



One of the most important things you can do for your children is to be involved in their education. You need to know the school principal and your child's teachers, so you can discuss your child's progress. You need to know the school's rules and what the school expects from parents and students. You also need to know the school's procedures and your rights in case a problem occurs. By failing to be involved in your child's education, you are not doing your part to promote the development of your child.

Student Attendance

Under Georgia law, every child has the right to attend school. Children between the ages of six and sixteen must go to school. If children miss more than five days of school without an excuse, they are truant and their parents may face legal action for educational neglect. Unless children are homeless or have homeless parents, they must attend the school in the neighborhood where they live. Homeless children may be able to continue attending a school they moved away from. Families forced to move because of an emergency may immediately enroll in the school where they are relocated.

Suspension & Expulsion

Every fall when school starts, go over

the school rules with your children so both you and your children know exactly what the school expects. If children break school rules, they can be suspended (asked to leave school for a certain number of days) or expelled (asked to leave school permanently).

Students who are suspended or expelled have "due process" rights. Due process means the school must give the student notice—an explanation of what the school thinks the student did wrong. The school must also give the student a hearing—a fair chance to tell their side of the story. For suspensions of 10 days or less, students have the right to be told, in person or in writing, the reason for the suspension. They also have a right to tell their side of the story before being suspended, unless letting the student stay in school would be dangerous or disruptive. For suspensions of more than 10 days, and for expulsions, students have the right to a more detailed notice and a more formal hearing, including:

- a written notice telling what the school says the student has done wrong and explaining the student's rights;
- a hearing before several people acting as judges (called a "tribunal" hearing) where the student can tell what happened, cross examine witnesses that testify against him/her and have people testify for him/her;
- the right to be represented by

a lawyer or non-lawyer at the tribunal hearing;

- the right to have witnesses subpoenaed by the school system to tell what happened;
- a right to appeal the decision of the tribunal hearing to the entire school board and then to the state board of education if necessary.

Children with disabilities who are or should be getting special education have more rights if they are facing suspension and expulsion.

All tribunal hearings are to be completed within ten days from the date the incident occurred. After 10 days, your child should be permitted to return to school pending the outcome of the tribunal.

Children with Disabilities

Federal law requires that children from ages three to twenty-one who have a disability or are suspected of having a disability get a free public education that meets their individualized needs. Children with physical problems, like those that must use a wheel chair, have a disability you can immediately see. Children with learning problems and children who act out also may be disabled and in need of accommodations. The school must identify all children that may be disabled and then evaluate each child to decide what type of educational services the child needs. The school must also identify what

health services and transportation services are possible. Parents have the right to participate in the decision about the educational placement and services their child receives. The school must obtain a parent's consent before evaluating their child, before meeting to make a plan of action, and before changing their child's placement.

If parents disagree with anything in the school's evaluation or education plan, they should tell the school that and explain what action they want the school to take. Parents can also request mediation and a hearing about disagreements they have with the school. Parents can have an attorney go with them to meetings, mediation and hearings.

Homeless Children

Homeless children, including those children displaced by natural disaster, have rights under federal law. A school must enroll such a child right away even if the student does not have the papers he or she would normally need. The school must help the family get those records as well as records from the student's last school. A homeless student has the right to stay in the school he or she last attended before losing his/her home. As well as the right to immediately enroll in a school to where they are relocated. The school district must provide transportation even if the child moves to a different city, county or district. The also requires a school to make its programs and services available to homeless children. Each school

district must have a coordinator to tell families their rights and help them get the services they need. If you are homeless or displaced, contact the school and ask to speak to the Homeless Student Coordinator.

Student Records

School records are confidential. Parents have the right to see their own children's records and allow the release of those records to their family doctors. If the records are not accurate, parents can ask that they be corrected. Parents must give written permission to schools to give their child's records to anyone. Once a student is eighteen, he or she has the right to see his/her own school records.

Student Support Teams

If your child is having any kind of problems in school, the school should hold a student support team (SST) meeting. The SST will meet to discuss the child's educational problems and then create a plan to help the child improve on their current situation. If you see your child having significant problems in school, you have the right to request an SST meeting. If your child is already being served by an SST program and continues to struggle, you should ask that the SST meet to change the plan. If you believe that the cause of your child's problems is an unidentified disability, you have the right to ask the school to evaluate your child to determine whether he/she has a disability. If you have asked the school to evaluate your child but got no response, send a letter to the

school stating that you believe your child is disabled and may be eligible for additional educational support. Keep a copy of the request for your records. For more information about your rights, you can call the Atlanta Legal Aid Society at the office closest to you.

Contact Us

DeKalb County
246 Sycamore Street
Suite 120
Decatur, GA 30030
(404) 377-0701

Clayton County Pro Bono Project
1000 Main Street
Forest Park, GA 30050
(404) 366-0586

Cobb County
30 S. Park Square
Marietta, GA 30090
(770) 528-2565

Fulton County
151 Spring Street, N.W.
Atlanta, GA 30303
(404) 524-5811

South Fulton &
Clayton Counties
1514 East Cleveland Avenue
Suite 100
East Point, GA 30344
(404) 669-0233
(Wagon Works Building)

Gwinnett County
180 Camden Hill Road
Suite A
Lawrenceville, GA 30045
(678)376-4545

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