

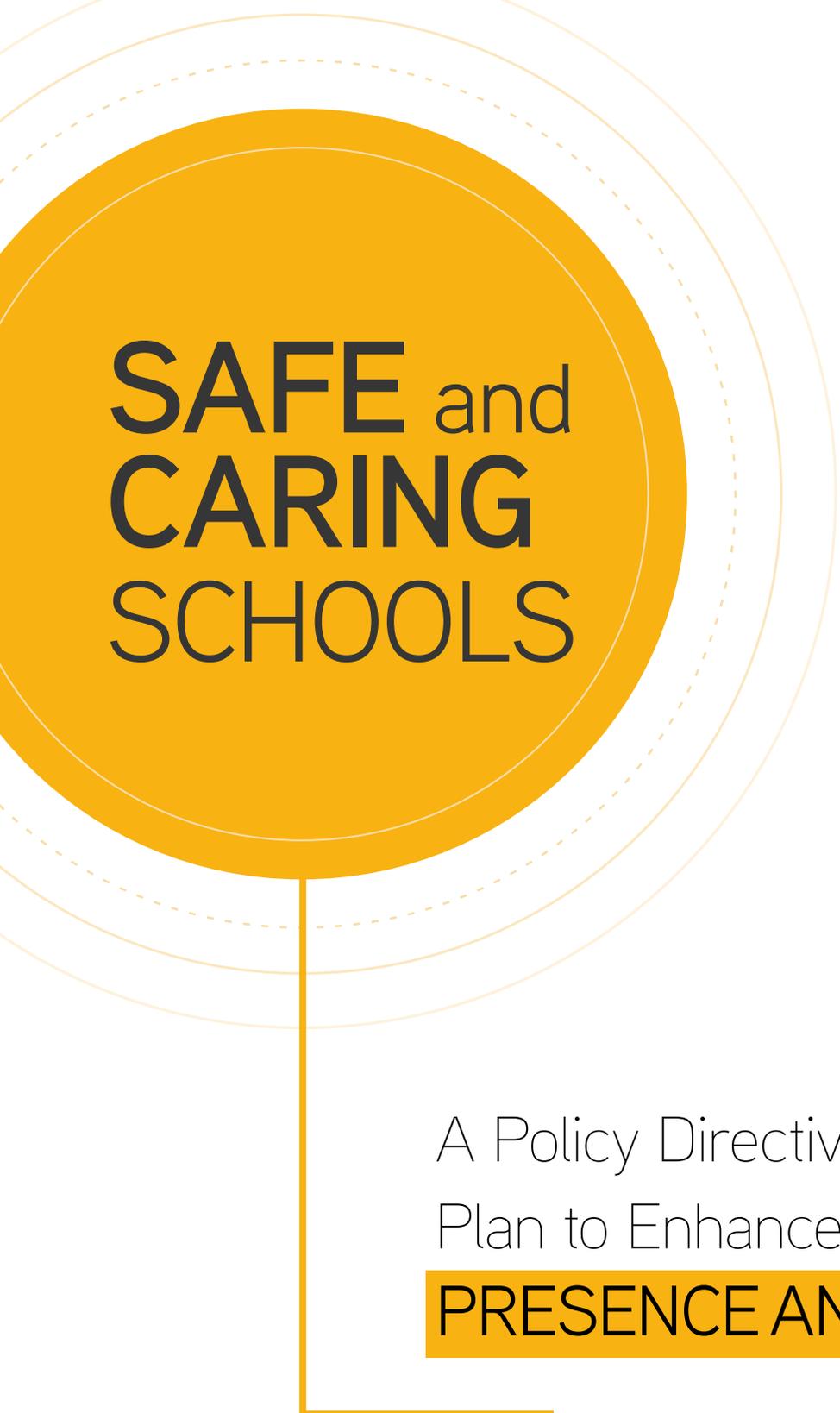
# SAFE and CARING SCHOOLS

A Policy Directive and Action  
Plan to Enhance Student

**PRESENCE AND ENGAGEMENT**

2023





# **SAFE** and **CARING** SCHOOLS

A Policy Directive and Action  
Plan to Enhance Student

**PRESENCE AND ENGAGEMENT**

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This resource is available on the Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning website at [www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/safe\\_schools/index.html](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/safe_schools/index.html).

*Disponible en français.*

Available in alternate formats upon request.

