



Rockdale County Public Schools

Attendance Guidelines and Procedures

Revised by the Rockdale County Attendance Protocol Committee May 2022

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Section 1: Statement of Purpose

This document includes a protocol for addressing and decreasing the incidence of truancy in Rockdale County in accordance with the references below. This protocol reflects commitments that Rockdale County Public Schools employees have made to promote the educational progress of children and families in Rockdale County. Policies and procedures have been crafted as a reflection of Georgia law and Rockdale County Schools board policy.

Section 2: 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.
- 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.

Section 3: Applicable Definitions

A) Types of absences

1. **Excused absence:** an absence which meets the established criteria set forth in the Georgia Department of Education State Board Rule and local school board policy for consideration of excused absences.
2. **Unexcused absence:** an absence from school which does not meet the established criteria set forth in the Georgia Department of Education State Board Rule and local school board policy for consideration of excused absences.
3. **Truant:** any child subject to the Compulsory School Attendance Law who during the school calendar year has more than five days of unexcused absences.
4. **Tardy:** Arriving late to class after the established start time or checked out before the end of the school day.
5. **Excused tardy:** a late arrival to class or an early checkout from school which meets the established criteria set forth in the school board policy for consideration of excused absences. An early checkout from school is 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.

6. **Unexcused tardy:** a late arrival to class or an early checkout from school which does not meet the established criteria set forth in the school board policy for consideration of excused absences.
7. **Tardy to class (middle and high school students):** a student is tardy to class when he/she arrives to class after the established start time.

B.) Other relevant definitions

1. **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 stepparent, legal 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.
2. **Immediate family:** For the purposes of this protocol, immediate family members refer to a student’s parents, stepparents, siblings, maternal and paternal grandparents, step grandparents, a student’s own children, and legal guardians.
3. **CHINS:** Child in Need of Services, a program of the juvenile court.

Section 4: Guidelines for Excused Absences

A.) Accepted reasons for excused absences

The Georgia Department of Education and Rockdale County Schools board policy allow for excused absences for the following reasons:

1. Personal illness.
2. Illness or death in the immediate family.
3. Visits to medical and mental health professionals as documented by a dated note issued by those professionals.
4. Special and recognized religious holidays observed by the student’s faith.
5. Mandates by order of a governmental agency.
6. Conditions rendering school attendance impossible or hazardous to the safety of the student.
7. Serving as pages of the Georgia General Assembly, successful participation in the Georgia Student Teen Election Participation Program, registering to vote for a period not exceeding one day, or voting for a period not exceeding one day.
8. 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, shall be granted excused absences, 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 parent’s or legal guardian’s deployment or during such parent’s or legal guardian’s leave.
9. Attending court proceedings related to the youth’s own foster care.
10. A student who participates in an activity or program sponsored by 4-H shall be credited as present by the school in which enrolled in the same manner as an educational field trip, and such participation in an activity or program sponsored by 4-H shall not be counted as an absence, either excused or unexcused, for any day, portion of a day, or days missed from

school. Upon request from a school principal or the principal's designee, a 4-H representative shall provide documentation as proof of a student's participation in an activity or program sponsored by 4-H. As used in this subsection, the term "4-H representative" means an individual officially recognized or designated by the University of Georgia Extension 4-H Program as a 4-H professional or a 4-H adult volunteer.

B.) Documenting an excused absence

Written documentation must be submitted to the school to validate that the absence is excused within **3 days** of the child's return to school. The principal has the authority to require additional proof of the legitimacy of the excuse. Schools have the authority to require the signature of a parent or guardian on all excuses submitted via paper. Schools may choose to assume that an emailed excuse, sent from the email address on file for a parent/guardian, is being sent from that parent/guardian.

