

Attendance Counts!

A TOOLKIT

FOR

**RAISING
THE ATTENDANCE RATES OF
FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS
IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**



UPDATED March 2024



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ATTENDANCE COUNTS:
A Toolkit for Raising the Attendance Rates of First Nations Students in British Columbia

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INTRODUCTION

This Toolkit is focused on the critical topic of student attendance, including why attendance is an important issue, some of the reasons why students might not always attend school regularly, and what can be done to help all First Nations students achieve success by being in school as much as possible.

Helping First Nations students attend school consistently is best addressed collaboratively. It is not an issue that can be left to parents or school staff alone. Successful attendance intervention programs being implemented around the world – including those for Indigenous students – involve entire communities finding ways to encourage students to arrive at school regularly and on-time.

Reflecting that perspective, this resource is intended to be helpful for school and community education staff, First Nations parents clubs, and other community members who support students who are enrolled in a variety of education settings – including public schools, First Nation schools, and independent schools.

The following resources are also available for additional information sharing.

- ▶ An *Attendance Guide for First Nations Adult Education Programs*. Some of the information included in this document is also included in that resource, but the adult program edition was written specifically for those settings.
- ▶ An *Attendance Information Guide for Parents*. That Guide is specifically focused on what parents may want to know about attendance issues, and how they can help address this important component of student and school success.
- ▶ An *Attendance Information Guide for First Nation School Governing Authorities*. That Guide is intended to help First Nation School Governing Authorities lead their school's attendance efforts.

By necessity, the information presented in this Toolkit is quite general, as it is meant to apply to a wide range of circumstances.

Some of the suggestions may work well in some areas, but perhaps not in others.

The suggestions also should be considered within specific contexts; they are presented as ideas to adapt and build upon as relevant for each community and school setting.

“There is no one approach that will work for all schools. All schools are different. All students are different. All families are different. You have to keep trying different things to find what clicks for your setting.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

The original version of this Toolkit, published in December 2019, was informed by participants in two attendance focus group meetings.

This updated version reflects feedback gathered through further discussions at numerous workshops, the April 2023 FNSA Conference, the February 2023 First Nations Parents Conference, the October 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting, four “attendance capacity building” sessions held in February and March 2024 with school representatives and First Nations parents and families, and specific attendance meetings with First Nation School Governing Authorities, principals, and teachers. It also reflects evolving research related to attendance – including suggestions arising after the COVID pandemic had such a serious impact on student attendance rates globally.

The extensive feedback that has informed this Attendance Toolkit is greatly appreciated. Specific suggestions gathered in the past four years are included throughout this resource where appropriate.

Project Sponsors



The **BC First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC)** is committed to supporting First Nations in their efforts to improve the success of all First Nations students in BC. FNESC facilitates collaborative services in the areas of research, communications, advocacy, program administration, and networking, and FNESC strives to share up-to-date information about available programs, government policies and initiatives, and local, provincial and national education issues that affect First Nations learners. See www.fnesc.ca.

FNESC Mandate: *“To facilitate discussion about education matters affecting First Nations in BC by disseminating information and soliciting input from First Nations.”*



The **First Nations Schools Association (FNSA)** was formally established as a non-profit society with charitable status in 1996. The FNSA represents and works on behalf of First Nations controlled schools in BC and has a mandate to support those schools in creating effective, nurturing, and linguistically and culturally appropriate education environments that provide students with a positive foundation in all academic areas. More information is available at www.fnsa.ca.

FNSA Mission: *“The First Nation Schools Association will collaborate with First Nation schools to create nurturing environments that will develop learners’ pride and competence in their First Nations language and heritage and will equip them to realize their full potential, within self-governing First Nations communities.”*

Comments and suggestions regarding this resource and other useful supports for raising student attendance rates are always welcome.

Celina



PART ONE

DEFINING AND UNDERSTANDING ATTENDANCE RATES: A KEY PLACE TO START

In order to address attendance issues effectively, it is necessary to carefully track student absences and gather relevant data, which means that definitions related to “absences” and “attendance” must be thoughtfully considered and understood.

Attendance Issues Are Complicated ... and Extend Beyond Concerns About Truancy

In the past, schools and communities often examined measures of “truancy” to identify students who might be at-risk of educational challenges due to missing too much school. But truancy – which means missing school without good reason and without parental permission – does not account for all, or even the majority, of absences for many students.

- ▶ Some students may have an excessive number of excused absences (seen especially at the primary level).
- ▶ Some students may have a relatively low rate of absenteeism for any one type of reason (for example, excused or unexcused), but when the absences are combined, the students may be exhibiting patterns of problematic absences.
- ▶ Whatever the reason, an absence – even if a parent has given permission – means time missed from school and a lost learning opportunity.
- ▶ Therefore, using truancy alone as a warning sign of an attendance problem can be misleading.

TRUANCY	VS	CHRONIC ABSENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counts only unexcused absences 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counts all absences: excused and unexcused
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasizes compliance with rules 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasizes the academic impact of absences = missed learning opportunities

Chronic Absenteeism versus Truancy

A more current and commonly used term for discussing attendance is “chronic absenteeism.”

Chronic absenteeism is generally defined as missing ten percent or more of a school year, including excused and unexcused absences – which results in approximately 18 days a year, or about two days every month.

Chronic absenteeism is usually measured as a percentage of days missed rather than a simple number, so that students can be identified as being at-risk of chronic absenteeism before they hit the threshold of 18 days. If a student has missed six days of school by the end of September, for example, people should be paying attention and interventions may be warranted. Determining that a student missed 18 days of school in June may be too late to address the issue.

Measuring Chronic Absenteeism Differs from Measuring Average Daily Attendance

It is also important to be aware that the concept of chronic absenteeism is sometimes confused with Average Daily Attendance (ADA).

ADA is the total number of days students attend in a given period (such as each day, each week, or each month), divided by the number of days school was in session during that period. For example, if a school has a daily ADA of 90%, that means an average of 90% of students were in attendance each day.

It is easy to mistakenly assume that a high ADA is an indicator of overall good attendance, but this may not always be the case.

- ▶ In order to meaningfully analyze ADA, it is necessary to understand whether the student attendance results are due to most students occasionally missing a few days – which is to be expected in any school situation, or whether a high ADA is due to excessive absences among only a small group of students – which is much more problematic.
- ▶ High rates of absenteeism by even a small proportion of a school's student population can have extremely important consequences – especially for the students who are missing a large number of days.
- ▶ While ADA may be a reasonable broad measure of attendance, it can mask critical challenges for individual students.

Chronic Absenteeism versus Occasional Absences

It is also important to differentiate between “chronic absenteeism” and occasional student absences due to illness, appointments, family issues, etc. Infrequent, short-term absences from school are to be expected, and parents should be encouraged to keep sick students home from school whenever appropriate – so the sick children have an opportunity to rest and recover, and to avoid spreading illness when students are contagious.

In contrast, chronic absenteeism refers to long-term, regular, and/or repeated absences that can impact a student's educational success. Some students who have injuries or chronic illnesses may experience frequent and/or prolonged absences, and schools should know who those students are so that individual strategies can be designed to support them. Schools must also be attentive to all other students who miss an excessive number of days of school, recognizing that this problem can have lifelong impacts.

Recognizing Context in Defining Absences

Finally, accurate definitions of attendance should be considered in consultation with First Nations in order to appropriately address the issue of student absences due to traditional pursuits. Engagement in traditional activities is of course a meaningful and entirely legitimate form of learning. Students' success is nurtured by their participation in cultural activities, which makes students stronger and more confident in who they are. Accordingly, some schools do not consider students "absent" when they are involved in such activities. Other schools mark students absent in these circumstances.

- ▶ The choice of practice should be determined locally, but understanding whether these types of activities have a role in attendance rates is important for analysing attendance data and identifying students who could be considered "chronically absent."
- ▶ Also, if students miss days of school because they are involved in traditional pursuits – recognizing that doing so is very beneficial – it is still important to be aware of whether supports are needed to help the students stay up-to-date with any school-based learning they might have missed as a result.

Why is Monitoring Attendance So Important?

All of these considerations are important to consider because high rates of chronic absenteeism often pose significant challenges for both individual students and for schools overall, and strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism will likely require community support, as well as effective policy approaches and targeted strategies to assist specific children and their families.¹ In order to inform discussions about these issues, careful tracking of absences is important, and school communities should select a method for monitoring attendance to identify students who appear to be at-risk of chronic absenteeism. Additionally, data to highlight trends and causes can be reviewed carefully, such as attendance rates at different times of the year, on specific days (e.g., Fridays or Mondays), related to gender identities, etc. – always with a focus on identifying possible causes, with an aim to informing effective responses.

¹ Rates of absence are best considered within the context of each school. For example, for schools that operate according to a four-day school week, daily attendance may have an even greater impact on learning.

What Does the Data Show? Attendance Is a Serious Challenge for First Nation Students in BC – Especially After the Pandemic

Given the serious impacts of students not attending school regularly and on-time, as well as the importance of carefully monitoring attendance data in order to inform responses and track progress over time, attendance rates for First Nations students in BC are collected and analyzed annually.

- ▶ The data for students who attend First Nation schools in BC is alarming – especially since the COVID pandemic. The rates of students attending First Nation schools who are chronically absent doubled between 2018/2019 (pre-COVID) and 2021/2022 (post-COVID).
- ▶ Data for First Nations students who attend public schools is also problematic, showing much higher percentages of student absences after the COVID pandemic.
- ▶ That data is consistent with attendance trends worldwide. Schools and school districts throughout North America report that attendance rates generally have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels and are a serious concern.

Why?²

Widespread research and feedback from First Nations representatives identifies the following reasons.

- ▶ Students come to school, and parents send their children to school, when they feel school is physically and emotionally healthy and safe. Unfortunately:
 - First Nations were seriously affected by COVID, and families may still be recovering emotionally.
 - As a result of COVID, some people still feel anxious about large gatherings of people – which are difficult to avoid in schools.
 - Some students who strictly followed guidelines around social distancing during the pandemic may find it difficult to adapt to being around large numbers of people again.
 - Increased mental health concerns and greater caution about sending children to school when they are not feeling well has impacted attendance. Some students (and possibly families, too) feel anxiety related to catching and spreading COVID-19 and other illnesses, and they may have difficulty adjusting to changing messages about the safety of schools.

² Mervosh, 2023. Gallagher-Mackay and Corso, 2022; Mehta, 2023; Attendance Works, 2022; Blaid, 2022; Brontë McDonald, Lester, and Michelson, 2022

- Given the history of Residential Schools, some First Nations families found it difficult to embrace schools as safe places even before the pandemic. Some First Nations representatives report that COVID-19 compounded this issue and had a damaging impact on efforts to build strong relationships between schools, families, and communities.

- ▶ For some families, COVID eroded their sense of security at the school, especially because safety measures kept families out of schools and made some families feel unwelcome / uncomfortable in school settings during and immediately after the pandemic. These feelings may still linger.
- ▶ During the pandemic, some students lost their connections to school staff and even some of their peers – which may make them less motivated to attend school.
- ▶ Some families and students have struggled to return to the routine of going to school after the prolonged period of being at home.
- ▶ For some students who have exceptionalities, the COVID pandemic may have made existing challenges worse. For example, students who experience sensory issues or difficulty with social situations or academic demands may have found returning to in-person education after an extended period at home uniquely stressful.

COVID generally increased the need for broad social supports for families to help mitigate the mental health and socio-economic challenges that arose as a result of the pandemic – which have been exacerbated for many families by high rates of inflation.

Some First Nation representatives also report that staff absences have increased since the pandemic. Some school staff remain effected by the anxiety caused by COVID, and are still trying to determine “how sick is too sick” for them to attend work.

- ▶ **None of these concerns mean that the attendance challenges that were heightened by the pandemic cannot be overcome.**

- ▶ **However, it does mean that even more intentional efforts to build positive relationships and engage students and families will be needed, possibly including the following ideas.**
- ▶ Talk about the issues caused by the pandemic as a school community. Share information with families and the community about the importance of attendance – especially highlighting the increased number of students who are missing large numbers of days post-COVID.
 - ▶ Provide parents with non-judgmental support and effective strategies for managing and responding to children’s anxiety about attending school.
 - ▶ Send home guidance about when to come to school and when to stay home – making the messaging as clear as possible.
 - ▶ Remind staff and students how the school is being vigilant about cleaning and disinfecting.
 - ▶ Build partnerships, asking parents and community members to help everyone feel confident about students being in the school.
 - ▶ Pro-actively welcome parents back post-COVID. Many parents felt excluded from the school as a result of the pandemic, and they need to be encouraged to return – more than ever! When parents are more comfortable and confident being back in the building, their children are more likely to feel comfortable, too.
 - ▶ Provide masks for students and staff who are concerned – including those who are not sure if they might be coming down with something (or is it allergies?), and those who are worried about whether others might be ill.
 - ▶ Provide homework packages and assistance to students who do stay home because they are concerned about illness.

Be patient but persistent. It takes time for people to re-adjust.

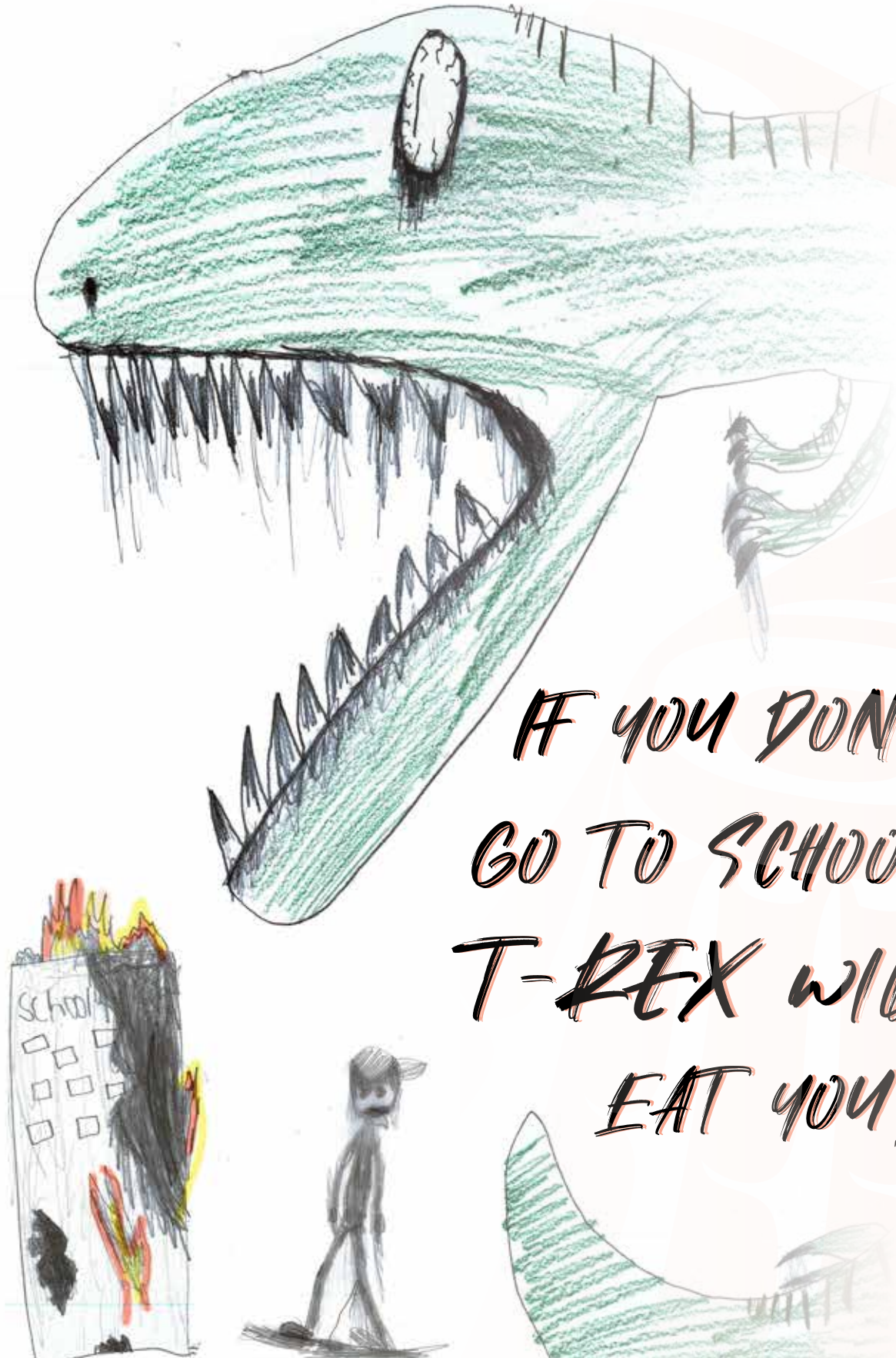
Sample Messages to Share With Families Post-COVID

- ◆ Every day in school is an important opportunity for students to recover from the uncertainties caused by the COVID pandemic.
- ◆ We want your children back with us so they can learn, connect with their peers and teachers, and contribute to our school.
- ◆ We also welcome families to be here with us. Your involvement is so important for encouraging and celebrating our students' success.
- ◆ We are doing everything we can to make the school a safe and healthy place.
 - We are focusing on hand washing and making hand sanitizer available.
 - Our excellent staff are working hard to keep our school healthy by wiping down surfaces and keeping things clean.
 - We have masks available for anyone who feels uncertain about the spread of germs.
- ◆ If you are worried that your child may have COVID, or if your child seems anxious about going to school, it may help to call your doctor for advice, or please reach out to us to discuss.
- ◆ If your child or teen is unable to get to school because they have COVID or another illness, please ask us for materials to help your child or teen keep learning at home. We can all work together to make sure our students do not fall behind, so they feel ready and excited to come back to school when they are well.

“We encourage our teachers ... ‘if a student has missed more than five days, reach out to the family and provide a homework package. Just start by making a connection. Talk to the family about how the student can keep up.’ Then if the student doesn’t return to school soon, a school based team makes a plan to help.”

Input at a 2023 First Nation School Principal Network





IF YOU DON'T
GO TO SCHOOL,
T-REX WILL
EAT YOU!

PART TWO

WHY FOCUS ON STRONG ATTENDANCE?

Poor attendance is the canary in the coalmine, warning us of trouble ahead.
Attendance Works, 2014(2)

Benefits for Students Who Attend Regularly

In short, students who have the best chance to succeed in school are generally those who attend school on a consistent basis. Regular school attendance is an essential part of the learning process and crucial to graduating from school with a strong foundation for further studies and a successful career.

- ▶ Students who regularly attend school receive more hours of instruction, often leading to higher grades.
- ▶ Studies show that students with good attendance have a greater chance of graduating, and they often finish high school with higher grades. That means they will have a wide range of options for post-secondary education and careers.
 - Studies show that by 9th grade, students' chances of graduating from high school drop by 20 percentage points for every week of school they miss.³
 - Students who graduate from high school are less likely to become long-term unemployed, homeless, caught in the poverty trap, dependent on welfare, and involved in the justice system.⁴

3 Jordan, 2019

4 Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012; Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2008; Danielson, 2002; Rothman, 2001; Virginia Department of Education, 2005

- ▶ Students who attend school regularly access opportunities to practice and build important behavioural and social-emotional skills, and to create positive relationships with adults and other students in the school.
- ▶ Research suggests that good attendance lessens the chance of students being negatively affected by challenges outside of school, including substance abuse, early pregnancy, and disruptive or illegal activities – issues that have been shown to contribute to attendance problems.⁵

By 6th grade, absenteeism is one of three signs that a student may drop out of high school.

