

Truancy Reduction Protocol

2004-2005

Thomaston-Upson County

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

This protocol was created by a local Truancy Reduction Protocol Committee, which included representatives of the following entities:

Upson County Superior Court
Thomaston-Upson County School System
Thomaston-Upson Juvenile Court
Department of Juvenile Justice
Upson County District Attorney's Office
Upson County Sheriff's Department
Thomaston Police Department
Upson County Department of Family and Children Services
Upson County Health Department
Upson Counseling Center
FYCA (Family Connection Collaborative)
Thomaston-Upson Chamber of Commerce and Development Authority

The purpose of the Committee is to make recommendations to the local Board of Education regarding attendance policy and procedures, as well as to create guidelines for collaboration between local and state agencies having an interest or function related to educational achievement and school attendance in Thomaston-Upson County.

The Truancy Reduction Protocol Committee has agreed upon procedures, which are intended to allow the reduction of truancy at the individual, family, and community levels. It is understood, however, that these procedures are general guidelines, and extenuating circumstances may be considered, as allowable by law, for each student and family. In addition, it is understood that each state and local agency involved must first adhere to its own policies, which were considered in the development of this protocol.

Thomaston- Upson County Truancy Reduction Protocol

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Truancy Reduction Protocol

I. School System Procedures

The Thomaston-Upson Board of Education will monitor student attendance daily. Codes for attendance used in the student records database (SASI) will be consistent between schools to indicate excused absences, unexcused absences, excused tardies, unexcused tardies, early withdrawals, in-school suspensions, and out-of-school suspensions. Excused absences shall be delineated by the reason for excuse. The local Board of Education will adopt policy and procedure outlining the specific steps to be taken to monitor and address student attendance. Each school will create a building level procedure in accordance with this policy,

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 JB and absences and excuses policy JBD. 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. At the Middle and High schools, students will also receive this notice and provide a signature. At the Elementary schools, this notice will be received by all students who have reached age ten (10) or above by September 1 of that school year. This notice should also be included in each school's Code of Conduct.

Each school will establish an Attendance Support Team, (hereinafter, AST) which will be chaired by each school's Principal/Designee and include as it's members the School Social Worker and faculty having direct contact with the parents/guardians of or providing direct service to the specific student(s) to be discussed. School Resource Officers will also be invited to participate, as appropriate. Each school's AST will meet weekly and be responsible for implementing and monitoring policy to reduce tardy days, early withdrawals, and truancy. Parents/guardians shall be invited to and encouraged to attend these meetings.

Daily attempts will be made to call the parents/guardians of absent students. *In cases known to involve joint or shared custody or guardianship of a student, efforts should be made to contact all individuals with custodial rights. This standard shall also apply to steps mentioned hereinafter.*

After three (3) absences, the homeroom teacher or administrative designee will call parents.

Attendance postcards will be sent at five (5) absences.

After five (5) unexcused absences:

1. A referral will be made to the Attendance Support Team, which will assess the student's absences and determine strategies to address attendance, including the possibility of referral to the School Social Worker. Each school will take reasonable steps to ensure that parents/guardians are, in writing, invited to and encouraged to attend these meetings. Students may also participate in AST meetings, as deemed appropriate by the AST.

2. In addition to notice of the AST meeting, two (2) reasonable attempts will be made by the school to notify parents/guardians, in writing, of attendance to date (absences, tardies, and early check-outs), compulsory attendance law, and potential consequences and penalties for failure to comply. A signature of receipt of this notice will be obtained, and kept on file for the remainder of the school year. Students age ten (10) and older will also receive a copy of the notice and provide a signature of receipt.
 - a. First attempts to meet this requirement shall be made in conjunction with the notice of an AST meeting and/or during an AST meeting when the parent(s)/guardian(s) are in attendance.
 - b. After two (2) unsuccessful reasonable attempts to provide notice to parent(s)/guardian(s) and obtain signatures, notice shall be sent via certified mail, with return receipt requested. The school should keep a copy of the notice mailed. Once the receipt is obtained, it will be kept on file by the school, attached to the copy of the notice.