C.) Further guidelines on acceptable reasons for excused absence

- 1. Death or illness in the immediate family:** Rockdale County Public Schools excuses **3 days** for a death or illness in the immediate family. Any days beyond this will be considered unexcused.
- 2. Head lice:** Students will be excluded from school if they are found to have a case of head lice. Before the student may return, treatment with a specially formulated head lice product, or other treatment as recommended and documented by a physician, must be completed. The empty container of head lice product, or documentation from a physician indicating successful treatment of head lice, must be brought to the school nurse to show compliance. The student must be checked by the school nurse to ensure the treatment has been successful before returning to the classroom.
 - a.** Rockdale County follows a "**no nit policy.**" The school nurse must recheck the student when he or she returns to school following exclusion. There must not be evidence of nits, or the student will continue to be excluded from school and treatment must be repeated. Students will receive an excused absence for only the first day that a case of head lice is discovered unless further documentation from a physician is presented indicating that further absence was required to ensure the successful treatment of head lice.
- 3. Religious Holidays:** Rockdale County Public Schools would like to accommodate religious observances while meeting academic needs and standards. Indiana State University offers a calendar of religious holidays on its website; currently, this is the list utilized by Rockdale County Public Schools to excuse absences due to religious holidays.
 - a.** Students are required to request accommodation for religious observance ***before***, not after, it occurs, by submitting a note to the front office of their school indicating what dates they will be absent for religious observation.
 - b.** School officials will make reasonable accommodation when a student is absent from school because of religious observance. This includes allowing for makeup work and tests. **Students are not required to show evidence of their attendance at the religious service or event, nor are they required to show evidence or proof of their adherence or membership to a specific religion or faith practice.**

Section 5: Guidelines for Marking and Excusing Tardy Arrivals/Early Check-Outs

A.) Definition of tardy

A child is tardy to school when they arrive in class after the tardy bell or check out before the end of the school day. If they are tardy, they must report to the office to be signed in by a parent or guardian and a reason recorded for the late arrival or early check-out. If the student has driven themselves to school and arrived tardy, and no parent or guardian is present, they may check themselves in. Students who self-transport to school and arrive tardy may have their parking or other related privileges revoked subject to the policies of that school.

B.) Excessively late arrivals

A student will be counted as absent for missing a substantial portion of the day. If the student checks into school after the time listed below, he or she will be counted absent for the day:

Elementary (PreK-5): 10:50 AM

Middle (6-8): 12:20 PM

High (9-12): 11:30 AM

Absences accrued in this manner will be treated the same as/subject to the same guidelines as any other absence.

C.) Accepted reasons for excused tardy arrivals/early check-outs

Tardy arrivals and early check-outs will be judged as excused based on the same guidelines presented in Section 4-A and Section 4-C of this document pertaining to the excusal of absences.

D.) Documenting an excused tardy arrival or early check-out

Documentation excusing a tardy arrival or early check-out will function according to the guidelines presented in Section 4-B of this document pertaining to the documentation of excused absences.

Section 6: Responsibilities of Classroom Teachers in Regarding Attendance

A.) Teachers instructing in-person or synchronous virtual classes will take attendance daily. Elementary school (PreK-5) attendance should be entered by 8am. Secondary attendance (6-12) should be entered each class period.

B.) Should teachers receive notes, emails, REMIND messages, or other correspondence from parents regarding attendance, these messages should be sent to the attendance clerk at their school **upon receipt** so attendance may be adjusted accordingly. It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that attendance is entered and recorded appropriately.

C.) Teachers should take every opportunity to encourage positive attendance among students.

Section 7: School Responsibilities Regarding Attendance

In addition to adherence to the other guidelines in this document, each school:

A.) May develop and implement active, positive student attendance incentive programs to support and encourage good daily school attendance, including rewards and recognitions for yearly, quarterly, or other periods of perfect attendance.

B.) Will, prior to the completion of the first month of each school year, send home letters to students who had 15 or more unexcused absences during the previous school year emphasizing the importance of attendance and that their child’s attendance may be monitored by the school’s attendance support team.

C.) Will create and maintain an active Attendance Support Team (AST).

D.) Ensure an effort has been made to ensure parents/guardians and students are aware of have received a copy of these policies in coordination with county-level administration or via their own procedures should no county-level administrative effort be in place to do so. (See **Section 8**).