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# Acknowledgements

Manitoba's attendance policy directive to enhance student presence and engagement has been developed in collaboration with the Attendance Task Force, which was in place from April 2019 to June 2022. Work on enhancing student presence and engagement has continued with the establishment of the School and Community Support Unit within Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning and with the release of this policy directive.

We thank the following task force members for their guidance, recommendations, and work:

- Community Members: Sel Burrows and Kent Dueck
- Manitoba Association of School Superintendents: Barb Isaak
- Winnipeg School Division: Pauline Clark and Celia Caetano-Gomes
- Frontier School Division: Reg Klassen and Tyson MacGillivray
- Government: Representatives from Families, Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations, Justice, and Education and Early Childhood Learning

In partnership with the Attendance Task Force, the department engaged Directions Evidence and Policy Research Group to develop an action plan in consultation with the following:

- school divisions/districts/independent funded schools
- school-level personnel
- Indigenous Inclusion Directorate Advisory Council
- Manitoba Association of School Superintendents
- Manitoba School Boards Association
- The Manitoba Teachers' Society
- Éducatrices et éducateurs francophones du Manitoba
- Council of School Leaders
- Student Services Administrators' Association of Manitoba
- Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth
- Student Advisory Council
- Poverty and Education Task Force participants
- members of academia
- various provincial government departments
- community members

The policy directive also builds upon extensive participation of educators, students, families, community organizations, partners, and school boards as part of the Commission on K to 12 Education. Attendance-related information, including student voices, has been embedded as part of the report.

We thank all of those involved in the development of this important policy work.

### ***Land Treaty Acknowledgement***

*We recognize that Manitoba is on Treaty 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10 Territories and the ancestral lands of the Anishinaabe, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline, Ininiwak, and Nehethowuk Peoples. We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit.*

*We respect the spirit and intent of Treaties and Treaty Making and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people in the spirit of truth, reconciliation, and collaboration.*

# Introduction

*“Student absenteeism is a puzzle composed of multiple pieces that has a significant influence on education outcomes, including graduation and the probability of dropping out. The factors that contribute to it are complex and multifaceted, and likely vary from one school setting, district, and state to another”*

(Garcia and Weiss, 2018).

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 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

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

The disruption to schooling from 2020 to 2022 has emphasized the fundamental necessity of presence in school to ensure the well-being and mental health, learning, achievement, and social development of children and youth. This experience has

also provided our education system with best practices on engaging students and supporting re-entry into the school system.

Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning 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.

A lot of good work is happening in and across Manitoba schools to support student presence and engagement. This policy directive and related action plan have been created to provide provincial guidance to build upon the work of school divisions, school leaders, educators, and other partners. This policy directive is also designed to identify and address absenteeism before it becomes a problem.

Feedback from students, parents\*, teachers, principals, divisional leaders, and others is vital in identifying elements of the policy that are working well and areas that may require additional focus. Stakeholders are invited to provide feedback on the policy and its implementation throughout the year by emailing the School and Community Support Unit, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, at [attendance@gov.mb.ca](mailto:attendance@gov.mb.ca).

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\* The term *parent(s)* includes the caregiver(s), legal guardian(s), or any other person involved in raising the child (such as a grandparent, step-parent, foster parent, or extended family). It is used with the recognition that in some cases only one parent may be involved in a child's education, or that the significant adult in the life of a student may not be their parent.

# General Guidelines

School divisions are required to update their local policies in accordance with the provincial guidelines outlined in this policy directive in spring 2023 to ensure that all guidelines are met and in place by fall 2023. School divisions are responsible to create/amend, implement, and monitor student attendance policies responsive to local contexts and needs based on the guiding principles and focus areas articulated within this document.

In revising or developing policies and procedures on student attendance, it is expected that the school division policies and procedures are

- consistent with the guidelines in this document
- applicable to all students and engage parents
- consistent across schools
- made known to staff, parents, stakeholders, and the public

Schools and school divisions are encouraged to consult with students, parents, school staff, and divisional supports (e.g., school psychologists, school social workers, graduation coaches, school-family liaison workers, community connectors, etc.).

