

STUDENT ATTENDANCE PROTOCOL FOR GWINNETT COUNTY

**In Response to
O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.2 and State Board of Education Rule 160-5-1-.10
With References to
Mandatory Education Law O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.1**

Chief Judge of Gwinnett Superior Court
The Honorable Judge George Hutchinson

Gwinnett County Public Schools
Dr. Calvin J. Watts
Superintendent

Buford City Schools
Dr. Robert Downs
Superintendent

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Table of Contents

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. Points of Reference	3
A. O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.1.	3
B. O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.2.	3
C. State Board of Education Rule 160-5-.10	3
II. Definitions for Attendance Protocol	3
A. Truant	3
B. Unexcused Absences	3
C. Excused Absences	3
D. Students Counted Present	4
E. Early Checkouts	4
F. Grades and Absences	4
III. Parental/Student Notification of Attendance Requirements	4
IV. Local School Actions/Notification of Attendance Requirements	5
V. SARC Actions and Notifications	6
VI. School Social Worker Actions and Notifications	7
VII. Involvement	7
VIII. Other Agencies Involved with Attendance Protocol	8
A. Juvenile Court	8
B. District Attorney's Office	8
C. Solicitor-General's Office	8
D. Gwinnett County Health Department	8
E. Depart of Family and Children's Services	8
F. Family Connections	8
G. View Point Health	8
H. Listing of Committee Members	9

I. POINTS OF REFERENCE

- A. **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.1.** Mandatory education for children between the ages of six and 16.
- B. **O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.2.** The Chief Judge of the superior court for each county shall establish a student attendance protocol committee for its county. The purpose of the committee shall be to reduce the number of unexcused absences from school and to increase the percentage of students present to take state-mandated tests.
- C. **State Board of Education Rule 160-5-.10** governs student attendance.

II. DEFINITIONS FOR ATTENDANCE PROTOCOL

- A. **Truant.** Any child who is subject to compulsory attendance who has ten or more unexcused absences during a calendar school year.
- B. **Unexcused Absences** occur when the student fails to attend school, with or without the knowledge of the parent/legal guardian, for reasons other than those specifically outlined as excused absences.
- C. **Excused Absences** may occur under the following circumstances:
 - When a personal illness or attendance in school endangers a student's health or the health of others. Documentation may be required within five days of student's return to school.
 - A serious illness or death in a student's immediate family necessitating absence from school. Documentation may be required within five days of student's return to school.
 - A court order by a government agency, including pre-induction physical examinations for service in the Armed Forces mandating absence from school.
 - Observing religious holidays which necessitate absence from school. In some instances, documentation may be requested.
 - Conditions rendering attendance impossible or hazardous to student health or safety.
 - An absence not to exceed one day for registering to vote.
 - Out-of-school suspensions.
 - Visiting with a parent or legal guardian prior to or during leave from deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting as a member of the Armed Forces or the National Guard (maximum of five school days per year).

- D. **Students Counted Present** applies to students who are not in school but are marked present for the day when participating in specific activities.
- Students will be counted present when they are serving as pages of the Georgia General Assembly.
 - Students who are in a foster home or otherwise in the foster care system under the Department of Family and Children Services will be counted present when attending court proceedings.
 - Full time students participating in the Student Teen Election Participant (STEP) program, not to exceed two days per school year. (State BOE Rule 160-5-1-10)
- E. **Early Checkouts** occur when a student is removed from class and leaves school prior to the official end of the school day with a parent or legal guardian.
- To be considered in attendance for a school day, the student must be present one-half of the school day.
 - At the time the student is released from school, the parent or legal guardian may be required to bring appropriate documentation showing the reason for an early checkout.
- F. **Grades and Absences.** A student's final course grades shall not be penalized because of the absences if the following are met:
- Absences are justified and validated for excusable reasons.
 - Make up work for an excused absence is completed satisfactorily.

III. PARENTAL/STUDENT NOTIFICATION OF ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS:

- A. At the beginning of each school year, the local schools will provide the parent, guardian, or other person having control or charge of each student with a written and/or electronic summary of possible consequences and penalties for failing to comply with the GA Compulsory Attendance.
- B. By September 1 of each school year, the Principal or his/her designee will send the County letter to the parents/guardians of those students who had 15 or more unexcused absences during the previous school year. The letter should reference the importance of good attendance and offer support to the parents/guardian. These letters should also contain information informing parents about the State Board of Education Attendance Rules.
- C. Throughout the school year, administrators, teachers, counselors, and paraprofessionals should use every opportunity to discuss good school attendance when meeting with parents (i.e. conferences, open houses, newsletters, etc).

