

Guidance for Student Attendance & Virtual Learning

State Board Rule 160-5-1-.10 STUDENT ATTENDANCE outlines the legal and regulatory requirements for student attendance and notes that the local board of education determines the circumstances for excused and unexcused absences (outside of those circumstances specifically outlined Section 2(a) – (g) of the rule).

In June 2020, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) provided [guidance related to student attendance and FTE reporting](#) for systems utilizing a virtual/distance/remote or hybrid instructional model. As stated, educators are still required to record and report data on student attendance to the GaDOE. While the requirement to record student attendance is not impacted by the district's selection of a traditional, virtual/distance/remote, or hybrid instructional model, the methods used to record and report student attendance data may be different.

A student is considered to be “in attendance when he or she is participating in active instruction and/or educational services from a school or district. This active instruction may occur in-person or through virtual/distance/remote learning. Methods of collecting attendance for full or hybrid virtual/distance/remote learning include, but are not limited to¹:

Student attendance during live virtual instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record which students participate in live instruction (virtual lessons, morning meetings, office hours, etc.)
Student log-in to online platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record which students access the online learning environment Record which students access available videos or complete reading assignments in online platform
Student time spent in online classroom or platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record which students access the online learning environment and length of time logged in

¹ Methods provided derived from previous GaDOE guidance to state virtual charter schools and from the *Promising Practices Brief: Improving Student Engagement and Attendance during COVID-19 School Closures* by the American Institutes for Research.



Student submission of assignments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record when students submit homework assignments (via email, online, mail, in-person drop off, etc.) • Identify amount of time expected to be spent on assignments and the completion of assignments • Record when students complete quizzes or formative assessments • Record assignment/packet distribution
Student/teacher interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record phone call or email interactions between student/teacher

Regardless of the instructional model selected, educators will need to consider the many factors that may impact student attendance. School and district leaders should collaborate with their communities and district committees (e.g. School Attendance and School Climate) to:

- develop clear definitions for absences and tardiness,
- identify supports for students and families struggling with attendance and truancy, and
- implement interventions

School and district leaders should be mindful that any interventions implemented allow families to follow public health guidelines. Families should be able to keep their children home from in-person instruction when they are experiencing potential COVID-19 symptoms, quarantine as directed by local and state public health authorities, etc.

Considerations for Student Attendance During Online Instruction

Determine and consider the student’s situation. There may be many reasons why a student is not participating in, or is consistently tardy to, virtual/distance/remote learning. When making determinations on attendance, consider:

- Does the student have stable internet connectivity?
- Does the student have access to a device? If yes – is the student sharing a device with another relative in the home (and at the same time)?
- Is the student sick? Is the student caring for family members who are sick?
- Is the student caring for younger siblings during the day while parents/guardians are working?
- Is the student employed and required to work during scheduled virtual/distance/remote learning sessions?
- Are there any language barriers inherent to the instructional model or format?

Plan a communication strategy to identify the root of the student’s attendance issue. It is possible that students who are struggling to participate in virtual/distance/remote learning may not be immediately responsive to email. Consider multiple communication mediums and

strategies (text messages, phone calls, letters, contact with known friends/family) to connect with students and families to determine the cause of the student's attendance issue. Utilize school counselors and social workers or previous teachers or trusted school personnel for support.

Provide alternate or flexible solutions. Depending on the situation, students may need to adjust the timing or format of their instructional model. Advise the parent on options for student participation (improved internet access, access to additional devices if available, modified schedule or instructional options to ensure the student is able to fully access and participate in the class).

Helpful Resources

1. [Promising Practices Brief: Improving Student Engagement and Attendance During COVID-19 School Closures](#)
2. [Attendance Playbook: Smart Strategies for Reducing Chronic Absence in the Covid Era](#)
3. [Georgia State Board of Education Rule 160-5-1-.10 Student Attendance](#)