# Foundational Principles and Conditions for Success

In order to successfully enhance student presence and engagement, student attendance policies must reflect the following foundational principles and conditions:

- Presence and engagement begins with relationships. Reciprocal and respectful relationships with students, families, parents, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, communities, organizations, and the school need to be established, nurtured, and cared for.
- Student success and well-being is the collective responsibility of all who are responsible for children and youth.
- Putting students at the centre is the driver of all planning and responses.
- Safe, caring, and inclusive learning environments are foundational to student presence and engagement.
- Student absence requires consistent attention and collective action. Ensuring student presence requires continuity of effort and resources over time.
- Absenteeism has a range of root causes and effects that cross sectors, government departments, and jurisdictions. Policies and procedures must work in collective coordination and partnership with schools, organizations, parents, and communities, and across government agencies to support and improve regular daily presence and engagement for all students.

Best practices will continue to be compiled and shared as this policy directive is implemented.

*“Support and encouragement are two of the most important things for a student to achieve success... It builds up my confidence which makes me push harder into my schooling knowing I have people behind me who want to see me succeed.”* – student submission, Commission on K to 12 Education

*“Most helpful thing in achieving success is having teachers who actually care.”* – student submission

*“Positive relationships with teachers are key.”* – student submission

# Legislation and Policies

The policy and principles included in this document build on those found in current provincial legislation, policies, and reports.

## Provincial Legislation

- [\*The Public Schools Act\*](#)
- [\*The Education Administration Act\*](#)
- [\*The Human Rights Code\*](#)
- [\*The Protecting and Supporting Children \(Information Sharing\) Act\*](#)
- [\*The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act\*](#)

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 local school attendance officer 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.



# Guidelines for School Division Policies to Enhance Student Presence and Engagement

## GUIDELINE 1: COMMON TERMINOLOGY

Policies must include definitions for presence, engagement, regular attendance, absences, absenteeism, and student-specific planning that are consistent with those in this guideline.

**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.

## GUIDELINE 2: ENHANCING PROACTIVE AND PREVENTATIVE ATTENDANCE PRACTICES

Policies must include immediate, personal outreach to students whose absence is unexcused.

School divisions must seek a proactive approach that supports students by identifying and solving barriers to student presence and engagement early to prevent further absences and to limit and reduce the risk of chronic absenteeism. Building good habits in the early years has a positive impact on a child's education throughout their later school years.

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:

- School notifying 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 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.

- 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.
- Enhance visibility of staff at transition times. This includes throughout the school day as well as when students move from one grade or another or to different schools.

*“The biggest struggle I faced when beginning my school journey was in high school. I went to a school that only saw you when you stood out with achievements from the school itself. It was too big to see you as a normal individual. That bummed me out hard. I was used to having that human interaction back at my old middle school. I didn’t really start to notice this until grade 10 and this got me down. I felt like I needed to be the best all the time and that got to me when I started to get lower marks. I got depressed I started not going to school I started to stay cooped up in my room.”*

– student comment, Commission on K to 12 Education

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.

The Circle of Courage® model further provides direction to supporting and enhancing student presence and engagement. The model quotes Lakota anthropologist Ella Deloria to describe the core value of The Spirit of Belonging as “Being related, somehow, to everyone you know.” (Starr Commonwealth). The Spirit of Belonging’s understanding of respect and kinship can support nurturing students’ sense of community and relationship, fundamental to all planning and responses.

### **The Spirit of Generosity**

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Character is cultivated by concern for others so that the child can say, “I have a purpose for my life.”

### **The Spirit of Independence**

---

Free will is cultivated by responsibility so that the child can say, “I have the power to make decisions.”



### **The Spirit of Belonging**

---

The universal longing for human bonds is cultivated by relationships of trust so that the child can say, “I am loved.”

### **The Spirit of Mastery**

---

The inborn thirst for learning is cultivated; by learning to cope with the world, the child can say, “I can succeed.”

The Circle of Courage® is a trademarked title registered to Starr Commonwealth, and is a positive youth development model that is based on the universal principle that to be emotionally healthy all youth need a sense of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity. The copy righted content within this unique model was developed by Starr’s 2nd President, Dr. Larry K. Brendtro (PhD), and his colleagues, and it provides the philosophical foundation for Starr Commonwealth’s resilience-focused approach to working with children, families, and communities, in addition to the work of Reclaiming Youth International.

## GUIDELINE 3: DOCUMENTING, MONITORING, ANALYZING, AND REPORTING

Policies must include documenting, monitoring, analyzing, and reporting on student presence and absence at the divisional and school level.