IV. LOCAL SCHOOL ACTIONS/NOTIFICATION OF ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS:

- A. Schools will develop and implement active, positive student attendance incentive programs to support and encourage good daily student attendance. Schools should post attendance information and expectations on the school website and throughout the local schools.
- B. Local schools will provide to the parent, guardian, or other person having control or charge of each student enrolled in the school a written and/or electronic summary of possible consequences and penalties for failing to comply with compulsory attendance. By September 1 of each school year or within 30 days of a student's enrollment in the school, the parent, guardian, or other person having control or charge of each student shall sign a statement indicating receipt of such written statement of possible consequences and penalties. In addition, students age 10 or older by September 1 shall sign a statement indicating receipt of such written statement of possible consequences for non-compliance to the school system's policy. These notices to parents will be included in the GCPS Student/Parent Handbook.
- C. Before school begins for the year, teachers will be notified of students in their classes who had 15 or more unexcused absences the previous year so they can provide positive encouragement to these students.
- D. By September 1 of each school year, the principal or his/her designee will send letter to the parents/guardians of those students who had 15 or more unexcused absences during the previous school year emphasizing the importance of good attendance and offering support. These letters will contain information informing parents about the State Board of Education Student Attendance Rules.
- E. Designated school staff will contact parents each time a student has an unexcused absence to inquire about the reason for the absence and offer support/encouragement as well as remind student/parent of possible consequences for excessive absences. **All student/parent contact should be documented in Synergy.**
- F. Local schools will notify the parent/guardian or other person having control of the student when each student has reached 5, 7, and 10 unexcused absences. Schools are required to document the date upon which the letter was mailed to the parent in the Student Information System. Schools must maintain a copy of all mailed letters.
 - When such student has **five unexcused absences**, the school will notify the parent, guardian, or other person having charge or control of the student. The notice shall outline the penalty and consequences of such absences and that each subsequent absence shall constitute a separate offense.

- After two reasonable attempts without response to notify the parent (including but not limited to phone call, letters, emails, etc.), the school may send written notice via certified mail with the return receipt requested.
- Teachers should contact the parents to discuss attendance concerns. Teachers must maintain documentation of all parent contact.
- When such student has **seven unexcused absences**, the school will notify the parent, guardian, or other person having charge or control of the student.
- After two reasonable attempts without response to notify the parent (including but not limited to phone call, letters, emails, etc.), the school may send written notice via certified mail with the return receipt requested.
- When such student has **ten unexcused absences**, the school will send a letter to notify the parent/guardian or other person having control of the student. This letter shall outline the consequences, indicating the student's non-compliance with the GA Compulsory Attendance Law. The letter shall advise parent/guardian of the referral to the Student Attendance Referral Committee (SARC).
- The school counselor or appropriate school designee should refer student to the Student Attendance Review Committee (SARC). All parent/student contact by the teacher/counselor and/or other designated school staff related to attendance should be available at the scheduled meeting time.
- The school counselor or appropriate school designee shall send SARC/SST written and/or electronic letter informing parent/guardian or other having control of the student of the scheduled meeting time.

V. SARC ACTIONS AND NOTIFICATIONS:

- A. Parents/guardians are notified via mail and/or email of the combined SST/phone of the SARC referral by the school counselor or assistant principal for attendance. Parents are requested to attend the Student Attendance Review Committee meeting (in person or via conference call). School social workers should be invited to participate as members of the committee since one possible intervention includes an official referral to the school social worker.
- B. All documentation related to parent contacts, grades, discipline problems (if any), IEPs, and other relevant information will be brought to the committee meeting by the principal, counselor or assistant principal. The Student Attendance Review Committee will develop a plan of action that appropriately addresses the needs of the student and family to assist in improving the attendance. This may include direct services from the school such as tutoring, mentoring, attendance contracts, and referrals to appropriate community social service agencies. Also, the plan should identify the local school staff that is responsible for student follow-up. **If the student is receiving Special Education services, consideration should be made to include attendance as an objective on the student's IEP.**

VI. SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER ACTIONS AND NOTIFICATIONS:

A. School social workers will notify parents of the official attendance referral and the consequences resulting from ongoing attendance concerns. School social workers shall assess the needs of the student/family to determine the appropriate intervention plan. Interventions may include referrals to community agencies to address emotional/mental health, public health, financial issues etc, attendance contracts, parent/student conferences, home visits (when appropriate). Local schools shall complete the referral for an eligibility evaluation under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, review of an eligible students Individualized Education Program and placement and/or the filing of a Complaint with the juvenile court.

B. School social workers will monitor attendance and the effectiveness of the interventions in conjunction with the school counselor and/or other designated personnel.

C. Students with unexcused absences following the SST/SARC may be referred to the School Social Worker (SSW) for additional support. The SSW shall meet with these students and contact the parents/guardians to discuss additional interventions required to improve student attendance. The SSW shall collaborate with designed local staff to monitor progress of all interventions within the specified time frame. If the individual student attendance does not improve, the SSW shall submit a CHINS referral for review to the Director of Health and Social Services. If the referral has sufficient documentation to illustrate the local schools attempt to resolve the attendance issues, the CHINS Referral shall be submitted to GCPS board attorneys for further review. If appropriate, action may be taken to hold the parents/guardians of these students responsible for violation for the Compulsory School Attendance Law (O.C.G.A. §20-2-0690.1.), as well as other laws that may be applicable. If parental responsibility is in question, the School Resource Officer (SRO), or other appropriate law enforcement personnel shall be involved to assess the possibility of pursuing legal charges against the parents. If substantial evidence of such violations exists, the SRO, or other law enforcement personnel, shall take the necessary and appropriate action warranted by the situation.