At seven (7) unexcused absences and/or ten (10) absences total, the Principal or other designated Administrator will call the parent(s)/guardian(s).

At ten (10) unexcused absences, the AST will review the case again and make a referral to the School Social Worker, if a referral has not been made previously.

The School Social Worker will:

1. Review available information from the AST and parent contacts from school staff.
2. Meet with the student(s) and attempt a home visit within no more than 2 business days from the date of receipt of the referral to further explore reasons for absence and offer assistance to the student and family for addressing the causes of absences. Examples of such assistance would include, but is not limited to:
 - Brief individual or group therapeutic intervention with students at school
 - Referral to public or private mental health or counseling services
 - Referral to public or private medical or dental services
 - Referral to public assistance programs
 - Referral to the school's Student Support Team
 - In-home support facilitated by the School Social Worker
 - Referral to outside social service or counseling providers for intensive in-home support
3. Upon further investigation, determine the need for immediate referral of:
 - Students ages ten (10) to sixteen (16) to Juvenile Court for Truancy
 - Parent(s)/guardian(s) of students ages six (6) to sixteen (16) to the Magistrate Court for Deprivation, or to Superior Court for Failure to Comply with Compulsory Attendance

In most cases, Court referrals will be made at this point or at the next unexcused absence.

- The family to the Department of Family and Children Services for suspicion or indicators of abuse and/or neglect. *If a referral is necessary, the local Child Abuse Protocol will take precedence regarding further action.*
4. Continue to monitor student attendance weekly and provide support related to the student and family's educational needs once a referral is made to a court or to the Department of Family and Children Services.
 5. Review end of year attendance records with each school's Principal and determine a list of active referrals for the beginning of the next school year.

In general, students known to be on probation for truancy and students with excess of ten (10) unexcused absences, twenty (20) total absences or any combination of tardies and early checkouts totaling twenty-five (25) will be referred to the School Social worker or monitored for attendance concerns on a monthly basis the next school year.

II. Criminal Prosecution for Violation of School Attendance Law

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.1 requires any person in this State who has control or charge of a child between the ages of six and sixteen to enroll and send that child to school, including public, private and home schooling.

A child is responsible to attend school and is subject to adjudication in Upson County Juvenile Court as an unruly child for violation of this statute. If a parent, guardian or other person who has control or charge of the child *causes* the child's absence, then that person, and not the child, is in violation of this statute. Such a violation is a misdemeanor and carries a penalty of up to \$100 fine and 30 days in jail for each violation. The law specifies that *each day's absence* constitutes a separate offense.

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, a 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.

A. Filing Juvenile Complaints

A juvenile complaint should be filed in the Juvenile Court of Upson County against a child who is habitually and without justification truant from school. Such a child is "unruly."

For purposes of this Protocol, habitual truancy or absences, is defined as five (5) or more days of unexcused absence from school. At this point the child's circumstances will be reviewed by the AST, to which the parent will be invited to attend. At this review the following options will be discussed:

- Refer the child and/or parent to the appropriate social services
- Request further medical documentation if appropriate
- File an “unruly child” complaint with the Juvenile Court of Upson County
- Seek a protective order for the parent from the Juvenile Court
- Seek a criminal warrant for the parent from the Magistrate Court of Upson County for violation of compulsory attendance laws.
- Seek a complaint in Upson Juvenile Court against parents for deprivation.

The School Social Worker will be responsible for obtaining and monitoring compliance with the recommendations of the AST.

B. Juvenile Justice Procedures

1. Intake Process for Juvenile Complaints

- a. The Clerk of Juvenile Court in Upson County will immediately forward a copy of all Truancy complaints, to the Intake Officer of the Department of Juvenile Justice for Upson County. The Intake Officer will process complaints.
- b. Complaints will be entered into the Juvenile Tracking System and any past history will be assessed.
- c. The Intake Officer may contact the School Social Worker for any further pertinent information.
- d. The complaint will be immediately forwarded to the District Attorney’s Office, accompanied by any legal history and brief summary of involvement with the Department of Juvenile Justice. This may include offense history, placement history, a summary of any past or current interventions, as well as current worker information.
- e. Truancy complaints will receive immediate attention and be placed on the most current Juvenile Court Calendar for arraignment.

