

ATTENDANCE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The Dougherty County School System understands the number one factor affecting the overall achievement of students is attendance. Students must be present to take full advantage of available educational opportunities. The following policies and procedures for schools, students and parents/guardians are consistent with state standards for attendance.

If any provision of this policy is found to be inconsistent or non-compliant with any applicable Georgia State or Georgia Board of Education law, rule, or regulation, including Board of Education Rule 160-5-1-.10, then such provision shall yield to the applicable law.

Definitions

1. Truant - Any child subject to compulsory attendance who during the school calendar year has more than five days of unexcused absences.
2. Compulsory Attendance - Attendance in a public school, private school, or home school program is required for children between their sixth and sixteenth birthdays. Every parent, guardian, or other person residing in this state having control or charge of any child between their sixth and sixteenth birthdays shall be responsible for enrolling and sending such child to a public school, private school, or home school program. Attendance in a public school, private school, or a home school program is required regardless of the fact that a child has been suspended or expelled from school by the local board of education. Official Code of Georgia (O.C.G.A.) 20-2-690.1
3. Tardy— Students are considered tardy to school or class if the student arrives at a designated location after a school bell, chime, or buzzer has sounded. (Local schools will include specific information relevant to their facility to identify the designated location for student arrival.)
4. Early Checkout— When a parent, guardian, or other person having charge or control of a student authorizes a student to leave the facility before the end of the school day. School day hours are published in local school handbooks.
5. Any undefined term used herein shall have the definition as set out in Georgia Board of Education Rule 160-4-2-.48.

EXCUSED ABSENCES

State Board of Education Rule 160-5-1-.10 defines the following as excused absences:

1. Personal illness or attendance in school endangers a student's health or the health of others. Students are to present appropriate medical documentation upon the return to school for the purpose of validating that the absence is an excused absence.

2. A serious illness or death in the student's immediate family necessitating absence from school. (i) Students are to present appropriate medical documentation regarding the family member upon return to school for the purpose of validating that the absence is an excused absence.
3. A court order or an order by a government agency, including pre-induction physical examinations for service in the armed forces, mandating absence from school.
4. The observation of religious holidays, necessitating absence from school.
5. Conditions rendering attendance impossible or hazardous to student health or safety.
6. A period not to exceed one day is allowed for registering to vote or voting in a public election.
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. Nothing in this Code section shall be construed to require a local school system to revise any policies relating to maximum number of excused and unexcused absences for any purposes. (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-692.1)
8. The Dougherty County School System shall count students present when they are serving as pages of the Georgia General Assembly as set forth in O.C.G.A. § 20-2-692.
9. A foster care student who attends court proceedings relating to the student's foster care shall be credited as present by the school and shall not be counted as an absence, either excused or unexcused, for any day, portion of a day, or days missed from school as set forth in O.C.G.A. § 20-2-692.2
10. A student who successfully participates in the Student Teen Election Participant (STEP) program shall be counted as present and given full credit for the school day during which he or she served in the STEP program. No student shall be permitted to be absent from school or participate in the STEP program for more than two school days per school year.

PROCEDURE FOR EXCUSED AND UNEXCUSED ABSENCES

1. Parents or Guardians
 - a. Parents or guardians are encouraged to contact the school on the day of the student

absence to indicate the reason for the absence.

b. Within three (3) days of return to school students must present appropriate medical documentation or written note from the parent/guardian listing reason of the absence(s) and the date(s) of the absence(s) for the purpose of validating that the absence(s) is excused.

c. In order to ensure the opportunity of the student to complete make-up work and for local schools to record excused absences, it is best if a parent note or third party excuse be delivered to the school within three days the day that the student returns after being absent. ***If a parent note or third-party excuse is not delivered to the school, the absence will be regarded as unexcused.*** Local schools can employ proven best practices to improve student attendance for both excused and unexcused absences. This includes, but is not limited to, local schools requesting appropriate medical documentation from the parent/guardian of a student with excessive absences (excused or unexcused).

