



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 is a serious impediment to educational performance and well-being. It 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 the first sign that a student is experiencing life challenges, and there are many contributing factors, including 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

PLPSD commits to work across the system to enhance student presence and engagement. Collectively, we are responsible for facilitating and promoting 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, depending on their student-specific plan, even if they are not physically within a classroom.

Engagement: Students’ attitudes towards schooling, their attendance and participation in school-sanctioned 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-sanctioned 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-sanctioned activity while not being on suspension/expulsion.

- **Excused Absence** refers to any time that a student is not in class and not participating in school-sanctioned activities (while not being on suspension/expulsion) with the mutual consent of a parent/legal guardian and the school principal.
- **Unexcused Absence** refers to any time a student is absent in class or not participating in school-sanctioned activities (while not being on suspension/expulsion) without the mutual consent of a parent/legal guardian and the school principal.

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Chronic Absenteeism:

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

Severe Chronic Absenteeism:

- Kindergarten to Grade 8: Where unexcused absences account for **20 percent** or more of instructional days in a reporting period.
- Grade 9 to Grade 12: Unexcused absences account 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 Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba (MEECL, 2022).
- Student-specific planning is a process through which student support team members meet individual students' unique needs; 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, outreach facilitators, teachers, and principals all play vital roles.

Students:

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

Parents/Legal Guardians:

- have the right to be informed regularly of attendance, behaviour, and academic achievement of their child in school and to participate in planning to support their child's improvement in presence and engagement
- 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 daily student attendance
- are responsible for timely communication to the principal and the parent/legal guardian
- will identify potential issues related to chronic lateness and/or absenteeism
- will promote and support regular attendance

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- will communicate (verbally and in writing, if needed) with students and parents/legal guardians when concerns related to attendance arise
- will document steps taken to communicate with students, parents/legal guardians, and outside agencies when concerns related to attendance arise
- will participate in the student-specific planning process, including the implementation of recommended interventions and supports

Outreach:

- maintain connections between home and school in order to aid in improving student and family/caregiver engagement with school
- contact parents/caregivers via phone calls, texts, and home visits to understand the nature of absences better and identify strategies in response to barriers
- work with parents to assist in implementing favourable structure and home routines.
- work collaboratively with school teams (principals, resource, guidance, classroom teachers and educational assistants).
- attend school-based team meetings to identify supports and advocate for a Student Specific Plan to respond to student absenteeism
- case manage SSP for attendance to support families in improving attendance,
- meet with students to set goals to improve attendance and involve parents when appropriate
- connect families to appropriate community resources.
- develop summer programming opportunities for children and families.
- regularly monitoring and analyzing of division and school-based attendance data to support planning
- maintain up-to-date documentation related to attendance and actions taken to support students and families
- transport students and families as needed

Principals:

- are responsible for working with teachers, outreach facilitators, students, parents/legal guardians, outside agencies and others, as needed, to promote regular attendance, including identifying supports in response to student unexcused 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 chronic 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
- ensure students who are eligible for enrolment with the division receive regular and appropriate educational programming
- ensure that schools track student attendance accurately, document any chronically absent students, and take immediate, sustained action to address causes of chronic absenteeism until the student is regularly present

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- 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

Note: Principals may supervise a designate to take on some of the listed responsibilities.

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 parents/legal guardians 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. (e.g. phone, in person); and

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

- Creating a safe, welcoming, and culturally responsive school environment for all 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 to ensure that all students are expected to be present in school. This includes comparing enrolment registers year over year, as well as reviewing unclaimed pupil files and homeschool reports from the department.
- Discuss attendance at In-School Support Team (ISST) meetings.
- Have an early warning system:
 - For Kindergarten to Grade 8:
 - The school admin assistant/cleric and/or outreach facilitator will make contact for unexcused or unverified absences.
 - The classroom teacher will contact home at 5 unexcused absences in a term. They will document contact with the home.
 - For Grade 9 - Grade 12:
 - The school admin assistant/cleric will verify excused absences from parents/guardians.
 - The classroom teacher will contact home at 5 unexcused absences in a course and document contact.
 - Each month, an attendance report will be sent home to families.
 - Parents have daily access through the Parent Portal to view their child's attendance and verify absences.
 - The Principal will:
 - analyze school enrolment and attendance data.

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RESPONSE TO CHRONIC AND SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

PLPSD schools will not use suspensions, expulsions, and withdrawals to respond to student presence and engagement. Instead, a Student-Specific Plan (SSP) will be created to document barriers to attendance and support from the school, division, and/or outside agencies.

When a student experiences **chronic absenteeism**:

- The Principal will:
 - contact home at 10 unexcused absences to inform the parent/legal guardian of the next steps and document this communication or assign a designate to follow up.
 - designate a case manager (Outreach Facilitator, Resource Teacher or Guidance Counsellor) to investigate and identify the causes of student unexcused absences and determine the appropriate support required to promote regular attendance. This will be documented in the SSP.
 - notify the ISST team of chronically absent students.
- The Case Manager will:
 - contact the parents/legal guardians to discuss the unexcused absences, barriers/challenges to attendance/engagement, plan supports, and document this communication
 - lead and create the SSP
 - monitor student presence and engagement
 - follow up with parties as needed

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

- The case manager will set up a meeting to reassess in-school interventions to determine the next steps. This **must** include other members of the ISST, member(s) of the Student Services Team, and known outside agencies involved with the student.
- The case manager **must** invite the parents/legal guardians to attend this meeting with the team as mentioned above.

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 Senior Admin Team:
 - documentation of communication from all school staff with the parents/legal guardians
 - the SSP
- The Senior Admin Team will:
 - compile data on severe chronic absenteeism as submitted by PLPSD schools
 - contact MEECL School and Community Support Unit via formal written notification

SYSTEMIC CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

In schools with high student absenteeism rates (more than 3% of students with severe chronic absenteeism), divisional presence and engagement committees may be considered 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.

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- The school principal will contact the Senior Admin Team when the school has severe chronic absenteeism in more than 3% of the population.

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, reducing the likelihood of future harm while holding individuals accountable. These approaches allow students to understand negative behaviour's impact on others and develop empathy.
- The Protecting and Supporting Children (Information Sharing) Act supports collaborative and timely intervention efforts by enabling service providers to share information about supported children and their parents/legal guardians to provide services or benefits to children. When the school is aware of external agency involvement with a chronically absent student, this agency **must** be included in 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.

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