**Data is the foundation; we measure what matters.**

Policies must include the following:

- Consistent, daily recording procedures and common metrics on student presence and absence, including whether absences are excused or unexcused.
- Monitoring enrolment data to ensure that all students expected to be present are in school. This includes comparing enrolment registers year over year, as well as reviewing unclaimed pupil files and homeschool reports from the department.
- Regular monitoring and analyzing of division-wide and school enrollment and attendance data.
- Procedures for investigating and identifying the causes of student absences and determining the appropriate supports that are required to promote regular attendance.
- 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.
- Ensuring that student attendance is a standing agenda item at senior administration meetings and school-based support team meetings.

In divisions where there are high incidents of student absenteeism, divisional attendance 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.

Provincial enrollment data is currently reported twice annually. The planned provincial Student Information System will automate attendance data and enable timely review and analysis at all levels.

## GUIDELINE 4: RESPONSE TO CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Policies must prohibit the use of suspensions, expulsions, and withdrawals as a response to absenteeism and must include a requirement for student-specific planning for students who are experiencing chronic or severe chronic absenteeism.

Policies must include formal written notification to Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning for students who experience severe chronic absenteeism.

Responses to absences must be non-punitive, fair, and predictable for all students.

Suspension, expulsions, and withdrawals are inappropriate and counterproductive responses to absenteeism, and must be eliminated from practice.

Students who are chronically absent must have a student-specific plan in place to identify the student-specific barriers affecting attendance and the strategies in place to respond to these barriers. This includes initiating a meeting of the core team, including the parent. Student-specific planning processes are detailed in the department's [Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming](#).

Responses to student absenteeism will vary based on the age, grade, and development of the student, the professional judgment of teachers and principals, and the individual circumstances of the student. Responses may include connecting the student and/or their family with school-based or division-based supports and/or with outside agencies, if needed.

Student-specific planning to respond to attendance issues may include appropriate alternative educational programming, which provides options such as flexible timetabling, a variety of assessment methods/options, opportunities for credit acquisition and credit recovery, and ways to ensure learning is accessible to the student based on their current level of performance.

When a student reaches the number of absences defined as **chronic absenteeism**, a meeting of the core team is required, including the parent. If a student reaches the number of absences defined as **severe chronic absenteeism**, an in-school intervention is needed along with other members of the school support team and external agencies, if applicable.

If the school has been unsuccessful in addressing severe chronic absenteeism for a student, the division must notify the department's School and Community Support Unit in writing, as well as notify Child and Family Services (CFS) if there are concerns about student safety and well-being.

The unit will connect with the school division and support broader system planning through consultation and collaboration with interdepartmental contacts and community service agencies.

## GUIDELINE 5: COORDINATED SERVICES

Policies must include a coordinated response procedure, including restorative practices, which supports the return of students to school.

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 their parents. This process is outlined in the Case Management section of [\*Supporting Inclusive Schools: A Handbook for Resource Teachers in Manitoba Schools\*](#) (Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning).

The focus should always be on inviting students back and finding the necessary resources to support attendance.

Disengaged students benefit from restorative practices to reengage with the school environment. 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 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*.

*“We cannot afford to think about our education system as being divorced from the mental health and well-being of our children and our communities. Schools do not exist solely to impart content knowledge and develop problem solving and critical thinking skills; they must also create holistic approaches to fostering well-being in schools, offer robust and relevant learning opportunities in a safe environment, and strengthen relationships with parents and the community.”* – written submission, Commission on K to 12 Education

## GUIDELINE 6: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Policies must include clearly articulated roles and responsibilities of students, parents, teachers, principals/designates, and school divisions that are consistent with those in these guidelines.

### 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 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
- 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, 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

Beyond local policies, it is important to note some additional responsibilities that are embedded in the overall action plan, including the following:

### **Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning**

- monitors and supports implementation of the Attendance Policy Directive in school divisions and reviews its effectiveness
- assists divisions through consultation and collaboration with interdepartmental contacts and community service agencies, as necessary
- collects, monitors, analyzes, and reports provincial attendance data through the provincial attendance index
- establishes and maintains connections with inter-sectoral partners to support student presence and engagement in schools
- creates a culturally relevant and responsive curriculum
- supports the implementation of attendance strategies, including restorative practice
- expands implementation of anti-racism and anti-discrimination education
- supports culturally safe educational environments and cultural competence
- reviews and updates the policy directive on a three-year cycle

