

Gordon County/ Calhoun City Attendance Protocol

The Gordon County/ Calhoun City Attendance Protocol seeks to address two main goals as identified by O.G.C.A. 20-2-690.2:

Goal 1: To ensure coordination and cooperation among officials, agencies, and programs involved in compulsory attendance issues in an effort to reduce the number of unlawful absences from school.

Goal 2: To increase the percentage of students present at school to take state required tests.

I. Definitions of Attendance Terms

A. Excused or Lawful absences: If a student is not in attendance for at least half of the instruction day, he or she is counted absent. Each school system identifies lawful absences based on written excuses presented by parents. The following excuses are considered lawful excuses for absences based on the State DOE rule 160-5-1-.10.

1. Personal illness that would endanger the student's health or the health of others. Local boards may require students to present appropriate medical documentation upon return to school for the purpose of validating that the absence is an excused absence. With proper verification a student may be eligible for hospital/homebound instruction as outlined in State Board of Education Rule 160-4-2-.31 Hospital/Homebound Instruction.
2. A serious illness or death in a student's immediate family necessitating absence from school. In the event of a serious illness in a student's immediate family, local boards of education may require students to present appropriate medical documentation regarding the family member upon return to school for the purpose of validating that the absence is an excused absence.
3. A court order or an order by a governmental agency, including pre-induction physical examinations for service in the armed forces, mandating absence from school.
4. Observing religious holidays, necessitating absence from school.
5. Conditions rendering attendance impossible or hazardous to student health or safety.
6. Local boards of education may allow a period not to exceed one day for registering to vote or voting in a public election.
7. Local boards of education shall count students present when they are serving as pages of the Georgia General Assembly.

Final course grades of students shall not be penalized because of absences if the following conditions are met: 1) Absences are justified and validated for excusable reasons; and 2) Make up work for excused absences was completed satisfactorily.

- B. **Tardy/Early Release:** If a student is in attendance for at least half of the required instruction time, but not the entire day, that student is viewed as tardy or as having been released early. The validity of a of reason for a tardy/early release is determined based on the same criteria as a lawful or excused absence as stated in section A. Unlawful tardies/early releases shall accumulate into illegal absences pursuant to the policies established by the state board of education and by the boards of each school system.

- C. **Unexcused or Unlawful absences:** All other absences are considered illegal or truant. If there is no written excuse presented to the school within 3 days, the absence is also considered illegal. Normally excused absences can become illegal absences if required proof is not presented upon request by school system.
Local boards of education are not required to provide make-up work for unexcused absences.

- D. **Truancy:** Once a student accumulates 5 unlawful absences, the school shall notify the parents. If the school is unable to contact parents after two reasonable attempts, a certified letter with return receipt requested shall be sent. Once the school has followed the above procedures, any further unlawful absences by the student is considered Truancy. The school shall maintain records of such contact.

II. Identification of Attendance Violations

- E. Each school system identifies truant students based on written excuses presented by parents. Valid or legal excuses for absences are based on the State DOE rule 160-5-1-.10 sited in Section IA. All other absences are considered illegal or truant. If a written excuse is not presented to the school within three school days of the student's return to school, the absence is also considered illegal. Normally excused absences can become illegal absences if requested proof is not presented upon request by the school. Illegal tardies/early releases shall accumulate into illegal absences pursuant to the policies established by the state board of education and by the boards of each school system.

III. Notification of Attendance Violations

As required by state law 20-2-690.1, school systems shall notify all students falling within the mandatory attendance law of the requirements for lawful excuses and consequences of unlawful absences by 9/1 of each school year or within 30 days of enrollment. The school shall request a signed acknowledgement from parents and students 10 year of age or older of such notification and retain for the duration of the school year. Once a student accumulates five unexcused absences, the school shall notify the parents. If the school is unable to contact parents after two reasonable attempts, a

certified letter with return receipt requested shall be sent. The school shall maintain records of such contact.

Interventions and consequences for each school level following initial notification are described below.

A. Primary and Elementary Interventions and Consequences

- Letters will be sent home for students once they have reached a specific number of days absent, either lawful or unlawful as stated in school board policy and in student handbook. Schools may require medical documentation of any absences.
- Contact, either via phone or face to face, with a parent will be made by a school representative to investigate absence reasons prior to a judicial referral to investigate causes of unlawful absences. If causes dictate, the family will be referred to an appropriate community agency.
- Students, in which unlawful absences continue following contact by the school representative, shall be referred to the Truancy Treatment Team. A contract will be developed between the TTT, the students and their parent/s or guardian/s detailing attendance requirements for the student and consequences for parents if unlawful absences continue.
- Violation of the TTT contract will result in referral to DFCS, Juvenile Court, or Magistrate Court by the designated school system representative.

