

ROCKDALE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
ATTENDANCE GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES



SUBMITTED
TO THE
ROCKDALE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BOARD OF EDUCATION

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In Response to No Child Left Behind/Adequate
Yearly Progress
O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.2 and State Board of Education
Attendance
Rule 160-5-1-.10

Purpose: This document includes a protocol for addressing and decreasing the incidence of truancy in Rockdale County in accordance with the below references. This protocol reflects commitments that Rockdale County Public Schools employees have made to promote the educational progress of children and families in Rockdale County.

Facts about Attendance:

- Compulsory attendance is required for children from their sixth to their sixteenth birthdays and for children enrolled in a Kindergarten program for more than twenty days.
- The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) attendance requirement for meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) includes both excused and unexcused absences.
- It is **imperative** that local schools keep accurate data to reflect student's excused and unexcused absences.
- Parental involvement in the process is vital to improving student attendance since "parents, guardians, or other persons who have charge of a child" are ultimately responsible for that child's attendance in school.
- It is important for credibility within the community that all local schools operate under the same, consistent student attendance expectations and protocols.
- School Principals play a pivotal, primary role in improving student attendance by frequently communicating the expectations to students, parents and staff.

Applicable Definitions:

Early Check-Out – when a student leaves the school premises prior to the end of the scheduled school day accompanied by a parent/guardian or other person approved to check the student out of school.

Excused Absence - an absence which meets the established criteria set forth in the school board policy for consideration of excused absences.

Excused Tardy – a late arrival at school which meets the established criteria set forth in the school board policy for consideration of excused tardiness.

Parent - 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, or 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. For the purposes of this Protocol, immediate family members refer to a student’s parents, siblings and maternal and paternal grandparents.

Tardy to Class – a student is tardy to class when he/she arrives to class after the established start time for the class.

Tardy to School – a student is tardy to school when he/she arrives after the established start time for the school day.

Truant – any child subject to the Compulsory School Attendance Law who during the school calendar year has more than five days of unexcused absences.

Unexcused Absence – an absence from school which does not meet the established criteria set forth in the school board policy for consideration of excused absences.

Unexcused Tardy – a late arrival at school which does not meet the established criteria set forth in the school board policy for consideration of excused tardiness.

Unruly Child – a child may be determined to be unruly by the Juvenile Court if he or she is habitually and without justification truant from school.

ROCKDALE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS STUDENT ATTENDANCE POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Rockdale County School System Procedures:

School Policies: The Rockdale County School System will adopt the following procedures and specific steps to be taken to monitor and address student attendance on a daily basis:

Notification of Attendance Laws and Consequences: Upon enrollment and registration each school year, parents and guardians will be given notice of State Compulsory Attendance Law pursuant to O.C.G.A. Code 20-2-690.1 and local Board of Education school attendance policy within the school parent handbook. 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. Students who have reached age ten (10) or above by September 1 of that school year will receive this notice and will provide their signature. In addition, each school will prominently post a copy of the attendance policy in or near the front office of the building.

Attendance Support Team (AST): Each school will establish a team which will be chaired by an administrator. The team should include the School Counselor, School Social Worker, and other designated professionals as deemed appropriate by the principal. The team will meet at least twice per month during the school year to review attendance issues. The AST is responsible for implementing and monitoring policy to reduce tardy days, early checkouts, and truancy. The AST is directly responsible for reviewing all cases of students with 5 or more unexcused absences and all cases of students with 10 or more total absences.

Excused Absence: Georgia law allows a student to be excused from school for the following reasons: personal illness, illness or death in the immediate family, special and recognized religious holidays observed by the student's faith, mandates by order of a governmental agency, and conditions rendering school attendance impossible or hazardous to the safety of the student. Written documentation must be submitted to the school to validate that the absence is excused. The principal has the authority to require additional proof of the legitimacy of the excuse.

The Principal may require doctor's statements justifying the absence of the student, and may require proof that the child's condition rendered the child incapable of attending school. Once a student has been absent 10 days or more during any school year, the parent will be asked to provide written medical documentation for any subsequent absences to be considered excused. Excuses must be submitted within 3 school days of the date of absence. The school system will receive any excuses after that period but will not change the absences to excused.

General Information: Ideally, students should not miss more than ten (10) days of school each school year – five per semester for grades 9 through 12. Students served by the hospital/homebound program shall be considered present in accordance with the policies and procedures governing the administration of the hospital/homebound program. Students in grades K-8 who are absent from the same class more than ten (10) times during a school year for any reason may risk being retained when attendance is considered with other factors outlined in school policy. Students in grades 9-12 who are absent from the same class more than ten (10) times during a school year for any reason may lose course credit unless the course grade average is 70 or higher. As well, the consequences outlined in O.C.G.A. Code 20-2-690.1 still apply.