### **Government service providers and community partners**

- reinforce the importance of school attendance in all interactions with family and students
- share relevant information with schools and work collaboratively with students, parents, schools, and school divisions
- provide supports and services that encourage regular attendance and help decrease any barriers that may be affecting a student's ability to attend school
- participate in coordinated case management and responsive planning for those who are chronically absent

# Action Plan for Student Presence and Engagement

Through experience, engagement, and research, the following six areas of focus have been identified to enhance student presence and engagement. Many of these actions have been incorporated into the above policy directive, and additional strategies will be developed and implemented over time in support of these focus areas based on research, best practice, and recommendations from other provincial reports. This includes the Poverty and Education Task Force, which focused on identifying barriers to participation and actionable strategies.

The priority actions are guided by foundational principles and conditions for success for increasing and maintaining student presence and engagement:

- collective responsibility and coordination among all who are responsible for children and youth
- individualized, student-centred planning and monitoring
- multiple contributing solutions, including a welcoming, inclusive, culturally safe learning environment, student engagement, success planning, mentoring, and monitoring of progress
- enduring commitment requiring consistent and constant attention

Action Item	Role/Responsibilities			Progress
	Manitoba	School Divisions	Schools	
<b>1. Update school attendance policy (Guidelines 1–6)</b>	✓	✓	✓	
Shift the focus from absenteeism to student presence and engagement	✓	✓	✓	Underway
Ensure consistent implementation of terminology and definitions	✓	✓	✓	Underway
Prohibit the use of suspensions, expulsion, and withdrawals as a response to student absenteeism	✓	✓	✓	Underway
Require immediate outreach and action in response to student attendance		✓	✓	Underway

Action Item	Role/Responsibilities			Progress
	Manitoba	School Divisions	Schools	
Review and update attendance legislation to ensure terminology and definitions align with current research, which includes review of the current compulsory school age requirement and the role of the attendance officer	✓			Planned
Review and update enrolment reporting and resident pupil definitions and related policies	✓	✓		Planned
<b>2. Collect data on student presence/attendance (Guidelines 1, 4)</b>	✓	✓	✓	
Develop consistent recording procedures and metrics on student presence and absence, including whether absences are excused or unexcused	✓	✓		Underway
Monitor, record, and investigate student presence and absences daily			✓	Underway
Create an early warning system and protocols to identify students who are likely to experience chronic absenteeism		✓	✓	Underway
Monitor, disaggregate, analyze, and respond to student presence and absence data trends at all levels	✓	✓	✓	Underway
Ensure school divisions include planning and reporting on student attendance annually as part of the planning and reporting guidelines for the Framework for Continuous Improvement	✓	✓		Planned
Report publicly on the provincial attendance index included as part of the department's annual report	✓			Underway
Review unclaimed pupil file process	✓			Planned
Ensure that homeschool students are registered and are receiving an education	✓			Underway
Establish thresholds of student attendance and impact on student achievement through data analysis	✓			Planned
Implement a provincial Student Information System that will enable detailed review and analysis of data at all levels, in real time	✓			Underway

Action Item	Role/Responsibilities			Progress
	Manitoba	School Divisions	Schools	
<b>3. Coordinated case management (Guidelines 4, 5, 6)</b>	✓	✓	✓	
Ensure all students who are expected to be present at school are present and accounted for		✓	✓	Underway
Create, maintain, and monitor a coordinated case management approach to persistent or extended absence		✓	✓	Planned
Implement student-specific planning to support students who experience chronic absenteeism			✓	Planned
Provide professional development for case managers, specific to planning for and supporting student presence and engagement	✓	✓	✓	Underway
Explore the expansion of the Philosophy of Community Schools and the Community Schools Program	✓	✓		Underway
Implement a comprehensive and collaborative approach among schools and families for early and ongoing identification of needs and appropriate intervention	✓	✓	✓	Underway
<b>4. Enhance student engagement, well-being, and success (Guidelines 2, 5, 6)</b>	✓	✓	✓	
Create a safe, welcoming, and culturally responsive school environment for students			✓	Underway
Improve student and family/parent engagement with school	✓	✓	✓	Underway
Identify barriers to the participation in learning, and reduce or eliminate these barriers, leveraging recommendations from the Poverty and Education Task Force (e.g., nutrition, access to menstrual products, transportation)	✓	✓	✓	Planned
Launch and implement a provincial survey for students, parents, school staff, and leaders regarding their school experience to inform provincial-, division-, and school-level plans and responses to supporting student presence and engagement	✓	✓	✓	Planned

