

# **Towns County Schools**

## **Student Attendance Protocol**

**(Revised November 4, 2008)**

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## **I. School System Procedures**

Towns County School System will monitor student attendance daily. Codes for attendance used in the student records database (PowerGrade) will be consistent between schools to indicate excused and unexcused absences, tardies, early dismissals, and in-school and out-of-school suspensions, etc. Excused absences shall be delineated by the reason for the excuse. The Towns County Board of Education will adopt policy and procedure outlining the specific steps to be taken to monitor and address the attendance of all students. Each school will create a building level procedure in accordance with this policy based on the following definitions.

### EXCUSED ABSENCE

In order for a student to have an excuse absence, a written excuse from the parent or doctor must be presented to the Attendance Clerk within three days after the absences. These excuses will be maintained in the student's attendance folder. Based on Towns County and state Board of Education policy, only the following may be considered excused:

1. A student having a personal illness such that his or her attendance in school would endanger the student's health or the health of others. In the instance of head lice, two days will be excused for treatment.
2. A serious illness, death, or emergency in a student's immediate family necessitating absence from school.
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. Observation of religious events or holidays that necessitate absence from school.
5. Conditions rendering attendance impossible or hazardous to student health or safety.
6. A period not to exceed one day is allowed for registering to vote or voting in a public education.
7. Excused status can be obtained in advance for special circumstances at the discretion of the principal.

### UNEXCUSED ABSENCE

A student is absent any time he or she is missing from school or from any assigned class or school activity for reasons other than those stated above and/or has not provided a valid written excuse within three days.

Parents may provide up to five (5) written notes for absences per semester for reasons listed under "EXCUSED ABSENCES". Written notes after five will be considered unexcused unless reviewed by the principal and excused at his/her discretion.

### TRUANT

Any student subject to compulsory attendance who during the school calendar year has more than five days of unexcused absences in a semester and NO MORE than ten days total during the school year is considered truant.

### TARDY

A student is tardy when he or she arrives unexcused at an assigned place after the designated time.

### EARLY DISMISSAL

An early dismissal is when a student is checked out before the end of the school day.

Repeated or habitual tardiness and early dismissals are disruptive to the orderly instructional process. Teachers and/or principals shall have the discretion to take corrective action such as detention, ISS, silent lunch, etc.

### SATURDAY SCHOOL

School is provided on Saturday for students to make up time missed during the regular school schedule due to tardies and absences.

### IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION

Removal of a student from their regular classes and assignment of the student to a location isolated from their peers.

### HOSPITAL/HOMEBOUND

A hospitalized or homebound student who receives as much as three hours of instruction per week from a certified hospital/homebound teacher may be counted present at the school for that week.

### NOTIFICATION OF PARENTS

Upon enrollment and registration each school year, parents/guardians shall be given notice of State Compulsory Attendance Law pursuant to O.C.G.A. Code 20-2-690.1 and Towns County Board of Education school attendance policy. The school will make reasonable efforts to ensure receipt and comprehension of the policy by requesting signatures from parents/guardians that this notice was received and understood. At the middle and high schools, students will also receive this notice and provide signature. At the elementary level, this notice will be received by students who have reached age ten (10) or above by September 1 of that school year. This notice should also be included in each school's Code of Conduct.

### ATTENDANCE SUPPORT TEAM

Each school will establish an Attendance Support Team (AST) which will be chaired by the Attendance Coordinator and include one or more of the following as it's members: the principal of each school or his/her designee, School Counselor, SRO/DARE officer, Graduation Coach, and faculty having direct contact with the parents/guardians of or providing direct service to the specific student(s) to be discussed. Each school's AST

will meet when deemed necessary by the attendance protocol to discuss excessive absenteeism and will be responsible for implementing and monitoring policy to reduce tardiness, early dismissals, and truancy. Parents/guardians shall be invited, as well as encouraged, to attend these meetings. For purposes of this Protocol, the term “parent” may include any adult who has charge and control over the child, including a biological, adoptive, foster, step-parent, a guardian, or any other person who has control or charge of the child’s attendance at school. In this regard, two parents residing in the same household with the child are equally responsible for the child’s attendance at school.

