



**Rockdale County Public schools**

**Attendance Guidelines and Procedures**

*Originally Submitted June 8, 2006*

*Last revision: July 2011*

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**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. Policies and procedures have been determined via tenets of No Child Left Behind/Adequate Yearly Progress, Georgia Code for Compulsory Attendance: O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.1; Georgia State Board of Education Attendance Rule 160-5-1-.10; Rockdale County Public Schools Board Policy JB, JB-R, JBA, JBA-R, JBD, and JBE. This protocol was developed by the Rockdale County Truancy Protocol committee in accordance with Georgia Code for Compulsory Attendance O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.2.

#### **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.
- 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:**

##### **Absences:**

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.

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.

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

Tardy: Arriving late to class or checked out before the end of the school day.

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.

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.

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 for the class.

***Other Definitions:***

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, 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.

Immediate Family: For the purposes of this Protocol, immediate family members refer to a student’s parents, siblings and maternal and paternal grandparents.

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**

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.

**Excused Absences:**

Georgia State Department of Education Rule 160-5-1-.10 --STUDENT ATTENDANCE allows a student to be excused from school for the following reasons:

1. Personal illness
2. Illness or death in the immediate family

3. Special and recognized religious holidays observed by the student's faith
4. Mandates by order of a governmental agency
5. Conditions rendering school attendance impossible or hazardous to the safety of the student
6. Serving as pages of the Georgia General Assembly
7. 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

**Documentation:**

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.

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 may 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 child's return to school. The school system will receive any excuses after that period but will not change the absences to *excused*. It is the parent's responsibility to ensure that school staff received the excuses.

**Tardy/Checkout Policy:**

A child is tardy to school when he/she arrives in class after the tardy bell or checks out before the end of the school day. 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. School personnel will notify the AST of cases in which the student has 1) 15 or more unexcused tardies or 2) tardies in which the student is missing significant portions of class, either morning or afternoon. Perfect attendance recognition will not be given if a student has absences or any combination of three unexcused tardies or unexcused checkouts.

**Head Lice (Pediculosis):**

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 must be completed. The empty container 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 return to classroom.

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.

**Religious Holidays:**

Rockdale County Public Schools recognizes that there is an increasingly diverse population and 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 RCPS to excuse absences due to religious holidays.

Students are required to request accommodation for religious observance *before*, not after, it occurs if it is not already observed on the RCPS school calendar. Parents should submit a note to the classroom teacher stating the religious observance and the number of days that the student will be absent.

School officials will make reasonable accommodation when a student is absent from school because of a religious observance. This includes allowing for make up work and tests. Students are not required to show evidence of their attendance at the religious service or event.

**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.

**General Information:**

Ideally, students should be in attendance at school everyday. 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 and Activities:**

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 tests 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.

**School Responsibilities:**

**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 or to hold parent conferences. 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, including students in pre-kindergarten.

**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 students and parents of possible consequences of unexcused absences. Rockdale County Public Schools utilizes an electronic calling system to notify parents of absences or missed portions of the school day. It is important that parents update all phone numbers so that they can be contacted.

**b. Three (3) days absent:** The classroom teacher or designee 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 total days** of school. The attendance procedures will be explained. This action will be documented on a contact sheet/attendance card.

**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 **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 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 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.

Please note the following conditions from the Georgia Mandatory Attendance Law: O.C.G.A. § **20-2-690.1**: After two reasonable attempts to notify the parent, guardian, or other person who has control or charge of a child of five unexcused days of absence without response, the school system shall send a notice to such parent, guardian, or other person by certified mail, return receipt requested. Public schools shall provide to the parent, guardian, or other person having control or charge of each child enrolled in public school a written summary of possible consequences and penalties for failing to comply with compulsory attendance under this Code section for children and their parents, guardians, or other persons having control or charge of children. The parent, guardian, or other person who has control or charge of a child or children shall sign a statement indicating receipt of such written statement of possible consequences and penalties; children who are age ten years or older by September 1 shall sign a statement indicating receipt of such written statement of possible consequences and penalties. After two reasonable attempts by the school to secure such signature or signatures, the school shall be considered to be in compliance with this subsection if it sends a copy of the statement, via certified mail, return receipt requested, to such parent, guardian, other person who has control or charge of a child, or children. Public schools shall retain signed copies of statements through the end of the school year.

**c. Ten (10) days absent:** School personnel will notify the Attendance Support Team of all cases in which a student has missed **ten (10)** days of school. Based on relevant information shared at the time of the AST meeting, the AST may (1) request that the parent submit doctors excuses for additional absences or (2) make a SSW referral if the absences are unexcused and the parent is already under an attendance contract. If the 10 days are unexcused and consecutive, school personnel should make an effort to contact the parent to discern the reason for the absences before withdrawing the student. *Each superintendent or the superintendent's designee shall use his or her best efforts to notify the parent, guardian, or other person if the school system plans to withdraw such student. The superintendent of the LEA or the superintendent's designee shall document a minimum of three (3) attempts to contact the parent, guardian, or "other person" for the explicit purpose of holding a withdrawal conference. See Georgia Department of Education State Board Rules – Guidance for the Student Enrollment and Withdrawal Rule 160-5-1-.28.*

In the event that the 10 absences are unexcused and the parent is under an attendance contract, it may be determined that the SSW sends a formal letter of notification to the parents/guardian and 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. In this scenario 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 discuss and make a recommendation for the social worker to file a juvenile complaint and/or coordinate a warrant charging the parent with educational neglect.

Prekindergarten students: although students in Prekindergarten do not fall within the age-range of the Georgia Mandatory attendance law, each AST should monitor their

attendance and notify parents of the importance of school attendance. The AST should notify Leslie Demarco if a PreK student has reached 10 or more unexcused absences.

**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.

**Action by 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. 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.

**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).

**TADRA/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 ten or more school days of unexcused absences in the current academic year or ten or more school days of unexcused absences in the previous academic year; or
- c. Has been found in violation by a hearing officer, panel, or tribunal of one of the following offenses, has received a change in placement for committing one of the following offenses, or has waived his or her right to a hearing and pleaded guilty to one of the following offenses:
  - (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 Division of Support Services, who will 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. School personnel are responsible for submitting monthly Certificate of Noncompliance (for attendance) forms to the designee in the Division of Support Services.

### **Unemancipated Minors:**

An unemancipated minor who is older than the age of mandatory attendance as required in subsection (a) of this Code section who has not completed all requirements for a high school diploma who wishes to withdraw from school shall have the written permission of his or her parent or legal guardian prior to withdrawing. Prior to accepting such permission, the school principal or designee shall convene a conference with the child and parent or legal guardian within two school days of receiving notice of the intent of the child to withdraw from school. The principal or designee shall make a reasonable attempt to share with the student and parent or guardian the educational options available, including the opportunity to pursue a general educational development (GED) diploma and the consequences of not having earned a high school diploma, including lower lifetime earnings, fewer jobs for which the student will be qualified, and the inability to avail oneself of higher educational opportunities.

### **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.

**Monitoring of the 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.