

This policy is in place for the legal and physical safety of the child. STAR Academy staff are not authorized to supervise children beyond operational hours.