Action Item	Role/Responsibilities			Progress
	Manitoba	School Divisions	Schools	
Develop plans for enhancing student engagement, mental health, and well-being	✓	✓	✓	Underway
Provide school staff with trauma-informed professional development	✓	✓	✓	Underway
<b>5. Ensure safe, supportive environments for students (Guidelines 2, 5, 6)</b>				
Create and implement a culturally relevant and responsive curriculum	✓	✓	✓	Underway
Establish and implement guidelines for restorative practice, including restorative justice approaches	✓	✓	✓	Planned
Expand implementation of anti-racism and anti-discrimination education	✓	✓	✓	Underway
Explore the expansion of the Philosophy of Community Schools across the province	✓			Underway
Ensure culturally safe educational environments and cultural competence	✓	✓	✓	Underway
<b>6. Provide inter-sectoral and implementation supports (Guidelines 4, 5)</b>				
Engage in cross-departmental work on attendance support	✓			Underway
Establish a designated unit in Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning to provide system leadership to support student presence and engagement	✓			Complete

# Appendix: Historical Context

## 2019: Province Established Attendance Task Force

Established in 2019, the task force was composed of community and key child-serving departments to make school attendance a policy and programming priority (Education, Families, Justice and Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations). The task force was instrumental in the development of an attendance action plan, policy directive for student presence and engagement, and public education campaign to increase awareness and public discourse around roles and responsibilities. For more information on the task force and its former members, please visit [www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/action\\_plan/attendancetaskforce.html](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/action_plan/attendancetaskforce.html).

## 2019: The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth

The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth published a special report dedicated to honour the memory of Tina Michelle Fontaine (1999–2014) following an investigation in accordance with *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*. The special report, *A Place Where it Feels Like Home: The Story of Tina Fontaine*, includes a chronology of Tina’s life, gaps within public services, and the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth’s analysis. The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth calls attention to historical and ongoing impacts of colonization in understanding Tina’s story.

*“In order to understand the story of Tina’s life and death it is important to first recognize the history of colonization. This includes the residential school system and the Sixties Scoop, and their lasting impacts on the social, psychological, spiritual, and economic health of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous communities. Like so many, Tina’s parents were significantly impacted by historical traumas; their struggles with housing, intimate partner violence, addictions, and mental illness can be directly tied to Canada’s history of colonial practices and the implications of this history that continue to exist today for so many Indigenous families.”*

*In early years, from Kindergarten to Grade 4, Tina's attendance was bordering on chronic absenteeism. Years that Tina was chronically absent she was not promoted to the next grade level. In Grade 5, Tina's father died by homicide and Tina's disengagement from school increased. From November to December 2011, Tina only attended school for one day. In the new year, Tina transferred to a new school and was absent 26% of school days from 2011–12, 17% in 2012–13, and in 2013–14 Tina was severely chronically absent* (Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, *The Story of Tina Fontaine*).

Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth found there were no documented responses to her chronic absenteeism in her Manitoba Cumulative Record. “This lack of action allowed Tina Fontaine to become slowly disengaged from a system that could have acted as a protective factor in her life” (Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, *The Story of Tina Fontaine*).

The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth recommended a data-informed plan to address chronic absenteeism and resourcing to school divisions to increase capacity to measure, identify, assess, and respond to school absenteeism (Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, *The Story of Tina Fontaine*).

## 2020: Commission on K to 12 Education

In March 2020, the *Report of the Commission on K to 12 Education* highlighted the significant, interconnected relationship between student achievement and well-being and student absenteeism. The Commission recognized absenteeism as an “early warning sign” (symptom) of problems with “poor health, poor mental health, family and work responsibilities, transportation, bullying, homelessness, undiagnosed cognitive vulnerabilities, the death of a parent” (Commission on K to 12 Education 60).

