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 Melodie Snell Conner

Gwinnett County Public Schools

J. Alvin Wilbanks
CEO/Superintendent

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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 five 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:

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. A court order by a government agency, including pre-induction physical examinations for service in the Armed Forces mandating absence from school.

4. Observing religious holidays which necessitate absence from school. In some instances documentation may be requested.

5. Conditions rendering attendance impossible or hazardous to student health or safety.

6. An absence not to exceed one day for registering to vote.

7. Out-of-school suspensions.

8. 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.

1. Students will be counted present when they are serving as pages of the Georgia General Assembly.

2. 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.

3. 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.

1. To be considered in attendance for a school day, the student must be present for at least one-half of the school day, excluding lunch period.

2. 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:

1. Absences are justified and validated for excusable reasons.

2. Make up work for an excused absence is completed satisfactorily.

G. **Certificate of Attendance for Driver's License or Permit.**

1. Each student who applies for a driver's license or permit must submit a Certificate of Attendance to the examining station. This form must be completed by a school official to satisfy the relevant attendance requirements.

2. A student's driver's license may be suspended for having ten (10) or more unexcused absences.

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 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 a 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.

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 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.**

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 as follows:

1. 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.

2. After two reasonable attempts without response to notify the parent (including but not limited to phone call, letters, emails, etc.), the school <u>may</u> send written notice via certified mail with the return receipt requested.

3. Teachers should contact the parents to discuss attendance concerns. Teachers must maintain documentation of all parent contact.

4. When such student has **seven unexcused absences**, the school will notify the parent, guardian, or other person having charge or control of the student. This notice shall outline the consequences, indicating that if the student continues this pattern of absences and reaches 10 unexcused absences, the school will be required to make a report to the state. At that point, the student will not be eligible to obtain or keep a driver's license, losing driving privileges for one year or until he or she reaches the age of 18.

5. After two reasonable attempts without response to notify the parent (including but not limited to phone call, letters, emails, home visit, etc.), the school <u>may</u> send written notice via certified mail with the return receipt requested.

6. Teachers will refer students with seven unexcused absences to the school counselor along with documentation of their contact with parents related to attendance.

7. 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 including the referral to the Student

Attendance Referral Committee (SARC). Students with 10 or more unexcused absences are ineligible for driving privileges for one year or until he or she reaches the age of 18.

8. 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.

9. The school counselor or appropriate school designee shall send a letter informing parent/guardian or other having control of the student of the scheduled meeting time.

V. SARC ACTIONS AND NOTIFICATIONS:

A. Parents are notified via mail and/or phone of the SARC referral by the school counselor or assistant principal for attendance. Parents are invited and encouraged to attend the Student Attendance Review Committee meeting. 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. The school counselor and/or Assistant Principal for attendance will contact school social worker to discuss all attendance referrals prior to submission.

B. 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) and referrals to juvenile court.

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

D. School social workers shall refer the student to juvenile court if all other previously documented interventions were unsuccessful in improving student's attendance. Before any court referral is considered, the school social worker should have received written documentation detailing interventions implemented by the local school to intervene with students and their families, including a minimum of three (3) telephone calls (when feasible), letters and parent/teacher/administrator/counselor conferences.

VII. COURT INVOLVEMENT

A. Upon referral to Juvenile Court, the Intake Officer shall review the complaint with the following options available:

1. Dismissal with approval from the Judge
2. Informal adjustment
3. Diversion to a Citizen's Panel
4. A referral to the Department of Family and Children Services
5. A referral to the Solicitor's Office
6. Issue a Protective Order requiring school attendance

B. When the child appears in Juvenile Court and either admits to the charge or is found to be truant, the court has the following options:

1. Hold the case open for a period of supervision
2. Assign the child to probation (which may include special conditions such as programs, classes or treatment)
3. Impose a suspended sentence days (i.e., such as a child may serve a designated number of days for future unexcused absences)
4. Detention for up to 60 days
5. Commitment to the Department of Juvenile Justice

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:

1. Clinical services
2. Community-based programs
3. Epidemiology
4. Environmental health
5. Health screenings
6. 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:

1. Diversion
2. Early Intervention Program Services
3. Parent Aide Services
4. 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:

1. Intervention Resources
2. Teen Parents
3. Parent Support Groups and Networking
4. Individual/Family Counseling

G. **View Point Health (404-330-9733)** agrees to operate as the county behavioral health organization to provide information and service regarding:

1. Intervention Resources
2. Teen Parents
3. Parent Support Groups and Networking
4. 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	**The Honorable Melodie Snell Conner,** Chief Judge *Gwinnett County Superior Court*
The juvenile court judge or judges of the county	Judge Robert V. Rodatus Judge Stephen E. Franzen Judge Robert Waller *Gwinnett Circuit Juvenile Court*
The district attorney of the county	Daniel J. Porter, *Gwinnett County District Attorney*
The solicitor-general of state court	Rosanna Szabo, Solicitor-General, *Gwinnett County State Court*
The Department of Juvenile Justice	Robert Rosenbloom, Deputy Commissioner *Department of J. Justice*
The superintendent	J. Alvin Wilbanks, *Gwinnett County Public Schools* Dr. Geye Hamby, *Buford City Schools*
A certified employee	Dr. James "Jim" Taylor, Executive Director *Gwinnett County Public Schools* Dr. Kimberly Smith, Director *Gwinnett County Public Schools* Joy Davis, Principal *Buford City Schools*
Local school board member from each public school system in the county.	Louise Radloff, *Gwinnett County Public Schools* Pat Pirkle, *Buford City Schools*
A certified social worker	Chrystal Gillis, *Gwinnett County Public Schools* Elizabeth M. Lindner, *Buford City Schools*
The Sheriff of Gwinnett County	Sheriff Butch Conway, *Gwinnett County*
The Chief of Gwinnett County Police Department	Chief Charles M. Walter, *Gwinnett County PD*
The chief of police of each municipal police department in the county: Wayne Rikard, *Chief of Gwinnett Schools PD* L. R. Johnson, *Chief of Lawrenceville PD* Warren Summers, *Chief of Norcross PD* Michael S. Jones, *Chief of Suwanee PD* Randy Belcher, *Chief of Duluth PD* Bruce Hedley, *Chief of Lilburn PD* Roy B. Whitehead, *Chief of Snellville PD*	
The county department of family and children services	D'Anna Liber, Director *Gwinnett County Department of Family and Children Services*
The county board of health	Lloyd M. Hofer, M.D., M.P.H, Director Connie Russell, District Program Director *Gwinnett County Board of Health*
The county behavioral health organization	David Crews, CEO, *View Point Health*
The county family connection commission having authority to study problems of family, children and youth	Ellen Gerstein, Executive Director *Family Connection*
The court-approved community-based risk reduction program established by the juvenile court per §15-11-10	Felicia Steverson, Chief Intake Officer *Gwinnett Circuit Juvenile Court*