VII. COURT INVOLVEMENT

A. Upon filing a Complaint, the Juvenile Court will follow the procedures set forth in Title 15 of the Official Code of Georgia to process the Complaint and initiate Court proceedings.

B. When the child appears in Juvenile Court and either admits to the charge or is found to be a Child in Need of Services (CHINS), the court shall take action in accordance with the authority provided for the Court as set forth in Title 15 of the Official Code of Georgia.

VIII. OTHER AGENCIES INVOLVED WITH ATTENDANCE PROTOCOL:

A. **Juvenile Court.** The juvenile court is committed to developing programs and resources to work collaboratively to address truancy in Gwinnett County.

- B. **District Attorney's Office** will review a case, prosecute, and make a recommendation to Juvenile Court regarding a disposition.
- C. **Solicitor-General's Office.** Upon receipt of a warrant for the arrest of a parent, guardian, or other person in this state who has control or charge of a child or children shall prosecute that person(s) who has control or charge over the child or children which exceeds 5 unexcused days of absence.
- D. **Gwinnett County Health Department (770-339-4260)** works closely with school systems to support student attendance through:
- Clinical services
 - Community-based programs
 - Epidemiology
 - Environmental health
 - Health screenings
 - Immunizations
- E. **Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS)** works closely with school systems via school social workers to support student attendance by providing the following services:
- Diversion
 - Early Intervention Program Services
 - Parent Aide Services
 - Child Protective Services
- F. **Family Connections (770-995-3339)** maintains a comprehensive list of resources to assist families in Gwinnett County which includes but are not limited to:
- Intervention Resources
 - Teen Parents
 - Parent Support Groups and Networking
 - Individual/Family Counseling
- G. **View Point Health (678-209-2411)** (youthservices@vphealth.org) agrees to operate as the county behavioral health organization to provide information and service regarding:
- Intervention Resources
 - Teen Parents
 - Parent Support Groups and Networking
 - Individual/Family Counseling

H. **Committee Members.** As required, the agencies listed in the chart below are represented on the Gwinnett County Attendance Protocol Committee. **Each agency representative has verified his/her support of this Protocol by signing a signature page.**

O.C.G.A. §20-2-690.2 (a). Each of the following agencies, officials, or programs shall designate a representative to serve on the committee:	
Chief Judge of Superior Court	Honorable Chief Judge George Hutchinson <i>Gwinnett County Superior Court</i>
The juvenile court judge or judges of the county	Judge Robert Waller Judge Rodney Harris Judge Nhan-Ai Simms <i>Gwinnett Circuit Juvenile Court</i>
The district attorney of the county	Patsy Austin-Gatson <i>Gwinnett County District Attorney</i>
The solicitor-general of state court	Brian Whiteside , Solicitor-General, <i>Gwinnett County State Court</i>
The Department of Juvenile Justice	Victor Roberts , Deputy Commissioner <i>Division of Community Services</i>
The superintendent	Dr. Calvin J. Watts <i>Gwinnett County Public Schools</i> Dr. Robert Downs , <i>Buford City Schools</i>
A certified employee	Eric Thigpen , Executive Director <i>Gwinnett County Public Schools</i> Dr. Tinisha Parker , Executive Director <i>Gwinnett County Public Schools</i>
Local school board member from each public school system in the county	Everton Blair, Jr , <i>Gwinnett County Public Schools</i> Pat Pirkle , <i>Buford City Schools</i>
A certified social worker	Pamela Jemerson , <i>Gwinnett County Public Schools</i> Macy Black , <i>Buford City Schools</i>
The Sheriff of Gwinnett County	Kebo Taylor <i>Gwinnett County</i>

The Chief of Gwinnett County Police Department	James D. McClure <i>Gwinnett County</i>
The Chief of Police of each municipal police department in the county	Tony Lockard , <i>GCPS Office of Safety & Security</i> Mike Tusken , <i>Duluth Police Department</i> Tim Wallis , <i>Lawrenceville Police Department</i> Bruce Hedley , <i>Lilburn Police Department</i> Bill Grogan , <i>Norcross Police Department</i> Roy Whitehead , <i>Snellville Police Department</i> Cass Mooney , <i>Suwanee Police Department</i>
The county department of family and children services	Travis Moses , Deputy Director <i>Gwinnett County DFAC</i>
The county board of health	Audrey Arona , MD, CEO and Health Director <i>Gwinnett County Board of Health</i>
The county behavioral health organization	Jennifer Hibbard , CEO <i>View Point Health</i>
The county family connection commission having authority to study problems of family, children and youth	Renee Byrd-Lewis , Executive Director <i>Family Connection</i>
The court-approved community-based risk reduction program established by the juvenile court per §15-11-110	Felicia Steverson , Chief Intake Officer <i>Gwinnett Circuit Juvenile Court</i>