

Cook County Student Attendance and School Climate Protocol Policy

This document includes a protocol for addressing and decreasing the incidence of truancy in Cook County. This protocol reflects commitments that various local agencies, offices, and individuals have made to promote the educational progress of children and families in Cook County.

This protocol was created by the Cook County Student Attendance Protocol Committee which included representatives of the following entities:

Cook County Superior Court
Cook County Probate Court
Cook County Juvenile Court
Alapaha Circuit District Attorney
Department of Juvenile Justice
Cook County Board of Education
Cook County Sheriff's Office
Cook County DFCS
Cook County Family Connections
Cook County Chamber of Commerce
City of Adel Police Department
City of Lenox Police Department
City of Sparks Police Department
Cook County Mental Health Board – South Georgia Service Board
Cook County Board of Health

Purpose and Scope of the Student Attendance and School Climate Committee:

The purpose of the Cook County Student Attendance and School Climate Committee is to coordinate interagency efforts to improve student attendance, reduce truancy, address barriers to school engagement, and promote a positive school climate through prevention, early intervention, and collaboration among participating agencies.

The Committee serves in a planning, coordination, and advisory capacity and does not adjudicate individual cases, direct prosecutions, or exercise judicial authority.

Confidentiality and Data Sharing:

All information shared among members of the Student Attendance and School Climate Committee shall be handled in accordance with applicable state and federal confidentiality laws.

Information and data shared pursuant to this protocol shall be used solely for the purpose of improving student attendance and school climate and shall not be disclosed outside the Committee except as permitted by law. This provision does not restrict the distribution of this written protocol or general procedural information.

Operational Authority:

The Cook County Student Attendance Protocol Committee is operational under authority of the chief superior court judge as defined in O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.2. Following adoption of this written protocol and filing with the Georgia Department of Education, the committee will meet semi-annually for the purpose of evaluating compliance and effectiveness, and to modify the protocol as necessary.

Definition of Terms:

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

Cook County Truancy Education and Mediation Program (TEAM): A collaborative, school-based initiative designed to address and reduce student absenteeism through early intervention, communication, and support. TEAM is composed of the District School Social Worker, Building Administrator, Parent Coordinator, School Counselor, School Resource Officer, and, when appropriate, teachers or other relevant school personnel.

Student Support Team (SST): A state-mandated, interdisciplinary team responsible for identifying, implementing, and monitoring academic, behavioral, and attendance-related interventions for students in grades K-12. The SST supports students within the general education setting through data-driven strategies in accordance with Georgia’s Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework.

The SST membership in Cook County consists of the same core participants identified under the Cook County Truancy Education and Mediation Program (TEAM).

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 board of education shall adopt policies and procedures excusing students from school under the following circumstances, as a minimum:

- **Personal illness** of the student, or circumstances in which attendance in school would endanger the student’s health or the health of others. *Excessive or extended absences may require documentation from a medical provider.*
- **Serious illness or death in a student’s immediate family** necessitating absence from school.
- **A court order or an order by a governmental agency**, including pre-induction physical examinations for service in the armed forces, mandating absence from school.
- **Observance of religious holidays** necessitating absence from school.
- **Conditions rendering attendance impossible or hazardous** to the student’s health or safety.
- **A period not to exceed one (1) day** for registering to vote or voting in a public election, as permitted by the Board of Education.
- **Students serving as pages of the Georgia General Assembly** shall be counted as present during the period of service.

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

- Absences are justified and validated for excusable reasons.
- Make up work for excused absences were completed satisfactorily. Local boards of education are not required to provide make-up work for unexcused absences.

Absence Reduction Plan: The board of education adopts the following policies and/or procedures to reduce unexcused absences.

Parental Notification: Statement of Receipt:

- The school system will provide the parent(s), guardian(s), or other person(s) having control or charge of each student enrolled in public school with a written summary of possible consequences and penalties for failing to comply with compulsory attendance.
- By September 1 of each school year or within 30 school days of a student's enrollment in the school system, the parent(s), guardian(s), or other person(s) having control or charge of such student must sign a statement indicating receipt of the written statement of possible consequences for non-compliance with local school compulsory attendance policy and protocol.

