

# **Fannin County Attendance Protocol**

## **Committee Members:**

Ms. B. Alison Sosebee, District Attorney  
Darvin Couch, School Resource Officer  
Mark Knowles, Department of Family and Children Services  
Sheriff Dane Kirby, Fannin County Sheriff  
Chief Johnny Searce, City of Blue Ridge  
Chief Michael Early, City of McCaysville  
Sherry Morris, Family Connections  
Dr. Michael Gwatney, Fannin County Schools Superintendent  
J. Lucas Roof, Fannin County Schools and Committee Chair  
Chad Galloway, Chairman of Fannin County Board of Education  
Tara Cantrell, Fannin County School Social Worker  
Richard Worsley, Juvenile Justice Department  
Holly Petty, Fannin County Health Department  
Honorable Brenda Weaver, Superior Court Judge  
Honorable Judge Keith Galligan  
Honorable Judge Jan Wheeler



Submitted to Fannin County Board of Education – May 12, 2005  
Adopted by the Fannin County Board of Education – June 9, 2005  
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## **Mission Statement**

The mission of the Fannin County Attendance and School Climate Committee is to work collaboratively with the Fannin County School System (FCSS) to improve student attendance, improve school climate, raise student achievement, foster parent/student responsibility, and provide home support with the ultimate goal of ensuring quality learning for all.

## **Causes of Truancy**

Through working closely with students, families, and community stakeholders in an effort to decrease truancy, several causes of poor attendance have been identified. Absences, tardies, and early dismissals have been related to:

- Illnesses of the child or a relative
- Doctor/dental appointments for the child or a relative
- Religion related conventions
- Family related events (e.g. weddings, funerals, emergencies)
- Family vacations
- Lice
- Inclement weather
- No available babysitting when parent/guardian must go out of town for the day
- Child simply refuses to attend and parent “cannot make them come”
- Child feigns illness
- Ballgames
- Dance classes
- Car trouble including flat tires
- Visiting grandparents
- Missed bus
- Overslept
- Injury at school
- Shopping
- Out of town
- Parent gets off work early and does not want to make two trips to pick up child
- Migraine headaches
- Power outages
- Parent wants to beat the parent pickup line traffic
- Skipping school
- Mental health problems (e.g. anxiety attacks and depression)
- Alcoholic parent/guardian so child is caretaker
- Child dawdles/does not report directly to class
- Poor organizational skills of child and/or parents
- Court appearance
- No immunization record/birth certificate
- Single parent family with discipline issues
- Parental and student apathy
- Drugs/alcohol
- Out of school suspension for discipline infractions at school

## Solutions for Truancy

The Fannin County Board of Education implements the following procedures to reduce unexcused absences:

Parental Notification- The FCSS requires that all its public schools provide the parent, guardian, or other person having control or charge of each student enrolled in public school a written summary of possible consequences and penalties for failing to comply with compulsory attendance. The FCSS notifies the parent, guardian, or other person who has control or charge of the student by letter and phone call when such student has five unexcused absences. This notice will explain to the parent/guardian that a home visit may be the next step. The FCSS notifies again by letter and phone call when such student has seven unexcused absences. This notice will outline the penalty and consequences of continued absences. At the seventh unexcused absence, the parent will be asked to meet with the Attendance Support Team.

Notification by Certified Mail- If a student reaches ten unexcused absences; FCSS will send written notice via certified mail with return receipt requested, to inform them that they are being referred to Juvenile Court pursuant to O.C.G.A. 20-2-735 and State Board Rule 160-5-1-.10.

Statement of Receipt- By September 1 of each school year or within 30 school days of a student's enrollment in the FCSS, the parent, guardian, or other person having control or charge of such student must sign a statement indicating receipt of such written statement of possible consequences and penalties.

- In addition, students age ten or older by September 1 must sign a statement indicating receipt of written statement of possible consequences for non-compliance to the FCSS's policy.

