A. Foundation

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 success.

Student absence is 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 is a multitude of contributing factors, ranging from academic, social, economic, and psychological. These include and are not limited to potential. Student presence and engagement is required for:

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

Turtle River School Division is committed to promoting student presence and engagement, focusing on identifying barriers and removing them as early as possible.

B. 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

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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.

C. Roles and Responsibilities

Turtle River School Division believes that supporting students with presence and engagement requires the entire team: students, parents/legal guardians, teachers, principals/designates, and the school division.

Students

- are responsible to attend school and classes regularly and punctually

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- 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.
- 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

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- 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 Division

- ensures students who are eligible for enrolment with the division receive regular and appropriate educational programming
- works with schools, parents, and community and other partners to ensure that students are regularly present
- ensures that schools track student attendance accurately, documents any students who are chronically absent, and takes immediate, sustained action to address causes of chronic absenteeism until the student is regularly present
- works 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
- ensures culturally safe educational environments and cultural competence among all staff

D. Enhancing Proactive and Preventative Attendance Practices

Schools must provide immediate, personal outreach to students whose absence is unexcused or a cause for concern. This may be done in one of the following ways:

- School notifies parent(s) via voicemail/automated system; and
- If absence persists, a personal contact from the teacher or designate to better understand the nature of the absence and proactively identify strategies in response to these barriers.
- 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. Student engagement with school is strengthened when students experience school as a safe and welcoming environment that recognizes and supports their cultural needs.

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- 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. Positively engaging parents with school, including providing opportunities to connect with school and acknowledging and supporting family circumstances, supports the presence of their children in school.
- Enhancing visibility of staff at transition times. This includes throughout the school day as well as when students move from one grade to another or to different schools.
- Preventative practices to ensure safe, supportive environments for students can include the following:
- 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.

E. Documenting, Monitoring, Analyzing, and Reporting

Schools must:
- Daily record student presence and absence, including whether absences are excused or unexcused.
- Monitor enrolment registers from year to year to ensure that all students expected to be present are in school. This includes reviewing unclaimed pupil files and homeschool reports from the department.
- Regularly monitor and analyze division-wide and school enrollment and attendance data at meetings with school principals.
    - Put in place 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.
  - Kindergarten to Grade 8

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- The school secretary will make contact with the home daily for unexcused absences
- The classroom teacher will contact home at 5 unexcused absences and document.

  o Grade 9 to Grade 12
  - The school secretary will make contact with the home daily for unexcused absences.
  - The classroom teacher will contact home at 5 unexcused absences in a course and document.
  o The principal will
  - Analyze school enrollment and attendance data.
  - Follow the procedure for dealing with chronic and severe absenteeism at 10 unexcused absences (Section F).
  o The division will
  - Regularly analyze enrollment and attendance data from all schools.
  - Ensure that student attendance is a standing agenda item at senior administration meetings.

F. Response to Chronic Absenteeism

Turtle River School Division will not use suspensions, expulsions, or withdrawals as a response to absenteeism. A student specific plan (SSP) will be created for students who experience chronic or severe chronic absenteeism. This plan will identify the student-specific barriers affecting attendance and the strategies in place to respond to these barriers.

When a student experiences **chronic absenteeism**:
- The principal will:
  o Notify Student Services of this event
  o Designate a case manager to create or update the SSP for the student
  o Invite the student's parent/legal guardian to a team meeting to discuss barriers to attendance and strategies to address these barriers.
  o Contact Child and Family Services if there are concerns about the student's safety and well-being.

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- The case manager will:
  - o Create/update the SSP. This may include options such as flexible timetabling, assessment methods/options, opportunities for credit acquisition and credit recovery, and ways to ensure learning is accessible to the student.
  - o Compile data on severe chronic absenteeism

When a student experiences **severe chronic absenteeism**
- The case manager will:
  - o Will arrange a meeting with the Student Services team and the parent/legal guardian to examine in-school interventions to determine next steps.

If **severe chronic absenteeism** persists

- The principal will:
  - o Notify the Student Services Coordinator
- The Student Services Coordinator will
  - o Contact CFS (Child and Family Services)
  - o Contact MEECL (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning) School and Community Support Unit in a formal written letter.
  - o Compile data on severe chronic absenteeism.

G. Coordinated Services

Reducing barriers to student presence requires personalized assessment, planning, coordination, and monitoring of students. A case management approach to facilitate this 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 their parents.

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

When supporting a student with presence and engagement concerns:
- The focus should always be on inviting students back and finding the necessary resources to support attendance.
- The team must realize 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,

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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 by service providers for the purposes of providing services or benefits to children.
- 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 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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