Consequences and Penalties for Violation of Compulsory Attendance:

The Principal or Principal's designee may assign consequences and penalties for unexcused absences and/or early checkouts at any time if he/she deems necessary. Consequences and penalties may include, but are not limited to the following:

Five Unexcused Absences in the School Calendar Year:

- Schools will notify the parent(s), guardian(s) or other person(s) who has control or charge of the student when such student has accumulated five unexcused absences in the school calendar year.
- Notice of five accumulated absences will include notification of the penalties and consequences of such absences.
- After five unexcused absences in the school calendar year, each subsequent absence will constitute a separate offense.

Notification:

- Schools will make two reasonable attempts by phone, conference, letter, email, or other appropriate means to notify the parent(s), guardian(s) or other person(s) who has control or charge of the student when five unexcused absences in an academic year have occurred and of the penalties and consequences for violation of compulsory attendance.
- If two reasonable attempts to notify the parent(s), guardian(s) or other person(s) who has control or charge of the student have been unsuccessful, the school will send written notice via certified mail. Such notification will include a reminder of previous notice to the parent(s), guardian(s), or other person(s) having control or charge of each student enrolled in public school containing a written summary of possible consequences and penalties for failing to comply with compulsory attendance.

Six or More Unexcused Absences in an Academic Year:

Six Unexcused Absences: Students accumulating six (6) days of unexcused absences in a semester will receive a referral to the principal or administrative designee for violation of Board Policy JCDA: Student Code of Conduct. Upon a student's accumulation of six (6) or more unexcused absences in the school calendar year, a student's homeroom teacher will make a referral to the principal or designee for Student Support Team (SST) intervention. Prior to the first SST meeting, a school social worker, school nurse or other appropriate staff member will attempt contact with the student and parent(s), guardian(s) or other person(s) who has control or charge of the student.

The school social worker will participate as part of the SST to assist with the development of interventions and strategies for improvement of the student's school attendance.

Ten Unexcused Absences: Upon a student's accumulation of ten (10) unexcused absences in the school calendar year, the school social worker will refer the student and parent to Cook County Truancy Education and Mediation (TEAM) for contracted participation in the TEAM truancy diversion program. The school social worker will serve to coordinate efforts between the school SST and TEAM in monitoring attendance.

Violation of TEAM Truancy Diversion Contract or refusal to participate in the TEAM truancy diversion program may result in immediate referral by the School District or appropriate agency to the appropriate court, including but not limited to one or more of the following:

- Students ages six (6) to seventeen (17) and their parent(s), guardian(s), or other person(s) having control or charge of the student to the Juvenile Court for possible Protective Order or other appropriate disposition.
- Parent(s), guardian(s), or other person(s) having control or charge of students ages six (6) to seventeen (17) to Probate Court for Failure to Comply with Compulsory Attendance.

Attendance:

Students shall be counted in attendance if they are actually present at school at the time the attendance is taken or are away from school on a school day and engaged in an educational activity that constitutes a part of the school-approved instructional program for the student. (Rule 160-5-1-.10).

Excused/Unexcused Absences:

Excused absences from school are granted under the following circumstances:

- **Personal illness** of the student, or circumstances in which attendance in school would endanger the student's health or the health of others. *Excessive or extended absences may require documentation from a medical provider.*
- **Serious illness or death in a student's immediate family** necessitating absence from school.
- **A court order or an order by a governmental agency**, including pre-induction physical examinations for service in the armed forces, mandating absence from school.

- **Observance of religious holidays** necessitating absence from school.
- **Conditions rendering attendance impossible or hazardous** to the student's health or safety.
- **A period not to exceed one (1) day** for registering to vote or voting in a public election, as permitted by the Board of Education.
- **Students serving as pages of the Georgia General Assembly** shall be counted as present during the period of service.