Daily attempts shall be made to call parents of absent students. *In cases known to involve joint or shared custody or guardianship of a student, efforts should be made to contact all individuals with custodial rights. This standard shall also apply to steps hereinafter.*

- After three (3) unexcused absences, the principal or his/her designee will contact the parent either by phone or in writing. This serves to notify the parent(s) of attendance to date.
- After five (5) unexcused absences the Attendance Coordinator will send a letter via certified or registered mail to the parent(s) along with a copy of the attendance law mandated by the state. This letter will request the parent contact the Attendance Coordinator to arrange an Attendance Support Team (AST) meeting and will require a signature of receipt.
- After seven (7) unexcused absences and/or ten (10) unexcused absences total the Attendance Coordinator will call the parent(s) to investigate and request an AST meeting to review the case and consider making a referral.
- After ten (10) unexcused absences, the Attendance Coordinator and School Administrator(s) will make a referral if one has not been made previously.

#### Attendance Coordinator Timeline

- ⇒ Attendance Coordinator will meet with the student and/or attempt a home visit to explore the reasons for excessive absences and to recommend avenues to the student and family for addressing the cause of absences.
- ⇒ Upon review of attendance records, parent contacts made by school staff, and other pertinent information, the Attendance Coordinator will set an AST meeting to review the case and notify the parents and appropriate AST members.
- ⇒ After the Attendance Support Team meeting, the Attendance Coordinator will monitor the decisions/contract completed and take whatever actions were deemed necessary by the committee. (A sample of the Attendance Support Team Contract can be found on page 12).
- ⇒ If upon further investigation and the determination of the Attendance Support Team the student’s attendance has not improved and/or the decisions/contract terms not been fulfilled, the Attendance Coordinator will refer parent(s)/guardian(s) of students ages six (6) to eleven (11) to either the Magistrate Court for Deprivation, or to Superior Court for Failure to comply with Compulsory Attendance, and/or (c) refer the family to the Department of Family and Children Services for deprivation/educational neglect. Students ages twelve (12) to sixteen (16) will be referred to Juvenile Court for Truancy and/or (d) notify the

Department of Motor Vehicles as specified in O.C.G.A. 40-5-2 regarding denial of driving permits and/or licenses for students age fourteen (14) and (18). *(If a referral is necessary, the local Child Abuse Protocol will take precedence regarding further action.)* **NOTE: In most cases, Court referrals will be made at this point or at the next unexcused absence.** (A sample of the Court Criteria Assessment can be found on page 13).

⇒ Review end of year attendance records with each school's Principal and determine a list of active referrals for the beginning of the next school year.

## **II. Criminal Prosecution for Violation of School Attendance Law**

O.C.G.A. & 20-2-690.1 requires any person in this State who has control or charge of a child between the ages of six (6) or sixteen (16) to enroll and send that child to school, including public private and home schooling.

A child is responsible to attend school and is subject to adjudication in Towns County Juvenile Court as an unruly child for violation of the statute. If a parent, guardian or other person who has control or charge of the child *causes* the child's absence, then *that* person, and not the child, is in violation of this statute. Such a violation is a misdemeanor and carries a penalty of up to \$100 fine and 30 days in jail for each violation. The law specifies that *each* day's absence constitutes a separate offense.

### **A. Filing Juvenile Complaints**

A juvenile complaint should be filed in the Juvenile Court of Towns County against a child who is habitually and without justification truant from school. Such a child is "unruly"/truant.

For the purposes of this Protocol, habitual truancy or absence is defined as five (5) or more days of unexcused absence from school. At this point the child's circumstances will be reviewed by the Attendance Support Team. At this review the following options will be discussed:

1. Refer the child and/or parent(s)/guardian(s) to the appropriate social services
2. Request further medical documentation if appropriate
3. File an "unruly child"/truancy complaint with the Juvenile Court of Towns County
4. Seek a criminal warrant for the parent from the Magistrate Court of Towns County and/or make a referral to Department of Family and Children's Services for deprivation/educational neglect.

The Attendance Coordinator will be responsible for obtaining and monitoring compliance with the recommendations of the Attendance Support Team.

### **B. Juvenile Justice Procedures**

1. Intake Process for Juvenile Complaints

- a. The Clerk of Juvenile Court in Towns County will immediately forward a copy of all Truancy complaints to the Intake Officer of the Department of Juvenile Justice for Towns County. The intake officer will process complaints.
- b. Complaints will be entered into the Juvenile Tracing System and any past history will be assessed.
- c. The Intake Officer may contact the Attendance Coordinator for any further pertinent information.
- d. Truancy complaints will receive immediate attention and be placed on the most current Juvenile Court Calendar of arraignment.