Section 8: Informing Parents, Guardians, and Students of the Rockdale County Public Schools Attendance Protocol

The following should occur on or before September 1 of each school year:

A.) Per Georgia attendance law, each school year at least two reasonable and documented efforts will be made to ensure that at least one guardian of each student has received and recognized their understanding of this protocol via signing a recognition that this has occurred.

1. If two reasonable and documented efforts have been made to secure a signature, the school will mail a copy of this attendance protocol, along with information on how the parent/guardian may request further information, via certified mail with return receipt requested to the address on file for at least one guardian/parent of the student.

B.) Per Georgia attendance law, each student at or above the age of ten will be presented with information regarding this protocol, and their signature requested. This effort will be documented in the student’s information file.

1. The information presented may be modified to reflect appropriate and accessible language for that student’s age and ability, so long as the modified materials are a good faith reflection of these policies, the exact information presented to the student is documented, and the student is informed of how they may inquire further regarding these policies.

Section 9: Extracurricular Activities

A.) Students will not participate in activities, rehearsals, practices and/or games on days they are absent from school.

B.) Coaches and sponsors will ensure that all guidelines and procedures regarding attendance are discussed with parents and students and encourage compliance with those guidelines.

Section 10: The Creation of an 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 determined by the team or chairing administrator. The team will meet at least twice per month (or more) during the school year to review attendance issues or to hold parent conferences. The Attendance Support Team is responsible for reviewing student attendance and taking appropriate action to encourage increased

attendance among students. No school will assign the sole responsibility for reviewing student attendance and taking appropriate action to a single member of the Attendance Support Team.

Section 11: Progressive Actions by Number of Absences

The following actions will be carried out by each school, in coordination with that school's Attendance Support Team, in response to the attendance of any student at the minimum age for mandated attendance under Georgia law or older:

A.) One (1) absence – Call from the school automated system to notify the parent of the absence. Households will continue to receive automated calls for each absence throughout the year.

B.) Three (3) absences: The classroom teacher or school designated personnel will make direct contact with the parent, guardian or other person having control or charge of a child when he or she has missed **three unexcused days** of school. If the school has not been made aware of a reason for the absences, 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. This contact should be documented by the contacting staff.

C.) Five (5) unexcused days absent: School personnel will notify the Attendance Support Team of all cases in which a student has missed **five (5)** days of school. If the child has **five (5) unexcused** absences, a formal notification letter will be sent by the school requesting that the parent, guardian, or other person in charge of the student attend a conference with the school, which may occur via phone, TEAMS, or other method with the Attendance Support Team to discuss the reasons for the absences and to discuss an attendance contract. Should the parent or guardian fail to attend the meeting or respond to the letter, the school will make one more effort to inform the parent that their child has reached five absences. Afterwards, per Georgia attendance law, the school will send the parent a letter via certified mail with return receipt requested notifying them that the student has reached 5 absences.

The contract should outline the school's expectations for attendance as well as specify the consequences for continued unexcused absences/late arrivals/early checkouts. 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. At the end of the meeting, the parent will be requested to sign an attendance contract, as will be any student over the age of 10.

Failure of the parent or guardian to attend the scheduled conference will result in the school establishing the conditions of the contract and mailing a copy of the contract to notify the parent or guardian of expectations and consequences regarding attendance and that the contract is now in effect.

D.) Ten (10) consecutive days absent: Following 10 consecutive absences, schools should contact the school social worker and counselor to inform them of the student's ongoing absence. The counselor and social worker will work together to contact the family and develop a plan for attendance. Upon failure to contact the family despite reasonable and documented efforts, or failure of the family/student to return to school despite contact from the counselor and/or social worker, the student/family will be referred to the principal who may decide that the student should be withdrawn from school.