By 9th grade, regular attendance is a better predictor of graduation rates than 8th grade test scores.
Attendance Works, 2014

- ▶ *This does not mean that students who experience attendance challenges cannot catch up and go on to graduate and be successful. They definitely can!*
- ▶ It does mean that helping all students attend school regularly is very important.
- ▶ It also means that students who are experiencing attendance challenges should be provided effective supports as soon as possible.

“Promoting regular attendance really helps reinforce a good work ethic for our kids. It helps them be more responsible and helps them get used to structure, which will benefit them as adults.”

Input at the 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session with First Nations Parents

⁵ Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012; Epstein and Sheldon, 2012; Centre for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2008; Danielson, 2002; Virginia Department of Education; 2005

Benefits For Schools and Communities Associated With Better Attendance

In addition to issues related to individuals students, higher attendance rates benefit school communities.

- ▶ Higher attendance rates can enhance schools' overall efforts to raise student achievement and realize their missions by having a positive effect on the learning of all students.⁶
 - When teachers spend less time accommodating students who were absent, it is beneficial for the overall classroom learning environment.
 - When teachers spend less time organizing makeup work for students who have missed school, they have more time for other class preparations.
 - When teachers spend less time in review, the pace of instruction does not slow down and important instructional time is not lost.
 - Whereas high levels of chronic absenteeism can lead to some school staff feeling demoralized, teachers often feel more positive and energized when students attend regularly.
 - Teachers are better able to provide adequate attention to all students when they do not have to concentrate on students who have fallen behind due to chronic absences.
 - When classes use partner and group activities, absences can cause a number of challenges, leaving some students without partners, requiring students to change partners in the middle of assignments, and sometimes impacting the momentum of learning projects. When student absences are minimized, these types of challenges arise less often.
 - Some researchers suggest that absenteeism can become “contagious.” If some students are away day after day, other students may perceive attendance as less important. Encouraging all students to come to school unless they are sick can help prevent this problem.

- ▶ Increases in academic performance that result from higher attendance rates can potentially extend a cycle of educational success, providing more role models and mentors to inspire and support the next generation of students.

Reducing chronic absence can not only improve academic performance but boost morale for students, teachers and administrators as they see signs of progress.

(Attendance Works, 2014(2))

6 Rothman, 2001; Purdie and Buckley, 2010; Strick and Berg, 2019; Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000

Related Benefits of Minimizing Late Arrivals

Research also suggests that students who regularly arrive at school on time are generally more successful.

- ▶ Students who arrive on time do not miss the beginning of their morning classes, when important learning is taking place.
- ▶ Evidence shows that students who are not chronically late generally have higher standardized test scores, higher graduation rates, and they usually feel more connected to school, leading to fewer behaviour problems.
- ▶ Students who are regularly on-time for school are learning the importance of punctuality – a life skill that is needed for future employment and lifelong success.
- ▶ When students are on time, they do not negatively impact their teachers and other students. Late arrivals can disrupt instruction, require the teacher to reorganize lessons, and cause distractions for classmates. Conversely, on time arrivals can help classrooms run more smoothly.

As noted by Reynolds,⁷

“Students arriving to school with time to spare have the luxury of settling in, preparing their class materials and focusing their minds on the lessons to come. They have all the time they need to literally and figuratively wake up.”

Recognizing the benefits of attending regularly and on-time, strategies to address these issues will ideally encompass both issues simultaneously, and many of the ideas included in this Toolkit may be adapted to address morning lateness – and even excessive absences due to early pick-ups before the school day ends, if that is a problem. The goal, overall, is to reduce the amount of time students miss out on learning ... whatever the reasons.

⁷ Reynolds, 2024

Our best investments in instruction and curriculum won't count for much if students aren't in class to benefit from them. If we're serious about improving our schools, we need to take attendance seriously. We need to ensure that all students are in class regularly so they have an equal opportunity to learn.

Attendance Works. 2014(2)

SEE THE ATTACHED FACT SHEET



Why Worry About Attendance Issues? for a quick overview of this information that can be shared in attendance promotion campaigns.

All kids should go to school so they can learn about their culture and get an education so they can be a leader in their community.



PART THREE

UNDERSTANDING WHAT LEADS TO ATTENDANCE CHALLENGES IN ORDER TO IDENTIFY WHAT CAN BE DONE

There are many issues that lead to chronic absenteeism. Often the issues overlap and are very complicated, and the reasons why each student misses school are unique.

This section outlines some common factors related to chronic absenteeism.

- ▶ **Why is thinking about potential causes useful?**
- ▶ **Because understanding reasons for attendance challenges will ideally help identify the best solutions.**

School Related Factors

Past reports on student attendance issues tended to focus primarily on family issues and community socio-economic factors, and gave less attention to the role of schools in creating and addressing student absenteeism. But while it is certainly true that schools alone are not responsible for attendance challenges, studies increasingly emphasize the extremely important impact that schools have on student attendance.

Schools encourage better attendance when they:¹

- ▶ Are welcoming, safe, and inclusive, with personal connections between staff and students.
- ▶ Communicate effectively with families – including helping families know what steps are being taken to keep the school safe and healthy, and sharing clear information about when students should stay home because of illness.
- ▶ Have effective attendance policies and procedures, including following up with parents in helpful ways.
- ▶ Pro-actively address bullying.
- ▶ Expect and promote high student achievement and positive student behaviours.
- ▶ Consistently show positive attitudes about learning, students, and families.
- ▶ Offer culturally relevant courses and resources, and use teaching strategies that students find interesting and relevant.
- ▶ Support students through important transitions, such as beginning in a new school or moving on to high school.
- ▶ Provide adequate transportation options to help students get to school.

¹ Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012; Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000; Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2008; Epstein and Sheldon, 2002; Purdie and Buckley, 2010; Virginia Department of Education, 2005



T'letinqox School



Senpaq'cin School

Community Related Factors

Studies show that communities also play an important role in addressing attendance challenges.²

- ▶ Attendance rates can be impacted by the availability of community support services for families and students.
- ▶ It is especially important for communities to help address the anxiety and stress that many people still feel following the COVID pandemic, which continues to have a significant impact on student attendance.
- ▶ A community-wide emphasis on the value of education can affect students' attitudes about school – and their attendance – and families and communities can work together to help students believe that a good education will provide them meaningful options for post-secondary education and careers.

² Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000; Virginia Department of Education, 2005

Family Related Factors

It would be incorrect to ever focus entirely on home factors as a cause of attendance issues, but it is useful to acknowledge the crucial role of parents/guardians and other family members in influencing the willingness and ability of students to go to school. Consistent support, communication, and encouragement from families, as well as the provision of the basic necessities for attending school, all help to ensure that students are physically and emotionally equipped to enjoy the challenges of education. In contrast, repeated studies have shown that where parents and families find it difficult to provide sufficient supports, students are more likely to experience chronic absences from school. Understanding this reality is in no way meant to imply blame, but instead it emphasizes the critical need to support all families as comprehensively and effectively as possible.

Studies suggest that families can contribute to good attendance by:³

- ▶ Being involved in education and the school.
- ▶ Emphasizing to children and teens the importance of getting to school on-time and ready to learn.
- ▶ Making sure students are eating nutritious foods and getting enough sleep.
- ▶ Controlling the amount of time children and teens are gaming and using electronics.
- ▶ Helping students who are feeling anxious about going to school – especially after the pandemic.
- ▶ Eating meals together whenever possible, talking about the benefits of education and the many opportunities that are available to students who graduate from grade 12 and attend post-secondary.
- ▶ Helping children and teens stay organized, get ready for school on-time, and stay on top of their school-work.

³ Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012; Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000; Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2008; Virginia Department of Education, 2005

Factors Related to Individual Students

While it is crucial to never blame students for attendance difficulties, some of the reasons for chronic absenteeism can relate directly to the personality and experiences of individual students, some of which are interwoven with school and home related factors and some of which may be inherent to a specific person.⁴

Understanding the factors that can make students more likely to miss school can inform efforts to provide each student the supports they need.

“We must never blame students. We must always acknowledge that some things are out of their locus of control. Blame drives students further out of the school.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

Studies show that students are more likely to miss school when they:

- ▶ Are experiencing anxiety, stress, or other emotional and mental health challenges – which may be increased for some students due to the COVID pandemic.
- ▶ Are addicted to electronics.
- ▶ Find it difficult to make friends / have lost connections to other students (which may have happened during the pandemic).
- ▶ Are being bullied or experience conflicts at school, making them feel unsafe.
- ▶ Don't feel welcome and secure at school.
- ▶ Have friends who are missing school regularly.
- ▶ Find it difficult to keep up with their schoolwork / are worried about tests, assignments, and grades.
- ▶ Find school boring and not relevant to their lives.
- ▶ Don't understand the value of education, or think school is a waste of time.
- ▶ Don't feel that they can be successful / need to build their sense of self-esteem and self-confidence.

⁴ Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012; Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000; Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2008; Virginia Department of Education, 2005

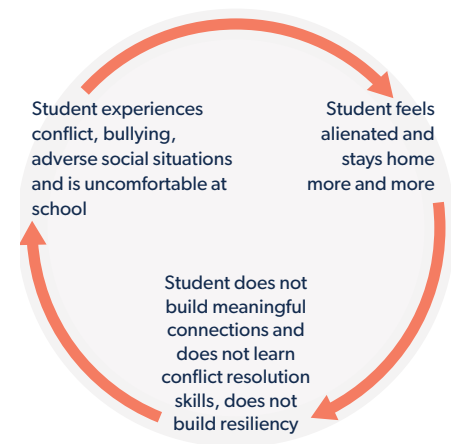
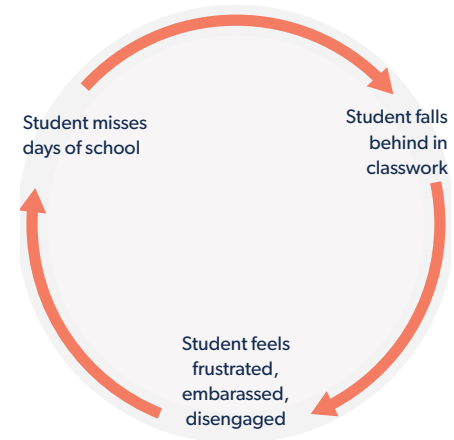
Sometimes, being absent from school can become a cycle for students.

Learning builds over time and from grade to grade. For example:

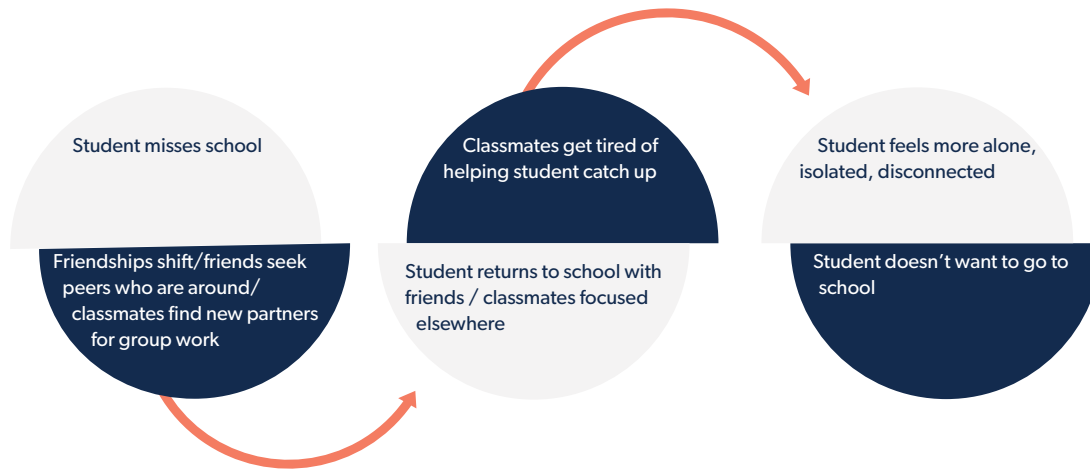
- ▶ what students learn in November is built on what students learned in September and October; and
- ▶ what students learn in grade 4 builds on what students learned in grades 1, 2 and 3.

When students miss too much school, they miss out on important foundational knowledge. Then they may feel frustrated or embarrassed, and they may want to stay home from school. But that leaves them further and further behind their classmates.

- ▶ Sometimes students might stay away from school because they feel bullied or they do not feel like they fit in. But missing school means that problems cannot be addressed, and students may feel even more uncomfortable returning to school after missing several days.
- ▶ Students develop important relationships in school, but when they miss too many days, they might find that friendships have changed when they return.



If they feel left out, students often avoid being in school – leading them to feel increasingly isolated and lonely, causing more attendance challenges.



Research suggests that attendance is a particular concern for some students who have exceptionalities. Factors that can make it difficult for students who have exceptionalities to be in school include chronic health conditions, fatigue and other side effects from medications, anxiety caused by bullying and harassment, inappropriate or inadequate services, trauma, and food and housing insecurity. Some students who have exceptionalities may also receive developmental and health related services outside of the school setting, which causes them to miss time during the school day.

Finally, school suspension and expulsion, as early as preschool, have increasingly been identified as causes of chronic absenteeism that disproportionately affect students with emotional and behavioral disorders and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. It is critical to be attentive to issues that affect all students – including those who have exceptionalities – in order to appropriately respond and remove any barriers.

Why is it important to consider the reasons why students might be missing school?

It is not meant to imply blame.

It is not meant to suggest that the reasons are too complicated to solve.

Instead, considering some of the common reasons why students are absent is intended to help everyone find and use the right strategies – to reduce the amount of time students miss out on learning, whatever the reasons.

One First Nation school reported that the principal took non-attending students to lunch to ask the students why they weren't attending school. Many of the answers came as a surprise. The number of students who said they didn't feel welcome at the school was especially unexpected and important to know ... so it could be addressed.

[There is] "... no doubt that some of the issues come from children themselves – there are some children that will overcome the obstacles and have a natural resilience and some that are less likely to succeed when the least obstacle is presented. This does **not** mean that you can blame the children ..."

Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2008

What Students Say

(Adapted from Department of Education and Children’s Services. 2003 Attendance Improvement Package)

When asked what causes lateness or absence, students often identify one of the following reasons.

FAMILY	FINANCES	HEALTH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Child care issues ▶ Parents are not concerned ▶ Needed to go shopping ▶ Slept in ▶ Had appointments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ No shoes or clothes ▶ No money for lunch ▶ No money for field trip ▶ No money for supplies or equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Headlice ▶ Stress/anxiety ▶ Depression ▶ Asthma ▶ Illness
CONFLICT	SCHOOL	EMBARRASSMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Conflict in the school yard ▶ Conflict after or before school ▶ Family in conflict with the school ▶ Dealing with harassment / bullying at school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ They’re bored in school ▶ Seems like a waste of time ▶ Don’t like the teacher ▶ Don’t value education ▶ Don’t believe they can be successful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Behind in work ▶ Domestic violence issues ▶ Late for school already – don’t want to stand out by coming in late ▶ No clean clothes or not enough food

Overall, some researchers describe 3 broad categories of causes for students missing school:

1. *Students who cannot attend school* (e.g. due to illness, family responsibilities, housing instability, etc.);
2. *Students who will not attend school* (e.g. to avoid bullying, unsafe conditions, harassment and embarrassment); and
3. *Students who do not attend school* (e.g. because they, and/or their parents, do not see the value in attending school, they have something else they would rather do, etc.).

These categories can also be exacerbated by “myths” (e.g. students and families not realizing that missing just 2 days a month can be a problem, thinking that only unexcused absences are problematic, or not thinking absences are a problem for younger children).⁵

5 Allison, Attisha, and Council on School Health, 2019.

Considerations for Decision-Making: Myths and Facts About Attendance

MYTH		FACT
Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused.	➔	Being away from school means lost opportunities, whatever the reason.
Sporadic absences (versus consecutive absences) are not a problem.	➔	Learning time is impacted regardless of when absences occur.
Attendance only matters in older grades.	➔	Significant research shows attendance at early grade levels has important consequences.
Attendance is a family's problem.	➔	Students miss school for many reasons, and it is best addressed collectively – by students, families, schools, and the community together.

“What works? Educate, educate, educate. Share information and simple messages to break down myths about attendance.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

It is important to note that each student is unique and responses must be individualized. Challenges may impact each student differently and may or may not result in high rates of absenteeism.

This realization does not mean that students who react to difficult circumstances by avoiding school should be labelled as 'bad' or 'troublesome,' as was often the case in the past; it just emphasizes the need to address the underlying causes of poor attendance by understanding and considering family and student needs holistically.⁶

The only reason for understanding factors that contribute to absenteeism is to use the information to match challenges with appropriate solutions.

When you have identified where concerns about chronic absenteeism lie, you may recognize that certain groups of students have attendance issues that you can work to address as a school community. However, be prepared to take a student by student approach to addressing attendance, helping individual students overcome the unique and specific hurdles they face in coming to school (for example, housing instability, a lack of effective transportation options, childcare issues, bullying concerns and more). Your school [and community] may want to form an attendance team that meets regularly to discuss at-risk students and follow-up on plans to improve their attendance.

Edutopia, 2013

⁶ Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000; Centre for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2008; Virginia Department of Education, 2005

What Parents Say About Why Students Miss School Input from Participants at the February 2023 FNEESC and FNSA Parents Conference

- ◆ COVID fears and the lingering anxiety from COVID isolation and stress.
- ◆ Mental health issues, including students not feeling emotionally well enough to go to school, sometimes due to bullying or other issues, and parents needing mental health supports, as well.
- ◆ Socio-economic challenges, including students not having lunch, students and families feeling embarrassed about not having food, trendy clothes, fancy sneakers etc. – issues that have been worsened by high inflation rates.
- ◆ Gaming addictions, leading to lack of sleep and directly causing missed school.
- ◆ The need for better scheduling and healthy routines at home.
- ◆ Lack of adequate transportation options.
- ◆ The time required for families in remote communities to travel for medical appointments, etc.
- ◆ Limited awareness of the impact of attendance on student success.

In order to understand absences, some teachers use anonymous surveys to ask students about the causes of their absences. The sample survey included below could be adapted to the specific grade/ age and circumstances of a class to make it relevant. It would be useful to emphasize to students that the survey is intended to help inform the teacher and school about overall reasons why students miss school. And just using the survey may be valuable for showing students that attendance is important enough to warrant measurement and attention (Sprick and Berg, 2019).

Approximately how many days do you think you have been absent this year? (CHECK ONE)

0 - 1 2 - 5 6 - 9 10 - 18 18 - 25 26+

Indicate how often the following reasons contributed to your absences.	NEVER	ONCE	MORE THAN ONCE
I was seriously ill and had to go see the doctor.			
I had a cold, headache, stomach bug, or other minor illness.			
I was tired and wanted to sleep in.			
I had a doctor or dentist appointment.			
I felt anxious or depressed.			
I missed the bus or had no way to get to school.			
The weather was too bad for me to walk to school.			
I had to take care of my brother or sister.			
I didn't think it would matter if I was at school and didn't feel like coming.			
I didn't think anyone at school would care if I attended or not.			
I wasn't ready for a test.			
I didn't do my homework.			
School is too boring.			
I was being teased or picked on and wanted a break.			
I was afraid to come to school.			
I was having trouble getting along with a teacher or another adult at school.			
I was hanging out with my friends.			
I went somewhere out of the community with my family.			
I was using technology at home and I didn't want to stop.			
I was participating in a cultural / traditional activity.			
Another reason (DESCRIBE PLEASE)			

School

is one of the most important things in the world.



