



Dear Parents, Guardians and Students:

Welcome to the beginning of another school year! We hope that you had an enjoyable summer break from school. This letter stresses the importance of school attendance.

The Cocke County School District takes 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. When students miss school, make-up work should be completed within three (3) days after the absence. **Even authorized absences may become excessive, and if the child is not in school regularly, he or she is missing valuable instruction time.**

Annually, the Director of Schools, or their designee, will provide written notice to parent(s)/guardian(s) that attendance at school is required. Students shall be present at least fifty percent (50%) of the scheduled school day in order to be counted present. Students may attend part-time days, alternating days, or for a specific amount of time as indicated in their Individualized Education Plan or 504 Plan and shall be considered present for school attendance purposes.⁸ If a student is required to participate in a remedial instruction program outside of the regular school day where there is no cost to the parent(s)/guardian(s) and the school system provides transportation, unexcused absences from these programs shall be reported in the same manner.⁹

One absence shall be recorded for unauthorized tardies or unauthorized early leaves or any combination of unauthorized tardies or unauthorized early leaves equaling three (3) that the student receives.

Parents may contact the school secretary throughout the year to determine if written excuses have been provided to the school. Parents are allowed five (5) excused parent notes each school year for their student's absences. After the five (5) parent notes, any absence the student has incurred will count toward the student's truancy count. A student who is absent five (5) days, without adequate excuse, shall be reported to the Director of Schools/designee who will, in turn, provide written notice to the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the student's absence. If a parent does not provide documentation within adequate time excusing those absences, or request an attendance hearing, then the Director of Schools/designee shall implement the progressive truancy plan described below prior to referral to juvenile court.

Progressive Truancy Plan¹⁰

Prior to referral to juvenile court, the following progressive truancy plan will be implemented.

Tier I

Tier one of the progressive truancy plan must include school-wide prevention-oriented supports

1. Letters to all students at beginning of each school year
2. Letter, call or other form of communication to student, parent or guardian when three unexcused absences occur.

3. Letter, call or other form of communication to student, parent or guardian when four unexcused absences occur.
4. Letter, call or other form of communication to student, parent or guardian when five unexcused absences occur.

Tier II

Tier II of the progressive truancy plan shall include the following:

At the fifth unexcused absence, the attendance clerk calls student into office to talk to student about absences and gives them three (3) days to have parent, guardian, or other person in parental relation to contact school to set up a parental conference, or a conference call meeting in which the parent and student are able to meaningfully participate. The Tier II plan includes:

1. A conference with the student and the student's parent(s)/guardian(s);
2. An attendance contract, based on the conference, signed by the student, the parent(s)/guardian(s), and an attendance supervisor or designee. The contract shall include:
 - a. A specific description of the school's attendance expectations for the student.
 - b. The period for which the contract is effective; and
 - c. Penalties for additional absences and alleged school offenses, including additional disciplinary action and potential referral to juvenile court; and
 - d. Give parent a copy of the contract and attendance report
3. Regularly scheduled follow-up meetings to discuss the student's progress.

Under this tier, a school employee shall conduct an individualized assessment detailing the reasons a student has been absent from school. The employee may refer the student to counseling, community-based services, or other services to address the student's attendance problems (Family Resource, Coordinated Health School Nurse, RTI, etc.)

If a student does not show up for the conference:

4. After at least two attempts to meet with the student the student will be subject to Tier III.

Tier III

This tier shall be implemented if the truancy interventions under Tier II are unsuccessful. Tier III includes:

1. Truancy Board referral
 - a. These interventions shall be determined by a team, (Truancy Board) formed by the district. The interventions shall address student needs in an age-appropriate manner. Finalized plans shall be (Truancy Board) approved by the Director of Schools/designee. The Truancy Board will examine any available information and afford the student and parent/guardian the opportunity to enter an attendance contract with them.
2. Referral to TN Dept. of Children's Services FCIP (if needed).

3. Referral to any other community-based services (if needed).
4. Contract aimed at addressing student's attendance problems

If a student or parent does not show up for the Truancy Board:

5. After at least two attempts to meet with the student or parent the school may document that the student's parent or guardian is unwilling to cooperate in the truancy intervention plan. The director of schools or designee may report the student's absences to the appropriate judge.

If student, parent/guardian fails to comply with Tier Three :

6. Referral to Juvenile Court accompanied by a statement from the student's school certifying that the school applied the progressive truancy interventions adapted to the student, and that the progressive truancy interventions failed to meaningfully address the student's school attendance.

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 an educational program for the child. If this is not done, the child may be placed into state custody.

In closing, please note that this letter is not intended to single out any person and is not for the majority of parents or their children in our school district. However, 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, Patrick O'Neil or the 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,

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