

**Truancy Reduction Protocol  
2005  
Catoosa County**

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

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

Lookout Mountain Superior Court  
Catoosa County Juvenile Court  
Catoosa County District Attorney's Office  
Catoosa County Department of Juvenile Justice  
Catoosa County Board of Education  
Catoosa County Sheriff's Office  
Catoosa County Department of Family and Children Services  
Catoosa County Health Department  
Lookout Mountain Community Services  
Catoosa County Family Collaborative  
Catoosa County Chamber of Commerce  
Ringgold Police Department  
Ft. Oglethorpe Police Department  
LMJC, Public Defender's Office

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 Catoosa County.

The Truancy 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.

# Catoosa County Attendance Protocol

## I. School System Procedures

Catoosa County School System will monitor student attendance daily. Codes for attendance used in the student records database will be consistent between schools to indicate excused absences, unexcused absences, excused tardies, unexcused tardies, early dismissals, 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 a policy and procedures outlining the specific steps to be taken to monitor and address student attendance. Each school will develop a building level procedure in accordance with this policy.

Upon enrollment and registration each school year, parents and guardians will be given notice of the State Compulsory Attendance Law pursuant to O.C. G.A. code 20-2-690-1 and local Board of Education school attendance 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. Students who have reached age ten (10) or above by September 1, will receive this notice and also will provide their signature. These notices will be included in The Student and Parent/Guardian Handbook provided by the school system and will be included in each school's Code of Conduct.

Each principal will establish a school attendance team to develop and implement strategies within their school to address student attendance. The school social worker that is assigned to the school should be a member of each school attendance team.

Daily attempts should 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.

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

Attendance postcards and/or letters will be sent at five (5) absences.

After (3) unexcused absences:

A referral will be made to the school attendance team which will assess the student's absences and determine strategies to address attendance, including the involvement of the school social worker and/or a referral to an in-school attendance review team meeting with parents/guardians and the student when age appropriate.

After five (5) unexcused absences:

1. Two (2) reasonable attempts will be made by the school to notify parents/guardians, in writing, of attendance to date (absences, tardies and early dismissals), 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 attempt to meet this requirement shall be made in conjunction with the notice of a requested school conference with parents/guardians in attendance.
  - B. After two (2) unsuccessful reasonable attempts to provide notice to parents/guardians and obtain signatures, a 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 five (5) unexcused absences and/or ten (10) absences total, the principal or other designated administrator will make a referral to the Catoosa Attendance Review Team (CART) and/or in-school middle school review team. CART is comprised of social agencies that routinely provide services for families and children within our county such as The Catoosa County School System, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Family and Children's Services, Lookout Mountain Community Services, and the Catoosa County Health Department.

The Catoosa Attendance Review Team (CART) will:

1. Meet with parents/guardians and age appropriate students to discuss school attendance.
2. Review available student attendance and academic information with the family.
3. Review all strategies and interventions that have been utilized with the student and family.
4. Further explore reasons for absences 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:
  - Referral to public or private mental health or counseling services
  - Referral to public or private medical or dental services
  - Referral to public assistance programs (i.e. Medicaid, Peachcare)
  - Referral to school's student support team (SST)
  - Referral to the School Social Worker, School Guidance Counselor and/or School Nurse
  - Referral to other school supplemental services (i.e. after-school programs, Homeless Liason, Performance Learning Center).

5. Develop an attendance contract between student, parent/guardian, school and attendance review team.

If the attendance contract is not followed, the social worker together with the school administrative team will determine the need for an immediate referral of:

- Students ages ten (10) to sixteen (16) to Juvenile Court for Truancy
- Parents/Guardians of students ages six (6) to sixteen (16) to the magistrate court, or 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.

6. Review end of year attendance records on students with attendance contracts and determine a monitoring 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, fifteen (15) total absences or any combination of tardies and early dismissals totaling twenty (20) will be referred to the School Social Worker or monitored by the school attendance team 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 Catoosa 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/guardian" 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 Catoosa County against a child who is habitually and without justification truant from school.

For purposes of this Protocol, habitual truancy or absence, is defined as five (5) or more days of unexcused absence from school, the violation of the attendance contract developed through a CART meeting, or the violation of an informal adjustment agreement.