2. School Notifications and Procedures

a. If a student accumulates two (2) unexcused absences, the school will make contact with the parent, guardian, or person having charge or control of the student to notify them of these absences and possible consequences.

b. If the student accumulates five (5) unexcused absences the school shall send a certified letter to parents/guardians regarding absences. The certified letter will also inform the parents/guardians that the student will be referred to the District Attorney's office if the student accumulates more than five (5) unexcused absences.

c. After two reasonable attempts to notify the parent, guardian or other person who has charge of the student, the Dougherty County School System shall send written notice via certified mail with return receipt requested, or first-class mail; and

d. Prior to any action to commence judicial proceedings to impose a penalty on a parent, guardian, or other person residing in this state who has control or charge of the school aged child for failing to comply with compulsory attendance, the Dougherty County School System shall send a written notice to such parent, guardian, or other person by certified mail, return receipt requested.

e. By September 1 of each school year or within 30 days of a student's enrollment in the Dougherty County School System, the parent, guardian, or other person having control or charge of such student 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, or first class mail, to such parent, guardian, or other person who

has control or charge of a child. In addition, students age ten or older by September 1 shall sign a statement indicating receipt of written statement of possible consequences for non-compliance to the Dougherty County School System.

f. If the student accumulates more than five (5) unexcused absences the student will be referred to the District Attorney's office.

3. Make-up Work for Excused and Unexcused Absences

Absences shall not penalize student grades if the following conditions are met:

- a. Absences are justified and validated for excused reasons.
- b. Make-up work for all absences is completed satisfactorily.

(Although an absence may be considered "unexcused," make-up work for approved, prearranged absences will be permitted. Procedures for doing so may be acquired from the local school.)

When students are suspended short-term (1–10 days), work missed will not count for or against their final grade. Suspended students shall be afforded a reasonable opportunity to make up those tests and assignments that the teachers determine will have an impact on the student's final grade and mastery of course content. Assignments that the teacher does not require to be made up will not count toward a student's final grade. Students are responsible for making arrangements and completing make-up work within the time line specified by the local school.

WITHDRAWING STUDENTS

1. Students not subject to compulsory school attendance laws who are enrolled for the current school year who do not attend school for ten (10) consecutive days and the local school is not notified of the absence by parent/guardian are considered withdrawn. These students may be dropped from the school's rolls after attempting to notify the parent or guardian. Students determined to no longer be a resident of the system may be withdrawn even if the student is subject to compulsory school attendance laws. The withdrawal shall be retroactive to the first day of the consecutive absences.

2. For currently enrolled students who are subject to compulsory school attendance laws, it is required that schools make a good-faith effort to obtain documented information that the student no longer resides in the school's attendance zone before the student is withdrawn.

EARLY CHECKOUT

1. Students who have emergencies necessitating their absence from school for a portion of the school day must have been present for the majority of the school day in order to be counted present. Students must attend school for at least the equivalent of half the school day in order to

be counted for the whole day. This does not have to be continuous time.

2. When there is cause necessitating students to be released from school, they may only be released to their parent(s), to a person properly identified to school authorities or upon request by letter or telephone call from the parents.

Student check-in and checkout procedures are determined at the local school level.

MONITORING ATTENDANCE

1. Elementary and Middle Schools:
 - a. Student attendance begins on the first day of school
 - b. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each day
 - c. Students who arrive late to school will report to the attendance clerk to receive a pass to class.
 - d. For each class missed, the teacher is to sign the admit slip and the admit slips are to be collected and returned to the office at the end of the day

2. High Schools:
 - a. Student attendance begins on the first day of school
 - b. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class period
 - c. Students who arrive late to school will report to the attendance clerk to receive a pass to class.
 - d. For each class missed, the teacher is to sign the admit slip and the admit slips are to be collected and returned to the office at the end of the day

Each school shall monitor student attendance by accurately recording all student absences daily and provide meaningful communications to parent(s)/guardian(s) regarding individual student attendance. On a bi-weekly basis schools will collect a paper copy of the attendance roster from each teacher (signed and dated) and conserve on file for a period not to exceed seven years.

POLICIES FOR EXCESSIVE UNEXCUSED ABSENCES

1. A student in grades K-8 absent from school for more than 5 unexcused days shall be retained. A student who is retained under this policy and otherwise would have been promoted may appeal to the Student Disciplinary Tribunal for a special exception. Such appeal must be

made in writing to the principal within one week following the end of the year.

2. The principal in his/her sole discretion may authorize a student to receive credit if the student has unexcused absences of more than 5 days in the school year provided the student produces documentation of extenuating circumstances within a reasonable time following the sixth unexcused absence. In determining whether to grant credit, the principal shall consider, among other factors, current and past academic performance and the disciplinary history of the student.

