

Barrow County Student Attendance Protocol

2011

This protocol was created by the Barrow County Student Attendance Protocol Committee (BCSAPC) as mandated by Georgia Law (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.2). The purpose of the BCSAPC is to ensure coordination and cooperation among officials, agencies and programs involved in compulsory attendance issues, to reduce the number of unexcused absences from school, and to increase the percentage of students present to take tests which are required to be administered under Georgia law. The responsibility of the BCSAPC is to make recommendations to the Barrow County Board of Education regarding attendance policy and attendance procedures, as well as to create guidelines for collaboration between local and state agencies having an interest or function related to educational achievement and school attendance in Barrow County.

The BCSAPC has agreed upon procedures, which are intended to reduce truancy and increase school attendance. It is understood, however, that these procedures are general guidelines, and extenuating circumstances may be considered, as allowable by law, for each student and family. In addition, it is understood that each state and local agency involved must first adhere to its own policies, which were considered in the development of this protocol.

Student Attendance Protocol

I. Definitions

Absent – not being present for school or class.

Early Dismissal - checking out or leaving school or class before the designated end time. See also partial attendance.

Excused – any absence, tardy, or early dismissal for a valid reason as specified in school board policy JBD. Excuses for absences must be furnished to the school by the student's parent no later than 2 school days after the student returns to school and must state the reason for the absence. Excuses for tardies and early dismissals should be furnished upon check-in or check-out. All Excuses will be evaluated by the principal or designee to determine if the absence is excused or unexcused. Under certain circumstances, school personnel may require proper medical documentation to code an absence as excused.

Partial Attendance - any day or class period that a student does not attend the full period/day. Tardies and early dismissals are both considered partial attendance and shall be treated in a similar manner.

Perfect Attendance – anytime that a student has zero absences and fewer than 5 partial attendance days in a 9 week grading period.

Tardy – checking in or arriving to school or class after the designated start time. See also partial attendance.

Truant – Any student who has more than 5 unexcused absences in a school year. School days missed as a result of an out of school suspension shall not count for the purpose of determining student truancy.

Unexcused – Any absence, tardy or early dismissal not covered by a valid excuse as specified in school board policy JBD.

II. School System Procedures

Attendance Tracking

School personnel will monitor student attendance daily. Codes for attendance used in the student information system will be consistent between schools. Designated staff at each school shall be responsible for entering attendance data on a timely basis into the student information system using the codes designated. Each absence or partial attendance shall be classified as either excused or unexcused according to criteria specified in Board of Education policy JBD.

Excuses for absences shall be furnished to the school by the student's parent or guardian and shall specifically state the reasons for the absence. All excuses will be evaluated by the principal or a designee to determine if the absence is excused or unexcused.

Attendance Notification

By September 1 of each school year or within 30 days of a student's enrollment in Barrow County Schools, parents and guardians will be given a written summary of state laws and school board policies and procedures relative to student attendance including possible consequences for failing to comply with compulsory attendance. The summary of possible consequences shall include possible dispositions for unruly children in accordance with O.C.G.A. § 15-11-67, and the possible denial or suspension of a driver's license for a student. Parents and students age ten or older by September 1 will be required to sign a statement indicating receipt of this summary.

The ParentLinkXP system will be setup to make an automated courtesy call to the parent or guardian of every absent student daily. This call will be made for period attendance at the middle and high schools and daily attendance at each elementary school. School personnel will monitor callout reports to determine when calls are not being delivered and will notify the ParentLinkXP administrator of potential problems. School personnel will also attempt to collect email addresses from parents/guardians when available and enter this information into the student information system or ParentLinkXP for attendance notification.

In addition to the above mentioned automated contacts, school personnel use their best efforts to contact the family of a student with absences at the following intervals: 1) Within the first three absences, the parent/guardian will be contacted by the teacher(s) regarding the importance of good attendance and the parent/guardian's responsibility for documenting acceptable excuses within appropriate time lines. 2) At 5 absences, the teacher(s) will make a referral to the attendance designee (counselor, AP or principal, or other personnel identified by administration) and they will use their best efforts to make personal contact (phone call, email or conference) to discuss the reason for the absences and jointly identify solutions to the problem and send a written notification. The person making the contact should document the contact (record phone

calls, email, parent conferences and make a copy of the letter to be filed). The specific procedure for making and documenting these contacts should be addressed at the school-level.

Per Georgia Law, (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.1) school personnel will notify the parent/guardian in writing when a student has 5 absences. This notice shall outline the penalty and consequences of such absences and that each subsequent absence shall constitute a separate offense. After two reasonable attempts to notify the parent/guardian, school personnel shall send written notice. Documentation of this notice is required prior to filing legal actions against students or parents. School staff will also use their best efforts including first class mail to notify a student age 14 or older when the student has only three absences remaining before violating the state's attendance requirements pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 40-5-2 regarding the denial of driver's permits and licenses.