2. Adjudication and Disposition

A youth may be placed on Probation for Truancy by the Juvenile Court Judge upon adjudication of a Truancy charge. At this time, 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.

The Probation Officer will monitor the youth’s attendance, at a minimum, on a weekly basis. Further unexcused absences from school by youth will result in immediate sanction by the Department of Juvenile Justice, including possible Violation of Probation. Upon adjudication for Truancy-related Violation of Probation, the Juvenile Court Judge will determine what further action or intervention is appropriate.

Judicial truancy reviews will be held on a monthly basis from the date of the initial Probation Order for Truancy-related Probation cases. These reviews will assess the youth’s attendance at school and effectiveness of any services that may be involved to assist youth and/or family. All parties involved should be prepared to report on youth’s progress at these reviews.

A Probation Order may be terminated by the Juvenile Court Judge prior to the two-year expiration date if youth's attendance and/or progress has reached a level satisfactory to all parties involved.

C. Prosecution in Superior Court

When it is clear that the parent is the direct cause of the child's absence, a warrant for violation of OCGA § 20-2-690.1 should be sought against the parent. In other circumstances, the AST may, but is not required to, take into account the following considerations when recommending a criminal warrant be sought for the parent of a child:

- The child is under the age of 13 years.
- 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.
- The parent has not actively sought assistance from community social services and resources to assist in getting the child to school.
- The parent is absent from the home or neglectful to an extent that it hinders the child's willingness or ability to attend school.
- The child is a deprived child.

The child and parent must comply with the AST's recommendations. Failure of the child or parent to comply with the recommendations, including further unexcused absences from school, will result in juvenile adjudication of the child and/or criminal prosecution of the parent. In any event, if the child accumulates ten (10) or more unexcused absences in any school year, the School Social Worker will file a juvenile complaint and/or apply, via the School Resource Officer, for a criminal warrant for violation of mandatory school attendance laws. When a parent is prosecuted, regular school attendance will be assigned as a condition of bond.

D. Notification to Parent(s)

Notification to the parent of a truant child shall include notice of an AST review and information about attendance law and the penalties that may occur as a result of the child's continued absence. After two unsuccessful attempts to serve such notice and obtain signature of receipt, notification should be sent via certified mail, with return receipt requested, to the parent and should contain the following language:

“Decisions as to appropriate action recommendations will be made at an AST review that could include recommendations for criminal prosecution of you or your child. Parent(s) may be charged with a misdemeanor if they are causing the child's absence from school. The penalty can be up to \$100.00 fine and up to 30 days in jail for each day the child has an unexcused absence from school.”

III. Community Support

A. Law Enforcement

Each school in Thomaston- Upson County has access to, either on-site or within minimal driving distance, an employee of the Upson County Sheriff's Department and or Thomaston Police Department. These individuals are certified peace officers designated as "School Resource Officers." In support of improved school attendance, the School Resource Officers shall:

- Attend AST meetings, as appropriate.
- Forward complaints against parents directly to the Sheriff's Department regarding compliance with mandatory attendance law.
- Honor any applicable school-related transportation orders issued by a court
- With parental permission and on an intermittent basis, transport truant students to school.

B. Public Health

Each school in Thomaston-Upson County has licensed staff available to serve students via on-site school "clinics". School nurses/clinic staffs are employed by the Board of Education. School Nurses will be responsible, in cooperation with other staff, for the final determination at each school regarding when a child should be sent home early for the day, due to health related concerns, and excusing any resulting absences.

- Be available to parents for preliminary verification to the school of illness pending an appointment with a physician and advocate with physician's offices for timely appointments, as appropriate.
- Follow any orders written by students' physicians regarding medication or other medical treatment to be provided during school hours.
- Coordinate immunization evaluations for Kindergarten registration and Scoliosis screens for students provided through Public Health.
- Work in conjunction with Teachers, School Administrators, Public Health, and the School Social Worker to promote general health and safety for students, school staff, and the community.