2. Adjudication and Disposition

- a. A youth may be placed on contract and/or probation for Truancy by the Juvenile Court Judge upon receipt of a Truancy charge. At this time, the Judge and/or the Department of Juvenile Justice may request a Protective Order to ensure that the parent(s)/guardian(s) actively assist in the youth's compliance with court mandates and the youth's attendance at school.
- b. The Probation Officer will monitor the youth's attendance, at a minimum, on a bi-monthly basis. Further unexcused absences from school by youth will result in immediate sanction by the Department of Juvenile Justice. Upon adjudication for Truancy-related Violation of Probation, the Juvenile Court Judge will determine what further action or intervention is appropriate.
- c. Judicial truancy reviews will be held as the judge instructs from the date of the initial Truancy Contract/Probation Order for Truancy-related cases. These reviews will assess the youth's attendance at school and effectiveness of any services that may be involved to assist youth and/or family. All parties involved should be prepared to report on youth's progress at these reviews.

A Probation Order may be terminated by the Juvenile Court Judge prior to the two-year expiration date if youth's attendance and/or progress had reached a level satisfactory to all parties involved.

C. Prosecution in Superior Court

When it is clear that the parent is the direct cause of the child's absence, a warrant for violation of OCGA & 20-2-690.1 should be sought against the parent. In other circumstances, the Attendance Support Team may, but is not required to, take into account the following considerations when recommending a criminal warrant is sought for the parent of a child:

- 1. The child is under the age of 13 years

2. The child has an illness for which the parent has not been diligent in pursuing medical attention or in seeking financial assistance to procure the proper medical attention
3. The parent is absent from the home or neglectful to an extent that it hinders the child's willingness or ability to attend school
4. The child is a deprived child.

The child and parent/guardian MUST comply with the Attendance Support Team's recommendations. Failure of the child or parent to comply with the recommendations, including, but not limited to, further unexcused absences from school, will result in juvenile adjudication of the child and/or criminal prosecution of the parent/guardian. In any event, if the child accumulates ten (10) or more unexcused absences in any school year, the Attendance Coordinator will file a juvenile complaint and/or apply, via the School Resource Officer, for a criminal warrant for violation of mandatory school attendance laws. When a parent/guardian is prosecuted, regular school attendance will be assigned as a condition of bond.

### **III. Community Support**

#### **A. Law Enforcement**

Each school in Towns County has access to either on-site or within minimal driving distance, an employee of the Towns County Sheriffs Department. These individuals are certified peace officers designated as "School Resource Officers." In support of improved school attendance, the School Resource Officers shall:

- ❖ Attend Attendance Support Team meetings, as appropriate
- ❖ Forward complaints against parents directly to the Sheriff's Department regarding compliance with mandatory attendance laws
- ❖ Honor any applicable school-related transportation basis, transport truant students to school.

#### **B. School Health Services**

Each school in Towns County has access to licensed staff available to serve students via an on-site clinic. Our Health Services staff shall:

- ❖ Be responsible, in cooperation with other staff, for the final determination at each school regarding when a child should be sent home early for the day, due to health related concerns, and excusing any resulting absences.
- ❖ Be available to parents for preliminary verification to the school of illness pending an appointment with a physician and advocate with physician's offices for timely appointments, as appropriate
- ❖ Follow any orders written by students' physicians regarding medication or other medical treatment to be provided during school hours.
- ❖ Coordinate immunization evaluations for Kindergarten registration and Scoliosis screens for students provided through Public Health

- ❖ Work in conjunction with Teachers, School Administrators, and Public Health to promote general health and safety for students, school staff, and the community.

C. Public Health

The Towns County Health Department is an integral partner in community health related to school readiness, attendance, and success. Towns County Health Department shall:

- ❖ Continue to support and promote Towns County Health Services
- ❖ Provide immunization evaluations, immunizations, and immunization records required for school enrollment
- ❖ Provide Scoliosis screens for students
- ❖ Provide various medical, dental, and prescription services, referrals, and education to students and families in Town County to promote personal and community health.

D. Mental Health

Avita Community Partners offer crucial support for the mental, physical, and emotional well being of students and their families, including individual and group sessions on-site at the schools for student clients of Towns County. In support of this Protocol, Avita Community Partners shall:

- ❖ Notify and/or refer student clients to the School Counselor or Attendance Coordinator when efforts to conduct individual or group sessions at school repeatedly fail, due to absences.
- ❖ Coordinate and host regular Emergency Staffing Committee meetings, which facilitate support and treatment planning for at-risk youth, including students who are truant.
- ❖ Attend court proceedings, when appropriate, for cases involving truancy and support any court orders for treatment of emotional or family issues contributing to absences.
- ❖ Offer clinical support, when possible and appropriate, to any truancy prevention or treatment programs instituted.