PART FOUR

WHAT TO DO ABOUT CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM?

- ▶ Numerous studies provide a range of suggestions for promoting better attendance.
- ▶ FNEC and FNSA have also communicated with representatives of First Nations and First Nation schools, as well as parents, to discuss what is working well for First Nations students in BC.
- ▶ The ideas shared in this section of the Guide are based on research, as well as the input that has been shared.

Generally, three critical themes are identified in the literature related to student attendance.

1. **Address Attendance Early – Prevention is Key:** It is important to address signs of irregular or poor attendance as soon as they arise, providing supports before problems become more firmly rooted in student behaviour patterns, and before other associated challenges – such as falling behind in learning because of missed school – begin to make problems mutually reinforcing and therefore more difficult to solve.

- ▶ Research shows that half of students who miss 2 – 4 days in September go on to miss nearly a month of school.¹⁴

It is also most valuable to encourage regular attendance for *all* students, not just those who are showing signs of difficulty, to prevent challenges as much as possible.¹⁵

14 www.attendanceworks.org

15 Jordan, 2019

When there is an attendance concern the school should intervene immediately and provide the necessary support. An effective attendance plan must act on the first unexcused absence and continue to act on each absence thereafter.

(Alberta Education, 2014)

2. **Address Attendance Young – Attendance Counts from the Start:** Studies show that parents are twice as likely to say that attendance is a “big deal” in high school than in kindergarten. But, in fact, good attendance is a habit that children need to form early ... and if they do not, attendance problems may worsen over time.

- ▶ Evidence shows that a significant majority of children who are chronically absent in kindergarten were chronically absent in pre-K.
- ▶ Because literacy instruction is frontloaded in the early grades, if children miss too much school, they fall behind their classmates in reading, which can also negatively impact their connection to school.
- ▶ Research shows that children who are chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade usually have the lowest levels of attendance five years later.¹⁶

“Teacher effectiveness is the strongest school-related determinant of student success, but chronic student absence reduces even the best teacher’s ability to provide learning opportunities. Students who attend school regularly have been shown to achieve at higher levels than students who do not have regular attendance. This relationship between attendance and achievement may appear early in a child’s school career. A recent study looking at young children found that absenteeism in kindergarten was associated with negative first grade outcomes, such as greater absenteeism in subsequent years and lower achievement in reading, math, and general knowledge.”

National Center for Education Statistics, 2009

16 Attendance Works, 2014

As early as kindergarten, children learn and practice skills that are critical for ongoing school success. Skills build from the foundation set in early grade levels, and it is important for all students to achieve early learning milestones.

This does not mean that students cannot catch up if they are behind! Of course they can.

It does mean that promoting good attendance while children are young is useful.

It also means that if a student is chronically absent in the early grade levels, schools and families should pay close attention to the student's progress and provide any necessary supports.

All children, regardless of socio-economic background, do worse academically in first grade if they are chronically absent in kindergarten. Further, going to school regularly in the early years is especially critical for children living in poverty, who are less likely to have the resources to make up for lost time in the classroom. Among poor children, chronic absence in kindergarten predicts the lowest levels of educational achievement at the end of 5th grade.

Bruner, Discher and Chang, 2011

3. **Attendance Is Best Addressed Together:** Efforts to help students attend more school will ideally involve multifaceted, cooperative approaches. For instance, while programs to address attendance challenges must *never* focus solely on students or families, which would wrongly suggest they are to blame, families will ideally be key partners in campaigns to promote improved school attendance.

- ▶ Given the complicated interplay between factors that contribute to chronic absences, family and school partnerships are essential in order to fully understand and address students' attendance patterns.
- ▶ Additionally, involving parents and communities in a widespread campaign to emphasize the value of education – and attendance in particular – is invaluable in making it clear that everyone expects all students to be in school.

It can be particularly beneficial for child care centres / preschools, K-12 schools, and adult education centres to collaborate in tackling attendance challenges, recognizing overlapping reasons for absences. For example ...

- If children stay home from school because they are experiencing challenges (e.g. anxiety about school, bullying, etc.), that can lead to their parents missing classes and important learning activities.
- If parents go out of town during the week for appointments, their children may go along and miss school as a result.
- Promoting the importance of attendance with students of all ages may encourage fewer absences for children, teens and adult learners in the community.
- A First Nations adult education program leader also noted that encouraging regular attendance for adult students can inspire their children and emphasize the importance of education; “seeing their parents attend school regularly offers children positive role models, with one child reporting ‘Mom’s cool; she’s going to school.’”

Overall, given the number and complexity of underlying issues that can contribute to high rates of absenteeism, schools cannot be expected to correct attendance problems themselves. Many of the issues associated with attendance are beyond the immediate control of teachers and administrators alone.

This does not mean, however, that schools are powerless to address the problem of absenteeism or that they should label the issue as too difficult to solve. For far too long, attendance was viewed as something beyond the realm of schools, exhibited in phrases such as: “it’s a parents’ problem,” or “that student is just not motivated,” or “what can we as schools do?”

Instead, a key theme in the current literature on school attendance is the primary role that schools can and should play in making sure students attend regularly.¹⁷ By focusing attention on the factors that are within their control, and by reaching out to parents and communities for assistance, administrators and teachers can make a positive difference to student attendance, and thereby increase the potential for greater student, school, and community success.

“Attendance is complicated. But we try hard to act on things we can control. When the bus arrives at school in the morning, we know which students didn’t arrive. Then we focus on what **we** can do. We call the homes and ask if we can pick up the students.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

¹⁷ Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012; Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000; Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2008; Danielson, 2002; Epstein and Sheldon, 2002; Virginia Department of Education, 2005; Purdie and Buckley, 2010; Sprick and Berg, 2019

“At times, we made the mistake of assuming that all of our staff were equally invested in looking at our attendance data and thinking about how we can make a real impact. That isn’t always the case. So we took time to talk about all of our roles in addressing absences. What can teachers do in their classrooms? How can bus drivers encourage attendance? We all have roles to play. We also talk about students and families who might be experiencing struggles and how we can coordinate our response. We want to avoid families being bombarded with messages from everyone. We collectively brainstorm thoughtful and respectful responses we can implement together.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

There are numerous proven strategies that schools can use to promote attendance – many of which can be implemented quickly and cost effectively.¹⁸

- ▶ Generally, schools should approach the issue of attendance with a balance of high expectations for both attendance and academic achievement, with an understanding of the issues surrounding absenteeism and a commitment to provide ongoing support for students and families, especially those at risk.¹⁹
- ▶ Research has found that, perhaps not surprisingly, students have the best attendance records in schools that make high demands and concurrently provide high levels of support.²⁰
- ▶ And again, prevention is key. One of the best ways to address absenteeism is to make sure schools are places that students want to be – that is, safe, supportive, and engaging environments where students feel welcome and valued.

“Really, attendance is a reflection of the climate in our school. It is an extension of our attitudes. Our voices, what we notice, our words ... they really matter. We hold high expectations for achievement. We need to hold high expectations for attendance. It starts with us.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting



More specific strategies for improving school attendance are identified in the remainder of this Toolkit.

18 Jordan, 2019

19 Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012; Virginia Department of Education, 2005; Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2008

20 Virginia Department of Education, 2005

Some First Nation school representatives have suggested that, when facilitating a team approach to addressing attendance, it is beneficial to share information and engage in deliberate conversations that will *empower* people to believe that they can make positive change. Improving attendance can require persistence, patience, and significant effort; in response, emphasizing the concept of “collective efficacy” may help motivate attendance teams.

Collective efficacy refers to a group of people sharing the belief that by working together they can overcome challenges and achieve their desired results. Evidence shows that when school staff and their education partners *genuinely believe* in their combined ability to influence student outcomes, they can raise levels of academic achievement. The beliefs teams hold about their ability to make positive change can influence their success – and can be especially valuable in helping people overcome difficulties.

More information about collective efficacy that might be useful to share with school staff / attendance teams is included in Appendix 9: Sample Handouts.

► Take Attendance Seriously

Develop and implement policies, procedures and structures designed to reduce absences

It is important for schools to carefully consider relevant policies and procedures that:

1. provide for quick and consistent responses to unexplained absenteeism; and
2. include prevention measures and ways to identify and support students who are facing attendance barriers.²¹

Some of the issues to be considered when creating policies include the following.

- Whenever possible, students and parents should be involved in creating attendance policies, which can confirm that the policies are feasible and relevant, and increase support for the policies that are developed.
- Relevant, effective policies should explicitly define what is considered an excused absence, or the policy could be perceived as being inflexible or too difficult to follow. It is also important to emphasize that students should not come to school when they are ill, which is not good for sick students or their peers.²²

“It is so important to design policies that balance high expectations with compassion. Policy really provides the foundation to work from, so it must reflect how we want students and families to be treated.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Conference

- Policies that simply mandate attendance and apply increasingly harsh punishments for unexcused absences are generally not effective. Such policies fail to consider the range of underlying causes of attendance problems, and the prevention, early intervention, and ongoing supports that are needed to most effectively address barriers.²³ In fact, there is a strong global movement away from the traditional focus on punishing students for missing school – an approach that study after study has shown to fail in reducing absenteeism.²⁴

21 Epstein and Sheldon, 2002; Virginia Department of Education, 2005

22 Danielson, 2002

23 Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2008

24 Jordan, 2019

- If there are disciplinary consequences for chronic unexcused absences or lates, they must be clear, not excessive, and well defined, as well as consistently and equitably applied – *used only as a last resort, and always complemented with support.*

“We cannot punish students into wanting to attend school.”
Sprick and Berg, 2019

- Critically, any consequences must not further drive students out of the school, such as suspension; it is far better to use consequences that keep students in school, such as requiring after-school or lunch-time sessions with school staff so students can catch up on school work.²⁵

It is also important to review the school’s behaviour policies (or what some schools refer to as discipline policies) to ensure that they minimize the time students miss out on classroom instruction.



FNESC and FNSA have created a *Policy and Procedure Resource Guide for First Nation Schools in BC* (updated September 2023), which includes discussion papers and sample attendance and student behaviour policies for consideration by First Nation schools.

As schools attempt to identify and bring back individual students with frequent absences, it is essential that the affected students feel as if the school is their oasis, not their holding cell.

Elias, 2019

- ▶ School attendance policies and procedures should address student attendance tracking.
 - Paying attention to attendance data is vital to ensure the early identification of emerging attendance problems, along with effective follow-up.²⁶
 - Some schools track attendance each period, not just at the beginning of the day. This helps to identify when children are leaving school early or when an individual student is skipping a particular class. If a student is regularly missing the same class, extra tutoring or addressing a potential disconnect with a specific teacher may eliminate the absenteeism problem.²⁷

²⁵ Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2008; Epstein and Sheldon, 2002; Virginia Department of Education, 2005

²⁶ Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2008; Virginia Department of Education, 2005

²⁷ Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012

Designing attendance policies can start with asking simple questions:

- ◆ What do we consider an absence? Is there an important difference between excused and unexcused?
 - ◆ When should attendance be collected? What should happen when a student is absent?
 - ◆ Must excused absences be verified by the school? Does parent notification need to be written or phoned in?
 - ◆ How many absences can occur before the school should intervene?
- ▶ Careful attention should be given to the question of when and how to contact parents.
- Policies may require informing parents at the first and each subsequent unexplained absence from one or more classes, to ensure that parents are informed early, not just when student grades are slipping or when the problem has become very serious.
 - It is especially useful to adopt procedures that involve making personal contact with parents, such as personal phone calls, instead of texts or emails. Making direct contact with parents will ensure that they are aware of attendance issues. It can also open the door to dialogue about relevant challenges and potential cooperative efforts to resolve any difficulties.

“What doesn’t work? Quick things – such as quick emails, versus taking the time to reach out and really connect with families.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“We take an approach we call our “safe arrival program” – a positive program name that is non-judgmental and non-threatening. After attendance is taken, parents are notified if their children did not arrive, and we ask the reason for the absence. It seems to help with attendance issues.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Conference

- ▶ Any school policies related to late arrivals should be reviewed to ensure they are not contributing to absences. If students think the consequences for being late are too punitive, they may decide to skip the whole day if they are going to be late.²⁸

“We have eliminated any consequences for being late. We just welcome students whenever they arrive. We would rather have kids for part of the day than not at all.”

Input at a 2023 First Nation School Principal Network

In addition to school policies, it can be beneficial to consider systemic issues and school structures to identify possible changes to promote attendance.

“We have staggered our start times to promote better attendance. We asked our high school students what would help them get to school on time, and they asked us to move to a 9 am start. That also gave our students more voice in school decisions, which was really valuable for connecting to our teens.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“Last year, we moved to student-led conferences, which was a big success in terms of building connectedness.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

FOR MORE INFORMATION SEE THE ATTACHED FACT SHEET



Moving From Parent-Teacher Conferences to Student-Led Conferences: What the Research Says

28 Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012; Danielson, 2002



Sxoxomic Community School

“We have changed our school schedule to four longer days, with half day Fridays. We ask families – ‘please try to schedule appointments on Friday afternoon when you can. We really want students in school on the other days.’”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“We have slightly extended each school day so our school closes one Friday each month. That day is available to families and staff for appointments, running errands ... all the things that keep us so busy and sometimes lead to kids missing school.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“We try to think about everything we are doing through the lens of our attendance trends – such as scheduling. For example, why are our reading blocks in the morning, when many students arrive late? Why can’t we try something different, and adjust reading lessons to later in the day to better accommodate the reality of our school and our students’ situation? Some teachers were initially resistant when we proposed this idea. We had to respond and ask firmly ‘Why can’t we try a change to see if it works?’ And it did work.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“Reporting to parents about attendance – especially the attendance of their children, is key. Parents should be given clear and timely information so there are no surprises for families.”

Input at the 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session with First Nations Parents

FNESC and FNSA have created a Reporting Handbook for First Nation Schools, which provides suggestions for reporting to parents through: ongoing, informal communications; parent-teacher or parent-teacher-student conferences, and formal written report cards. That Handbook includes the following suggestions.

Reporting Student Attendance

Given the critical importance of regular student attendance, and in light of data demonstrating that regular attendance is a serious challenge for the majority of students in First Nation schools in BC, it is recommended that parents should be informed about their child or teen's attendance and on-time arrivals using all reporting mechanisms. Efforts to ensure that parents are aware of their children's attendance and its potential impact on their success can include ongoing communications, parent-teacher-student conferences, and written reports. Ongoing communications and conferences with parents can also provide opportunities to discuss relevant barriers and strategies to promote attendance for students.

Additionally, there may be circumstances in which a student's serious chronic absenteeism may make it very difficult to determine a student's progress. What can be done in those cases?

If the report card format uses a grading option such as a 4-point scale, letter grade, percentage, pass/fail, or if proficiency scales are used, the teacher can leave the "grade" or proficiency scale blank.

The teacher could then include in the comments section a note such as: "This student's lack of attendance makes it difficult to accurately assess their understanding and progress. We welcome [student name] to come to school more often. Please let us know how we can work with you in partnership to help [student name] attend and be successful in school."

For students who are taking grade 10 – 12 courses, schools may want to consider an approach like that used for the Ministry of Education grading system, which includes the "IE" symbol to alert parents / caregivers when students, for a variety of reasons, have not provided sufficient evidence of learning in relation to the Learning Standards. This means that teachers do not have enough information (observations, conversations, and products) to adequately and accurately assess a student's progress.

Teachers and families should work together when a potential assessment issue arises related to insufficient evidence of learning. When an "IE" reporting symbol has been assigned, teachers, students, and parents/caretakers are expected to jointly discuss the situation, including the subject areas where evidence of learning is unavailable, the potential needs of the student, and possible solutions and supports. Teachers should provide a clear timeline for resolution, a description of student needs, and a specific plan of action to arrive at a possible solution.

► Make Schools Places Where Students Want to Be

Create a positive, welcoming school environment in which students feel supported and connected

“In the early stages of our attendance journey, our school tried paying honoraria for regular attendance, but we found this did not lead to good discussions. Over time, it just led to everyone focusing on the funding, rather than the benefits of strong attendance. So we shifted to focusing on information sharing, newsletters ... We began talking as a staff about how we could show our students we genuinely want them in school with us. We began celebrating our students and their families. We moved to promoting the benefits of attendance as the reward itself, rather than money. This was when real change started happening.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

It is extremely important for all students to have strong interpersonal relationships in their lives, and many studies have shown increased attendance when schools create opportunities for students to develop bonds with teachers, other staff, and each other.²⁹

To really connect with a student, school personnel need to get to know the student both inside and outside the classroom. Involving students in discussions about their learning and goals is important to understand them. This allows for identification of the student’s strengths and needs and can enhance the experience the student has both in the classroom and outside. This way the student will want to attend school and not feel that they have to.

Alberta Education, 2014

²⁹ Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012; Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000; Epstein and Sheldon, 2002; Virginia Department of Education, 2005; Purdie and Buckley, 2010

The teacher / student / parent relationship is the foundation of each student's success at school. Ideally, teachers will:

- ▶ create a safe, comfortable, inclusive atmosphere for learning;
- ▶ use a demanding but warm and personal style, which can challenge students' intellectual abilities while making them want to be in class;
- ▶ be kind and demonstrate a positive awareness of students' families, their culture, and their lives outside of school – to help them feel welcome and encourage them to attend regularly.

In addition, students do their best work and they often attend more regularly when they experience:

- ▶ a sense of belonging and opportunities to share and contribute as respected and valued members of a community of learning;
- ▶ the spirit of mastery that comes through encouragement of their gifts and competencies;
- ▶ independence developed through opportunities to show responsibility and contribute to decision-making.³⁰

“Do our students have voice? When they genuinely have a voice, they will want to be in school more.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

These types of issues are commonly referred to by researchers as “school connectedness” – i.e. students feeling that there are program staff who care about their education and well-being as individuals, and feeling a strong sense of belonging and attachment to a program that has a community-like atmosphere.³¹

“I really suggest – start by making connections. Then add specific attendance promotion strategies as you can over time.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

³⁰ Alberta Education, 2005

³¹ Virginia Department of Education, 2005

School connectedness has been shown to be a marker not only for increased attendance, but also for higher student performance and reduced likelihood of “risky behaviours,” such as less chance of substance abuse, violence, or involvement with the justice system.³²

Some ways to encourage school connectedness include the following.

- ▶ Make sure each student has a personal relationship with at least one supportive adult at school (teacher, administrator, or other staff as appropriate).³³ Consider if it is possible to institute a mentoring or tutoring program for students. Perhaps parents can be enlisted to nominate an older sibling or other relative (such as a cousin) who will pro-actively encourage students to attend school.³⁴

“We tell our high school students – ‘We know you can be successful. Here are the people who can help you. Use them.’ We want to empower our students to advocate for themselves.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

Commit to Silent Mentoring

- ◆ Staff meet in a room with a list of all students posted on the wall.
- ◆ Staff are given stickers to apply to the name of every student they feel they have a relationship with.
- ◆ When done, if there are any names without stickers – talk about those students and identify a staff member who will volunteer to build a relationship with each of them.

Note: Students should not learn about this process, as it may make some feel singled out or targeted.