## B. Juvenile Justice Procedures

### 1. Intake process for Juvenile Complaints:

- A. Upon receipt of a Juvenile complaint for truancy, a Department of Juvenile Justice employee will assure that the complaint is valid. The worker will check the complaint to see that it has all of the appropriate information as well as signed by an authorized complainant.
- B. The DJJ worker will check previous CART files to ensure that the child has been through the CART process or school in-house meeting within the last two years prior to the complaint being filed.
- C. Within one week of receipt of the complaint, the DJJ Juvenile Probation/Parole Specialist III (office manager/intake manager), will schedule an intake appointment and send notice to the youth and family.
- D. The intake appointment, which is usually held within two weeks from the receipt of the complaint, is a meeting with the youth and their legal guardian. Attorneys are also invited to attend if requested by the youth or family. In the intake meeting, DJJ will discuss the allegations, explain the youth's rights and determine if they wish to have an attorney. DJJ then will determine if the youth will be admitting or denying the allegations.
- E. If this is the youth's first truancy complaint, an Informal Adjustment Agreement may be entered and processed. If the Informal Adjustment is refused, violated or another complaint for truancy is filed, then the case is forwarded to the Juvenile Court Administrator to schedule a court date.

### 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.

### C. Prosecution in Magistrate and/or Superior Court

When it is clear that the parent/guardian 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/guardian. In other circumstances, CART and/or the school social worker or school administrator may, but is not required to, take into account the following considerations when recommending a criminal warrant be sought for the parent/guardian of a child:

- The child is under the age of 16 years.
- The child has an illness for which the parent/guardian has not been diligent in pursuing medical attention or in seeking financial assistance to procure the proper medical attention.
- The parent/guardian has not actively sought assistance from community social services and resources to assist in getting the child to school.
- The parent/guardian is absent from the home or neglectful to an extent that it hinders the child's willingness or ability to attend school.

If the child and parent/guardian are under a CART attendance contract, failure of the child or parent/guardian 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/guardian.

#### **IV. Community Support**

##### **A. Law Enforcement**

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

- Forward juvenile complaints 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 or guardian permission, if possible, and on an intermittent basis, transport truant students to school.

##### **B. Public Health (School Nurse)**

Each school in Catoosa County has registered nurses available to serve students via-on-site school "clinics" through the Catoosa County Health Department. School Nursing Services 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/guardians for preliminary verification to the school of illness pending an appointment with a physician.
- 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 Catoosa County Health Department is an integral partner in community health related to school readiness, attendance, and success. Catoosa County Health Department shall:

- Provide immunization evaluations, immunizations, and immunization records, for those who qualify, required for school enrollment
- Provide Scoliosis screens for students
- Provide various medical, dental, and prescription services, referrals, and education to students and families in Catoosa County to promote personal and community health.

#### C. Mental Health (Lookout Mountain Community Services)

LMCS provides crucial support for the mental, physical, and emotional well being of students and their families. LMCS shall:

- 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 family issues contributing to absences.
- Offer clinical support, when possible and appropriate, to any truancy prevention or treatment programs instituted.

#### D. Department of Family and Children Services

The Catoosa County Department of Family and Children Services often provides social services to the families of truant students. In support of this Protocol, the Catoosa 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.
- Monitor school enrollment and regular attendance for students in emergency shelter care, temporary guardianship arranged by the Department, or foster care.

- Attend court proceedings, when necessary, for cases involving truancy and/or complaints against parents/guardians related to mandatory school attendance.

#### E. Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber has an Education Committee, which will support this Protocol by facilitating a partnership between local businesses employing students during the school year and Catoosa County Schools. Businesses should ensure:

- Employment hours shall be restricted to no more than twenty (20) hours per week.
- Student employees shall not knowingly be allowed to work on days they are absent from school.
- 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.

#### F. Family Connection

The Catoosa County Family Collaborative offers free parenting classes in an effort to increase those skills parents need to set and enforce boundaries such as school attendance. Class facilitators accept referrals from all partners including the schools, DJJ, DFCS, and the Catoosa Attendance Review Team. The Collaborative, in partnership with the schools, has also successfully implemented two prevention grant programs for students at risk. Both programs emphasize school attendance and making good choices to avoid all risk behaviors.

### **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.