*In accordance with state and federal laws related to confidentiality, Avita Community Partners and Towns County Schools shall, as appropriate, obtain releases of information to allow communication as outlined above.*

E. Department of Family and Children Services

The Towns County Department of Family and Children Services often provide social services to the families of truant students. During the course of an investigation or an on going protective service or placement case the Towns County Department of Family and Children's Services shall:

- ❖ Accept and consider information related to school attendance, behavior, and performance in reports and investigations of other suspected abuse and/or neglect
- ❖ Address school attendance in departmental case plans and safety plans
- ❖ Ensure school enrollment and regular attendance for students in emergency shelter care, temporary guardianship arranged by the Department, or foster care
- ❖ Verify involvement of the Attendance Coordinator when available attendance information indicates more than ten (10) unexcused absence
- ❖ Attend court proceedings, when necessary, for cases involving truancy and/or complaints against parents/guardians related to mandatory school attendance. *Subpoena(s) should be issued to the appropriate Case Manager and/or Investigator when participation by the Department of Family and Children Services is desired.*

#### **IV. Monitoring the Protocol**

To insure the written protocol procedures are followed, the Protocol Committee will meet bi-annually, as required by law. The Committee's goal will be to improve communication between agencies, encourage inter-agency cooperation, and update the protocol as necessary. Each participating agency shall monitor and evaluate compliance with this protocol and, as needed, recommend protocol revision and implementation that best meets the needs of the community and complies with Federal, State, and local statutes, as well as agency policy.

#### **V. Steps to Prevent Truancy**

Various measures are currently being explored to address truancy from a prevention perspective.

- ❖ The Family Connections Program in Towns County serves as a pre-adjudicatory measure. This program offers a strong family lever component of intervention against truancy.
- ❖ Towns County Student Attendance Protocol Signature Sheet



**ATTENDANCE SUPPORT TEAM CONTRACT**

**STUDENT**  
NAME \_\_\_\_\_ GRADE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

**PARENT/GUARDIAN** \_\_\_\_\_ **DOB** \_\_\_\_\_ **AGE** \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL UNEXCUSED ABSENCES** \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL UNEXCUSED TARDIES and/or EARLY DISMISSALS** \_\_\_\_\_

Please check all that apply:

**THE STUDENT SHALL:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Attend school and assigned class period's everyday.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Arrive at school and every class period on time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Obey school rules, dress codes, and behave appropriately at school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Complete and return homework as directed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Attend Saturday School on \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE PARENT/GUARDIAN SHALL:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Get child to school every day on time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Do not remove child from school early without providing the school a valid excuse.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. For all absences: Contact school to explain absence, follow up with written verification by doctor/medical advisor.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Ensure homework is completed and returned by student promptly as directed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Inform school nurse about medication prescribed and taken by the child on a regular basis.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Attend meetings scheduled by the school concerning my child's attendance.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**PARTICIPATING AGENCIES SHALL:**

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  

Signature
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  

Signature

I have received a copy of the Georgia State Compulsory Attendance Law and understand its contents. Violations of the above-signed conditions may result in a referral to other agencies or the Juvenile Court System.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Student Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Parent/Guardian Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**School Representative**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**School Attendance Coordinator Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**AST Member**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**AST Member**

**COURT CRITERIA ASSESSMENT**

**Student's Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent/Guardian Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Grade** \_\_\_\_\_ **DOB** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date of AST** \_\_\_\_\_

**As of AST: Total UNEXCUSED Absences** \_\_\_\_\_

**Total UNEXCUSED Tardies and/or Early Dismissals** \_\_\_\_\_

**As of** \_\_\_\_\_ **: Total UNEXCUSED Absences** \_\_\_\_\_

**Total UNEXCUSED Tardies and/or Early Dismissals** \_\_\_\_\_

**Has Student/Parent made any progress regarding absences/tardies since AST Contract?**

**None** \_\_\_\_\_ **Minimal** \_\_\_\_\_ **Some** \_\_\_\_\_ **Significant** \_\_\_\_\_ **Excellent** \_\_\_\_\_

**Special/Unusual Circumstances**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Past History of**

**Absences/Tardies** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Intra Agency Referral:** \_\_\_\_\_

**PLAN(S):** \_\_\_\_\_ **Monitor** \_\_\_\_\_ **Letters/Phone Calls** \_\_\_\_\_ **Court Referral**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Other** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
**School Representative**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**School Attendance Coordinator**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**AST Member**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**AST Member**