Virginia Department of Education, 2005

32 Virginia Department of Education, 2005

33 Virginia Department of Education, 2005

34 Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000

In New York City, a corps of Success Mentors were each assigned 15 to 20 chronically absent students. If the students didn't turn up for school, the mentor gave them a call to find out where they were. If they were struggling with class work or social dynamics, the mentor was there to help. **Students who had mentors saw their absenteeism rates fall by 25.3 percent for elementary school students, 16.4 percent for middle school students, and 2.8 percent for high school students, according to city data.**

To test which model worked best, schools used mentors including retired professionals, college students who got course credit for the role, school staff members, and high school seniors. The results found that the age or source of the mentors didn't matter as much as other factors:

- Mentors had a consistent, year-long relationship with students
- Mentors had a connection to the schools
- Mentors and the schools celebrated attendance gains

Attendance Works www.attendanceworks.org

- ▶ Communicate to all staff and other students the importance of making every student feel respected and valued,³⁵ and make sure that the school is a secure environment with clear and consistently applied anti-bullying policies, procedures and practices.³⁶

“We took a team approach to supporting students who have specific needs. When a student is experiencing difficulty, the principal, a staff member who regularly works with the student, and our school counsellor all meet with the student to express our concern and talk about how we can help address their specific challenges. For example, one student was experiencing severe stress and anxiety and was consistently throwing tantrums in school. We gave the student a phone so they could reach out immediately to the counsellor when they were getting upset. It worked. A small, quite simple solution made a huge difference.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Conference

³⁵ www.attendanceworks.com

³⁶ Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000

“Bullying was a real concern at our school, and we knew we had to do something proactive about it. So we built a firepit and allowed the students to gather there after school without organized activities. But that didn’t work for breaking down barriers between students. We then switched to having students do team building exercises and debriefing by the firepit afterward to share their feelings. This made a real difference. Sometimes you just have to try something, see what works, what doesn’t, make changes ... keep trying.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Conference

“We began implementing a new activity to address lateness thanks to excellent feedback from a student who arrived late fairly often. She reminded us that late slips could feel like a “ticket of shame” – a fluorescent sign for everyone to see. She helped us redesign our late slips so they have positive messages, like:

► **Thanks for coming today – written in both our First Nations language and in English.**

► **School + [student’s name] = success.**

► **It all starts with attendance. We are happy you are here.**

We find that has helped with attendance and with students’ feeling of connectedness to the school.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

- Provide a welcoming and personal environment for students; make school a place where they feel visible and where they want to be. Especially for students at risk due to challenges in their home or community life, make sure school is a safe haven. It is important to make sure every student feels noticed, which will reduce the chance that students might feel that their absences are meaningless or will go undetected – which is a common feeling for students who struggle with attendance issues.³⁷

“We personalize what we do to try to support each student. For one student who was struggling, we started having a parade every morning she arrived. It was fun for her and the other students. It seemed to make a difference.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“It is so important to get feedback from students. For chronically absent students, we could use an exit ticket when they attend for a few days and ask them how it felt to be at school – and if it felt more comfortable by the end of the few days. We need to know how they are experiencing school and attendance.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

In one program, chronic non-attenders have lunch with the principal once a week in grade-level groups. Students with perfect attendance during the week (no absences, tardies, or early dismissals) receive a treat along with lots of praise. At the end of each month, students with improved attendance earn a pizza lunch. At the weekly meetings, the principal and students talk about the importance of school. The participants with improved attendance share how their week went and the benefits of being in school each day. The kids receive support, caring, and encouragement from the principal and from each another. The principal has daily contact with students who have the greatest attendance concerns, possibly including a morning check-in, visit to the classroom, or a call home if the child is absent. If the child isn't legitimately ill, parents are asked to bring the child to school or allow the school to pick them up.

- ▶ Some students remain in the program for the entire year, while others graduate when attendance concerns are resolved.
- ▶ The principal sends a letter to parents to explain the program goals and get permission for the kids to be involved.

"Kids love being in the program and feel they are a part of something special. ... They love the special attention during lunch and are very proud when they reach their attendance goals. Several kids have shown improvement in self-esteem and a more positive attitude, as well."

www.educationworld.com

Little Things Can Make a Big Difference

- ◆ Have principals stand outside each day and greet students by name.
- ◆ Have teachers stand outside their classrooms between classes and greet students.
- ◆ Have the school bus driver and secretary greet students. They are often the first people to see students in the morning. A welcoming environment often starts with them.
- ◆ Everyone can make a difference.

“Little things really do go a long way, like the principal at the front door, greeting students, saying ‘nice new shoes,’ ‘I like your haircut’ What you are really saying is ‘I notice you,’ ‘you matter to me.’”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“We have created a schedule so we have staff at the door each morning to greet students who arrive late and connect with families who are dropping off their children.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“We have found that addressing lateness starts with our attitudes. Instead of being disappointed with students who don’t arrive on time, we greet them happily, telling them ‘we are glad you’re here,’ ‘thanks for coming,’ ‘we are happy to have you with us.’ If parents drop off their children late, we greet them, too, and thank them for getting their child to school for the day.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

SEE THE ATTACHED FACT SHEET



***Reasons to Greet Students at the Door:
What the Research Says***

“We find that student lateness can be very disruptive. So we spoke to the school secretary and said ‘you are the first person who sees late students every day. Can you help?’ Now she welcomes late students and asks what she can do to help. She heard that one student was having trouble getting up and ready in time, so school representatives went to visit the home and asked if they could share some suggestions for morning routines. The secretary also got small prizes, and when students show improvement and arrive earlier in the morning, she gives them a small reward.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“We saw students inspired by a teacher who told students ‘if you are all on time for our next class, I will do 30 push-ups!’ It was amazing to see kids who are chronically late rushing to class.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

- ▶ Evidence suggests that students who participate in extra-curricular programs attend more school than their peers.³⁸ One study found that *before-school* activities and clubs particularly increased student engagement and attendance and increased on-time arrival of students who were previously tardy. First Nation school representatives also echoed this idea, suggesting, for example, that opening the gym before school encourages students to come early to play.³⁹

“We now start each day with the whole school – students and staff – taking a walk around the school together. It helps us start the day in a calm and refreshed way. We also find it helps us get students organized at the beginning of the day, and increases student engagement, as well. It also allows students who arrive a bit late to start class with their peers. We are finding the walks create a range of benefits.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Conference



Cataline Elementary School

38 Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000; Epstein and Sheldon, 2012, Virginia Department of Education, 2005, Edutopia, 2013
39 *Examples of Attendance Strategies and Interventions: A Comprehensive Data-Driven Approach.* countmeinmaine.org.



Boston Bar Elementary



Barriere Elementary

- ▶ Pro-active efforts to promote pride in the school make students feel positive about being a part of the school community – encouraging them to attend more often.⁴⁰

“Our school practices the “WAHOO!” When a whole class is in attendance, we do an announcement and the whole school gives them a “WAHOO.” You can hear the sound echo throughout the school. It is really students encouraging other students.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“In our school, monthly attendance announcements work well and help us celebrate successes. I post the monthly attendance on bulletin boards, and students and families who walk by really enjoy seeing the improvements everyone is making.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

Education is about opening the doors to learning and citizenship for all. Meeting this sacred responsibility is possible when our schools work to have a positive school culture and climate. If we build this, kids will come. And when they can’t, once we help them with barriers and they do come, they are more likely to stay.”
Elias, 2019

40 Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000; Virginia Department of Education, 2005

What Parents Say Schools Can Do To Help With Attendance

Input from participants at the February 2023 First Nations Parents Conference and 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Sessions With First Nations Parents

- ◆ Address student achievement – provide strong instruction, as well as tutoring supports and after school academic programs
- ◆ Avoid jargon; share information with families using language they can understand
- ◆ Create a sense of belonging and make sure students feel safe and wanted at school – including students who experience behaviour challenges
- ◆ Build positive connections with students so they know you are coming from a place of genuine caring
- ◆ Work with families to have older siblings act as role models for their younger siblings, and have students mentor others to help them feel safe and build a sense of belonging
- ◆ Acknowledge the real struggles some students experience and show them you appreciate how hard they have worked to get to school and make it through the day
- ◆ Tell students you are happy to see them at school; use positive affirmations
- ◆ Implement programs and activities that help students feel excited about attending school, including: extra-curricular activities; language and culture activities; more on-the-land opportunities; special field trips; spirit weeks; summer programs for fun activities like drama and dance; movie nights ... activities “kids don’t want to miss”
- ◆ Address student mental health and wellness, including providing nutrition programs and efforts to help with teen anxiety, ideally with counselling supports and adequate resources for students who have high anxiety and who are scared or bullied
- ◆ Provide families alarm clocks, so kids don’t need to bring phones into their bedrooms to wake them up
- ◆ Assign staff to support students who are experiencing challenges, and encourage vulnerable students with special gatherings / extra activities
- ◆ Make efforts to ensure all students know what supports are in place, and make sure students never feel shame reaching out for the help that is available
- ◆ Consider creative ways to keep students engaged in learning when they aren’t in school
- ◆ Teach students “financial literacy;” help them understand the importance of education for earning a good living
- ◆ Host an Elders-in-Residence program/create culturally safe spaces for students, with traditional foods and teas, etc.
- ◆ Host presentations by graduates from the school to encourage students to value education

- ◆ Create a pleasant, constructive environment students want to be a part of
- ◆ Encourage students to join in extra-curricular activities
- ◆ Provide professional development so teachers understand who First Nations people are, and First Nations' educational rights
- ◆ Make sure there is positive energy in the school

Hold a Connectedness Staff Meeting

- ◆ Provide a brief overview of the importance of connectedness
- ◆ Ask the staff to fill out a brief survey on connectedness, such as rating 1 to 5 for the following statements about the school:
 - Each student is connected with at least one caring adult at school
 - Staff treat one another with respect
 - Staff know about their students' lives outside of school
 - The school's behaviour policies and practices are fair
 - The school environment is safe for students and staff
 - Staff value what students have to say
- ◆ Avoiding any blame or judgment, ask people to describe key obstacles they face in building relationships with students, such as:
 - Needing to use teaching time for classroom management
 - Any external circumstances that affect relationships
 - Not having enough time to get to know students as individuals
 - Differing cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds
 - Other (explain)
- ◆ Discuss how the responses are linked to connectedness
- ◆ Ask what areas of connectedness need to be addressed
- ◆ Identify actions and assign staff to follow through
- ◆ Commit to follow up in future staff meetings

Virginia Department of Education, 2005

▶ Be In It Together

Create positive and strong relationships between the school and parents / families

“The school’s attendance efforts are invaluable. The family’s efforts are vital, as well.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

Research is very clear about the critical importance of the home environment for student success. Parents and families play a fundamental role in the education of their children, and no one has a greater influence on getting a young person to go to school every day.

“We need to make sure families feel our genuine appreciation. They are doing their best to support their children. They are our best and most important allies.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

“We should start a social media campaign to help families understand how important they are. Not all families understand the vital role they play in education. We could send a weekly notice celebrating their contribution to their children’s success and to everything we do.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

While in no way discounting schools’ responsibilities for and impact on student learning, there is overwhelming evidence that parents can make a valuable difference to their children’s learning, and that when they are involved in education, children do better in school and schools improve. In particular, student achievement is enhanced when parents emphasize the value of a good education and help their children understand the importance of regular participation in all school activities.

Therefore, one of the best foundations for students’ successful education, including the probability of consistent attendance at school, is the development of strong partnerships between schools, parents, caregivers, and families.

Research demonstrates that school practices to encourage family engagement are more important in determining whether parents become involved in the school than are family characteristics such as parental education, family size, marital status, socioeconomic level, or student grade level. To help overcome barriers to parental engagement, it is critical that schools understand the challenges that exist for families and communities, but then focus inward – on the school’s beliefs and assumptions that shape its practices with parents – and identify and implement relevant activities that the school can control. In doing so, schools must always take an honouring and respectful approach, asking parents about their needs and ensuring that the school responds to what families are saying.

“We find it useful to reach out to parents and tell them: ‘You love your child. We love your child. And we are the adults. We need to work together to figure out how to get your child to school, and to make sure your child feels safe, loved, and welcome at school.’”

2019 FNEsc and FNSA Attendance Focus Group participant

Specific measures that can enhance home-school partnerships for promoting strong student attendance include the following.

- ▶ Teachers can use introductory phone calls and emails with all parents in (or close to) the first week of school, which provides a positive foundation for regular communications throughout the year. The initial contact should be followed up with regular meetings and/or progress reports as the year progresses, as well as ongoing phone calls acknowledging parents for any assistance they provide.⁴¹
 - Early and regular communications with parents will be very beneficial if attendance becomes an issue of concern sometime in the future.
 - If phone calls home related to attendance problems eventually become necessary, they should be welcoming and supportive (see sample script attached in Appendix 2).
 - Then, if the student’s attendance improves, teachers should quickly follow-up with phone calls to provide positive feedback and express appreciation for the family’s understanding and commitment.

“We do everything we can to build strong relationships, so we can have difficult discussions later if they are needed.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

⁴¹ Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000; Virginia Department of Education, 2005; 2019 Attendance Focus Group participants

“Positive phone calls home are so important. Families don’t want to always hear problems. We ask teachers to choose a couple of families to call each Friday – rotating through to reach out to all families over time.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“What do parents want? We want to be a part of solution-based conversations.”

Input at the 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session with First Nations Parents

“It is very clear that what doesn’t work is shaming parents.”

Input at the 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session with First Nations Parents

Positive Communications

One of the critical factors for working with parents as partners in your attendance initiative is to build and maintain positive relationships with them, and this comes from your communication style and from making frequent overt efforts to provide positive acknowledgements of students. It is easy to fall into the trap of calling on parents only when there is a problem ... but this tends to break down positive relationships.

Sprick and Berg, 2019

Sample Teacher Phone Log

NAME	DATE	REASON FOR CONTACT	NOTES
John	10/12	Positive email	John was really helpful to a classmate who was struggling with a math problem.
Sara	10/14	Concern phone call	Sara was late several days in a row and she is falling behind on her science project. Said I'm worried about her. Mom said she would follow up.
Charlie	10/14	Positive phone call	Charlie has been working really hard in Language Arts. He wrote his best story in class today.
Dylan	10/15	Concern phone call	I had to talk to Dylan three times yesterday about not listening. I asked Dad if there is something I need to know.
Sara	10/15	Positive email	Said I was glad to see Sara today. She came to school happy and seemed really engaged in class.
John	10/17	Positive email	John did really well on the math test today. He must have studied hard. Thanks for the help at home.
Dylan	10/18	Positive email	Dylan has been listening really well. I thanked mom and dad for their help.
Sara	10/19	Positive call	Sara hasn't been late for days. Thanked mom. Said, "I know she is trying really hard. Let me know if I can help at all!"

“Our staff works as a team to address attendance. We come back a week before school starts for students. We take time to plan and talk about how we can foster good communications with families. Teachers who are not from the community sometimes feel less comfortable about how to build positive parental relationships. We try to help everyone feel confident and prepared to do this well, because it is so important.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“There is no magic wand; no easy solutions. Building connections takes time, time, time ... and patience. It requires slow conversations, and small expectations that build over time. When we see a student struggling with attendance, our home school coordinator reaches out to the teacher and asks ‘did you reach out to the family to ask what we can do to help?’ After the teacher has tried, our home school coordinator asks the principal to reach out. We never stop offering help.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“We hired a Student System Coordinator, who is responsible for making sure our student files and family contact information is up-to-date. Lots of families don’t have land-lines. They might not have data to be able to text. This can be complicated. It takes real time and attention to understand how to communicate effectively with parents and caregivers.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“Our high school attendance data clerk goes classroom to classroom each morning, and emails homes before 9:30 if any students are missing. She asks what is happening, and if we can help. She also monitors our attendance data weekly and monthly, and follows up with students who are struggling with attendance.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

“Reaching out to parents can have a number of benefits. For example, keeping a record of contacts with families can be useful for accountability.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

- ▶ If possible and *if supported by the community*, school staff can make home visits to connect with students' lives – bringing a community member or another person well known to the family along for the visit, if appropriate. Although no one should let any insights revealed through home visits negatively affect their expectations or ongoing interactions with students, when school staff build relationships with families and have a chance to learn more about any obstacles students might have to overcome to get to school, they can be of greater help to students and families. In many case studies, home visits have been shown to raise achievement for at-risk students;⁴² for example, an evaluation of one home visit program found that students whose families received at least one visit from teachers each year were 21 percent less likely to be chronically absent than other students.⁴³ In that program, teachers visited homes to build connections, not to explicitly target the issue of attendance.

The 2019 Attendance Focus Group participants also noted that home visits, when possible, are an excellent way to build trust, and that having community members or community staff either fulfill this role directly or accompany school staff who are not from the community can also be beneficial.

Post-COVID, if some parents are not as open to close interactions, it may be useful to adapt home visits to become “porch visits” or meeting in some other place parents choose. The key to making this strategy work is really a willingness to go where parents feel most comfortable, and focus group participants emphasized that attendance can only be addressed one conversation at a time, through relentless attention and communications.

“Our school has been working to promote this issue with parents and the community for almost three years, through constant reaching out and support. As a result, we are beginning to see improvements ... and we will continue to reach out. We can't quit.”

2019 FNEC and FNSA Attendance Focus Group participant

“We find home visits very beneficial. And if we can't get past the front door at our first visit, we invite parents to join us for coffee at Tim Horton's. If this doesn't work, we try again. Or someone else will try. We don't give up if there is initial resistance.”

2019 FNEC and FNSA Attendance Focus Group participant

“We visited homes and gave out gift baskets for Mother's Day. We just said ‘we want to thank you for everything you do.’ That is a way to start conversations, and start building relationships.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

42 Wooleyhand et. al., 2008

43 Jordan, 2019

“Sometimes phone calls are hard, as phone numbers change and sometimes people don’t answer calls immediately ... We find knocking on doors really works, giving us direct opportunities to thank parents for sending their kids to school.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

- ▶ Schools should pro-actively encourage parents to visit the building, and families should be welcomed in hallways and classrooms.⁴⁴ Parents should be asked for their advice and expertise as it relates to their children – on a regular basis, not just when there are problems.⁴⁵ Parents who are comfortable in the school and feel part of a school community will be more aware of the school’s goals and efforts – including those that relate to attendance.

2019 Attendance Focus Group participants further suggested the importance of offering meals for parents who come to school events. One school holds a dinner to pass out report cards. Another holds “dinner and literacy nights,” with book give-aways. These events, it was noted, bring families into the building, and also provide perfect opportunities to emphasize the importance of attendance.

Some schools hold weekly or monthly principal-led attendance dinners, which involve teams of adults, including school staff, families, and other partners, examining current attendance data, devising ways to get more students to attend regularly, and monitoring progress.

Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012

- ▶ Schools can also encourage families to volunteer at the school, recognizing that practical, specific requests can be more inviting than vague suggestions of “volunteers needed.”⁴⁶ Schools can offer families opportunities that are inviting and positive, such as coming to the school to assist with cooking projects, art projects, cultural activities, on-the-land learning opportunities, etc. – practical activities that complement families’ skills and knowledge and allow them to feel confident about the assistance they can provide.

44 Virginia Department of Education, 2005

45 Alberta Education, 2014

46 Virginia Department of Education, 2005

Begin Relationships On a Positive Note

The way parents and other family members are received the first time they come to the school can set the tone for the duration of their relationship. Families who feel ignored or slighted by the adults in the building are unlikely to come back, especially if they had been hesitant to come to the school in the first place. ... Oftentimes, the only time parents have contact with the school is in crisis situations, such as when the student has violated school regulations. With no previous contact ... these situations often lead to non-trusting interactions and, subsequently, non-optimal results for the student. ... Teachers whose contacts with family members are positive – notes or phone calls about something good the student did in class, for example – demonstrate to families that the school is interested in and values their child.