Other efforts that have aided in improving attendance are:

- Accurate record keeping
- Willingness of stakeholders to cooperate
- Use of good judgment in making decisions related to attendance issues
- Consistency for all students and parents
- Local School Board support
- Support of the Juvenile Court System
- Support of Community stakeholders
- Open communication between parents and school employees

### Definitions for Student Attendance Protocol

Exception for suspension-School days missed as a result of an out of school suspension shall not count as unexcused days for the purpose of determining student truancy.

Excused absences- The Fannin County Board of Education uses the following state approved guidelines for excusing students from school:

- personal illness and when attendance in school would endanger their health or the health of others (S.B.O.E. Rule 160-4-2-.31);
- a serious illness or death in their immediate family necessitates absence from school;

- mandated by order of governmental agencies, including pre-induction physical examinations for service in the armed forces, or by a court order;
- celebrating religious holidays;
- conditions that render attendance impossible or hazardous to their health or safety;
- registering to vote or voting, for a period not to exceed one day
- a maximum of five days per school year to visit with a parent or legal guardian prior to his or her deployment or during his or her leave to or from a combat zone or combat support posting.

The principal may require students to present appropriate medical or other documentation upon return to school for the purpose of validation that absences are excused.

Students Counted Present:

- A foster care student who attends court proceedings relating to their foster care shall be counted present.
- Serving as a page of the Georgia General Assembly

Excused tardy – This includes events that are physically out of the parent’s or student’s control such as: an accident, road closed due to an accident, power outage, etc.

Tardy - A student is “tardy to school” when he/she arrives after the 8:00 a.m. bell (High School is 8:10 a.m.). Please refer to your student’s school handbook for consequences of excessive tardies.

Tardy to Class - A student is "tardy to class" when he/she arrives to class after the tardy bell.

Truant – Any child subject to compulsory attendance who during the school calendar year has more than five days of unexcused absences.

Unexcused tardy – This includes: over-sleeping, traffic too heavy, errand for parents, delayed at train crossing, flat tires, etc.

**Consequences of Truancy**

The Fannin County Board of Education has adopted, as a part of the Student Code of Conduct developed pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 20-2-735, a definition of truancy that contains the minimum standards related to student attendance and a summary of possible consequences and penalties for truancy established in State Board Rule (160-5- 1-.10).

The Fannin County Student Code of Conduct provides a systematic process of behavioral corrections in which inappropriate behaviors are followed by consequences. Disciplinary actions are designed to teach students self-discipline and to help them substitute inappropriate behaviors with those that are consistent with the character traits from Georgia’s Character Education Program.

Included in the section “BEHAVIORS WHICH WILL RESULT IN DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES” are:

Unexcused absence, chronic tardiness, skipping class, leaving campus without permission, and failure to comply with compulsory attendance law.

The following disciplinary actions may be imposed for any violation of this Code of Conduct:

- Warning and/or Counseling with a School Administrator or Counselor
- Loss of Privileges
- Isolation or Time-out
- Temporary Removal from Class or Activity
- Notification of Parents
- Parent Conference
- Corporal Punishment
- Detention/Saturday School
- Temporary Placement in an Alternative Education Program
- Short-term Suspension
- Referral to a Tribunal for Long-term Suspension or Expulsion
- Suspension or Expulsion from the School Bus
- Referral to Law Enforcement or Juvenile Court Officials: Georgia Law requires that certain acts of misconduct be referred to the appropriate law enforcement officials. The school will refer any act of misconduct to law enforcement officials when school officials determine such referral to be necessary or appropriate.

The degree of discipline imposed will be in accordance with the progressive discipline process unless otherwise stated.

### **Grades and Absences**

Final student course grades shall not be penalized because of absences if the following conditions are met:

1. Absences are justified and validated for excusable reasons.
2. Make up work for excused absences was completed satisfactorily. Students may request makeup work at the convenience of the teacher. It is the responsibility of the student to ask for and seek out make-up work.

### **Out of School Suspensions**

School days missed as a result of an out of school suspension shall not count as unexcused days for the purpose of determining student truancy.

### **Rewards for Good Attendance**

Countywide recognition for good attendance comes in the form of Perfect Attendance certificates and T-shirts that are provided to the FCSS by a local bank.