Attendance Referral

If absences continue and at 8 absences, school professional staff will have a parent conference and notify attendance designee. If families do not attend the scheduled conference and/or absences reach 10, a Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) will be held. At 10 absences, a referral will be made to the student services department. The referral should be accompanied by copies of all relevant correspondence and documentation. School professional staff may also make a school social worker referral for attendance whenever a student has excessive excused absences if those absences are judged to have been preventable. School social workers (SSW) will work with the student, family, school and community resources to resolve attendance problems. These services will include assessment, case management and short-term problem solving based on identified needs. An attendance contract will be developed. The case will be closely tracked for 20 days. If the student has no further unexcused absences the case will be moved to monitoring status. If unexcused absences continue, the SSW will consider additional services available in the community, including the School Attendance Review Board or Community Based Risk Reduction Programs described below. If SSW interventions are unsuccessful, a complaint shall be filed in the appropriate court of law after providing written notice to the parent/guardian of the intent to do so. The SSW may also refer cases to court after reasonable efforts to contact the family or student have failed, the family has consistently failed to comply with appointments, or the family has refused to work with the SSW. When legal action is necessary to resolve an attendance problem, the SSW should initiate the court referral as soon as possible once it is determined that the legal action is necessary. Throughout the course of any legal action, school system casework should continue because it is critical, particularly in cases where students are completely out of school, that truancy does not go unattended.

TAADRA

The principal of each middle and high school shall implement school level procedures to comply with the requirements of the Teenage and Adult Driver Responsibility Act (TAADRA) and related school board policies including the timely processing of requests for certificates of attendance and non-compliance forms. The Director of Student Services shall implement system-level procedures to comply with the requirements of TAADRA including fulfilling requests for Certificates of Attendance for students in home study programs and processing non-compliance forms for home study and private school programs.

Progressive Discipline

The Barrow County Student Code of Conduct lists the following as attendance related offenses: attendance policy violation, excessive or chronic early dismissals, excessive or chronic tardies, skipping class/school, and unexcused absence. School administrators will enforce the appropriate corrective actions listed in the code of conduct to implement a progressive discipline approach to attendance related offenses. Out of school suspensions should not be used for attendance violations as this is counterproductive.

School Health Services

School nurses will work with school personnel, Public Health, private health care providers, students and parents to reduce unnecessary absences from school. School nurses will promote good health among all students. This goal will be accomplished through services such as; 1) following any orders written by student's physicians regarding medication or other medical treatment required while the student is attending school; 2) acting as a resource to staff, students and parents in determining when a student is too sick to attend school; 3) monitoring illnesses at school and developing strategies to reduce the spread of disease; and 4) monitoring compliance with immunization and health screening requirements for students; and 5) serving as a liaison between parents, physicians, community-based health-related support groups and schools.

School Social Work Services

School social workers are available to work with students, families, school staff and community resources to resolve a full-range of problems that interfere with a student's ability to succeed in school. Problems addressed by school social workers include, but are not limited to, abuse, attendance, discipline, dropout, emotional, family, financial, and homelessness. In addition to truancy cases, school social workers also assist families when students have excessive amounts of excused absences. Services provided by school social workers include assessment, case management and referral and short-term problem solving.

System-level Attendance Team

The Director of Student Services will lead a system-level attendance team composed of representatives of each school and other support staff as needed to implement the requirements of this protocol. The system-level team will review school level plans and attendance data on as needed basis. Team members will also develop additional resources to support improved student attendance in Barrow County.

Withdrawing Students

BCS personnel will withdraw from school a student that is not subject to compulsory attendance under the following conditions: 1) the student has missed more than 10 consecutive days of unexcused absences; 2) the student is not receiving instructional services required by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); 3) the student is not receiving hospital homebound services. School personnel shall use their best efforts to notify the parent/guardian of a student who is younger than 18 years of age and not subject to compulsory if the school plans to withdraw the student. This withdrawal may be retroactive to first day of consecutive absences.

BCS personnel will withdraw students subject to compulsory attendance only after a designated member of the Student Services staff determines the student is no longer a resident of the local school system, or is enrolled in private school or home school. This withdrawal may be retroactive to the first day of consecutive absences.

III. Community Based Interventions

School Attendance Review Board (SARB)

The School Attendance Review Board includes representatives from the, Department of Family and Children's Services, Department of Juvenile Justice, a school administrator, a school counselor, a school social worker, a school nurse, and a school resource officer. The purpose of the SARB is to review truancy cases for students in grades 6-8 prior to referring students and/or parents to court for failing to comply with Georgia's Compulsory School Attendance law. The review is designed to insure that all other actions which hold promise for solving the truancy problem have been exhausted prior to going to court. The SARB hears the case brought by the school and a contract is developed with the parent and student to resolve the attendance problem.