Attendance Goals:

The Rockdale County Public Schools attendance goals are aligned with the mandated state goals of the Student Attendance Protocol Committee. Rockdale County Public Schools goals reflect compliance with No Child Left Behind.

- Goal 1** *Ensure compliance of compulsory laws and develop strategies/interventions that will reduce the number of unexcused absences from school.*
- Goal 2** *Increase the daily attendance rate of every school site to at least 95% in every subgroup.*
- Goal 3** *Increase the participation percentage of students who take required state test in all subgroups.*

Activities:

1. Schools will develop and implement active, positive student attendance incentive programs to support and encourage good daily school attendance.
2. Prior to the completion of the first month of each school year, the school principal or designee will send home letters that emphasize the importance of good student attendance in reference to high academic achievement and to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements for meeting AYP to the parents of all students in their school. Those students who had 15 or more unexcused absences during the previous school year should receive additional notation on their letters of the number of absences the student had during the previous year and encouraging better attendance during the current year. Schools may want to post attendance information and expectations on the school website. It should be noted that direct principal participation in this entire process has been proven to be the most effective means to promote positive student attendance.
3. Administrators, teachers, counselors and paraprofessionals should use every opportunity to discuss good school attendance when meeting with parents at conferences, open house and/or when preparing school newsletters.
4. Before school begins each year, teachers should be notified of students in their classes who had 15 or more unexcused absences during the previous school year and provide positive encouragement to attend school more regularly. Consequences and repercussions relative to failing to maintain good attendance should be discussed with the student and parent where applicable.

At the end of each school year, the cases of all students whose absences exceeded 10 days of school, excused or unexcused, will be reviewed by the school AST. The school will consider placing each of these students, on a case-by-case basis, into an active intervention program for the next school year. This intervention program may consist of the following measures and should be in place prior to the start of the next school year:

1. A contract may be established consistent with the provisions of this protocol.
2. Assignment of a mentor to provide support and assistance in improving attendance during the next school year.

3. Monthly school team review and communication of current attendance record to parent/guardian.

Positive Reinforcements: Each school will establish an incentive program to motivate students to improve their attendance. The program may include, but is not limited to, rewards based on the following:

1. Perfect Attendance for the year.
2. Perfect Attendance for each respective term/semester.
3. Daily/Weekly/Monthly recognition for punctuality and attendance.

School systems may choose to coordinate with local businesses to acquire sponsors to support incentive programs.

Schools Responsibilities:

a. Daily – The school will make a concerted effort to contact parents each day a student is absent. Designated school staff should contact parents each time a student has an **unexcused** absence to inquire about the reason for the absence and to offer support and encouragement as well as to remind student and parent of possible consequences of unexcused absences.

b. Three (3) days absent: The school designee will make direct contact with the parent, guardian or other person having control or charge of a child when they have missed three total days of school. The attendance procedures will be explained. This action will be documented on a contact sheet.

c. Five (5) days absent: The classroom Teacher will refer the case to the school counselor. If the school has not been made aware of a reason for the absences which is included in the legal definition of an excused absence, the counselor or designee will contact the parent(s) to inquire about the reason for the absence and offer support and encouragement, as well as remind student and parent of possible consequences. If the child has had **five (5) unexcused** days of absences, a formal notification letter will be sent by the school requesting that the parent, guardian or other person in charge of the student come to the school for a conference with the Attendance Support Team to discuss the reasons for the absences and to develop an attendance contract. The contract should outline the school's expectations for attendance as well as specify the consequences for continued unexcused absences. **These consequences include the possibility of a referral to the Rockdale County Juvenile**

Court's Truancy Intervention Project, a referral to the Department of Family and Children Services for educational neglect, or to the Juvenile Court for a formal truancy hearing. A copy of the contract will be given to all parties present at the meeting.

Failure of the parent or guardian to attend the scheduled conference will result in the school's establishing the conditions of the contract and mailing a copy of the contract by certified mail, return receipt requested, to notify the parent or guardian of expectations and consequences regarding attendance.

c. Ten (10) days absent: School personnel will notify the school Social Worker (SSW) of all cases in which a student has missed **ten (10) unexcused** days. The SSW will send a formal letter of notification to the parents/guardian and may make a personal contact or visit to inquire about the reason for the absences and offer support and encouragement, as well as remind student and parent of possible consequences. Having **ten unexcused** absences will constitute a violation of any prior attendance contract. The SSW will take the action provided for by the contract. At this time, a truancy referral along with a copy of the school attendance contract and all documentation regarding this student's attendance may be sent to the Truancy Intervention Program designee. In any event, if a child accumulates ten (10) or more unexcused absences in any school year, the Attendance Support Team (inclusive of the principal or his/her designee and the social worker) may make a recommendation for the social worker to file a juvenile complaint and/or coordinate a warrant charging the parent with educational neglect.