Brewster and Railsback, 2014

- ▶ All policies related to attendance should be pro-actively shared with parents, including why attendance is a priority and how they can help the school with this issue. Encouraging letters or flyers explaining the policies can be sent home at the start of each school year, with suggestions for getting students to school every day and on time. Attendance charts can be shared with parents to help them track their children's absences, ideally colour coding absences – such as absences one to nine green, absences ten and up turning to yellow, and transitioning to red to indicate the increasing risk. The goal of the chart should be to provide a tool for busy students and families to easily track the number of absences the student is accumulating throughout the year.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Sprick and Berg, 2019

Sample Home Attendance Tracker

ABSENCE NO. DATE	REASON FOR ABSENCE
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	TEN ABSENCES – YOUR STUDENT IS AT RISK FOR CHRONIC ABSENCE
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	

PART ONE
Defining and Understanding
Attendance Rates

PART TWO
Why Focus on
Strong Attendance?

PART THREE
What Leads to
Attendance Challenges?

PART FOUR
What to Do About
Chronic Absenteeism?

CONCLUSION

APPENDICES

Research shows that many parents underestimate the amount of school their children are missing.

For example, the Ad Council – CA Attorney General (**Reducing Chronic Absence by Informing Parents**) conducted extensive research about parents' awareness of attendance issues, finding that parents had the best of intentions for supporting their children's education, but a large proportion of the surveyed parents underestimated the amount of school their children missed.

- ▶ When asked whether their children were absent an average of two or more days per month, and whether their children were absent more than ten days over the year:
 - 60% of parents said their child **was** absent an average of two or more days per month, but **not** 10 or more days per year
- ▶ The math: if a child is absent an average of two or more days per month, he or she is absent more than ten days per year.

Another study surveyed parents who estimated that their children had missed about nine days of school in the previous year, when in fact they had all missed **at least** 17.8 days – right at the 18-day threshold for chronic absenteeism.

Jordan, 2019.

“When I begin a meeting, I warn people ... ‘please understand that if I see an opportunity to connect with a family member, I will take it right away, even if it disrupts this meeting.’ Never underestimate the power of leaving your office or even leaving the school to reach out to parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles ... Show how much you care about their children and teens. Drop everything when you have the chance to do that.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“Take every opportunity that comes up to be relentlessly positive with parents. If you see parents at drop off or pick up, in the grocery store, on the water taxi . . . tell parents ‘your child did really well this week,’ or just ‘thank you for your efforts.’”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

“If possible, principals should build relationships by joining social opportunities – bingos, community events ... Have casual conversations, build friendly relationships. That makes a difference.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

- ▶ Schools can ask parents what information might be helpful to them as they support their children’s education,⁴⁸ and parents can be invited to join in discussions about how the school and homes can work together to set and maintain high expectations for academic achievement, school completion, and attendance.⁴⁹ School staff can discuss with parents whether they would be interested in any classes or workshops to help them feel more confident dealing with educational issues, or knowing how to create structures and routines in the home that will help with attendance and emphasize the value of education.⁵⁰ Including parents in school decision-making can also be valuable to parents and schools. A combination of efforts is needed to address attendance issues.

Research suggests that parents sometimes want more information about a range of issues that might affect attendance, such as:

- Tips on technology and social media use, including how staying up late in front of screens impacts sleep and attendance, or how cyberbullying can make students less likely to come to school
- Knowing how sick is too sick to attend, and what minor conditions are not serious enough to keep students at home
- Suggestions for improving students’ sleep habits so they are well rested and healthy enough to attend
- Strategies for helping students manage anxiety – which is a growing problem among young people nation-wide and can make school very difficult for students
- Recommendations for establishing routines that make getting to school on time a little easier
- FNEC and FNSEA have created a Parents Toolkit that includes a series of short, reproducible papers that can be adapted and shared with parents to provide information about topics in three general areas.
 - Appreciating the importance of parental involvement in education
 - Understanding the structure of the school system, how to build positive relationships with school staff for the benefit of students, and what to do if difficulties arise

48 FNEC, 2022, *Handbook for Principals of First Nation Schools*

49 Virginia Department of Education, 2005

50 Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000

- Thinking about how to create healthy and supportive learning environments at home
 - » The Importance of Regular School Attendance
 - » The Link Between Sleep and Success in School
 - » Eating Together Can Help With School Success
 - » The Benefits of Extra-Curricular Activities
 - » Tips for Creating a Family Technology Use Plan
 - » Keeping Up With Technology Use
 - » What To Know About Vaping
 - » How to Talk to Your Children About Drug and Alcohol Awareness



The Toolkit can be found at www.fnsa.ca and www.fnesc.ca

“Ultimately, the family is the first place of learning. If kids are having real struggles attending, we need to ask ourselves ‘How can we get resources home? How can we support learning in the home?’”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

“In our community, I organized a series of Zoom sessions for parents, during which we read through each section of the Parents Toolkit together. I had pizza delivered to the parents who participated, and they could keep their cameras on or off – however they felt comfortable – as we read through the information sheets and talked about how we could use the ideas. Some parents who don’t usually attend events joined us. Some parents even joined sessions from their cars if they were out. And the exciting thing is we heard feedback from students showing that people are using the information. For example, a student told us their family is sitting down for family meals more often now!”

Feedback from a participant in the 2023 FNESC Education Conference

“It might be useful to use the Parents Toolkit in staff professional development sessions. It could help our staff build our capacity for sharing information with families.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

- ▶ Parents of individual students who are experiencing attendance problems can be invited to join in pro-active, encouraging discussions about how to address any barriers.⁵¹ The discussions should avoid any suggestion of blame, and should focus on ways to work together for the benefit of the student.

51 Epstein and Sheldon, 2002

“We must not put our energy into blame. We must find solutions. That is the school’s responsibility.”

Input at the 2023 FNSEA Authorized Representatives Meeting

Are Peer Support Initiatives a Possibility?

Some First Nation school representatives have shared concerns that their staff feel strained and stretched thin – especially in the aftermath of the COVID pandemic. In these cases, it may be useful for schools, ideally in partnership with a parents club or other family group, to consider trying peer support programs, possibly with adult volunteers helping to facilitate discussion groups.

In fact, research suggests that parents sometimes prefer seeking advice from other parents with similar experiences, rather than consulting only with school staff.

- ◆ Talking about their experiences with peers can help validate family’s feelings, provide emotional support, and allow families to draw on practical, solution-oriented strategies that have worked for other people.
- ◆ Providing opportunities that bring people together to share their struggles and successes in a non-judgemental forum, such as lunch-time or evening discussion groups, can help families feel less alone.
- ◆ Some parents suggest that peer discussions can be facilitated in a helpful way by a trained person to ensure a productive experience and to avoid fuelling negativity towards the school.

Trying peer support approaches does not mean that one-to-one, targeted supports will no longer be necessary. Both options can be offered in complementary ways.

“Many people do want to be part of a circle of caring and sharing. It is easier to be an advocate and support your children when other people are supporting you.”

Input at the 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session with First Nations Parents



Okanagan Indian Band Cultural Immersion School

- ▶ Widespread research suggests the value of “nudges” to remind parents about absences.
 - Researchers at UC Berkely sent five postcards to families of more than 40,000 high-risk students – one group getting generalized messages about the value of good attendance, and the other group receiving individualized information about how many days their children had missed. Alerting parents about how many days their children had missed proved to be most effective.
 - In another study, parents were sent weekly texts about their children’s absences, and attendance increased by 17 percent among the families who got the texts compared to other students.⁵²
 - In a third study in 2014, postcards with different messages encouraging guardians to improve their student’s attendance were sent to the homes of students in grades 1–12, finding that a single postcard reduced absences by roughly 2.4 percent.⁵³

Nudges alone likely won’t solve attendance challenges, and written communications may not work well in all circumstances and with all families. Texts and short messages cannot take the place of personal contact. However, when they are positive and encouraging, nudges can be a relatively easy-to-implement component of a broader attendance campaign that may be effective for some schools and communities.

⁵² Jordan, 2019

⁵³ Rogers et. al. 2017.

Nudges: Texting

A study funded by American Institutes for Research (<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/2020006/>) found “texting is an effective and low-cost way to reduce chronic absenteeism.” The study recommendations include:

- ▶ Send weekly preventative text messages that emphasize the benefits of good attendance. Examples:
 - Regular attendance at school helps children learn good study habits. We love having all of our students here.
 - Children who attend regularly are more likely to graduate from high school. We’re here to help.
- ▶ Recognize and express appreciation. Examples:
 - [CHILD] had perfect attendance this week! Thank you for your commitment. Keep up the great work. We’re here if you need anything.
 - [CHILD] has really improved their attendance! We love having them in school with us. Thank you for your efforts!

In one initiative, First Nation school staff members took turns arriving at the school early to call families who were struggling, to make sure the students were awake and getting ready to come to school on time.

In Pittsburgh, an AmeriCorps member who served as a liaison with parents in two kindergarten classes sent a text message every week about attendance or available resources to help families. During the year, parents started responding to the weekly texts with requests for help. One mother needed ideas for addressing her son’s anxiety about going to school. Home visits and extra attention in the classroom helped improve his attendance.... In the wake of the regular text messages and support, chronic absenteeism in the classrooms plunged from 30 percent of students to 13 percent.

Jordan, 2019

“Texting parents is one strategy ... but it can also help to text students positive messages, such as ‘Today is going to be a great day. Please come and join us – today and every day.’”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

- ▶ The 2019 Attendance Focus Group participants noted that recognizing and celebrating parents seems to be an especially valuable component of attendance strategies.

- One community holds a parent award night at the end of each year, providing gifts and prizes to parents of students with excellent and improving attendance. Over time, donated prizes expanded to include barbecues and kayaks. “As word spread, the initiative grew and grew.”
- One school used family attendance prizes of paper towels, laundry soap, dish soap, etc., which the parents really appreciated.
- Meat draws were also suggested as a way to provide a main protein for holiday meals – such as turkeys in October, hams in December ... Parents were provided a raffle ticket for each day their child was in school. In response to this initiative, a student was heard to say, “I went to school every day so I could earn my dad a chance to win a prize.”
- When cold or rainy winter weather arrives, schools can recognize the effort of students and families to come to school in spite of the weather, offering a warm welcome and, if possible, a warm beverage to simply say “thanks for getting here.”⁵⁴

“The great thing about incentives that benefit the whole family is they really encourage everyone to support one another.”

Input at a 2024 Attendance Capacity Development Session with First Nations Parents

- ▶ It is valuable to think carefully about attendance at critical times through the year. For example, many students are settling into a routine of regular attendance by December, and it is important to support that rhythm during the holiday season. It can be helpful to remind families that regular attendance is still a priority in spite of the holiday excitement. And to get students to return to school in a good way, schools can consider planning a special event for the first day after the holiday break to welcome students and staff back – possibly sending parents a text right before school starts up again to remind them of the special plans.
- ▶ A First Nation representative suggested that “we really need to be thinking about how we are building the confidence of parents” – confidence in their own capacity to support education, and confidence in the school and our concern for students and families. Encouragement and support are key; recognizing and responding to families’ needs can be invaluable for building strong relationships.

“We have set up a food bank at the school, and we share food baskets when families need them.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“Ask families what help is needed. Rides to school? Alarm clocks? Gas cards if transportation is an issue or grocery store gift cards when parents are experiencing hardships? Do families need strategies that might work with children or teens who are reluctant to go to school? It is important to find out and respond to what people really need.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“Host family nights and family dinners. Sit with each family. Tell them something specific you enjoy about their child, a strength. Show families you notice their child. And then ask ... ‘is there anything you need from us? Anything we can do to help?’”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“Parents are the key. They have the most influence over students now, and they will have the most influence throughout their lives. So we have started taking parents to tour post-secondary institutions. We want to help parents see the opportunities that are available to their children and teens. We talk about how they can help their kids get to post-secondary – including the importance of attendance. The parents come back from the tours inspired to encourage their kids to graduate and move on to post-secondary. Schools need to help families see the value of education.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

What Parents Say Families Can Do To Help With Attendance

Input from participants at the February 2023 First Nations Parents Conference and 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Sessions With First Nations Parents

- ◆ Tell their children they value education and want to support them in school
- ◆ Start each school day in a positive way; share positive messages before children leave for school in the morning
- ◆ Set positive routines at home so kids are healthy and well rested
- ◆ Share the message with students that “education = independence”
- ◆ When possible, try to avoid having older children stay home from school to care for younger siblings and try not to book medical appointments or trips during school hours
- ◆ Limit screen time and take away phones at bed time (not always easy)
- ◆ Talk with other families and the school about how to help address students’ anxiety about attending school
- ◆ Regularly check in with teachers
- ◆ Contact the school (for younger students) or help students reach out to their teachers when days are missed, so children and teens don’t fall further behind
- ◆ Text each other when they need or can share help, such as transportation supports, and encourage each other on the rough days when their children don’t want to go to school
- ◆ Text the teacher, when appropriate, to share “my child is having a rough day today,” so everyone is aware when students might need some extra attention, patience, and support

“How can we help our students attend and succeed in school? We can share our stories about our traditions and experiences, which will help our students build resilience and grow into strong leaders in our communities.”

Input at a 2024 Attendance Capacity Development Session with First Nations Parents

► Share the Message, Share the Message, Share the Message

Promote awareness of the importance of school attendance with students and within the school community; make reducing absenteeism a consistent and common goal

“Set an attainable, high attendance goal. Then share that goal with everyone – school staff, Chief and Council, families, the School Governing Authority, other staff of the Nation ...”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

School and community education staff can implement deliberate and thoughtful efforts to make students aware of the negative, long-term consequences of absenteeism and the wide-ranging benefits of staying in school.⁵⁵ It is critical to let students know that the school community cares about absences.

Strategies that schools might consider for communicating with students about attendance include the following.

- Teach students about the importance of attendance, including both formal lessons and more informal strategies. Sample learning activities / lessons are attached in Appendix 7. Students can also be involved in regular class discussions about attendance, or they can write essays or participate in debates about whether attendance is important for student achievement and success.
- Involve students in setting class rules for lateness or skipping class. Talk with students about the difference between acceptable, occasional days at home versus avoidable, problematic absences, as well as the consequences of absenteeism. When a student has been absent for more than two days in a row, a staff member can call the student to say “we notice you aren’t here and we are looking forward to you coming back.” This can be especially important in high school, when students might think no one will notice when they are away from school. All students should feel that school staff authentically care when they are absent. And of course, when absences become a pattern, more in-depth discussions and deliberate – ideally early – interventions may be needed.

55 Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000

- ▶ Greet students who have missed school, telling them “we miss you when you are gone,” “the class really noticed that you weren’t with us yesterday / the last few days,” “is everything ok? I notice you missed a few days.” Although this practice sounds simple, it can be surprisingly effective in making students feel noticed and appreciated. Also, if there is a pause after the greeting to allow time for a response, students usually feel responsible for explaining their absence – which can provide a subtle accountability mechanism. Then it is important to offer kind words without judgment and never questioning the veracity of the student’s reason, saying instead “well I am really glad to have you back,” or “let me know if I can do anything to help” – simple but powerful messages (**Sprick and Berg, 2019**).

In one program, at-risk students signed a contract pledging not to have unexcused absences and agreed to have their teachers sign a daily attendance card. Participants earned one ticket for each signature and for each positive comment from a teacher. Tickets could be exchanged for prizes.

“Our staff tries to have “pocket prizes” – pieces of gum, small rewards we can hand out quietly when we see students who are not regularly in attendance, just to quietly and immediately show them “we recognize your effort to get here and we are really glad to see you today.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

- ▶ Many attendance campaigns include an incentive component that recognizes and rewards group and individual achievements and improvements, making attendance promotion positive and fun for staff, students, and families.
 - If using incentive strategies, in order to keep all students motivated, it is important to recognize ‘good’ or ‘improving’ attendance and fewer lates, not just ‘perfect’ attendance or punctuality. Perhaps the incentive rewards could recognize an attendance streak for students who do not regularly come to school regularly. It is helpful to make incentive initiatives accessible for all students, and to focus on individualized attendance goals that meet students where they are.
 - For example, an incentive could be a cookie in a snack bag, with a note attached: “You’re One Smart Cookie. You have attended [# of days] of school!” (or # of days in a row, or some other relevant goal). With this approach, there is no time limit, so all students can be celebrated when they make it to the goal ... whenever it works for them.

“Instead of the word “perfect,” we should talk about “attendance achievement.” We must recognize kids when they are trying.”

Input at the 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session with First Nations Parents

“If students are finding it difficult to reach large goals, start by using incentives to reward small steps to get students motivated.”

Input at the 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session with First Nations Parents

“We provide all of our students with theatre tickets before the winter and spring breaks – telling our students we are celebrating their attendance efforts – regardless of how many days they were able to come.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

- Also, a challenge facing schools that use incentive rewards for high attendance is encouraging students who are well to attend school while at the same time advising those who are truly ill to stay home. How do they meet this challenge?
 - Some incentive approaches distinguish between absences for different reasons; a student can miss a couple of days for illness and still be celebrated for excellent attendance and eligible for prizes.
 - Others recognize attendance monthly so that students who miss a couple of days for illness can start fresh the next month.⁵⁶
- If you are going to use an incentive program, make sure the expectations and rewards are clear and well thought out. It is also important to make sure you can sustain the strategies you begin. If an incentive campaign is started and then it loses momentum, students will be disappointed and they will be less likely to be engaged in future efforts.

“If you start off with a big assembly, you need to end off with something equally exciting. Make sure you ask yourself, ‘is this a program we can see through to the end?’”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

⁵⁶ Sprick and Berg, 2019.

- It can be valuable to consider varying types of incentives, and remember that no-cost rewards can be very encouraging. For example ...
 - Depending on the grade level, some students love the opportunity to help their teachers by being assistant-for-the-day. A daily helper can assist with classroom tasks to demonstrate just how important they are. Hopefully, other students will be eager to fill this role, as well, and will make sure they're present each day in class to have their chance.
 - Students can be recognized and celebrated as "attendance stars" (studious, thoughtful, accountable and respectful) in community newsletters, on bulletin boards, in community meetings ...
 - Other ideas might include a flashlight reading party, or classroom pajama party, or "your favourite book read to the class" ... ideally with parent volunteers joining in and cheering for students.

"We try to provide valuable non-material incentives, too. For example, we offer students rewards such as opportunities to visit with Elders, participate in cultural activities, go berry picking or out on-the-land to collect traditional medicines The kids love it."

Input at the 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session with First Nations Parents

It is also valuable to monitor the impact of incentive programs.⁵⁷ How is the intervention working? Is it working better for some students than others? Does it need to be changed or adapted at all?

"We found it really useful to look at the results of our incentive programs. We found that most of the students who were being recognized were children of our school staff. That wasn't reflecting our objectives. Looking at the incentive program closely helped us to try new things."

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff



See Appendix 6 for a more thorough description of incentive program issues, and for tips for planning a school-wide attendance campaign..