Elementary School

Community Based Risk Reduction Program (CBRRP)

The Community Based Risk Reduction Program was established in accordance with O.C.G.A. Section 15-11-10 for the purpose of utilizing community resources in assessment and intervention in cases of delinquency, deprivation or unruliness. CBRRP partners include the Barrow County Department of Family and Children's Services, Advantage Behavioral Health Systems a/k/a Mental Health, Barrow County Juvenile Court, Barrow County Department of Juvenile Justice and the Barrow County School System. The goal of the CBRRP is to identify children and families who are at risk of becoming delinquent, deprived or unruly and develop such early intervention plans as may be appropriate to divert such children and their families from becoming involved in future court cases. Through multi-agency collaboration a case plan is developed which, if agreed to by the child and family, ordered by the court. The CBRRP partners monitor compliance of the plan for 90 days. The plan is renewable in 90 days as needed but after 60 days violations of the plan are brought to the attention of the court.

Community Interventions

LIPT

LIPT (Local Interagency Planning Team) is a multi-agency staffing team that reviews cases to determine whether or not all community-based options have been exhausted prior to recommending residential placement. Members of LIPT include representatives of the Barrow County Department of Family and Children's Services, Barrow County Department of Juvenile Justice, Advantage Behavioral Health Systems, Barrow County Schools, Core Mental Health Services, and Barrow County Family Connection. Although LIPT is not primarily designed to address attendance issues, cases in which mental illness is a contributing factor, to truancy may be appropriate for review as determined by the school social worker.

Truancy Intervention Program

School Resource Officers and other local law enforcement officers will be alert to school age children who are not at school when school is in session. As appropriate, law enforcement officers will stop and question these students. The officer will determine whether or not the student is away from school without a valid reason. If the student is skipping school and the officer is available to do so, the student will be taken to school and/or the parents will be contacted. If the student is brought to school, a school administrator will administrator appropriate corrective actions in accordance with the code of conduct and contact the parent/guardian. Out of school suspensions will not be used as a result of a student being returned to school by a law enforcement officer.

IV. 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 and sixteen 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 Barrow County Juvenile Court as an unruly child for violation of this 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.

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.

Filing Juvenile Complaints

A juvenile complaint may be filed in the Juvenile Court of Barrow County against a child who is habitually and without justification absent from school. Such a child is truant and "unruly." The Barrow County Department of Juvenile Justice receives all juvenile complaints. Complaints will be entered into the Juvenile Tracking System. The Intake Officer may contact the School Social Worker for any further pertinent information. The complaint will be immediately forwarded to the District Attorney's Office. Truancy complaints, once petitioned by the District Attorney's Office will be placed on the most current Juvenile Court Calendar for arraignment.

A youth may be placed on probation and/or given community service by the Juvenile Court Judge upon adjudication of a truancy charge. At this time, 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.

The Probation Officer will monitor the youth's attendance. Further unexcused absences from school by youth will result in filing a Violation of Probation. Upon adjudication for truancy-related Violation of Probation, the Juvenile Court Judge will determine what further action or intervention is appropriate.

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 has reached a level satisfactory to all parties involved.

Deprivation/Educational Neglect

A deprivation complaint may be filed in Juvenile Court for educational neglect. As defined in Georgia Law (O.C.G.A. § 15-11-2) a student is deprived who is without proper parental care and control, subsistence, education as defined by law, or other care and control necessary for the child's physical, mental or emotional health or morals.

If educational neglect is found at the adjudication hearing, and after the Judge hears arguments and reports in the disposition, the Judge may issue a protective order to the parent/guardian as well as order Protective Services Supervision for a specific length of time. The protective order's purpose is to protect the child from further educational neglect. After the protective order has been issued, the child's attendance will be monitored by the appropriate party as specified in the court order.

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 may be sought against the parent. The SSW may, but is not required to, take into account the following considerations when recommending a warrant is sought for the parent of a child:

- The child is under the age of 13 years.
- 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.
- The parent has not actively sought assistance from community social services and resources to assist in getting the child to school.
- The parent is absent from the home or neglectful to an extent that it hinders the child's willingness or ability to attend school.

Prior to seeking a warrant against a parent all attendance notices required by law must be documented. When possible, the District Attorney's office will expedite hearings involving school attendance.

V. Monitoring the Protocol

To ensure that these written protocol procedures are followed, the Protocol Committee will meet quarterly for a year, which will begin on the date of the protocol's adoption. The Protocol Committee will then 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.