

Dear Parents, Guardians and Students:

Welcome to the beginning of another school year. We hope you had an enjoyable summer break from school and that you have begun another productive school year. This letter is written to stress to you the importance of attending school.

We take compulsory school attendance very seriously. Tennessee law requires that children under age eighteen attend school. It is the parent and/or guardian's responsibility to insist that the child attend school. Truancy is defined as an absence for an entire school day, a major portion of the school day or the major portion of any class, study hall or activity during the school day for which the student is scheduled. Make-up work should be completed within the number of days after the absence the school policy gives you. Even authorized absences may become excessive, and if the child is not in school regularly, he or she is missing valuable instruction time.

Parents/Guardians/Students you will be receiving a call after every absent, tardy or dismissal from school. Please contact the school to have meaningful communications with them in order to determine the underlying cause(s) of the absences. If the absences are unexcused remember the compulsory school attendance law. The school system is aware that some circumstances arise that are unavoidable. Contact should be made with the school to develop a Tier Intervention Plan with the attendance team (contract, assessment, truancy board). In order to try avoid further actions (see next paragraph).

Children who do not attend school are considered, by law, to be unruly and may be placed into state custody to receive an education. The parents of these children may be fined and/or incarcerated. Any parent, guardian or other person who has control of a child, or children, and who violates the compulsory school attendance law commits educational neglect. Educational Neglect is a Class C Misdemeanor with a maximum punishment of a \$50.00 fine and up to thirty (30) days in jail for each day of unauthorized absence beyond the fifth (5th) unauthorized absence. In addition, a Show Cause Order for Contempt may issue for those who have been to court on these same issues in the past.

If your child is expelled from school for any reason, your child is still subject to the compulsory school attendance law, if under the age of eighteen. It becomes the parent's obligation to obtain and pay for a private educational program for the child. If this is not done, the child may be placed into state custody.

This letter is not intended to single out any person and is not for the majority of parents or their children. It is a reminder to those who do not see the importance of attending school and behaving appropriately while there.

If you begin to experience a problem with your child attending school, please contact the Attendance Supervisor, Dennis Balch or your Juvenile Court Youth Services Officers, Jennifer Shelton or Martha Newman. They have resources and advice that may be beneficial. It is our goal for children and parents to not be petitioned to court or arrested. We believe in utilizing preventive measures before the matter goes too far.

May each of you have a safe and productive school year.

Sincerely,

Dennis Balch
Cocke County School System
423-623-7821 ext. 2020

Jennifer Shelton
Cocke County Juvenile Court
423-623-9291

Parent/Guardian's Signature: _____