Individual schools may include but is not limited to offering incentives to students for good attendance. Included as some of these rewards are:

- Announcing student's names and classes with 100% attendance for specified time periods.
- Placing 100% Perfect Attendance stars on teachers' doors for daily attendance.
- Giving small prizes (pencils, stickers, candy, etc.) to students with chronic absenteeism problems to encourage better attendance

- Providing plaques at Awards Day for students with six years of perfect attendance in elementary school.

### **Student Withdrawals**

Schools in the FCSS may withdraw any student who meets either of the following criteria:

1. The student has missed more than 10 consecutive days of unexcused absences; the student is not subject to compulsory school attendance; and the student is not receiving instructional services from the local school system through homebound instruction or instructional services required by the federal I.D.E.A.
2. The student is no longer a resident of the FCSS or is enrolled in a private school or home study program.

Also, the superintendent or his/her designee shall use his or her best efforts to notify the parent/guardian if the school system plans to withdraw such student who is younger than 18 and is not subject to compulsory attendance.

In addition, the FCSS shall withdraw students retroactive to the first day of the consecutive absences.

### **Certificate of Attendance**

The FCSS will issue certificates of attendance to students trying to acquire their driver's permit. During the regular school year, the Certificate of Attendance is good for 30 days after the date it is notarized. During the summer months of June, July, and August, when most schools are not in session, the Department of Driver Services will accept Certificates of Attendance that are dated near the end of school year (late May or early June).

The Certificate of Attendance should not be issued to students who have graduated from high school, have earned a GED, or are enrolled in college or postsecondary school. Such students must furnish acceptable proof of their status to the Department of Driver Services.

It is required that students obtain a Certificate of Attendance when receiving a driver's instruction permit, and obtain another Certificate of Attendance when receiving a driver's license.

It shall be the responsibility of the parent or guardian of a student who transfers from an out-of-state public, private, or home school to provide for the transmission of attendance records in order to be eligible for the receipt of a Certificate of Attendance. The official record of attendance must be received before a Certificate of Attendance can be prepared.

## **Guidelines for Attendance**

Fannin County School System Elementary Schools and Middle School guidelines:

Absences:

1. At five unexcused absences the Family Support Worker will mail a letter and attempt to call the parent/guardian.
2. At six unexcused absences the principal may choose to send the school attendance officer to the child's home for a home visit.
3. At seven unexcused absences the Family Support Worker will mail a letter to the parent/guardian. At this time, the parent will be contacted to meet with the Attendance Support Team to discuss ways to help improve attendance. After two reasonable attempts to notify the parent, the FSW will send written notice via first class or certified mail, return receipt requested.
4. At ten unexcused absences, a student will be referred to juvenile court. Prior to any action to commence judicial proceedings to impose a penalty on the parent for failing to comply with compulsory attendance law, the FSW will notify by certified mail, return receipt requested.

Tardies or Early Dismissals:

Please consult your school's handbook for consequences for excessive tardies or early dismissals.

Consequences for truancy at the school may consist of allowable forms of discipline as stated in the Student Code of Conduct. Consequences for truancy should a child be referred to Juvenile Court may include fine(s) and/or imprisonment for the parent/guardian as well as community service for middle and high school students.

# FANNIN COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

2290 East First Street  
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SUPERINTENDENT  
*Dr. Michael Gwatney*

BOARD MEMBERS  
*Chad Galloway*  
*Terry Bramlett*  
*Bobby Bearden*  
*Mike Cole*  
*Lewis DeWeese*



August 7, 2020

Dear Parents,

Please review the information about Fannin County School System's Attendance Support Team on the back of this letter. The Attendance Support Team (AST) cares about Fannin County students, and our number one goal is to help them be successful in school. We believe that regular attendance is crucial to academic success.

House Bill 1190 was signed into law in the spring of 2004 and requires that all counties in Georgia implement an attendance team. Ours has been in effect for several years, and each year we have modified our procedures slightly in order to best serve our families. One of the new procedures required by this law is that all parents and any students aged ten or over are to sign a notice for the School System that they have received the guidelines of their county's AST. You will find that letter attached to this one. Please sign it after reviewing the guidelines printed on back of this letter, and return it to your child's school at your earliest convenience.

