



AP 4-200 – STUDENT PRESENCE AND ENGAGEMENT

BACKGROUND

Under Manitoba's *Public Schools Act*, children are required to attend school from the time they reach compulsory school age (7 years of age or will be reaching 7 years of age by December 31 in a given calendar year) until they attain the age of 18. Every parent of a child of compulsory school age is responsible for sending their child to school regularly. Every student is responsible for attending school and classes regularly and on time and completing assignments and other related work.

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.

A principal must report a child's absence to the Student Services Administrator if the principal is satisfied that

- (a) the child continues to be absent from school after the child's parent has been informed of the absence; and
- (b) the parent has had a reasonable opportunity to comply with their obligations under this Act.

COMMON 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 refers to 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 the parent.

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.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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

Schools must make immediate, personal outreach to students whose absences are unexcused.

Taking a proactive response to even a day of absence creates opportunities to provide supports and intervention before absenteeism becomes persistent. This includes and is not limited to the following:

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/guardians to help them attend school regularly.

Parents/Legal Guardians:

- 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



- are responsible for timely communication to the principal and the parent/legal guardian
- 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/legal guardians when concerns related to attendance arise
- document steps taken to communicate with students, parents/legal guardians, 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/legal guardians, 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/legal guardians, 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



ENHANCING PROACTIVE AND PREVENTATIVE ATTENDANCE PRACTICES

Schools must provide immediate, personal outreach to students/families whose absence is unexcused or a cause for concern. They will do this in the following ways:

- School notifying parent(s)/legal guardian via voicemail/automated system; and
- If absence persists, a personal contact from the teacher to better understand the nature of the absence and proactively identify strategies in response to barriers. (phone, in person, email, SeeSaw); and
- Once the student reaches chronic absenteeism, a designate will make personal contact.

Preventative practices to enhance student engagement, well-being, and success can include the following:

- Creating a safe, welcoming, and culturally responsive school environment for students.
- Addressing gaps in nutrition and basic needs.
- Improving student and parent/legal guardian engagement with school.
- Enhancing visibility of staff at transition times.

DOCUMENTING, MONITORING, ANALYZING, AND REPORTING

Every school must:

- Record daily student attendance including whether absences are excused or unexcused.
- Monitor enrolment data including comparing enrolment registers and reviewing unclaimed pupil files.
- Discuss attendance at In-School Support Team (ISST) meetings.
- Have an early warning system:
 - For Kindergarten to Grade 8:
 - The school Administrative Assistant will make contact daily for unexcused absences.
 - The classroom teacher will contact home at 5 absences. They will document contact home via a school presence and engagement contact form.
 - The classroom teacher will give the Principal a copy of their school presence and engagement contact form.
 - For Grade 9 - Grade 12:
 - The school Administrative Assistant will make contact daily for unexcused absences.
 - The classroom teacher will contact home at 5 absences in each class. They will document contact home via a school presence and engagement contact form.



- The classroom teacher will give the Principal a copy of their school presence and engagement contact form.
- The Principal will:
 - analyze school enrolment and attendance data.
 - contact home at 10 absences to inform the parent of next steps included in this document.
 - designate a case manager to investigate and identify the causes of student absences and determine the appropriate supports that are required to promote regular attendance.

RESPONSE TO CHRONIC AND SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Schools will not use suspensions, expulsions, and withdrawals 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 (Resource Teacher/Guidance Counsellor/other) to create/update the SSP for students who are experiencing chronic absenteeism.
 - contact home to inform the parent of next steps included in this document.
 - fill out their portion of the school presence and engagement contact form and provide a copy of this form to the case manager.
 - notify the ISST 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 parties, as needed
 - fill out their portion of the school presence and engagement contact form

When a student experiences severe chronic absenteeism:

- The Case Manager will create/assess in-school interventions to determine next steps. This will involve other members of the ISST, member(s) of the Student Services Team, and/or other agencies, as needed.



- The Case Manager will invite the parent(s)/legal guardians 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 school Principal will provide the following to the Student Services Administrator:
 - the completed school presence and engagement contact form
 - the SSP
- The Student Services Administrator will:
 - compile data on severe chronic absenteeism as submitted by WSD schools.
 - contact MEECL School and Community Support Unit via formal written notification.

SYSTEMIC CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

In schools where there are high incidents of student absenteeism (more than 3% of students with severe chronic absenteeism), divisional presence and engagement committees may be considered as a mechanism to ensure that student absenteeism is monitored and that responsive planning is in place. Committees at the school level are also recommended where feasible.

- The school Principal will contact the Student Services Administrator when the school has severe chronic absenteeism in more than 3% of the population.
- The Student Services Administrator will form a divisional presence and engagement committee.

COORDINATED SERVICES

Reminders for School Staff when working to support a student with presence and engagement concerns:

- The focus should always be on inviting students back and finding the necessary resources to support attendance.
- Conflict in the school environment may be a barrier to student presence. Restorative practices can reduce conflict, bullying, and absenteeism and strengthen relationships. Restorative practices provide opportunities to make amends and repair relationships, and they reduce the likelihood of future harms while holding individuals accountable. These approaches allow students to understand the impact of negative behaviour on others and to develop empathy.
- The Protecting and Supporting Children (Information Sharing) Act supports collaborative and timely intervention efforts by enabling information sharing about supported children and their parents/legal guardians by service providers for the purposes of providing services or benefits to children. When the school is aware of 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/legal guardians 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.

EXCEPTIONS TO THE ABOVE PROCEDURE

Students who have chronic / severe chronic absenteeism from school and who have been:

- present
- engaged, and
- doing well outside of these absences

do not need to be reported on with a student specific plan. The principal will have the discretion to make other exceptions to the above procedure.

The school will make every effort to follow up on, and determine reasons for, any student absenteeism.

A student who is excused must fulfill the school's requirements in order to be promoted. [PSA 260(1)(2)][PSA 58.7(b)]

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