

Presence and Engagement Attendance Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all students attend school regularly and participate in their educational experiences, as required by law and supported by the Manitoba Policy Directive and Action Plan to Enhance Student Presence and Engagement Policy Directive.

Foundational Principles

- Reciprocal and respectful relationships with students, families, parents, elders, communities, organizations, and the school.
- Student success and well-being is the collective responsibility of all who are responsible for children and youth.
- Putting students at the centre drives all planning and responses.
- Safe, caring, and inclusive learning environments are foundational to student presence and engagement.
- Student absence requires consistent attention and collective action. Ensuring student presence requires continuity of effort and resources over time.
- Partnership between schools, organizations, parents, and communities, and across government agencies are needed to support and improve regular daily presence and engagement for all students.

Common Terminology

Presence: When a student attends and participates in the school or classroom on the days in which they are required. Students may be present even if they are not physically within the classroom, depending on the student specific plan.

Engagement: Students' attitudes towards schooling, their attendance and participation in school activities, disposition towards learning, and working and socializing with others in schools. Engagement is expressed in students' feelings that they belong at school, and in their participation in school activities (OECD, 2003).

Regular Attendance: Coming to school and/or participating in learning consistently and on a routine, habitual basis, missing no more than five days for the entire school year.

Absence: Any time that a student is not in class or not participating in a school activity while not being on suspension/expulsion.

- **Excused Absence** refers to any time that a student is not in class or not participating in school activity while not being on suspension/expulsion, with a valid excuse and the mutual consent of a parent/care giver and the school principal.

- **Unexcused Absence** refers to any time a student is not in class or not participating in school activity while not being on suspension/expulsion, without a valid excuse, with or without parent/caregiver approval.

Chronic Absenteeism:

- Kindergarten to Grade 8 – **Where unexcused absences account for 10% of instructional days in a reporting period**
- Grade 9 to Grade 12 – **Where unexcused absences account for 10 or more classes in a single high school course.**

Severe Chronic Absenteeism

- Kindergarten to Grade 8 – absent for **20% of instructional days in a reporting period.**
- Grade 9 to Grade 12 – absent for 20 or more classes in a single high school course.

Student-Specific Plan (SSP): A planning, record-keeping, and communication document, as outlined in the Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba (MEECL, 2022). Student-specific planning is a process through which members of student support teams meet the unique needs of individual students; it may range from short-term strategies applied in the classroom to comprehensive, individualized programming.

Attendance Requirements

All students enrolled in the School Division are expected to attend school regularly, on time, and prepared to learn. Parents/Guardians are responsible for ensuring that their children attend school regularly and on time.

The Public Schools Act directs that where a child is absent from school the teacher or the employee recording school attendance shall, in writing, report the matter, including the name of the child, to the principal of the school. A principal who receives a report of an absence must, if satisfied that the child is in fact absent,

- (a) report the absence to the child's parent; and
- (b) inform them of their obligation to ensure that the child
 - (i) attends school, or
 - (ii) if the child is at least 15 years old, participates in an activity or program provided for in the regulations made under section 262.2.

Schools must notify parent(s) via voicemail/automated system and if the absence persists to chronic absenteeism, a personal contact from the teacher or designate to better understand the nature of the absence and proactively identify strategies in response to and proactively identify strategies in response to barriers.

Documenting, Monitoring, Analyzing and Reporting

Schools maintain accurate attendance records for all students that include:

- Consistent, daily recording procedures that include whether absences are excused or unexcused.

- Monitoring enrollment data to ensure that all students expected to be present are in school. This includes comparing enrollment and reviewing unclaimed pupil files and home-school reports from the department.
- Regular monitoring and analysing of school enrollment and attendance data.
- Procedures for investigating and identifying the causes of student absences and determining the appropriate supports that are required to promote regular attendance.
- An early warning system and non-punitive outreach protocols to identify students who are likely to experience chronic absenteeism by monitoring, disaggregating, and responding to student presence and absence data trends at all levels.
- Ensuring that student attendance is a standing agenda item at school-based support team meetings.

Response to Chronic and Severe Chronic Absenteeism

Beautiful Plains School Division will not use suspensions, expulsions, and withdrawal as a response to student presence and engagement. Rather, the Student Specific Plan (SSP) will be created to document barriers to attendance as well as support from the school, division, and/or outside agencies.

When a student experiences **chronic absenteeism**:

- The Principal will:
 - Designate a case manager to create/update the SSP for students who are experiencing chronic absenteeism.
 - Contact home to plan a meeting to create the SSP.
 - Notify the school team of students who are chronically absent.
- The Case Manager will:
 - Lead the SSP
 - Document the action plan
 - Monitor student presence and engagement
 - Follow up with other parties as needed

When a student experiences **severe chronic absenteeism** (20 or more classes in single high school course or 20% or more of instructional days in K-8):

- The Case Manager will create/assess in school interventions to determine possible next steps. This may involve other members of the team, social work, and/or other agencies, as needed.
- The Case Manager will invite the parent/caregivers to attend a meeting with the above-mentioned team.

If **severe chronic absenteeism persists**:

- The Case Manager will contact CFS if there are concerns for the student's safety and well-being.
- The Principal will provide an update with the SSP to the Student Services Coordinator

- The Divisional Attendance Officer will contact Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning School Unit via formal written notification.

Roles and Responsibilities

Supporting children with presence and engagement is a team effort. Students, parents/caregivers, teachers and principals/designates all play vital roles.

Students

- are responsible to attend school and classes regularly and punctually
- must comply with the school's code of conduct and complete assignments and other related work required by teachers
- participate in student-specific planning as developmentally appropriate
 - Note: It is recognized that elementary aged students are more dependent on their parents/caregiver to help them attend school regularly

Parents/Caregivers

- have the right to be informed regularly of the attendance, behaviour, and academic achievement of their child in school, and to participate in planning
- are responsible for cooperating fully with the child's teachers and other employees of the school division to ensure the child complies with the school's code of conduct
- must take all reasonable measures to ensure the child attends school regularly

Teachers

- are responsible for monitoring and recording student attendance
- are responsible for timely communication to the principal and the parent/caregiver
- identify potential issues related to chronic lateness and/or absenteeism
- promote and support regular attendance
- communicate (verbally and in writing if needed) with student and parents/caregivers when concerns related to attendance arise
- document steps taken to communicate with students, parents/caregivers, and outside agencies when concerns related to attendance arise
- participate in the student-specific planning process

Principals/Designates:

- are responsible to work with teachers, students, parents/caregivers, and others, as needed, to promote regular attendance, including identifying supports in response to student absences
- ensure teachers maintain accurate attendance records
- monitor and review student attendance data and oversee the student-specific planning process, including the assignment of a case manager for students experiencing chronic absenteeism
- report chronic/severe absenteeism to the division
- invite community agencies, organizations and associations, other education authorities, regional health and children's services authorities to plan collaboratively in support of appropriate educational programming and planning for students
- lead school-based attendance initiatives

School Divisions:

- ensure students who are eligible for enrolment with the division receive regular and appropriate educational programming
- work with schools, parents/caregivers, community and other partners to ensure that students are regularly present
- ensure that schools track student attendance accurately, document any students who are chronically absent, and take immediate, sustained action to address causes of chronic absenteeism until the student is regularly present
- work with schools and agencies to identify supports and interventions to help meet both the educational and non-educational needs of students and families to ensure regular school attendance, such as through coordinated services
- ensure culturally safe educational environments and culture competence amongst all staff

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