E.) Ten (10) unexcused days absent: the student/family will be considered out of compliance with the previously created attendance contract. The attendance support team will refer the student/family to the school social worker, who will send a letter to the family reminding them of possible consequences of non-attendance and that a referral may be made to outside agencies, programs, and/or the court.

Section 12: Progressive Actions by Number of Tardy Arrivals/Early Checkouts

The following actions will be carried out by each school, in coordination with that school's Attendance Support Team, in response to the attendance of any student at the minimum age for mandated attendance under Georgia law or older:

A.) Fifteen (15) tardy arrivals or early checkouts: The school will inform the Attendance Support Team of any student who has reached any combination of 15 unexcused tardy arrivals or early checkouts. The Attendance Support Team will follow up with the student/family to establish a reason for this pattern and create a plan to increase on-time arrival and/or reduce early checkouts.

B.) Twenty-five (25) tardy arrivals or early check-outs: The Attendance Support Team may consider and carry out a referral to the Department of Family and Children's Services, Juvenile Court, and/or another appropriate agency.

Section 13: Action by the School Social Worker

School social workers will follow up with those students referred to him or her from the Attendance Support Team to assist students and families in improving student attendance. 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 juvenile complaint with the Rockdale County Juvenile Court or refer the family to other outside governmental or non-governmental service agencies as deemed appropriate by the school social worker. Documentation of all actions taken by the social worker and the Attendance Support Team will be maintained as a part of school records.

Section 14: Filing of Reports to the Juvenile Court, Department of Family and Children's Services, and Other Agencies

Reports may be filed with the Juvenile Court, DFCS, or other agencies as deemed appropriate by the school social worker as related to truancy and educational neglect in consultation with the attendance support team. The following guidelines may be considered during the process:

A.) Filing a report with the Juvenile Court:

A juvenile complaint should be filed in the Juvenile Court of Rockdale County against a child who is habitually and without justification truant from school, despite documented interventions on behalf of the school to as deemed appropriate by the school social worker in collaboration with the attendance support team. When such a complaint is filed, notification will be sent to the family of the juvenile via certified mail with return receipt requested.

B.) Filing a report with the Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS):

A report regarding the educational neglect of a child or youth may be filed with DFCS based on the discretion of the school social worker, in consultation with the Attendance Support Team (AST) of that

child's school. The following may be considered as factors in determining whether a report should be made:

1. The number of absences/late arrivals/early checkouts accrued by the student
2. The degree to which the parents or guardians of the student have communicated with the school regarding the reason for the child's absences, and the extent to which the reasons given for absences/late arrivals/early checkouts are subjectively reasonable
3. The willingness of the family to establish a plan with the school to improve attendance, and the degree to which the family then puts in effort to comply with that plan
4. The family or student's educational history, especially related to non-attendance
5. The stated motivations of the parent or student for not attending school
6. The perceived risks to the child created by not attending, especially regarding failure to obtain a proper and full education
7. The discretion and judgement of the attendance support team and social worker

C.) With other agencies:

Reports or referrals to other appropriate agencies may be made via the school social worker and Attendance Support Team based on the team's judgement that such referrals would be in the best interest of the child.

Section 15: Attendance of Hospital Homebound Students

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. The hospital/homebound program may reach out to that student's school of origin for assistance with attended related matters as needed.

Section 16: Attendance of Pre-Kindergarten Students

Although students in Pre-Kindergarten do not fall within the age-range of the Georgia Mandatory attendance law, each Attendance Support Team should monitor their attendance and notify parents of the importance of school attendance. The Attendance Support Team should notify the Early Learning Coordinator if a Pre-Kindergarten student has reached 10 or more unexcused absences. Decisions regarding the student's ongoing enrollment in Pre-Kindergarten will be determined by those tasked with the administration and oversight of Pre-Kindergarten programs.

Section 17: Attendance of Students Enrolled in Synchronous Virtual Programs

A.) In addition to the reasons outlined in Section 4-A, absences may be excused for Synchronous Virtual Program students related to technology (including internet) issues under the following guidelines:

1. Only one day of absence at a time (i.e., non-continuous) will be excused by the school, so long as proper and timely documentation is provided (Section 4-B), unless:
 - a. On the first or second continuous day of absence due to technology issues, the parent/guardian of the student informs their student's school or program of their need for assistance in resolving technology issues and actively complies with school instructions for receiving that assistance.

