Board Policy GARH: Employee Leaves and Absences **Status:** DRAFT

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Employee Leaves and Absences

The Bleckley County Board of Education ("the Board") believes that school system personnel are entitled to an employment benefit that reduces the risk of monetary loss because of certain recognized absences. This policy shall apply to all employees of the Board, regardless of the origin of any funds used to pay their salaries.

Employees are 10-month employees unless extended year (to 11 or 12 months) employment is contracted or otherwise specified by the Board. All employees are required to follow the work calendar established by the Board and may take leave from work only in accordance with this policy or other leave policies enacted by the Board.

SICK LEAVE AND PERSONAL LEAVE

Certified personnel employed as teachers, student services support personnel, administrative and supervisory personnel or bus drivers shall be entitled to sick leave with full pay computed on the basis of one and one-fourth working days for each completed contract month (school month in the case of bus drivers). Sick leave days can be accumulated up to 45 days and can be transferred to another employing school system only as provided for in Georgia law.

Classified personnel employed as paraprofessionals, secretaries, nutrition workers, custodians, and maintenance employees are eligible for one (1) day paid sick leave per month worked. ~~Three~~ Five of these days may be used for personal leave, but should be approved in advance by the principal or building administrator. Sick leave days can be accumulated up to 45 days.

Sick leave may be used for:

Personal and professional reasons, but only up to three days per school year and only upon approval by the superintendent or designee. (The employee may not be required to reveal the reason for the request as a condition for granting such leave.)

- Personal illness, physical disability (including disability related to maternity) or injury. However, if the local school board disagrees with any doctor's statement of disability or ability, it may appoint a physician of the same medical specialty as the employee's physician for the purpose of receiving independent medical judgment.
- Absence necessitated by exposure to contagious disease.
- Absence due to illness or death in the employee's family.

Professional Leave

Professional leave for training and/or professional meetings attended at the request of the school system shall not be counted against an employee's sick leave. Such professional leave must not be personal in nature, must benefit the school system as a whole, and must be approved in advance.

Deductions

For any sick leave in an amount above that which is allowed by policy, there shall be a deduction from the full salary of the employee equal to one day's salary for each day of sick leave.

OBSERVANCE OF RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Employees may use personal leave for the observance of recognized religious holidays. If an employee desires to take leave for the observance of recognized religious holidays in excess of the days allowed for personal leave, the employee may be approved for unpaid leave for such purposes provided that such leave is not excessive and does not interfere with fulfilling the obligations of his or her job.

JURY AND WITNESS LEAVE

Each person employed by the Board shall be allowed leave with pay for the purposes of serving as a juror in any court or when attending a judicial proceeding in response to a subpoena. Jury and/or witness leave shall not be

deducted from an individual's accumulated personal, professional or sick leave unless requested by the employee in accordance with # 2 below. No employee utilizing jury and witness leave shall be required to pay the cost of employing a substitute to serve during his or her absence for such leave. Employees must provide a copy of the jury summons to their supervisor and/or upload it to the absence request in Red Rover as soon as practicable upon receipt. Upon completion of jury service, employees must submit documentation from the court verifying attendance and the dates of service.

~~Employees who serve on juries or who are subpoenaed for reasons arising out of their employment with the school system may select one of the following alternatives:~~

1. ~~Return the juror remittance to the system and receive full salary; or~~

2. ~~Keep the juror remittance and deduct from personal leave provided it does not exceed three days.~~

MATERNITY LEAVE

A leave of absence shall be granted employees for the purpose of childbearing in accordance with the following regulations:

1. Any employee who is pregnant shall be entitled to a leave of absence to begin at a time to be determined by the employee, the physician, and the superintendent between the commencement of the pregnancy and the anticipated date of delivery. The employee shall notify the superintendent in writing of her desire to take such leave and, except in case of emergency, shall give such notice at least 60 calendar days prior to the date on which her leave is to begin. This notice shall include a doctor's statement of anticipated date of physical disability. The employee may continue in active employment as late into her pregnancy as she desires provided she is able to perform properly the required job functions of her job. Final determination of ability to perform properly the required job functions shall be made by the board of education. An employee wishing to work to the date of physical disability shall be entitled to the use of all accumulated sick leave credited to her, not to exceed the doctor's estimated length of physical disability. An employee wishing to discontinue work prior to the date of physical disability shall be governed by the same sick leave provisions as apply to employees on leave for other reasons;

2. An employee who has been granted leave for the period of physical disability only shall be entitled to return to active employment upon presentation of a doctor's statement of physical ability to perform the required functions of the job and shall be assigned to a substantially equivalent position to be approved.