57 Jordan, 2019

“We hold “Attendance Matters Surprise Days” ... random days when we do fun things that students don’t want to miss.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“We use a daily 100% classroom attendance campaign. When a class has 100% attendance, we announce it, celebrate it, and the class has a pizza party for fun on Friday. We have seen an increase of 10 – 13% in attendance for some classes.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“For our monthly prize draw, our home school coordinator creates themed baskets. At the beginning of the month, she goes class to class to show students what’s in the baskets. Then she leaves the baskets by the front door so everyone who comes to the school can see them. Every day, each child who is in school gets a slip that reads “School + [Student Name] = Success.” Students fill in their names and put the slips in a big box, and there is a draw at the end of the month. We have heard kids telling their parents ‘I need to go to school. I can’t miss my slip.’”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“We have found it important to avoid an all or nothing, black or white approach – 100% attendance for students to be rewarded at the end of the year. We found over time that didn’t work; it didn’t reach the students we wanted to help and it actually discouraged students who had to miss a day or two of school. So instead, we provide multiple opportunities for students to achieve a reward. We have monthly award ceremonies, rather than only at the end of the year, which helps us catch more students doing well. We reward perfect and close to perfect attendance. We make a big deal about improved attendance. We celebrate coming to school on time and fewer lates.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“End of year “perfect” attendance celebrations can be difficult. “Perfect” is an intimidating idea. So we also celebrate consistent and improved attendance.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“We recognize attendance monthly – we congratulate students who have 90%, 95% and 100% attendance, as well as most improved attendance for the month. We give the kids a raffle ticket and the prize is a big “healthy brain snack basket” – with dried fruits, healthy granola bars, etc. The kids love the baskets.”

Input at a 2023 First Nation School Principal Network

“Our school holds attendance assemblies every six weeks. Prizes are given to students with the most improved attendance, made possible through donations from the community. Year-end grand prizes have included bicycles. At the assemblies, the students with improved attendance are wildly celebrated by everyone. Their improvement is publicly recognized, they get an award, and the school staff and students cheer them on. And it seems to be making a difference. One mother of a student who previously missed school regularly called me to say, ‘My daughter refuses to miss school today but I have to take her to the doctor. Please get on the phone and tell my daughter it is ok for her to miss part of the day.’”

2019 FNEsc and FNSA Attendance Focus Group participant

“Our school receives points for purchases we make using our credit card. We could reward classes with good attendance by awarding them points that can be accumulated to buy fun things, like a classroom fish tank and accessories, PE equipment, an exciting game for the classroom like a life-size connect four ...”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

“We are going to purchase a few paddle boards, and we will start acknowledging students who are in attendance with credits they can use to “buy” time with the paddle board. This will also be a great way for us to encourage healthy activities.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

“A great reward for our students is earning an opportunity to go on-the-land for a fun hot dog roast, where we play some games and just enjoy each other.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

“We use an “in-your-seat” incentive. In our morning announcement, we announce the names of three students. If they are in their seat when we call the names, the students can come to the office to receive a small prize. We find that what students appreciate most is hearing their names called, being appreciated, being celebrated.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

“We can build on the value of teamwork and inspire the whole school to be enthusiastic about attendance by sometimes rewarding teachers with an incentive for “having a full house today” or for contributing to attendance campaigns.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

“We want to recognize our staff and their role in making schools places where students want to be. We could implement a monthly prize draw for staff who attend regularly to celebrate their role in school and student success.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

- ▶ If a student does not respond to general classroom and schoolwide efforts to encourage attendance and if absences become serious, teachers should have a focused meeting with the student at a time that is free from distractions and interruptions. A private meeting with the teacher can convey the importance of the attendance issue, and during the meeting the teacher should sensitively communicate concerns about the student's absences and/or lateness, *never attaching blame or accusing the student of bad behaviour*. Instead, the meeting should be used as an opportunity to gently explore whether there are any issues that the teacher should be aware of, such as potential bullying, difficulties keeping up with schoolwork, or problems with friendships / relationships with other students. If the student is reluctant to discuss the situation, looking at the attendance records together to identify patterns may help to brainstorm ways the student, teacher, the student's family, and the community – if relevant – might be able to help. If possible, given the student's response and feelings, it may also be helpful to make a plan with the student, outlining actions and timelines for follow-up.
- ▶ If the school is large enough, it is often helpful to identify a school contact person for parents who want to discuss attendance issues and to help parents deal with attendance concerns.⁵⁸
- ▶ Some schools report that newsletter articles, hand-outs, or short messages included in communications to families are useful. Other people suggest that personal contact is preferable. Both approaches may be complementary, and schools and communities can determine what works best in their circumstances.

58 Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000; Epstein and Sheldon, 2002



Sample newsletter articles, short messages, and sample slogans are attached at the end of this Toolkit – all of which are offered as ideas only; they are intended to be used and/or adapted depending on local needs and circumstances.

“We send out newsletters that have pictures showing our students doing exciting, important learning activities, such as on-the-land opportunities. The families appreciate it; they love seeing their children and teens looking happy, having fun, doing things they enjoy. It makes the whole community feel positive about the school.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

- ▶ Social media can be used to regularly provide relevant information. For example, it might be useful to share: “In two days, we are holding a school assembly focused on attendance. Lots of surprises to be shared. Come join us and stay tuned for more information.” Or it might be fun to share pictures of students holding attendance posters, to generate enthusiasm about attendance goals.

“Although social media has challenges, it can be a useful tool for communications. We post pictures of what we are doing and it helps break down the wall between the school and the community. It allows people who don’t always attend our events to see what is happening. Then many people want to come next time. It can be an effective, non-threatening way to open dialogue.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“What might be fun? Having students create a commercial promoting attendance that they can post on Tik Tok.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

How Can Schools and Families Empower Students To Become Attendance Champions?

Deliberating and pro-actively including the voices of students in planning, designing, and implementing attendance promotion campaigns can be invaluable. No one better understands what approaches students will find relevant and exciting. Peer support and encouragement are particularly powerful in motivating children and teens to attend school and be positive about their educational opportunities.

Student involvement in attendance strategies can also build students' leadership skills, and it will emphasize to students that their contributions matter. Opportunities to participate in service activities and to help others can also enhance students' self-esteem, sense of self-efficacy, and connections to the school community.

First Nations parents shared that the first and perhaps the most important way to help students become attendance champions is for families to talk to their children and teens about the importance of education, and to emphasize the value of being in school.

Other ideas are shared below.

What Do First Nations Parents and School Representatives Say?

The following ideas to promote the role of students in attendance promotion efforts were shared in Attendance Capacity Building Sessions with First Nations Parents and First Nation School Staff, February and March, 2024.

- ▶ Focus on positive encouragement and build students' enthusiasm to be involved in attendance campaigns through fun random daily draws, class competitions, celebrations, etc.
- ▶ Deliberately build students' self-confidence, which includes letting them know they are being listened to and understood
- ▶ Include student representatives on school attendance teams
- ▶ Challenge students to come up with ideas and get direct input from children and teens; ask students to help plan incentive programs, and ask students what rewards would work

- ▶ Give students a voice and a platform; ask students what obstacles are preventing students (themselves or others) from being in school regularly and what might help
- ▶ Ask students to take pictures of attendance promotional activities and post them on social media, have students create a commercial promoting attendance that they post on Tik Tok, have students start a facebook group and recognize “attendance superstars” ...
- ▶ Help students learn to be leaders, not followers, by facilitating classroom discussions and activities to build student leaders
- ▶ Allow student leaders to plan a specific component of an attendance campaign, and showcase their successes
- ▶ Ask students to help lead a presentation to families / the community on the importance of attendance
- ▶ Encourage students to set up contests and compete with one another to turn off games / spend less time using screens
- ▶ Help student leaders host attendance “rap-sessions” – opportunities for students to talk to each other about attendance barriers / solutions and the benefits of being in school
- ▶ Help make arrangements for older students to mentor younger students to communicate the value of coming to school regularly and on-time
- ▶ Encourage students to write articles for the school or community newsletter about what they enjoy about being in school, or what they hope to do after they graduate and how school will help them reach their goals
- ▶ Have students lead incentive initiatives ... e.g. make announcements about how it will work, hand out raffle tickets, manage the draw for prizes
- ▶ Help students build and empower a peer network; organize a “buddy program,” find ways for “reliable attenders” to act as positive role models for others, have students text each other on the way to school to ask “are you on your way?” – recognizing the power of students encouraging each other to get to school.

- ▶ Ask for student input into the design of relationship-building activities / strategies to improve students' sense of connectedness
- ▶ Empower students by giving them roles that challenge them.
- ▶ Celebrate the small things.
- ▶ Honour students who become attendance champions. Celebrate them with their peers, teachers, families, and within their community.
- ▶ Don't forget to involve and celebrate families. Parents can help support student attendance champions, and student attendance champions can help plan ways to express appreciation for parents' efforts to promote attendance.

"We will be starting a student attendance leadership group, which will meet together to think about all kinds of activities ... developing cheers, creating posters, planning attendance incentives and events, creating thank you cards for parents ... identifying and implementing a range of attendance initiatives that will be relevant and exciting for other students in the school."

► Understand the Link Between Attendance and Achievement

Provide the best possible learning environment and insist on high teaching standards and expectations in schools

Generally, educational literature makes it clear that using research-based, effective, and culturally-relevant instructional practices will improve achievement in all areas – including attendance. Cole (2008), for example, refers to “a pedagogy of plenty,” and he states:

When we integrate proven, research-based strategies into daily classroom practice and use them to help children transcend their situations outside school, we enable students to reach their highest potential and, in the process, to acquire a range of resilient behaviours that lead to success both in school and in life. What might all children attempt if they knew they could not fail? We know that the stronger children’s self-esteem is, the more likely they are to capitalize on their strengths. This is why some children do well despite the many obstacles in their lives.

How can a “pedagogy of plenty” be addressed?

Effective schools generally implement a multi-tiered educational framework, which includes:

- high-quality instruction, with relevant teaching adaptations that are aligned to individual student needs;
- deliberate and regular progress monitoring to inform decisions about instruction and behavioral supports for all students;
- evidence-based interventions of varying types and intensities, depending on student needs; and
- careful attention to identifying students who have learning and attention challenges that will require extended planning, services, and interventions.

Similarly, effective schools approach attendance issues with a multi-tiered perspective, including:

- a focus on academic achievement and engagement for all learners, creating a strong foundation for schools and classrooms that all students want to attend;

- ▶ attention to the attendance of all students, including looking for patterns in absences that may suggest concerns related to school programs and services;
- ▶ interventions with students to promote strong attendance, including planned efforts to emphasize and encourage students to come to school regularly and on-time; and
- ▶ pro-active, individualized supports for students who are chronically absent.

Professor Dough Willms (2008), Professor of Education, University of New Brunswick, has published numerous articles maintaining that discussions of attendance should move to broader discussions of engagement with school. Willms asserts that one of the most important aspects of engagement is students' sense of belonging and students' sense of attachment at school, which has to do with feelings of being accepted and valued by their peers and others in the school. Strategies to increase engagement and reduce absenteeism should include high quality classroom practices, focusing on academic achievement, improving school climate, and monitoring student well-being.

What can help promote quality teaching and high levels of academic achievement? Among other things ...

- ▶ Ensuring students have their cultures, languages, heritages, and experiences acknowledged and incorporated into their schooling. Implementing culturally-rich curriculum has been shown to be positively correlated with a range of positive educational outcomes, such as academic achievement, engagement, and – according to research – improved attendance.⁵⁹
- ▶ Promoting engagement with learning opportunities that are relevant, authentic, purposeful, and involve student choice, including making connections between what students are learning in school and their day-to-day experiences in their homes and communities.
- ▶ Providing instruction that is accessible and challenging for all students, creating flexible learning experiences to meet different needs and abilities, including providing multiple ways for students to demonstrate and practice skills, as well as multiple assessment options – including using intentional scaffolding as needed for each unique student.

59 Jordan, 2019

- ▶ Providing a literacy-rich learning environment containing a wide variety of high-quality resources.
- ▶ Using experiential, problem-based, active learning opportunities, and encouraging student participation and incorporating cooperative learning strategies.
- ▶ Engaging students in dialogue, discussion, and debate to help them learn, understand, and apply the content of a given subject area.
- ▶ Providing targeted feedback to help students reflect on their schoolwork and their choices, consider whether they have met their goals, and understand how they are progressing and how they can improve.
- ▶ Carefully examining learning spaces to ensure they are designed to accommodate all learners.

MORE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE: First Peoples' cultures and perspectives must be accurately portrayed in contemporary, positive ways. The inclusion of authentic First Peoples content into classrooms can help support students in developing their self-esteem and self-identity, but it requires the respectful use of appropriate resources. Given the importance of effectively integrating First Nations perspectives and content into learning, FNEsc and FNSA, in collaboration with teachers and other partners, have developed a Learning First Peoples series of resources to reflect the First Peoples Principles of Learning, as well as the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Given the dramatic increase in the number of Indigenous texts available, FNEsc and FNSA also have developed tools to help educators in BC make decisions about which resources might be most appropriate for use with students. See:

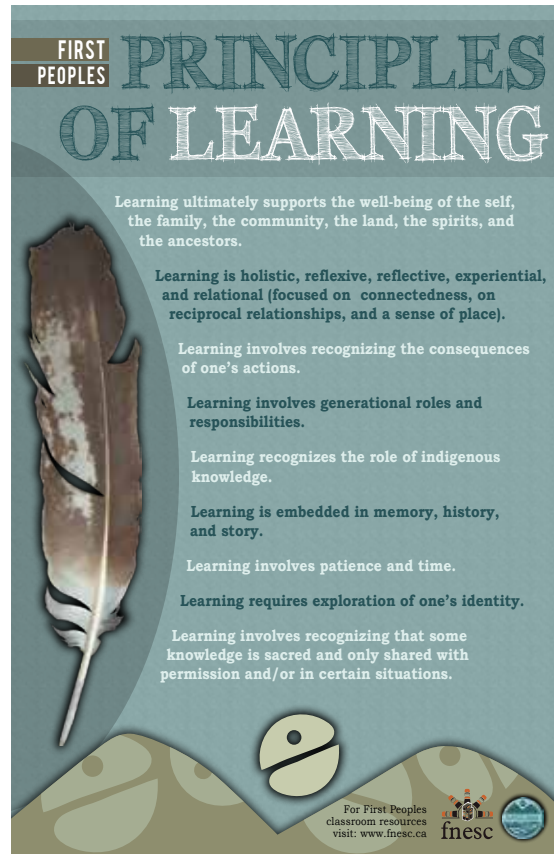
[Learning First Peoples Classroom Resources: https://www.fnesc.ca/learningfirstpeoples/](https://www.fnesc.ca/learningfirstpeoples/)

First Peoples Principles of Learning.
FNESC; 2008.

See www.fnesc.ca

The First Peoples Principles of Learning

- ▶ Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.
- ▶ Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- ▶ Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.
- ▶ Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
- ▶ Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.
- ▶ Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
- ▶ Learning involves patience and time.
- ▶ Learning requires exploration of one's identity.
- ▶ Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.



Additionally, positive behaviour strategies must be implemented school-wide, which have been shown to improve academic outcomes **and** attendance for all students. This involves education staff, among other things:

- ▶ creating safe, nurturing classroom environments and relationships with students;
- ▶ being compassionate and understanding about student behaviour issues, while setting and maintaining high expectations for each student's behaviour-related efforts and improvement;
- ▶ assuming that students are not being intentionally disruptive or difficult, and identifying, as much as possible, causes of behaviours to strategize the best responses – including any relevant changes in the classroom environment and routines;
- ▶ understanding how trauma can impact student behaviour and can intersect with learning and behaviour challenges;
- ▶ applying a continuum of prevention strategies, and modeling the behaviours the school community promotes;
- ▶ responding to behaviour issues early, effectively, and consistently so students stay in the classroom and are engaged in learning; and
- ▶ explicitly teaching positive student behaviours.

Social emotional learning opportunities are also critical for all students, as developing students' emotional intelligence is fundamental for students' thinking and learning. All school staff can help students learn to communicate and manage their emotions and needs, including helping students who are chronically absent identify any challenges they might be experiencing.

Cole (2008) further states:

Teachers who succeed in bringing diverse learners to high levels of achievement have a considerable degree of expertise in subject-specific learning strategies. Yet they also recognize the importance of using a set of universal, research-proven teaching and learning practices that provide students with multiple avenues for academic success. These practices help teachers successfully implement content-specific strategies and, more important, are adaptable and proven to work with a broad range of students with varied backgrounds, abilities, and perspectives.

The literature related to raising attendance rates also highlights the following suggestions for schools.

- ▶ Hire the best possible teachers and focus on their professional growth to support strong performance.⁶⁰ Good teaching is a cornerstone in the fight against absenteeism.⁶¹
- ▶ Provide training and professional development, including specific training on dealing with absenteeism.
- ▶ Provide teachers with relevant information to help them identify and support students who might have short-term support needs, as well as continuing exceptionalities.
- ▶ Establish well-developed and understood policies and procedures for dealing immediately with students' behavioural needs or issues.
- ▶ Provide educational supports outside of class as much as possible, such as tutoring, counselling, computers for doing homework, etc.⁶²

“What can we do to encourage students to attend?”

- Keep them happy.
- Keep them interested.
- Keep them motivated to access opportunities after they graduate.”

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

60 Virginia Department of Education, 2005

61 Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000; Virginia Department of Education, 2005

62 Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000

A FNESC and FNSA publication, a *Discussion Guide for First Nation Schools: Supporting Students Who Have Exceptionalities* (2023), emphasizes the importance of creating school environments that ensure that all students, including students with exceptionalities, are able and welcomed to engage in age-appropriate, regular classes, with appropriate supports that enable them to join in, learn, and contribute to all aspects of school life.

This concept is often referred to as “inclusion” – a term that is generally used broadly, not only in reference to students who have exceptionalities. The principle of inclusion means creating an environment in which all students are accepted and can participate and succeed – a principle that is generally extended to students who have all kinds of learning needs, gender identities, family backgrounds and experiences, and socio-economic circumstances.

As outlined in the Discussion Guide, the following classroom teaching strategies and approaches are generally effective for supporting students who have a range of different exceptionalities – *and they are good practice for all students, as well.*

- ▶ Maintain regular routines, structures, and ensure order in the classroom.
- ▶ Provide students adequate time for assignments and tests, and focus on process, not just product.
- ▶ Write down steps for students to use, especially for activities that will be repeated often. Provide visual supports when possible.
- ▶ Offer students options for alternative activities when necessary, and involve them in selecting the skills they will learn and practice.
- ▶ Interrupt inappropriate behaviours, control disruptions, do not allow talking out without hands-up, and use positive reinforcement to encourage good habits.
- ▶ Avoid overstimulation and minimize distractions, such as overly colourful and cluttered displays, too much noise, and excessive activity; these can be difficult for many students.
- ▶ Use calm, minimal colours and do not include too many decorations / materials that are overly distracting or stimulating.
- ▶ Reduce the brightness of the lighting in the classroom or specific areas in the classroom.
- ▶ Arrange desks to minimize distractions.