The Upson County Health Department is an integral partner in community health related to school readiness, attendance, and success. Upson County Health Department shall:

- Continue to support and promote School Clinic Health Services
- Provide immunization evaluations, immunizations, and immunization records required for school enrollment
- Provide Scoliosis screens for students
- Provide various medical, dental, and prescription services, referrals, and education to students and families in Upson County to promote personal and community health.

C. Mental Health

Upson County Mental Health provides crucial support for the mental, physical, and emotional well being of students and their families, including individual and group sessions on-site at the

schools for student clients of Upson County Mental Health. In support of this Protocol, Upson County Mental Health shall:

- Notify and/or refer student clients to the School Counselor or Social Worker when efforts to conduct individual or group sessions at school repeatedly fail, due to absences.
- Coordinate and host regular Interagency Staffing Committee meetings, which facilitate support and treatment planning for at-risk youth, including students who are truant.
- Attend court proceedings, when appropriate, for cases involving truancy and support any court orders for treatment of emotional or family issues contributing to absences.
- Offer clinical support, when possible and appropriate, to any truancy prevention or treatment programs instituted.

In accordance with state and federal laws related to confidentiality, Upson County Mental Health and Thomaston-Upson County Schools shall, as appropriate, obtain releases of information to allow communication as outlined above.

D. Department of Family and Children Services

The Upson County Department of Family and Children Services often provides social services to the families of truant students. In support of this Protocol, the Upson County Department of Family and Children's Services shall:

- Accept and consider information related to school attendance, behavior, and performance in reports and investigations of other suspected abuse and/or neglect.
- Address school attendance in departmental case plans and safety plans.
- Ensure school enrollment and regular attendance for students in emergency shelter care, temporary guardianship arranged by the Department, or foster care.
- Verify involvement of the School Social Worker when available attendance information indicates more than ten (10) unexcused absences.
- Attend court proceedings, when necessary, for cases involving truancy and/or complaints against parents related to mandatory school attendance. *Subpoena(s) should be issued to the appropriate Case Manager and/or Investigator when participation by the Department of Family and Children Services is desired.*

E. Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber of Commerce has formed an Education Committee, which will support this Protocol by facilitating a partnership between local businesses employing students during the school year and Thomaston-Upson County Schools. Businesses will be asked to sign an agreement with their student employees that states the following:

- Employment hours shall be restricted to no more than twenty (20) per week.
- Student employees shall not knowingly be allowed to work on days they are absent from school.
- Students shall share grade and attendance information quarterly.
- Student employees shall be placed on probation and/or work hours shall be reduced if grades or school attendance decline.

The agreement forms shall be provided by the school system. The school system shall require that students requesting agreement forms or employment permits identify their prospective

employer and, along with their parent(s)/guardian(s), give permission for attendance and grades to be shared with that employer.

IV. Monitoring the Protocol

To ensure that these written protocol procedures are followed, the Protocol Committee will meet quarterly for a year, which will begin on the date of the protocol's adoption. The protocol Committee will then meet bi-annually, as required by law. The Committee's goal will be to improve communication between agencies, encourage inter-agency cooperation, and update the protocol as necessary. Each participating agency shall monitor and evaluate compliance with this protocol and, as needed, recommend protocol revision and implementation that best meets the needs of the community and complies with Federal, State, and local statutes, as well as agency policy.

V. Steps to Prevent Truancy

Various measures are currently being explored to address truancy from a prevention perspective.

- A. The Department of Juvenile Justice in conjunction with Upson County Juvenile Court, Upson County Mental Health, and Thomaston-Upson County Schools will be examining the usefulness and feasibility of instituting other prevention programs to aid families with strategies to help combat truancy.
- B. Local businesses, clubs, and civic organizations will be asked to consider developing incentive or even scholarship programs for those students whose grades and attendance exhibit significant improvement.

2004-2005 Upson County Truancy Reduction Protocol Signature Sheet 2

Thomaston Police Department

Date

Upson County Mental Health

Date

Upson County Health Department

Date

Upson County Family Connection
(FYCA)

Date

Thomaston-Upson Chamber of Commerce
And Development Authority

Date