

1.0. School Administration

1.A. General

1.A. Presence and Engagement

Adopted: September 26, 2023

Reviewed by Committee:

Legislative Reference: The Public Schools Act, The Education Administration Act, The Human Rights Code, The Protecting and Supporting Children (Information Sharing) Act and The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

Policy statement

In accordance with the document provided by Manitoba Education (2023) [Safe and Caring Schools: A Policy Directive and Action Plan to Enhance Student Presence and Engagement](#), all school divisions are required to update their attendance policies to be responsive their local contexts and student needs. Furthermore, there is a general recognition that student absence is a serious impediment to success and that regular attendance is key to providing adequate support to students.

Definitions and Terminology:

Presence: When a student attends and participates in the school or classroom on the days in which they are required. This is an entry point to being able to engage students in the process of learning. Students may be present even if they are not physically within a classroom, depending on their 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 school. 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 present in class or not participating in a school sanctioned activity (while not being on suspension/expulsion) with the mutual consent of the school principal and the parent.

Unexcused Absence: When any time a student is not present in class or not participating in a school sanctioned activity (while not being on suspension/expulsion) without the mutual consent of the school principal and of the parent. Administrators may consider a number of factors in whether an absence is excused including patterns of absenteeism, cultural events, and academics.

Chronic Absenteeism: Where unexcused absences account for 10 or more classes in a single high school course or 10 percent or more of instructional days in Kindergarten to Grade 8 in a reporting period.

Severe Chronic Absenteeism: Where unexcused absences account for 20 or more classes in a single high school course or 20 percent or more of instructional days in Kindergarten to Grade 8 in a reporting period.

Student-Specific Plan (SSP): A planning, record-keeping, and communication document, as outlined in [*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.

Guiding Principles:

Prevention:

Pro-active measures to increase attendance are considered the primary focus of schools due to the universal importance to all students of establishing these practices and the efficacy of early intervention as opposed to reactive measures. As per the Policy Directive, preventative practices include:

- Creating a safe, welcoming, and culturally responsive school environment for students.
- Addressing gaps in nutrition addresses a basic need that supports student health and well-being and is a barrier to student engagement and success when it is unmet.
- Improving student and parent engagement with school.
- Enhance visibility of staff at transition times. This includes throughout the school day as well as when students move from one grade or another or to different schools.
- Creating and implementing a culturally relevant and responsive curriculum. Students are more engaged in and positive about school when they see their cultures reflected in the curriculum.
- Establishing and implementing restorative practice, including restorative justice approaches.

- Expanding implementation of anti-racism and anti-discrimination education.
- Ensuring culturally safe educational environments and cultural competence among all school division staff.

Student Specific Attendance Plans:

Student Specific Plans should focus on restorative practices that encourage attendance.

Student Specific Plans must include:

- a clearly identified attendance case manager who will be responsible for coordination and follow up of the SSP

Student Specific Plans may include:

- alternative education programming
- flexible timetabling
- a variety of assessment methods/options
- opportunities for credit acquisition and credit recovery
- ways to ensure learning is accessible to the student based on their current level of performance
- connecting the student and/or their family with school-based or division-based support and/or outside agencies

Student Specific Plans must **not** include:

- suspensions, expulsions, and withdrawals as a response to absenteeism

Roles and Responsibilities:

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-age students are more dependent on their parents to help them attend school regularly.

Parents

- 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 or school district 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 within their class
- are responsible for timely communication to the principal and the parent
- identify potential issues related to chronic lateness and/or absenteeism
- promote and support regular attendance
- communicate (verbally and in writing, if needed) with students and parents when concerns related to attendance arise
- document steps taken to communicate with students, parents, 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, 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 school division
- invite community agencies, organizations and associations, other education authorities, and 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, and 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 cultural competence among all staff

Response to Chronic and Severe Chronic Absenteeism

Lakeshore School Division will not use suspensions, expulsions, and withdrawal as a response to student presence and engagement. Rather, Student Specific Plans are required to be created for Chronic and Severe Chronic Absenteeism.

When the school is aware of an external agency involvement with a student who is chronically absent, this agency **MUST** be included as part of the student specific planning process.

School divisions must provide staff with direction on informed consent for information sharing from parents/caregivers in compliance with the Manitoba Pupil File Guidelines, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the Personal Health Information Act, and the Protecting and Supporting Children (Information Sharing) Act.

When a student experiences **chronic absenteeism**:

- The Principal will:
 - Notify the school team of the students who are chronically absent.
- If necessary:
 - designate a case manager (Resource Teacher, Guidance Counsellor, Classroom Teacher, Administrator) to create and update the SSP for students who are experiencing chronic absenteeism.
 - Determine who will contact home to plan a meeting to elicit parental engagement and update the SSP.
- The Case Manager will:
 - Lead and document the SSP creation and updating process.
 - Monitor student presence and engagement.
 - Follow up with other parties as needed.

When absenteeism persists and a student reaches the level of **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 invite the parent/guardians to attend a meeting to review, evaluate and update the SSP.
- The Case Manager will create/assess in school interventions to determine possible next steps. This may involve other members of the school support team.
- The Principal will Notify the school team of the students who are chronically absent.

If **severe chronic absenteeism** persists (interventions are not resulting in a change in attendance patterns):

- The Case Manager will contact CFS if there are concerns for the student's safety and well-being.
- The school Principal will provide the following to the divisional Truancy Officer and the Student Services Manager when the severely chronic absenteeism reaches 30%:
 - summary of steps taken to date
 - the SSP
- The divisional Truancy Officer will:
 - Compile the data on severe chronic absenteeism
 - Contact MEECL School and Community Support Unit via formal written notification.

Documentation:

Consistent daily recording of attendance using the division-wide Student Information System (SIS), is of critical importance. Designated staff must ensure that they are inputting data consistently and accurately.

Monitoring and Review

The Division will:

- monitor enrolment data to ensure that all students expected to be present are in school. This includes comparing enrolment registers year over year, as well as reviewing unclaimed pupil files and homeschool reports from the department.
- monitor and analyze division-wide and school enrollment and attendance data.
- Review procedures for investigating and identifying the causes of student absences and determining the appropriate support required to promote regular attendance.
- Ensure that there is 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.
- Ensure that student attendance is a standing agenda item at senior administration meetings and school-based support team meetings.