

Red River Valley School Division
ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE G17
STUDENT PRESENCE & ENGAGEMENT



Students who attend school regularly are more engaged in learning, have a greater opportunity to access school and community resources, have a greater sense of belonging, and are more likely to reach their full potential. Student presence and engagement is required for success. Student absence can be a serious impediment to a student's educational performance and well-being. Absenteeism can have lasting negative impacts on student achievement, graduation rates, transition to post-secondary education, employment and social inclusion, as well as on the community at large.

Attendance issues are often a first sign that a student is experiencing life challenges and there are a multitude of contributing factors, ranging from academic, social, economic and psychological. These include but are not limited to:

- poor physical health
- poor mental health
- family and work responsibilities
- transportation
- bullying
- homelessness
- undiagnosed cognitive vulnerabilities
- death of a parent or loved one

Red River Valley School Division commits to work across the system to enhance student presence and engagement. Collectively, we share responsibility to facilitate and promote student presence and engagement with a focus on identifying and removing barriers early.

DEFINITIONS

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.

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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 not being on suspension/expulsion, with a valid excuse. In practice, this has also 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 - absent for **7** or more instructional days per term.
- Grade 9 to Grade 12 - **10** or more classes in a single high school course.

Severe Chronic Absenteeism:

- Kindergarten to Grade 8 - absent for **13** or more instructional days per term
- Grade 9 to Grade 12 - **20** or more 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.

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.

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.

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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 and division attendance initiatives
- ensure students who are eligible for enrolment with the division receive regular and appropriate educational programming

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- 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. (School Messenger); 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, or email); 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.
- Enhance 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 school support team meetings.
- Have an early warning system:

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- For Kindergarten to Grade 8:
 - The school secretary will make contact daily for unexcused absences.
 - The classroom teacher will contact home at 5 absences. They will document contact home.
- For Grade 9 - Grade 12:
 - The school secretary will make contact daily for unexcused absences.
 - The classroom teacher will contact home at 5 absences in each class. They will document contact home.
- 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

Red River Valley School Division 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) 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.
 - 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 parties, as needed.

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

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- The Case Manager will create/assess in-school interventions to determine next steps. This will involve other members of the school team, 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 Divisional Truancy Officer and the Student Services Administrator:
 - documentation of communication from the teacher and school regarding the student severe chronic absenteeism
 - the SSP
- The Divisional Truancy Officer will:
 - compile data on severe chronic absenteeism as submitted by Red River Valley School Division 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 Divisional Truancy Officer when the school has severe chronic absenteeism in more than 3% of the population.
- The Divisional Truancy Officer 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

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- 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 the student has 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.

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