Absences are unexcused for all other reasons, including but not limited to: missing the bus, oversleeping, power outage, vacations, trips, family visits, car trouble, baby-sitting, and running errands.

Absence Notes:

Documentation is required when a student returns from an absence. The fact that attendance was impractical or inadvisable must be attested to by a written statement from the student's **parent or guardian** or a **licensed physician** within **five (5) school days** of the student's return. These written statements must be submitted to the **Attendance Office** within the required timeframe, or the absence will be documented as **unexcused**. If an absence is due to a **court appearance**, a copy of the subpoena or other official court documentation must be provided.

Parent Notes:

A maximum of **five (5) parent notes** per school year may be accepted to excuse student absences. For high school students operating on a semester-based block schedule, a maximum of **three (3) parent notes per semester** may be accepted, which equates to **six (6) parent notes per academic year**.

Medical Documentation:

Documentation from a **licensed physician** is accepted **without limitation** and is not subject to the annual or semester cap applicable to parent notes.

Documentation for each day of absence (parent notes, medical excuses, or other required documentation) must be on file within five (5) school days following the student's return from an absence.

Probate Court Agreement:

The following section sets forth court-specific procedures related to the enforcement of Georgia's compulsory attendance laws. This section supplements, but is separate from, the Student Attendance and School Climate Committee Protocol and does not expand the authority of the Committee beyond that provided by law.

COOK COUNTY PROBATE COURT
Protocol Agreement for Truancy in Schools

This agreement is made and entered into by and between the Cook County Attendance Protocol Committee; Cook County Probate Court ("Probate Court"), acting by and through Chase

Daughtrey, Judge thereof; and the Cook County School System ("School District"), by and through its appropriate designee, which protocol shall become effective March 1, 2026, and shall remain in effect until otherwise altered, modified, or canceled in writing.

WHEREAS, it appears to the undersigned that the absences and late arrivals of students on the school campuses is a major problem in the School District; and

WHEREAS, the laws of the State of Georgia authorize the protocol to outline in detail methods for determining the cause of failing to comply with compulsory attendance and appropriately addressing the issue with children and their parents or guardians; and

WHEREAS, the Juvenile Court of Cook County, Georgia has jurisdiction over violations of the compulsory attendance law committed by any child under the age of 16; and

WHEREAS, the Probate Court of Cook County, Georgia has jurisdiction over violations of the compulsory attendance law committed by parents or guardians of students, and

WHEREAS, the parties hereto desire to minimize the occasions of failure to comply with the compulsory attendance laws; and

WHEREAS, it also appears to the undersigned that a uniform method of procedures dealing with said failure to comply with the compulsory school attendance law prior to filing complaints with the Juvenile Court and Probate Court is necessary.

NOW THEREFORE, the undersigned parties do hereby agree as follows:

The below procedures will be followed by the School District in addressing cases of truancy. Prior to initiating any complaints with in any Court, the Judge of the Probate Court of Cook County, or any other government agency who may be involved or associated with truancy matters, the School District will appoint a designated School District employee ("Records Custodian") to collect and maintain any and all documentary evidence that may be required by state law or used in Court proceedings. This individual may be the School District's Truancy Officer or System Social Worker. At the School District's option, there may be a separate records custodian for each school within the district.

PARENTAL NOTIFICATION

The School District will notify the parent, guardian, or other person who has legal control or charge of the student when such student has three unexcused absences. The notice will outline the penalty and consequences of such absences and that each subsequent absence will constitute a separate offense.

If a parent meeting is required, written notification will be delivered by a School Resource Officer (SRO) to such parent, guardian, or other person who has legal control or charge of the student. Signature by the parent, guardian, or other person who has legal control or charge of the student will be required to indicate receipt of the notification.

**ANNUAL
NOTIFICATION**

By September of each school year or within 30 school days of a student's enrollment in the School District, the parent, guardian, or other person having control or charge of such student must sign a statement indicating receipt of the written statement of possible consequences and penalties. After two reasonable attempts by the School District to secure such signatures, the School District shall be considered in compliance with this requirement.