- ▶ Explicitly teach your expectations, ideally using visuals. Show what a finished assignment should look like. Use a photograph to illustrate an organized desk. Practice and show students what you mean when you ask them to form a “calm line.”
- ▶ Describe tasks very specifically and in sequential order.
- ▶ Be clear in your communications. Keep your language simple and concrete. Get your point across using as few words as possible.
- ▶ Gain a student’s full attention before communicating with them directly.
- ▶ Intentionally teach and reinforce key social rules and skills, such as taking turns, respecting personal space, not taking the belongings of other students, etc.
- ▶ Establish a few simple rules that are regularly reinforced.
- ▶ Offer fewer rather than numerous choices, which can be overwhelming. Also, give very clear choices that are not open ended. “Do you want to read or draw?” will often lead to better results than “What do you want to do now?”
- ▶ When asking a question or giving instructions, use short sentences for clarity and check for understanding, such as asking the student to repeat back what you said using their own words.
- ▶ Slow down your communication, and allow time for the student to process information and respond.
- ▶ Never take what appears to be rude or aggressive behavior personally; the cause and the target for difficult behaviours are often not the same.
- ▶ Use uncluttered worksheets and wide spaced paper.
- ▶ Try to connect assignments and schoolwork with the student’s particular interests.
- ▶ Provide exit strategies, such as a quiet place to go when stress levels get too high, in case a student is experiencing difficulty in class.
- ▶ Aim for consistency, ideally having the same teacher/Educational Assistants all year.
- ▶ Avoid confronting an angry/upset student by arguing or raising your voice. Use a neutral tone of voice – never shout. Try to divert and defuse the situation, giving a clear alternate choice or compromise and providing adequate time for response. If necessary, use clear and expected consequences consistently and calmly.
- ▶ Communicate with parents. Keep them informed and listen to their input. Ask for their help. Parents are always the best resource for knowing how to help their children.

▶ Work Together As a Community Support System

Whenever possible, provide programs or services collaboratively with community service agencies

While attempts to improve attendance must focus on things that happen in the school, such as setting high expectations, maximizing time on task, ensuring a safe climate, and providing a challenging curriculum, it is helpful when out-of-school factors are addressed collaboratively and when schools access support and expertise from the wider community.⁶³

Research shows that more success is achieved through the power of coordinated community action in making sure that every student has the necessary supports to stay on track for success in school and in life.⁶⁴ Although not always a quick process, it is valuable to build a widespread understanding that everyone owns attendance – and not just when it is a serious problem.

Ideally school and community education staff can work with parent groups to promote the issue of attendance broadly, possibly using activities such as the following.⁶⁵

- ▶ Community meetings or information sessions on student absenteeism can encourage collective discussions and a broad response to attendance challenges.⁶⁶
 - It might be useful to begin by communicating information about the potential consequences of absences for students, and possibly some anecdotal stories about how attendance issues affect classrooms and schools (see Appendix 5 for some notes to use in a community presentation).
 - It is also important to share tips and ideas for improving student attendance.

See Fact Sheets attached for information that may be used for promoting awareness.

63 Hatch, 2009

64 US Dept. of Justice et. al. 2015.

65 Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000; Virginia Department of Education, 2005; Jordan, 2019

66 Epstein and Sheldon, 2002; Sprick and Berg, 2019

- ▶ Awareness campaigns might include putting up flyers and posters in the school and community, adding relevant articles to community newsletters, making announcements at assemblies and meetings, and raising the issue with the School Governing Authority for advice and suggestions. School principals or community education staff can meet with Chief and Council to let them know what is being done to help improve attendance. Attendance considerations might also be raised in discussions with school district representatives about Local Education Agreements.

“Lawn signs can be given out so families can proudly and collectively show that they are attendance champions. Creating this connection and excitement in homes will demonstrate to students that schools and families are partners.”

Input at the 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session with First Nations Parents

Generally, it can be encouraging to positively communicate what the school and/or community is doing to promote attendance and goals for improvement – as well as what people can do to help. Catchy slogans for attendance campaigns can be fun, and t. shirts with the slogan can be made. Then students, teachers, community members and leaders can be asked to wear the t. shirts to demonstrate their support for a community-wide attendance campaign.

Attendance campaigns also might be launched by inviting a special guest speaker to talk about the importance of being in school on time every day, and/or previous graduates can be invited to share how their success was increased by attending school regularly.

“One day I ran across a young parent looking at an attendance awareness poster in the school. The poster included statistics about the importance of attendance for student achievement. The young parent said: ‘why didn’t anyone tell me about this when I was a student? I never knew that missing school was so important. I am so glad I know this now, so I can help my child.’”

2019 FNESC and FNSA Attendance Focus Group participant

Beyond awareness raising, school and community partnerships can also enhance student and family access to relevant supports.

- ▶ The community may be involved in direct ways – perhaps asking for assistance from community leaders and local businesses to monitor the activities of students who are not in school during school hours.⁶⁷ Donations are also always helpful.

67 Virginia Department of Education, 2005

“We asked community agencies and businesses to help support our attendance campaign. Our local RCMP detachment donated Xboxes as an incentive prize! It helps when people know that everyone is willing to pitch in to make attendance a priority.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Conference

“We fund our attendance strategies by reaching out to businesses in our area. We have received funding, prizes, tickets from our local hockey team. Chief and Council and our community entrepreneurs contribute. Then we follow-up and tell them how their contributions made a difference – the positive impacts. I would encourage others to be bold. Find someone in your school or community who is confident going out and asking for help.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

In Arnhem Lands in Australia, community shops do not serve children during school hours unless they have a note or pass.

Korff, 2014

- ▶ Recognizing the research supporting the value of mentoring approaches,⁶⁸ Elders and community leaders can be invited to mentor students who appear to be at-risk of chronic absenteeism.
-

“We are going to assign an Elder to each of our classes to support our students and their families. We really think that is an exciting way to provide unique and invaluable support.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“We are talking with the community about creating an attendance council. We want to involve Elders and community support workers to help provide healing supports to families who are dealing with challenges and underlying issues causing absences. We know the efforts of the school will be limited if students’ basic needs are not met and families are struggling with anxiety etc. We need to encourage parents ... ‘let us know how we can help if your child isn’t able to attend – regardless of the reasons.’”

Input at a 2023 First Nation School Principal Network

- ▶ In some places, a “community attendance navigator” or a “home-school coordinator” is identified to help schools and communities tackle attendance issues, such as building wider support for attendance initiatives and helping to connect students to the services they need. People in these positions can be especially attentive to students who are making transitions (e.g., moving from school to school, entering high school, etc.), with specific follow up for students who are having particular difficulty with transitions.

68 Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest (REL Southwest). Handout: Strategies to Address Chronic Absenteeism. www.ies.ed.gov

“What worked well for us? Things changed considerably when we brought in a home-school coordinator – who is a community member who knows our families. Our home school coordinator began visiting all families to share the message ‘we miss your child and love your child and we want them back.’ After that, the home-school coordinator went back to visit families whose children were missing school to ask how we can help. For example, was the bus coming too early? If so, we told parents ‘if your child needs a ride to school, text us, and we will pick them up.’ The home-school coordinator position has been invaluable.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

- ▶ Communities and schools might work together to increase access to student or family counselling. The many First Nations representatives who provided input into this Toolkit, including parent representatives, consistently noted the importance of focusing on family mental and emotional health, including raising awareness about trauma informed practice. Feedback also highlighted the value of community-based substance abuse programs – for students and families.

“We were really struggling to provide counselling services to our students. It is hard to access counsellors. So we advertised widely to find counsellors who could support us. The counsellors we hired visited the school in-person to be introduced to the students, and then are available virtually. We set up a room where students can meet with the counsellor privately, or we help students connect to a counsellor from home. It might not be ideal but it is working well.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“We have a full-time counsellor ... which is invaluable. The counsellor provides individual and small group sessions, as well as social-emotional learning activities in classrooms. We had one student who was in a very complex situation. Last year the student came in just to see the counsellor and then left school. We had to shift the perspective of our staff – help them understand ‘that’s ok for now;’ that’s what the student needed and could manage at the time. This year, the student’s attendance has improved. He often comes late and has a soft-start with the counsellor, but he now stays for a few classes. We have to meet students where they are, and celebrate all improvements – even when they seem small.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

- ▶ Communities and schools can ideally work together to provide other relevant programs and services, as well.

- Many studies show that breakfast, snack and/or lunch programs improve not only school attendance, but also student achievement.

- Community-based homework clubs can help make sure that students stay on track with their school-work, avoiding a cycle of students falling behind and then avoiding school.

- Evidence shows that tutoring programs and/or after-school or youth engagement programs that seek to promote problem solving, self-control, emotional regulation, and stronger self-identity are helpful for reducing school absenteeism.

- Flexible learning options may be helpful for students who experience challenges with chronic illness or other complex issues, who might benefit from alternate education approaches. Alternate options may also help students who become pregnant.

- Access to needed clothing and laundry facilities can be beneficial, recognizing that some students might miss school if they do not have clean clothes. The following ideas were shared by First Nation and school representatives.

- Some schools and communities have clothing available in a variety of sizes so that students can swap clothes while theirs are being cleaned.
- In other places, bins of winter boots, toques, and mittens are available for students to take when they are needed.
- A First Nation school collects donated clothing and sets them up so that students can “go shopping,” which the students really enjoy.

“We strongly believe that every child deserves to be fed. Everyone in the school knows our policy: that every student will know ‘you’ll never be hungry here.’”

2019 FNEC and FNSA Attendance Focus Group participant

“To help address missed learning time for students who don’t make it to school on time, we use a “soft start” for our day. We have a breakfast program, then we do a traditional welcome for our students. We try to start the day a bit relaxed to give all students a chance to wake up and get ready for learning.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

- ▶ Communities may also be able to help sponsor a school health worker, implement school-based health promotion activities, and/or promote student and family’s access to community health services.

“Our community nurse goes to the public high school one day each week to check in with students and support them as much as she can. She also brings kids food when they need it.”

2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session with First Nations Parents

Help Keep Kids Healthy:

Schools and Communities Can Emphasize Good Health Habits To Keep Kids Attending School

- ▶ Remind families to complete annual health forms. Schools should be aware of students who have chronic health issues, with permission to keep and use necessary medications at school.
- ▶ Promote hand washing and the use of hand sanitizers, especially before and after eating. A 2016 review of 18 randomized controlled trials suggests that hand hygiene interventions among students and school staff can reduce the incidence of respiratory tract illness symptoms, symptoms attributable to influenza, and school absenteeism.⁶⁹
- ▶ Offer breakfast in the classroom or grab-and-go items to ensure every child has a good meal.
- ▶ Aim for students to be physically active (recess, gym, after school activities, etc.) for 60 minutes a day.
- ▶ Work with community partners to promote students’ access to mental and physical health services (including vaccines, COVID testing and masks) -- promoted in the school where possible, or providing help to connect families with nearby clinics.
 - School-located influenza vaccination programs have been shown to increase community vaccination rates and reduce student and staff absenteeism during influenza season.
 - School-based health services, including preventive services, dental services, and mental or behavioural health services, have been shown to improve education outcomes, including grade point average and high school graduation, and to reduce absenteeism.
- ▶ Work as community partners to provide specific health screenings (vision, hearing, dental, etc.) if possible.
- ▶ Ensure school buildings are clean, properly ventilated and free of mold.
- ▶ Monitor outdoor air when necessary to determine if outdoor play should be limited.

Allison, Attisha, and Council on School Health, 2019

- ▶ It is valuable when schools and communities work together to ensure adequate transportation options are available for students, and possibly to explore and support transportation alternatives such as carpools, walking school buses (supervised groups walking together), or buddy systems organized with parents clubs or parent advisory councils, etc.

What else can schools and communities do to address transportation?

- A First Nation school representative suggested a “bike bus” as an inexpensive way to increase attendance that their kids love. Helping out with walking or bike buses may also be a great opportunity for community volunteers to demonstrate their commitment to school attendance.
- A First Nation in BC added a “breakfast bus” – a second bus run at 9 am. A friendly, kind bus driver was chosen to drive the bus and greet students, breakfast items are provided on the bus, and the community’s home-school coordinator rides the bus, too. If students are not ready when the bus arrives, everyone waits patiently and the home school coordinator offers to help the child or teen get ready. There seem to be fewer and fewer students using the service over time – and the community hopes that eventually the second bus won’t be needed.
- A First Nation school in BC bought a van and equipped it with car seats to enable students who have babies to attend school.
- A community buys bus passes for students who are attending the nearby public school to help them attend.
- Bus policies may also help with attendance. For example, a community found that students were regularly using the district school bus to get to town, but some students were not attending school when they got there. When those students were told they could no longer ride the bus if they didn’t start going to school, they started attending school so they could get back on the bus with their friends.
- Another First Nation school gives all parents the cell phone number of the school bus driver so that they can call or text the driver if the family is running late. The bus driver tries to make adjustments to the bus route to make sure all students have every possible opportunity to get on the bus each morning.
- Several communities are also experimenting with different bus pick up locations. One community has found it useful to have students from neighbouring communities picked up at their Band office, so that if school is closed due to weather or another emergency, the students are all located in a safe place. Other communities have found that approach infeasible. Ideally, schools, families, and communities will collectively determine bus policies and practices that are designed with attendance in mind.

“We provide quarterly updates to our health department, social department, council members, First Nation staff members ... and we talk about what we can all do to help families. For example, if a staff member knows a family or student who is struggling, we talk about who might be able to help out – never from a place of blame, but from a place of support.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“We are starting meetings to consider the roles that all Departments can play. For example, we have some community staff who have told us ‘if a child misses the bus, let me know and I will swing by to give them a lift to school.’ It really helps for students to see everyone being involved – it shows we all care about their education. We need other Departments to help us come up with a clear plan for how we can collectively promote attendance. It is not a school issue; it is a community issue.”

Input at the 2023 First Nation School Principal Network

“Wrap-around services are so important. Some families and students are dealing with losses or health and wellness issues. If we know a student is facing difficulties or a trauma, we approach their family and ask if we can use a culturally appropriate approach to offer support, such as blanketing the student. We ask Elders to help us and share their cultural teachings. We invite the family to join us, too.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“When we have a student who would benefit from wrap-around supports, we ask the family ‘can we meet with support people, like counsellors, a community support worker, representatives of outside agencies ...?’ We tell families, ‘if you agree, we want to meet as a group to talk about how we can help you and your child succeed.’”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

“Our community has home support workers, who are invaluable for helping with issues that are beyond the scope of the school. But sometimes families are uncertain about accessing their help. We start slowly and build relationships over a considerable length of time until people are ready for assistance. Then we say ‘there are support workers who might be able to help you, and this is what they can do’ It takes time and we have to move at the parent’s pace.”

Input at a 2023 First Nation School Principal Network

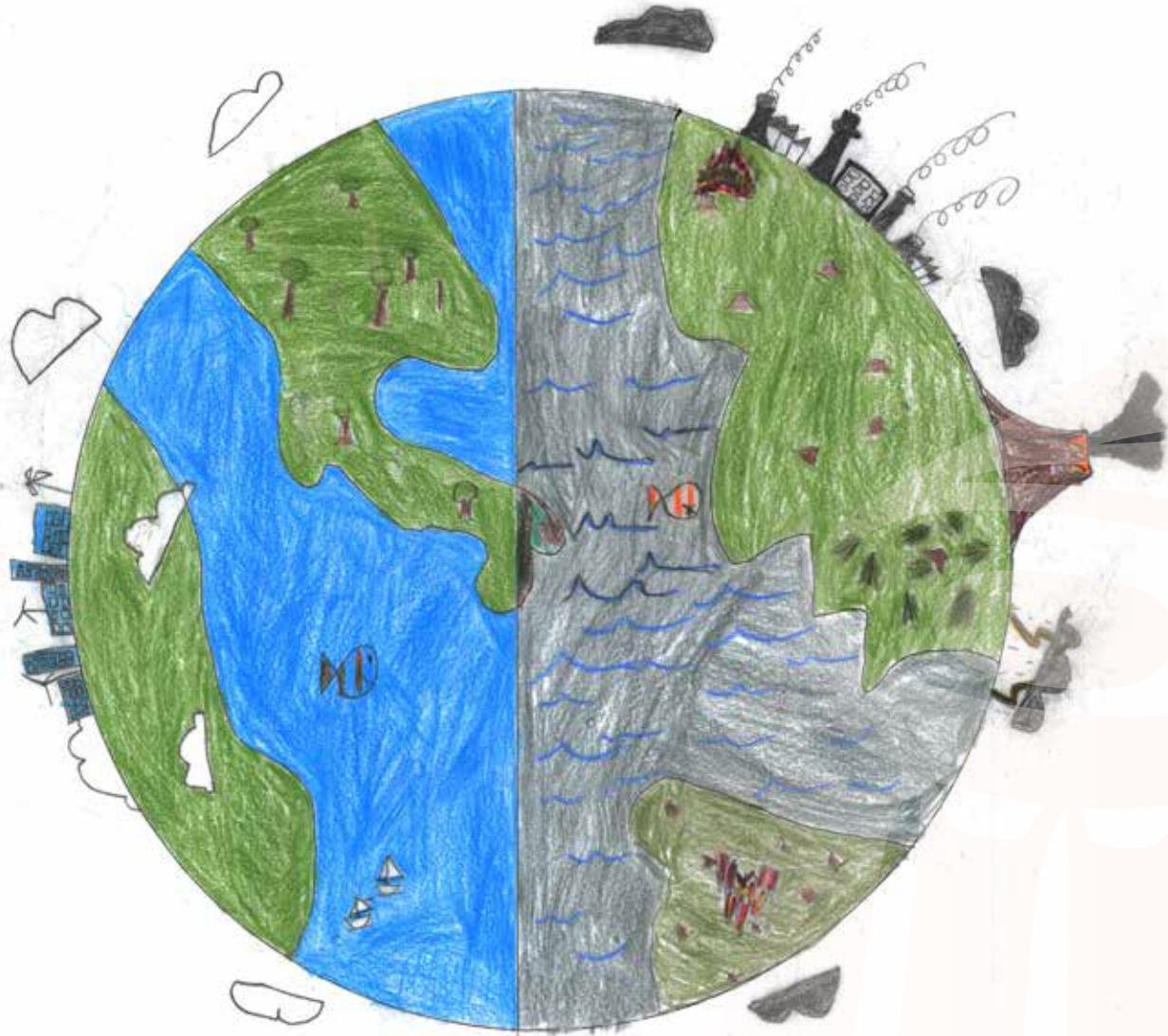
“Our community Education Coordinator/Youth Support Worker contacts the high school our students attend. They talk together about our students’ attendance, and our Education Coordinator contacts parents about what supports will help their children and teens get to school.”

Input at a February 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session with First Nations Parents

“For students who face serious challenges and families who are dealing with complicated situations, we watch their attendance and act immediately when there are improvements. We ask the parents if we can publicly recognize the student’s attendance gains. Most parents say yes, and we invite the family to a celebration of the student, where we recognize the important role the parents had in the attendance improvements, too. One parent said no to a public celebration, so we had a private recognition of the student. We have to meet parents where they feel comfortable, respecting what they want.”

Input at a 2023 First Nation School Principal Network

You Can Make
A Difference...



If You Stay
IN School

PART FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

As clearly described in this Toolkit, attendance is a complicated issue. There are numerous reasons why students may not attend school, and the multifaceted nature of the related challenges can make it very difficult to implement immediate and simple solutions. As with most education issues, it is almost impossible to identify specific factors as exclusively predicting attendance. Instead, a variety of issues can be the cause of attendance patterns, including external influences that are beyond the immediate control of teachers and program administrators. No one strategy will work in isolation, and identified approaches will not work every time and in every circumstance. But research is clear about the important role that schools, in partnership with families and communities, can and must play in addressing inconsistent patterns of attendance.

What is clear is that purely punitive approaches are not successful in changing behaviour, and waiting for a severe problem to arise before intervening is the least effective approach to attendance issues. The key is often finding out what is preventing students from being in school – individually and systemically – and working as a coalition of school staff, families, and community members to apply responses that are positive and proactive, making immediate and consistent efforts to help all students attend school regularly and on time.

As the 2019 focus group participants noted, “there is no magic bullet to solve challenges related to chronic absence. The work will always be ongoing.” It is important to be relentless, and also to celebrate small successes; what may seem like minor improvements are meaningful and they *will* make a difference for students.