If you have any questions about the Attendance Support Team or referral procedures, you can contact your school principal or Family Support Worker at the individual school, or you may also contact me at the Fannin County Board of Education office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Lucas Roof".

J. Lucas Roof  
Attendance Support Team Coordinator

It is the policy of Fannin County School System to not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, creed or disability in admission to its programs, services, and activities in access to them, in treatment of individuals or in any aspect of their operations to also include but not be limited to additions, modifications, or alterations to the physical plan of any school facility.

## SCHOOL LETTERHEAD

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Child's Name)

I have received a copy of the Fannin County Attendance Support Team (AST) information and understand the procedures of the AST and the consequences that may occur should my child have ten unexcused absences.

My signature on this letter does not indicate that I agree or disagree with this policy. I realize that the Fannin County School System is required by law (House Bill 1190) to obtain my signature and my child's (if he or she is age 10 or over) acknowledging my receipt of this information.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent/Guardian's Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Child's Signature if age 10 or older\*)

\*Any child who will be 10 years of age during this school year needs to sign

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August 7, 2020

Dear Parents,

Welcome back to an exciting new school year! Our students and teachers will be working hard to master The Georgia Standards of Excellence, our required state curriculum. Because this is so important, we would like to stress how critical good attendance is to a student's success. You are doing a great job as parents keeping your children in school and making sure that our students are arriving on time and remaining at school for the entire day.

There are times, however, when your children will have to miss school. When this does happen it is vital that we receive a written excuse within three days after the child's absence even if you have already called the school. All excuses should be dated, signed by a parent or guardian, and should specifically state the reason for the absence.

State law and the State Board of Education policy permits students to be excused for the following reasons:

- personal illness and when attendance in school would endanger their health or the health of others;
- a serious illness or death in their immediate family necessitates absence from school;
- mandated by order of governmental agencies, including pre-induction physical examinations for service in the armed forces, or by a court order;
- celebrating religious holidays;
- conditions render attendance impossible or hazardous to their health or safety;
- registering to vote or voting, for a period not to exceed one day; and
- a maximum of five days per school year to visit with a parent or legal guardian prior to his or her deployment or during his or her leave to or from a combat zone or combat support posting.
- A foster care student who attends court proceedings relating to their foster care shall be counted present.

Please help us follow these guidelines by reviewing them so you are familiar with them. Feel free to contact the principal of your child's school if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Lucas Roof".

J. Lucas Roof  
Attendance Support Team Coordinator

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## SCHOOL LETTERHEAD

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Our records indicate that your child, \_\_\_\_\_, has accumulated five (5) unexcused absences from school thus far this year. Regular school attendance is mandated by Georgia Law and encouraged by the Fannin County Board of Education. Fannin County school attendance guidelines require that the names of students with six (6) absences may be turned over to the school attendance officer. At the principal's discretion it may then become his responsibility to determine if the student has legitimate excuses for his/her absences or is beginning to develop a school attendance problem.

If your child has to be absent from school, please send a doctor's excuse or written explanation of the absence to the school within three days of your child's return to school. This will alleviate much of the investigation time required by the attendance officer.

If you have any questions regarding this procedure or would like to discuss school attendance, please contact the school to make an appointment. School personnel will gladly assist you in any way possible.

Sincerely,

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Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Our records indicate that your child, \_\_\_\_\_, has accumulated seven (7) unexcused absences from school thus far this year. Regular school attendance is mandated by Georgia Law and encouraged by the Fannin County Board of Education.

You should have already had a phone contact or personal contact as well as a letter contact from the Family Support Worker at school. You may even have had a home visit from the school attendance officer. Following the receipt of this letter, you will be invited to attend an Attendance Support Team meeting to determine how the school system can best work with you to improve your child's attendance.

Once again, if your child has to be absent from school, please send a doctor's excuse or written explanation of the absence to the school within three days of your child's return to school. A phone call from you to your child's teacher or the Family Support Worker will also help us to understand your child's individual situation.

If you have any questions regarding this procedure or would like to discuss school attendance, please contact the school to make an appointment. School personnel will gladly assist you in any way possible.

Sincerely,

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