Tardy/Checkout Policy:

A child is tardy to school when he/she arrives in class after the tardy bell. If he/she is tardy, he/she must report to the office to be signed in by a parent or guardian and a reason recorded for the late arrival. If a child has five (5) unexcused tardies/checkouts, a notification letter will be sent to the parents or guardians to acknowledge the tardies/checkouts and to encourage punctuality and full day attendance. School personnel will notify the school social worker of all cases in which the student has ten (10) unexcused tardies/checkouts. The social worker will make follow-up contact with the parents or guardians and take all the necessary actions to remediate the concern up to holding the parents of these students responsible for the violation of the Compulsory School Attendance Law. Perfect attendance recognition will not be given if a student has absences or any combination of three unexcused tardies or unexcused checkouts.

Action by School Social Worker:

School social workers will follow up with those students referred from the Attendance Support Team to assist students and families in improving student attendance. School social workers may request the assistance of the appropriate school staff in monitoring attendance. If these efforts do not result in improved attendance the school Social Worker may file a truancy petition with the Rockdale County Juvenile Court or may request that the student's case be diverted from a formal hearing into the Truancy Intervention Program or a similar diversion program.

Where a school social worker reports a parent to Law Enforcement who is willfully or otherwise failing to ensure compliance with the law regarding school attendance for their child or children, prosecution of said violation of law may be directed to the appropriate Court and legal forum that the school social worker and Law Enforcement deem in the best interests of the student based on the facts and circumstances presented; however, the school social worker shall be authorized to seek prosecution through the appropriate court and legal forum absent law enforcement involvement, at the recommendation of the Attendance Support Team. Documentation of all actions taken by the social worker and the Attendance Support Team will be maintained as a part of school records.

Extracurricular Activities:

The following procedures will be followed regarding school supported extracurricular activities:

1. Students will not participate in activities, rehearsals, practices and/or games on days they are absent from school.
2. Coaches and sponsors will ensure that all guidelines and procedures are discussed with parents and students and complied with accordingly.

Filing Juvenile Petitions

A juvenile complaint and petition should be filed in the Juvenile Court of Rockdale County against a child who is habitually and without justification truant from school.

All truancy petitions will be submitted to the Rockdale County Juvenile Court Office. A determination will be made as to whether the petition will be handled through a Court diversion program such as the Truancy Intervention Project (TIP) or a formal process of adjudication.

Adjudication and Disposition

During the formal process of adjudication, Truancy petitions may be placed on the Juvenile Court calendar for arraignment.

A youth may be placed on probation for Truancy by the Juvenile Court upon adjudication of a Truancy charge. As a result, the District Attorney 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 Conditions of Probation and the youth's attendance at school.

Prosecution for Violation of School Attendance Law

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.1(a) requires every **parent**, guardian, or other person who has control or charge of a child between the ages of six and sixteen **to enroll and send** that child to a public school, a private school, or a home study program.

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.1(a) also requires such **child to enroll in and attend** a public school, a private school, or a home study program, *unless the child's failure to enroll and attend is caused by the child's parent or guardian, in which case the parent or guardian alone shall be responsible.*

Such a violation on the part of the parent or guardian is a **misdemeanor** and carries a penalty of up to a \$100 fine and 30 days in jail or community service for each violation. The code specifies that each day's absence constitutes a separate offense. O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.1(b).

When it is clear that the parent or guardian is the direct cause of the child's absence, a citation or warrant for violation of O.C.G.A § 20-2-690.1 should be sought against the parent or guardian. The following factors may be taken into account when recommending a criminal citation or warrant be sought against the parent or guardian of a child:

1. The child is under the age of 11 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 has not actively sought assistance from community social services and resources to assist in getting the child to school.
4. The parent is absent from the home or neglectful to an extent that it hinders the child's willingness or ability to attend school.
5. The child is a deprived child.

Upon receipt of a warrant against a parent or guardian under O.C.G.A § 20-2-690.1, the District Attorney's Office will review the case and may take one of the following actions:

1. Decline to accuse the case.
2. Dismiss the charges with judicial approval.
3. Place the case in pretrial diversion with an agreement that, upon completion of terms and conditions, the case can be dismissed with judicial approval.
4. Plead the case and make recommendations to a Court of Rockdale County that it may impose one or a combination of the following: a fine, community service, jail time, probation, parenting classes, etc., as the Court sees fit.
5. Bring the case to trial in State Court and, if a conviction results, impose penalties pursuant to O.C.G.A § 20-2-690.1(b).