B. Middle School Interventions and Consequences

- Letters will be sent home for students once they have reached a specific number of days absent, either lawful or unlawful as stated in school board policy and in student handbook. Schools may require medical documentation of any absences.
- Contact, either via phone or face to face, with a parent will be made by a school representative to investigate absence reasons prior to a judicial referral to investigate causes of unlawful absences. If causes dictate, the family will be referred to an appropriate community agency.
- Students in which unlawful absences continue following contact by the school representative, shall be referred to the Truancy Treatment Team. A contract will be developed between the TTT, the students and their parent/s or guardian/s detailing attendance requirements for the student and consequences for parents if unlawful absences continue.
- Violation of the TTT contract will result in referral to DFCS, Juvenile Court, or Magistrate Court by the designated school system representative.
- Middle school students who are 14 years of age and who shall accumulate 10 unexcused absences in one semester will also be

notified of their ineligibility to receive a Certificate of Attendance for a driver's license or permit until two completed semesters with fewer than 10 unexcused absences in each semester.

- In addition, students 15 years of age who already have a driver's license or permit shall lose those privileges if they accumulate 10 unexcused absences in any one semester.
- Each Middle school will also develop in house discipline procedures to address unlawful absences and tardies that work in conjunction with the procedures described above.

C. High School Interventions and Consequences

- Letters will be sent home for students once they have reached a specific number of days absent, either lawful or unlawful as stated in school board policy and in student handbook. Schools may require medical documentation of any absences.
- Contact, either via phone or face to face, with a parent will be made by a school representative to investigate absence reasons prior to a judicial referral to investigate causes of unlawful absences. If causes dictate, the family will be referred to an appropriate community agency.
- Students (those 15 and under), in which unlawful absences continue following contact by the school representative, shall be referred to the Truancy Treatment Team. A contract will be developed between the TTT, the students and their parent/s or guardian/s detailing attendance requirements for the student and consequences for parents if unlawful absences continue.
- Violation of the TTT contract will result in referral to DFCS, Juvenile Court, or Magistrate Court by the designated school system representative.
- High school students who are 14 years of age and who shall accumulate 10 unexcused absences in one semester will also be notified of their ineligibility to receive a Certificate of Attendance for a driver's license or permit until two completed semesters with fewer than 10 unexcused absences in each semester.
- In addition, students 15 years of age who already have a driver's license or permit shall lose those privileges if they accumulate 10 unexcused absences in any one semester.
- Each High school will also develop in house discipline procedures to address unlawful absences and tardies that work in conjunction with the procedures described above.

IV. Prosecuting of Attendance Violations

Steps for Truancy Cases

5 unexcused absences

1. Letter to Parent or Guardian

Additional Absences after letter

2. Phone Contact to Parent/Guardian, home visit by school based advocate, and/or face to fact contact with student

Additional Absences after conference

3. Referral to School Social Worker, who reviews attendance history, previous referrals (including any previous TTT involvement or probation), parental responses, student's grades, discipline, and family situation.
4. The SSW proceeds with one of the following:
 1. Conference with parent/guardian
 2. TTT referral
 3. Juvenile Court referral
 4. DFCS referral

Truancy Treatment Referral

1. Juvenile Court notifies parent/guardian
2. TTT meets with parent/guardian and student and develops an attendance contract

A No Show to TTT may result in one of the following:

1. Case is rescheduled
2. Referral is made to DFCS
3. Informal probation with Juvenile court (typically middle or high school age students)

A violation of the TTT contract may result in one of the following:

1. Referral to Juvenile Court** and/or
2. Referral to DFCS

****Juvenile Court Referral:**

A child who is adjudicated unruly for violation of the Georgia Compulsory School Attendance Law may face the following dispositions:

1. fines
2. probation
3. community service

4. change of custody
5. commitment to Department of Juvenile Justice

Where a child has been adjudicated deprived, the Court may dispose of the case in the best interests of the child, including:

1. holding parents in contempt for willful violation of the court order, including fines and jail time;
2. change in custody of the child; and/or
3. placing parents under protective orders.

V. Protocol Review Process

The Protocol committee will evaluate protocol compliance and effectiveness and suggest appropriate modifications as required by law.

The following data will be collected and shared with the Protocol committee.

- Data will be shared on the number of referrals by each school to the following resources: TTT, DFCS, Juvenile Court, and/or Magistrate Court.
- Data will be shared on number of students denied driving privileges due to attendance.
- Data will be shared by each school on the number of students missing more than 15 days.
- Data will be shared by each school on the number of students having 5 or more unexcused absences.
- Data will be shared on the percentage of improvement by students who participate in TTT, and whether or not further referrals had to be made.
- Data will be shared on the number of students with perfect attendance at each school.

Based on this data, attendance incentives and interventions will be examined and adapted as needed to address the areas identified for further improvement.

VI. Community Initiatives

Community health professionals assist the school systems by using standard medical excuse forms whenever a student is absent or late due to a medical appointment.

Other Ideas to Explore:

- Attendance Logo to be printed on various items
- Newspaper articles
- Attendance drive with PTO involvement
- Truancy Awareness Day