The recommendation by the Commission was for the Manitoba government to “work with intersectoral partners to improve student attendance by designing an action plan, implementing a new provincial attendance policy and developing a system to measure, assess and respond to the root causes that lead to chronic absenteeism, including supporting parents in their roles.” Recommendations 17 to 21 speak specifically to this objective, which include the following:

- Increasing public awareness on the impact of absenteeism on student achievement and well-being
- Increasing the capacity to collect, measure, assess, and respond to the underlying causes of absenteeism; providing transparent information to the public on suspensions and expulsions, ensuring absences are reported to the province and parents in a timely manner
- Developing and implementing a plan to identify factors for non-attendance, ensuring the best interests of children are paramount and that actions respect the right to education for all children and youth
- Reviewing *Manitoba’s Provincial Code of Conduct: Appropriate Interventions and Disciplinary Consequences* (2017) in light of recommendations from Manitoba’s Advocate for Children and Youth and, regarding suspensions and expulsions, develop a province-wide strategy to limit, reduce, and phase out exclusionary practices except in situations of imminent safety risk to students and staff, balancing appropriately the need for at-risk students to receive an education and ensuring that all students have a safe and orderly learning environment
- Developing and implementing a provincial protocol that clearly defines the roles/responsibilities of all involved in the education of students and their families, including staged actions to be taken to respond to student absenteeism with a focus on building and sustaining relationships

## 2021: Consultations for a New Action Plan for Student Presence

In February 2021, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning launched work with Directions Evidence and Policy Research Group to address chronic absenteeism in K to 12 schools. The research, interviews, and recommendations provided by Directions Evidence and Policy Research Group, as part of Manitoba’s action plan on student presence, informed the development of this policy directive.

The Directions team conducted 51 interviews with people working in government, school divisions, and schools, the larger community, and academia (2022). Interviewees identified many reasons that students do not attend school and reasons that students do attend school (Table 1).

**Table 1: Lessons from Interviews: Reasons Affecting Student Attendance, 2022**

Reasons to stay away from school	Reasons to go to school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No one cares or notices if I’m there</li> <li>• Must look after family members:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep parent/siblings safe from X</li> <li>• Look after siblings when parent works</li> <li>• Take care of sick siblings, young siblings, adults</li> <li>• Must accompany parent to appointments</li> </ul> </li> <li>• No food at home, always hungry, can’t concentrate</li> <li>• My clothes aren’t ok for school: shoes, clothes, outerwear</li> <li>• Getting to the bus/school on time is hard</li> <li>• I’m too sad</li> <li>• Trips to grandparents, aunts, and uncles away from home community</li> <li>• Always behind in schoolwork—no place to work, no Wi-Fi</li> <li>• School is boring, subjects aren’t interesting to me</li> <li>• I don’t have friends at school</li> <li>• My friends are on the street</li> <li>• School feels hopeless</li> <li>• Don’t see a future that connects to school</li> <li>• I don’t feel safe at school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are teachers and others at school who care about me</li> <li>• There is help at school with my problems:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help with my emotions</li> <li>• I learn about healthy relationships</li> <li>• Help with practical problems like clothing, food, housing and help for my family</li> </ul> </li> <li>• There is food at school—breakfast, lunch, and snacks</li> <li>• If I get behind, the teacher helps me get back on track</li> <li>• School is fun—I like learning</li> <li>• There are activities at school that I enjoy: arts, crafts, sports, cooking</li> <li>• There are programs at school that help me learn about my culture</li> <li>• Subjects are taught in a way that makes me see myself as a successful learner</li> <li>• There are programs at school that help me think about my future (Career Trek, experiential learning)</li> <li>• I’m safe at school</li> <li>• I can play safely at school</li> </ul>

## 2022: Manitoba's K to 12 Education Action Plan and the Vision for Student Success

Launched in April 2022, Manitoba's K to 12 Education Action Plan articulates a vision where are **all Manitoba students succeed, no matter where they live, their background, or their individual circumstances.**

This vision puts students at the centre and requires focusing all talents, efforts, and resources on improving student success. Student success will look different for every child and it always means they are prepared to reach their full potential and to live The Good Life in which they

- have hope, belonging, well-being, and purpose
- have a voice
- feel safe and supported
- are prepared for their individual path beyond graduation
- have capacity to play an active role in shaping their future and be active citizens
- live in relationships with others and the natural world
- honour and respect Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing with a commitment to and understanding of truth and reconciliation

To achieve our vision that all students succeed and reach their full potential, student engagement and well-being is of paramount concern. Every day in school counts. Engagement, presence, and attendance matter.

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