Maternal Birth Leave (O.C.G.A. § 45-20-23) *(Effective on or after July 1, 2026)*
In accordance with O.C.G.A. § 45-20-23, eligible full-time employees of the District who give birth are entitled to up to 120 hours of paid maternal birth leave following a qualifying birth event. To be eligible, an employee must be classified as a full-time employee and have completed at least six (6) continuous months (or 700 hours for hourly employees) of employment with the District prior to the birth.

Maternal birth leave is intended to provide time for physical recovery following childbirth and must be used during the three-week period **immediately** following the birth. This leave shall be taken before any paid parental leave available under O.C.G.A. § 45-20-23 and does not carry over or have cash value upon separation from employment.

Employees requesting maternal birth leave must provide notice and documentation as required by District procedures. The Superintendent or designee shall establish administrative procedures for the implementation and verification of eligibility for this benefit. Acceptable documentation may include a birth certificate, hospital birth record, physician certification.

PAID PARENTAL LEAVE

The Board of Education shall make paid parental leave equally available to all eligible employees of the Board of Education under the following terms:

1. An employee of the Board of Education shall be eligible for paid parental leave for qualifying life events upon satisfying the following criteria:
   a. The employee is classified as full-time by the District and is eligible to participate in the TRS (Teacher

Retirement System of Georgia) or the PSERS (Public School Employees Retirement System); and

b. The employee has six continuous months of employment with the Board, regardless of whether he or she is eligible for paid or unpaid leave under federal law. An employee paid on an hourly basis must have worked a minimum of 700 hours over the six-month period immediately preceding the requested paid parental leave date.

2. A qualifying life event means:
   a. The birth of a child of an eligible employee;
   b. The placement of a minor child for adoption with an eligible employee; or
   c. The placement of a minor child for foster care with an eligible employee.
3. The maximum amount of paid parental leave that may be taken by an eligible employee during a rolling 12-month period is 120 hours, regardless of the number of qualifying life events that occur during such period.
   a. The rolling 12-month period shall be measured backward from the date an eligible employee first uses parental leave.
   b. Parental leave may be taken as needed and may be taken in increments of less than eight hours. The smallest increment of parental leave that may be taken is four hours.
   c. **The leave must be taken within 12 weeks of the qualifying event.**
   d. Any unused paid parental leave that remains after the 12-week deadline after the qualifying event shall not carry over for future use.
   e. Unused paid parental leave shall have no cash value at any time of the eligible employee's separation from employment with the Board of Education.
4. Paid parent leave under state law shall run concurrently with any leave provided under federal law.
5. Eligible employees requesting paid parental leave must submit a request in writing to the Superintendent at least 14 days in advance of the requested leave start date, along with verifiable documentation that validates eligibility for the leave.

MILITARY LEAVE

All employees of the Board are entitled to paid leave not to exceed eighteen days in any one federal fiscal year for the purpose of complying with ordered military leave duty with the armed forces of the United States or State of Georgia, including duty as a voluntary member of the militia or reserve component of the United States or State of Georgia. Employees also are entitled to leave not exceeding thirty days in any one federal fiscal year if ordered to duty as a result of the declaration of any emergency by the governor or the appropriate officials of the United States armed forces. Employees who have military commitments shall inform the Superintendent or designee annually and shall cooperate to the extent possible in scheduling such leave so as to minimize the disruption in those employees' duties and the mission of the Board of Education.

BEREAVEMENT LEAVE

Sick leave may be used for absence due to death in the employee's immediate family. The term "immediate family" shall be interpreted to mean father, mother, brother, sister, child, husband, wife or grandparents of the employee concerned, in-law equivalents of those specified, or a relative living in the residence of the employee.

FAMILY & MEDICAL LEAVE ACT

To the extent that any provision in this policy conflicts with or is superseded by the Family and Medical Leave Act ("FMLA"), the regulations promulgated thereunder, or any other federal law, the provision of the FMLA, its regulations or other law, as the case may be, control.

a. by the superintendent. An employee who has been granted leave for a period longer than the period of physical disability, but not to exceed one full school year, shall be entitled to return to active employment upon written request for reassignment and contingent on a vacancy for which the employee is qualified. Such employee shall be given preference equal to any other applicant returning from a period of physical disability for a vacancy for which she is qualified. In any instance, the employee's return to active employment may be delayed until the beginning of a quarter, or semester, in order to maintain continuity of classroom instruction; and

b. If the board of education disagrees with any doctor's statement of disability or ability, it may appoint a physician of the same medical specialty as the employee's physician for the purpose of receiving independent medical judgment.