3. Any K-8 student receiving credit who has missed more than 5 unexcused days in a school year must complete all class work, tests, projects homework, and other work of any kind required of all members of the class irrespective of attendance.

4. Any student in grades 9-12 who misses more than 3 unexcused class hours per semester class or 5 unexcused class hours per year-long class will not receive credit for that subject. A student who is denied credit under this policy and has a passing grade in the course may appeal to the Student Disciplinary Tribunal for a special exception. Such appeal must be made in writing to the principal within one week following the end of the semester or year.

5. The principal in his/her sole discretion may authorize a student to receive credit for a class in which the student has absences of more than 3 unexcused class hours in a semester class or more than 5 unexcused class hours in a year-long class provided the student produces documentation of extenuating circumstances within a reasonable time following the fourth unexcused absence in a semester course and the sixth unexcused absence in a year-long course. In determining whether to grant credit, the principal shall consider, among other factors, current and past academic performance and the disciplinary history of the student.

6. Any high school student receiving credit who has missed more than 3 unexcused class hours in a semester class or 5 unexcused class hours per year-long class must complete all class work, tests, projects, homework, and other work of any kind required of all members of the class irrespective of attendance.

7. If a student is absent for five unexcused days their school shall notify the parent, guardian, or other person who has control or charge of the child. After two reasonable attempts to notify the parent or other person who has control or charge of a child of five unexcused days of absence without a response, their school shall send a notice to such parent, guardian or other person by certified mail, return receipt requested. Their school shall provide to the parent guardian, or other person have 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 OCGA 20-2-690.1 for children and their parents, guardians or other persons having control or charge of children as drafted by the Attendance Protocol Committee. The receipt of such written statement may be signed for by the parent, guardian or other person in charge of the child or the child if he or she is age ten or older by September 1. Schools shall retain signed copies of statements through the end of the school year.

8. The school Superintendent or visiting teachers and attendance officers shall use their best efforts to notify any child 14 years of age or older who has only three absences remaining prior to violation of the attendance requirements of OCGA 40-5-22(a.1). Such notification shall be made via first class mail. The Superintendent or visiting teachers and attendance officers shall report to the State Board of Education any child 14 years of age or older who does not meet the attendance requirements of OCGA 40-5-22(a.1). Such report shall include the child's name, current address, and social security number, if known.

POLICIES FOR EXCESSIVE TOTAL ABSENCES

1. A student must attend 166 days of the 180-day school year. A student in grades K-8 absent from school for more than 14 days shall be retained. A student who is retained under this policy and otherwise would have been promoted may appeal to the Student Disciplinary Tribunal for a special exception. Such appeal must be made in writing to the principal within one week following the end of the year.

2. The principal in his/her sole discretion may authorize a student to receive credit if the student has absences of more than 14 days in the school year provided the student produces documentation of extenuating circumstances within a reasonable time following the fifteenth absence. In determining whether to grant credit, the principal shall consider, among other factors, current and past academic performance and the disciplinary history of the student.

3. Any K-8 student receiving credit who has missed more than 14 days in a school year must complete all class work, tests, projects homework, and other work of any kind required of all members of the class irrespective of attendance.

4. Any student in grades 9-12 who misses more than 7 class hours per semester class or 14 class hours per year-long class will not receive credit for that subject. A student who is denied credit under this policy and has a passing grade in the course may appeal to the Student Disciplinary Tribunal for a special exception. Such appeal must be made in writing to the principal within one week following the end of the semester or year.

5. The principal in his/her sole discretion may authorize a student to receive credit for a class in which the student has absences of more than 7 class hours in a semester class or more than 14 class hours in a year-long class provided the student produces documentation of extenuating circumstances within a reasonable time following the eighth absence in a semester course and the fifteenth absence in a year-long course. In determining whether to grant credit, the principal shall consider, among other factors, current and past academic performance and the disciplinary history of the student.

6. Any high school student receiving credit who has missed more than 7 class hours in a semester class or 14 class hours per year-long class must complete all class work, tests, projects, homework, and other work of any kind required of all members of the class irrespective of

attendance.

ATTENDANCE PROTOCOL COMMITTEE

DCSS shall meet all requirements set out in Georgia Department of Education Rule 160-5-1-.10 and any other applicable rule regarding Attendance Protocol Committees.