- i. This policy should not be construed as overriding any program’s requirements that a family be able to provide reliable access to internet or technology to maintain enrollment in a virtual rather than in-person program.

B.) Synchronous virtual programs may set a policy requiring time-measured continuous attendance during a day to prevent a mark of ‘presence’ from being reverted to ‘absent.’ For example, the policy may be ‘Students must attend class for at least 2 and a half continuous hours to be marked present.’ This policy may be created to prevent students ‘checking in’ during the first moments of class to be marked present and then subsequently logging out. These policies should be reasonable, and the school should document their method of assuring students and families are aware of this policy.

C.) Synchronous virtual programs may set policies requiring a student’s webcam to be turned ‘on’ and/or that a student actively participate in class by speaking or sending messages using the school’s chat function for a student to be counted as attending. These policies should be reasonable, and the school should document their method of assuring students and families are aware of this policy.

D.) It is especially important in a synchronous virtual program that the guidelines in Section 6 of this document be adhered to. Teachers in these programs should make extra effort to document their adherence to those guidelines. Directors and leaders of synchronous virtual programs should make extra efforts to educate staff/faculty on these policies.

E.) It is noted that the ultimate responsibility for attendance in synchronous virtual programs, including frequently checking attendance records and communicating with the school, falls upon the student and their guardian.

Section 18: Attendance of Students Enrolled in Asynchronous Virtual Programs

A.) Asynchronous virtual programs, having no designated start times during the day or classroom environments to arrive to (virtual or in-person), may create methods for marking attendance such as:

1. Requiring students log their participation daily,
2. Requiring students access certain sites or features daily,
3. Any other method which is generally reasonable and has been shared with students and families (and documented).

B.) In addition to the reasons outlined in Section 4-A, absences may be excused for asynchronous virtual program students related to technology (including internet) issues under the following guidelines:

2. Only one day of absence at a time (i.e., non-continuous) will be excused by the school, so long as proper and timely documentation is provided (Section 4-B), unless:
 - a. On the first or second continuous day of absence due to technology issues, the parent/guardian of the student informs their student’s school or program of their need for assistance in resolving technology issues and actively complies with school instructions for receiving that assistance.
 - i. This policy should not be construed as overriding any program’s requirements that a family be able to provide reliable access to internet or technology to maintain enrollment in a virtual rather than in-person program.

C.) It is especially important in an asynchronous virtual program that the guidelines in Section 6 of this document be adhered to. Teachers in these programs should make extra effort to document their adherence to those guidelines. Directors and leaders of asynchronous virtual programs should make extra efforts to educate staff/faculty on these policies.

D.) It is noted that the ultimate responsibility for attendance in asynchronous virtual programs, including frequently checking attendance records and communicating with the school, falls upon the student and their guardian.

Section 19: Issuing of Work Permits by Schools

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.

Section 20: Monitoring of Attendance Guidelines and Procedures

School attendance data will be collected and reviewed 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.

Section 21: Notice of Georgia Law Requiring Cooperation of Schools with Visiting Teachers and Attendance Officers

Georgia Law: Cooperation of principals and teachers in public schools with visiting teachers and attendance officers; attendance reports and records kept by public schools; letter indicating enrollment

- (a) Visiting teachers (i.e., school social workers) and attendance officers shall receive the cooperation and assistance of all teachers and principals of public schools in the local school systems within which they are appointed to serve. All public schools shall keep daily records of attendance, verified by the teachers certifying such records. Such reports shall be open to inspection by the visiting teacher, attendance officer, or duly authorized representative at any time during the school day.
- (b) Any person failing to carry out the duties required by subsection (a) of this Code section shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction thereof, shall be punished by a fine not to exceed \$100.00.