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 with the local School District's policy.

PROCEDURES FOR INITIATING CRIMINAL PROSECUTION OF PARENT OR GUARDIAN

After a student has ten or more unexcused absences, the School District's designee or SRO may refer a parent to the Probate Court for citation and to the Solicitor General for prosecution under the Georgia Compulsory School Attendance Statute if it is suspected that the parent or guardian is the cause of the student's absence. At the Probate Court's discretion, parents may receive a fine of not more than \$250, up to 30 days of confinement in jail, community service, or any combination thereof for each offense.

*Nothing in this protocol shall be construed to require the initiation of criminal prosecution, which remains within the sole discretion of the appropriate prosecuting authority.

Adoption and Amendment:


This protocol was adopted by the Cook County Student Attendance and School Climate Committee and approved by the Chief Judge of the Superior Court. This protocol may be amended as necessary upon approval of the Committee and a Superior Court Judge from the Alapaha Judicial Circuit.

By signing below, the undersigned acknowledge review and adoption of the Cook County Student Attendance and School Climate Committee Protocol.

Clayton A. Tomlinson
Chief Judge of the Superior Court
Alapaha Judicial Circuit

Signature:  Date: 3/11/26


Matthew B. Bennett
Judge of the Superior Court
Alapaha Judicial Circuit

Signature:  Date: 3/10/2026

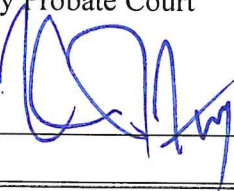
Suzanne P. Mathis
Juvenile Court Judge
Alapaha Judicial Circuit

Signature:  Date: 3/12/26

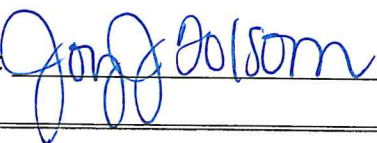
Chase L. Studstill
District Attorney
Alapaha Judicial Circuit

Signature:  Date: 4/9/26

Chase Daughtrey
Probate Judge
Cook County Probate Court

Signature:  Date: 3-12-26

Joy J. Folsom
Superintendent
Cook County School District

Signature:  Date: March 12, 2026

Brenda W. Moore
Vice-Chairman
Cook County Board of Education

Signature: Brenda W. Moore Date: 3-9-26

Leslie Folsom
Federal Programs Director
Cook County School District

Signature: Leslie Folsom Date: 3/12/26

Shari Breeden
System Social Worker
Cook County School District

Signature: Shari Breeden Date: 3/18/26

J. Allen Lawson
Chief Assistant District Attorney
Alapaha Judicial Circuit

Signature: J. Allen Lawson Date: 3/25/26

Jason Cain
Assistant District Attorney
Alapaha Judicial Circuit

Signature: Ja Cain Date: 3-12-26

Angela Bass
Juvenile Probation Parole Specialist
Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice

Signature:  Date: 03/10/2026

Carolina R. Gomez
Social Services Supervisor
Cook County Department of Family and Children Services

Signature:  Date: 3/10/26

Mark J. Eanes
District Health Director
Health District 8-1

Signature:  MD Date: 05/13/26

Joel Futch
Chief of Police
Lenox Police Department

Signature:  Date: 03/12/2026

Tavoris Belcher
Chief of Police
Sparks Police Department

Signature:  Date: 3-26-26

Bob Myers
School Resource Officer
Cook County School District

Signature: Bob Myers Date: 3-17-26

Katelynne Godwin
Community Outreach
Adel Police Department

Signature: Katelynne Godwin Date: 3/20/26

Randy Lane
Chair
South Georgia Community Service Board

Signature: Randy Lane Date: 3/11/2026

Zoe Myers
Executive Director
Cook County Family Connection

Signature: Zoe Myers Date: 3/20/26
