
STUDENT ATTENDANCE

The Division believes that good student attendance is important to being successful in schools and that it has an obligation to ensure compliance with the Public Schools Act provisions regarding student attendance. Students are encouraged to have regular attendance and schools are given responsibility for attendance procedures and for daily administration of those procedures.

Definitions

Presence: When a student attends and participates in the school or classroom in 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 (cognitively absent) 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 being on suspension/expulsion, with a valid excuse. In practice, this has been referred to as a verified absence.
- **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 parental/guardian approval.

Chronic Absenteeism:

- Kindergarten to Grade 8 – unexcused absent for **7** or more instructional days per term.
- Grade 9 to Grade 12 – **10** or more unexcused classes in a single high school course.

Severe Chronic Absenteeism:

- Kindergarten to Grade 8 – unexcused absent for **13** or more instructional days per term
- Grade 9 to Grade 12 – **20** or more unexcused classes in a single high school course.

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.

Responsibilities of Schools with Regard to Student Attendance

1. To develop and maintain, through periodic review, a written policy on attendance which is made available on an annual basis to parents and students in terms of information on expectations and procedures for implementation by the school.
2. Administration of the attendance policy including consultation with parents when student absence cannot be explained or is not known by the school.
3. Maintenance of a daily record of student attendance such that a permanent record of attendance exists for each student during each school year. The permanent attendance record should be stored and available to appropriate authorities as per the Public Schools Act and FIPPA regulations governing access.

Expectations for Inclusion Within School Attendance Policies and Procedures

1. A process for involving staff, parents and students, where appropriate, in the development and periodic review of attendance policies.
2. A means to ensure parents and students are informed on an annual basis as to attendance expectations and procedures for implementation.
3. Clear delineation of teacher and administration roles in implementing attendance procedures
4. A procedure for determining acceptable and nonacceptable student absenteeism and a means to discuss and indicate to students and parents as to what that difference is and what actions and consequences will follow from each type of absenteeism.

5. A means to involve parents in the various stages of dealing with student absenteeism and a clear understanding of school expectations and consequences for situations involving a student absenteeism whether it be acceptable or not acceptable to the school.
6. A method for accurate daily attendance reporting to those who need to know and the establishment and storage of a permanent record of student attendance each year in accordance with P.S.A. provisions.
7. Completion of a monthly absentee report to be forwarded to the superintendent after the last teaching day of the month.
8. Consideration of positive activities, rewards, etc., within the attendance policy which promote good student attendance.
9. Inclusion of a procedure for referral to the Division Attendance Officer in those situations where student absenteeism is not acceptable over time and school efforts to achieve acceptable attendance are not meeting with success.
10. Inclusion of an opportunity for appeal to the superintendent if removal from a class/school is to be considered.

Responsibilities of the Division in Support of Student Attendance Efforts by Schools

1. Ensure schools have an appropriate written attendance policy and procedures.
2. Support school efforts including the provision of a Division Attendance Officer as a support to schools.

Responsibilities of the Parent in Support of Student Attendance

1. As per P.S.A., to ensure their child(ren) attend school regularly.
2. To communicate with the school when their child(ren) will be absent from school.

To attend meetings, as stipulated in school attendance procedures; when it is felt necessary to discuss their child(ren)s lack of attendance.

Response to Chronic and Severe Chronic Absenteeism

Swan Valley School Division schools will not use suspensions, expulsions, and withdrawals as a response to student presence and engagement. Rather, a Student-Specific Plan (SSP) will be created to document barriers to attendance as we as support from the school, division, and/or outside agencies.

When a student experiences **chronic absenteeism**:

- The Principal will:
 - Notify the Student Services team of students who are chronically absent

- Designate a case manager (Resource Teacher/Presence & Engagement Facilitator) to create/update the SSP for students who are experiencing chronic absenteeism
- Contact home to invite the parent/guardian for team meeting to identify barriers to attendance and strategies to respond to these barriers.
- The Case Manager will:
 - Create the SSP
 - Monitor student presence and engagement
 - Follow up with team members, as needed

When a student experiences **severe chronic absenteeism**:

- The Case Manager will create/assess in-school interventions to determine next steps. This will involve others members of the Student Service Team, and/or other agencies, if applicable.
- The Case Manager must invite the parent(s)/legal guardians to attend a meeting with the above-mentioned team.

If **severe chronic absenteeism persists**:

- The school Principal will notify the Student Services Achievement Coordinator
- The Student Services Achievement Coordinator will:
 - contact Child and Family Services (CFS)
 - contact MEECL School and Community Support Unit via formal written notification
 - compile data on severe chronic absenteeism

Coordinated Services

Reducing barriers to student presence requires personalized assessment, planning, coordination, and monitoring of students. A case management approach to facilitate the process is required to coordinate the complexity of supports and to provide a stable point of contact to establish relationships with chronically absent students and parents.

The school must designate a case manager to respond to and work with the student and their parents.



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.
- Recognize that 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 behavior 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 should 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 Protection and Supporting Children (Information Sharing) Act.