Driver's License

1. In accordance with O.C.G.A. § 40-5-22(a.1)(1), the State shall not issue an instruction permit or driver's license to a person who is younger than 18 years of age unless such minor presents proof to the State that he or she has received a high school diploma, a GED diploma, or has terminated his or her secondary education and is enrolled in a postsecondary school, OR the minor:

- a. Is enrolled in and not under suspension from a public or private school and has satisfied attendance requirements for a period of one academic year prior to application; or
- b. Is enrolled in a home education program.

2. In accordance with O.C.G.A. § 40-5-22(a.1)(2), the instruction permit or driver's license of a minor, other than a minor who has terminated his or her secondary education and is enrolled in a postsecondary school, shall be suspended, if such minor:

- a. Has dropped out of school without graduating and has remained out of school for ten consecutive school days;
- b. Has more than ten school days of unexcused absences in any semester;
- c. Has been suspended from school for:
 - (i) Threatening, striking, or causing bodily harm to a teacher or other school personnel;
 - (ii) Possession or sale of drugs or alcohol on school property;
 - (iii) Possession or use of a weapon on school property;
 - (iv) Any sexual offense under Chapter 6 of Title 16; or
 - (v) Causing substantial physical or visible bodily harm to or seriously disfiguring another person, including another student.

School personnel shall use their best efforts to notify any child 14 years of age or older who has only three absences remaining prior to violating the attendance requirements contained in O.C.G.A. § 40-5-22(a.1). Such notification shall be made via first-class mail.

School personnel shall report to the State Board of Education, which shall, in turn, report to the Department of Motor Vehicle Safety any child 14 years of age or older who does not meet the attendance requirements contained in O.C.G.A. § 40-5-22(a.1). Such report shall include the child's name, current address, and social security number, if known.

Work Permits:

O.C.G.A. 39-2-11 states in part that no minor between the ages of 12 and 16 years shall be permitted to work for any person, firm, or corporation unless a certificate, showing that such minor is not less than 12 years of age shall be issued by the school superintendent or by some member of his staff authorized by him in writing, in the county or city where the minor resides or, if a student at a licensed private school, by the principal administrative officer thereof or by some member of his staff authorized by him in writing. A certificate shall also be required for employment of minors between the ages of 16 and 18.

The certificate provided for shall be accompanied by a letter from the minor's school administrator indicating that the minor is enrolled in school full-time and has an attendance record in good standing for the current academic year.

The employer of a minor shall maintain a copy of such certificate and letter in the minor's employment file. Such letter shall be updated in January of each subsequent academic year during which the minor maintains his or her employment until such minor reaches the age of 18 years or receives a high school diploma, a general educational development (GED) diploma, a special education diploma, or a certificate of high school completion, or has terminated his or her secondary education and is enrolled in a postsecondary school. Any employer failing to comply with this subsection shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction thereof, shall be subject to a fine not to exceed \$1,000.00, up to twelve months imprisonment, or both, for each violation.

The State Board of Education shall provide for the issuance of a waiver or exemption from the provisions of this subsection to a minor, upon such minor's petition, if there is clear and convincing evidence that the enforcement of the provisions of this subsection upon such minor would create an undue hardship upon the minor or the minor's family or if there is clear and convincing evidence that the enforcement of the provisions of this subsection would act as a detriment to the health or welfare of the minor.

Excused School Attendance for Certain Students Whose Parents Are in the Armed Forces

In compliance with Georgia legislation, O.C.G.A. § 20-2-692.1, Rockdale County Public Schools provides for excused absences for a student whose parent or legal guardian is in military service in the armed forces of the United States or the National Guard, and such parent or legal guardian has been called to duty for or is on leave from overseas deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting up to a maximum of five school days per school year, for the day or days missed from school to visit with his or her parent or legal guardian prior to such parents or legal guardians deployment or during such parents or legal guardians leave.

Monitoring of the Guidelines and Procedures:

To ensure that these written protocol procedures are followed, the Attendance Support Team will submit quarterly summary report to the Superintendent or his/her designee.

A record of the reports will be maintained at the Central Office and reviewed upon receipt to ensure compliance with and progress of the specifics of the protocol.

An annual report of student attendance rates to the student attendance protocol committee and the State Board of Education by September 1 following each school year.

The local school system will provide a copy of the written student attendance protocol to the Department of Education inclusive of any subsequent revisions or amendments.