“What gives me the energy to keep going? We had a student who used to attend about 10% of the time, but we kept sending the message: ‘We won’t give up on you. We want you here. We know you are capable. We believe you can succeed.’ Last year, when that student graduated he told me: ‘I got here because all those times you could have kicked me out, you didn’t.’ That is what makes our efforts worthwhile. At the end of the day, that’s what counts.”

Input at the 2023 FNSA Authorized Representatives Meeting

How can we address attendance?

- ♦ **Define it** – choose data and tracking that works for you
- ♦ **Explain it** – promote its importance using a range of mechanisms
- ♦ **Build excitement about it** – involve students, families, and the community
- ♦ **Reward it** – use incentives to celebrate attendance and on-time arrivals, rather than disciplining absences and lates
- ♦ **Celebrate it** – recognize improvements ... including individual, class, and school improvements

Input from a March 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session for First Nation School Staff

Attendance Self-Assessment Tool

adapted from a tool shared by www.everystudentpresent.org

A tool like this can be used in a number of ways:

- ▶ individually, for staff to reflect on how their school addresses attendance challenges;
- ▶ in a staff meeting or by a team of staff – possibly together with families or the School Governing Authority – to collectively discuss the school’s attendance approaches;
- ▶ in a meeting of community education staff and public school representatives to jointly consider approaches to support First Nations students’ attendance;
- ▶ other?

	STRENGTH	COULD BE BETTER	URGENT GAP	DON'T KNOW	HOW DO WE KNOW? WHAT CAN WE DO?
Attendance is taken in all classes daily.					
Our school has a clear and widely understood attendance policy.					
A team reviews attendance data regularly to identify chronically absent students and monitor attendance patterns .					
Our school offers rich and engaging learning activities, so students want to attend school.					
Our school recognizes and appreciates both excellent and improved attendance – individually and collectively.					
Our school informs parents about the importance of attendance and encourages parents to help each other get their children to school.					
Our school identifies and reaches out to chronically absent students and their families, without blame and in a caring manner, to see how attendance can be improved.					
Our school partners with community agencies that offer resources (pre-K, afterschool, health services, volunteer mentors, transportation) that can help remove barriers to getting to school.					
Our school behaviour policy and practices minimize students missing instruction.					

Where to Start: Designing an Attendance Improvement Plan

(adapted from Department of Education and Children's Services, 2003)

Hold an attendance staff meeting, or organize a meeting with school, parents club, and community representatives, and begin by asking: "Why should we be concerned about student attendance? What opportunities will better attendance rates provide to us and our students?" Consider whether it is necessary to increase understandings and better emphasize the negative effects of chronic absences. Explore the following questions.

How does focusing on attendance relate to our school's mission?

How much do we know about attendance in our school?

- ▶ What data do we have?
- ▶ Have we reviewed attendance in our School Assessment Process reports? What did we find?
- ▶ Would other data be useful? If yes, how can we gather it?
- ▶ How often do we / should we review our attendance data? Once a year? Monthly?
- ▶ Does student voice contribute to our knowledge about attendance? Should it?

What are our attendance trends and specific attendance issues for our school?

- ▶ Is there a particular grade at which attendance is a problem? A particular class?
- ▶ Is the attendance of a specific group of students a concern?
- ▶ Which individuals are particularly impacted by this issue?
- ▶ At what point do we consider student absence a concern? E.g., number of days absent, pattern of absences, combination of days absent and student achievement? Is this appropriate?

How well do our student attendance policies and procedures work?

- ▶ Do we have clear policies and procedures? Are they implemented consistently?
- ▶ Do students and families understand and support our policy?
- ▶ Do we alert parents about absences in a timely and effective way?
- ▶ Are we sure that our lateness policy is not promoting more absences?

How do we follow-up on serious absenteeism?

- ▶ Do we discuss reasons for problematic attendance with students?
- ▶ How do we communicate with and engage parents in addressing attendance challenges?
- ▶ Do we have plans to assist students whose attendance suggests they are at-risk for educational difficulties?

What messages are we giving our students, families, and the community about attendance?

- ▶ Do people know about the importance of attendance? Are we communicating this effectively?
- ▶ Are we encouraging the community to address attendance issues with us in genuine partnership?
- ▶ Have we communicated with our School Governing Authority / Chief and Council about attendance?
- ▶ What else should we be doing to encourage more support for our efforts?



APPENDIX 1

**SAMPLE MESSAGES TO USE WHEN
PROMOTING THE IMPORTANCE OF
GOOD ATTENDANCE**

WITH STAFF

Let's Count Everyone In

We should focus our energy and attention on helping students to regularly attend and get to school on time because ...

- ▶ It is consistent with our school's mission, vision, and goals.
- ▶ We will be showing all of our students that we value them, and that they are important members of our school community.
- ▶ It will improve learning outcomes for all students.
- ▶ It is an important part of our responsibility to the students in our care.
- ▶ It will make our classroom management less complex, and we will not need to re-teach to students who were absent when we taught something new.
- ▶ We will be making an important difference to our students – helping them to develop lifelong positive habits such as punctuality, self-discipline, and organization.
- ▶ We will be supporting the community's goals for its children and youth.

WITH PRIMARY STUDENTS

We Want You Here!

- ▶ You matter to us.
- ▶ Our school is better when you are here.
- ▶ We want to learn with you every day.
- ▶ What you learn at school is important. It will help you all through your life.
- ▶ You can be with your friends when you come to school.
- ▶ School is harder when you stay home too much.
- ▶ Your community wants you to be in school.
- ▶ We all want you to have fun and try new things by being with us every day.

WITH ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

Why We Want You Here!

- ▶ You are important to us. Having you here matters!
- ▶ Doing well in school will make a positive difference in your life.
- ▶ What you learn at school **will** help you.
- ▶ Students who come to school can find good jobs in the future.
- ▶ Being in school will let you spend time with your friends.
- ▶ The more you attend, the more you learn. The more you learn, the more you will like school!
- ▶ School is harder when you stay home too much.
- ▶ You might want to stay home if you are having trouble. But missing school will only make things worse. Ask for help, instead! We want you to enjoy school.
- ▶ Your community wants you to succeed. You can make your community proud by doing your best in school – and that means being here!

WITH MIDDLE AND SECONDARY STUDENTS

Attendance Counts!

- ▶ You are an important part of this school. Your contributions matter!
- ▶ Making the most of your school experience will increase your life choices.
- ▶ Every day absent from school matters. Missing a day here and there may not seem important, but absences quickly add up.
- ▶ Students who attend school regularly are more likely to graduate and find good jobs. And over a lifetime, a high school graduate makes, on average, a million dollars more than someone who does not graduate.
- ▶ At school, you're learning important things that will help throughout your life. Attending school regularly will help you develop key lifelong skills, such as self-discipline, punctuality, organization, and the ability to stick to a routine.
- ▶ Attending regularly will help you make friends and maintain relationships.
- ▶ Being in school helps to develop social skills you need to live and work successfully with others.
- ▶ Being in school gives you opportunities to socialize with your friends.
- ▶ The more you attend, the more you learn. This will make you like school more.
- ▶ School only gets harder when you stay home too much. It can be tempting to stay home because you have too much work or you don't understand what's going on in class. But missing a day only makes things worse. Ask for help, instead.
- ▶ Your community wants you to succeed. You make your community proud by doing your best in school – and that means being here! You also have the power to encourage your friends and classmates to attend school. You can take action and create change – for yourself and others.

WITH PARENTS

Attending school regularly helps children feel better about school – and themselves. You can help your children start building this habit early so they learn that going to school on time, every day is important. Good attendance will help your children do well in school, post-secondary, and at work.

Did you know?

- ▶ By encouraging good attendance, you will make an important difference to the education of your children. Regular attendance is key to educational success.
- ▶ It's understandable that challenges to daily attendance are unavoidable – like illness and urgent appointments. But try not to let absences add up! Studies show that students who miss 18 or more school days each year usually suffer academically!
- ▶ It doesn't matter if absences are excused or unexcused. They all mean lost time in the classroom, and that means a lost opportunity to learn.
- ▶ Attendance matters as early as kindergarten! Studies show that students who attend more in Kindergarten and Grade 1 are less likely to struggle with reading by third grade.
- ▶ Students with good attendance are more likely to graduate from high school.
- ▶ Children who have good attendance rates are less likely to be involved in behaviours that will get them in trouble. Studies show that students who attend school regularly are less likely to break the law and go to jail later in life.
- ▶ Children are safer in school than out on the street.

What families do is key.

- ▶ A regular bedtime and morning routine can help your children make it to school on time and ready for the day ahead.
- ▶ Get to know your children's teachers! Learn about the school's attendance policies. Keep in regular touch so you know how your children are doing.
- ▶ Let your children know that attendance matters to you. By learning how to show up for school every day, your children are learning how to show up for work every day later in their lives.
- ▶ Encourage your children to go to school unless they are sick.
- ▶ Try to avoid having older children stay home from school to care for their younger siblings.
- ▶ Try to avoid booking medical appointments during school hours if you can, and try not to schedule any family trips on school days unless you have to.
- ▶ Ask for help if you need it. What services are available in your community? Can the school help you access the resources you might need?
- ▶ Join with other parents to make an attendance commitment. Agree to help one another if something comes up that will make getting to school difficult.
- ▶ Contribute to your school's efforts to address absenteeism. Help out if you can. Help improve attendance for all of the children in our community.

WITH THE COMMUNITY

High Attendance Rates Are a Win for Us All. Please Be Part of the Solution!

- ▶ Improvements in education are impossible if students are not in school. Students must be in school in order to learn.
- ▶ We need to make sure that every student has the opportunity to succeed, and that means making sure they come to school regularly.
- ▶ Students who attend school regularly achieve greater educational success.
- ▶ By helping to encourage good attendance, we can make a positive difference to the future of all students and our community.
- ▶ Improved attendance rates can help our entire community. Studies show that students with higher attendance are more likely to graduate and get good jobs.
- ▶ Studies show that students with high attendance rates are less likely to be involved in behaviours that will get them into trouble – including breaking the law.
- ▶ Our school needs you to help us achieve our goals. We all want students to come to school regularly.
- ▶ We need to join together to support all families so we get our kids to school.
- ▶ Our school needs help from mental and medical health providers, social workers, and others – everyone can contribute to make higher attendance happen.

What are we doing to address this issue?

- ▶ Our school is carefully tracking the right data.
- ▶ We are pro-actively addressing these critical issues.
- ▶ We are making sure that all children are getting the attention they deserve.

Please help us spread the word about the importance of attendance, so we can all make sure that our students are spending their days safely and productively in school.



APPENDIX 2

**SAMPLE COMMUNICATIONS WITH
PARENTS RELATED TO ATTENDANCE**

SAMPLE CONGRATULATIONS LETTER

Dear Parent / Guardian Name,

I am writing to say a big thank you and congratulations to you and **[child's name]**. **[Child's name]**'s attendance at school has been excellent! They have had ___ absences in the past two months, and have been late only ___ times, which is on track for regular attendance this year.

As you know, our school is committed to helping our students attend school every day they can. I know it is not always easy to get to school on time every day, but research is clear that missing only a few days each month can have significant negative effects on learning.

In recognition of you and your child's efforts, we are happy to be entering **[child's name]** into a draw ... **[if an incentive program is in place describe it.]**

We love having **[child's name]** in our school and we are so happy you have been sharing them with us every day.

Thank you again for your commitment to attendance, and to your child's educational success.

Sincerely,

Principal or teacher name

SAMPLE SCRIPT FOR PHONE CALL HOME

(adapted from Sprick and Berg, 2019)

Hello _____

“This is [**student’s name**]’s teacher. How are you today?

I am calling because I’ve noticed that [**student’s name**] has been absent ___ times in the last month, and I want to make sure that everything is okay and there are no reasons [**student’s name**] might not want to come to school.

We really miss [**student’s name**] when they aren’t here, and I would be happy to help if there is anything I can do.”

- ▶ **If the parent is reluctant to talk about the issue ...** end the call by reiterating “it is a real pleasure having [student name] in class, and don’t hesitate to reach out if there is anything our school can do to help [student name] get to school each day.”
- ▶ **If the parent mentions a challenge that you can help problem solve ...** spend time discussing the issue and/or schedule a meeting if the parent wants to. Offer any information you can. For example, if the child has been feeling anxious about attending, offer to meet together with the student and family to talk about anything at school that might be challenging. If the child is feeling overwhelmed with school work and can’t face falling behind, talk about what the school can do to help address the situation and relieve some stress.
- ▶ **If the parent mentions challenges that are beyond your capacity to problem solve ...** be clear that you are on the family’s side, ask if you can talk to your colleagues about ideas to find support, and promise to do everything possible to make sure the student feels welcome at school while you are working collaboratively to address any barriers.



APPENDIX 3

ENGAGING PARENTS: MESSAGING DOS AND DON'TS

Adapted from Attendance Works. www.attendanceworks.org

Parents do want their children to do well in school, but parents might lose track of how many days their student is absent each year, and not all parents understand the connection between strong attendance and achievement. It can be useful to talk with parents, guardians, and families about absences – using the right messaging.

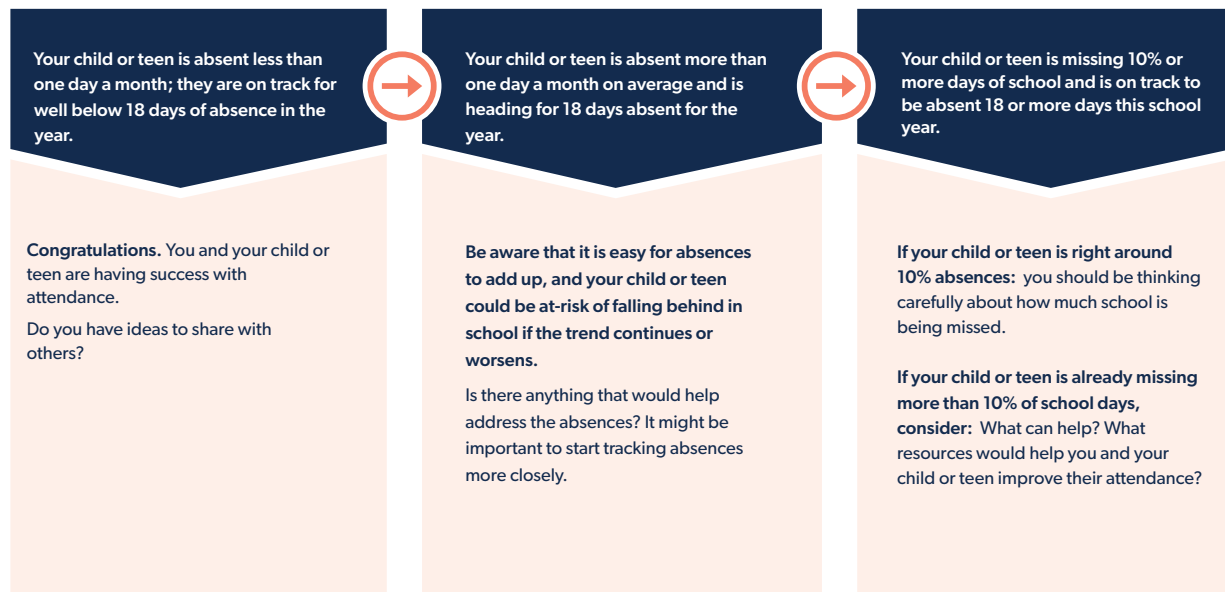
Do

- 1. Approach conversations with concern and optimism**, not by telling families what they're doing wrong. Families want their children to be in school. Assume that with the right information, they will make better attendance a priority.
- 2. Build upon families wanting the best for their children.** Families want their children to succeed in school and after they graduate. Help them connect that dream to evidence about the importance of being in school.
- 3. Help families understand what students miss when they are absent, even in the early grades.** Remind families that lessons build on one another — absent students miss the chance to learn something that they will need in order to understand more difficult material later. Explain that some things taught in the classroom can't be learned at home.
- 4. Let families be your best allies for getting students to school every day.** Together, discuss what barriers might be keeping their children from getting to school. Consider approaches to address challenges. Find out if families need resources to address issues such as recurring illness, anxiety, transportation difficulties ... Try to identify, together with families, any school staff, neighbours or other support people who could help get their child to school.
- 5. Help families recognize the importance of monitoring and tracking absences.** Research shows that many parents often aren't aware of how absences are building up. Yet parents are often willing to track absences and take steps to improve attendance if they have the right help.
- 6. Involve trusted messengers with strong relationships to families.** Ask families if they would like to involve other people in conversations about attendance so they feel supported and more comfortable.
- 7. If families ask for more support**, help them identify other community services that can assist in overcoming any challenges that are impacting on their children's attendance.

Don't

- ▶ **Don't assume families know what good attendance is.** Many, many families and students don't know that missing two days a month over the course of a school year is considered a problem.
- ▶ **Don't just rely on robocalls** to let families know that their children have missed school.
- ▶ **Don't send impersonal, threatening letters** home, which could give the impression that no one at school cares about their children.
- ▶ **Don't jump to the conclusion that students miss school because their families don't care.** Families are doing their best. Most families believe their student is on track for graduation – even families of students who are chronically absent.
- ▶ **Don't assume families are aware of the number of days their child has been absent.** Surveys show that many families underestimate their children's absences by half. Absences can sneak up on busy families.

What Parents Can Think About



PART ONE
Defining and Understanding
Attendance Rates

PART TWO
Why Focus on
Strong Attendance?

PART THREE
What Leads to
Attendance Challenges?

PART FOUR
What to Do About
Chronic Absenteeism?

CONCLUSION

APPENDIX 3

It may also be useful to thank parents for their efforts to help promote good attendance. This can be part of a positive narrative about attendance, with a focus on positive actions rather than what might not be working.

For example, schools may send home thank you notes to parents, possibly using a template that leaves space for the teacher or students to write a personal note of thanks.



APPENDIX 4

**IDEAS FOR DEVELOPING AN
ATTENDANCE ACTION PLAN**

Adapted from: Department of Education and Children's Services.
Government of South Australia. 2003

Step One

Work with a group to discuss:

What actions can we take to improve our school's attendance rate?

Step Two

Have all members of the group individually brainstorm ideas and/or issues related to attendance in your school. Then work in small groups to discuss the individual ideas and record them on stick-on notes, one idea per note. Teams randomly place their notes on a large piece of paper underneath the question.

Examples:

Teachers discuss with students and families / caregivers why attendance is important	Make roles clear for students, staff, and parents/caregivers	Review the school's policies to make sure they are clear and easy to follow	Provide pro-active support to students at-risk for chronic absenteeism
Work with parents / caregivers to ensure they always supply a note for absences	Make lessons relevant and engaging	Talk with students with attendance problems and ask what would make a difference	Intervene early – before it is too late!
Teachers follow up on student absences right away, letting parents know	Talk to students about their responsibility to be in school each day	Ask Chief and Council to put up a billboard promoting this issue	Promote this issue in the community newsletter

Step Three

Work together to sort the ideas into related groupings / “like” categories. Rearrange the post-it notes under headings. Continue until all members of the group are comfortable with the categories.

Sample category headings: Policy; Procedures; Student Engagement; Communications

Step Four

Discuss strategies for the key ideas, identifying who will lead the activity and when it will be done.



APPENDIX 5

**INFORMATION TO SHARE IN
A MEETING FOCUSED ON ATTENDANCE**

Step One

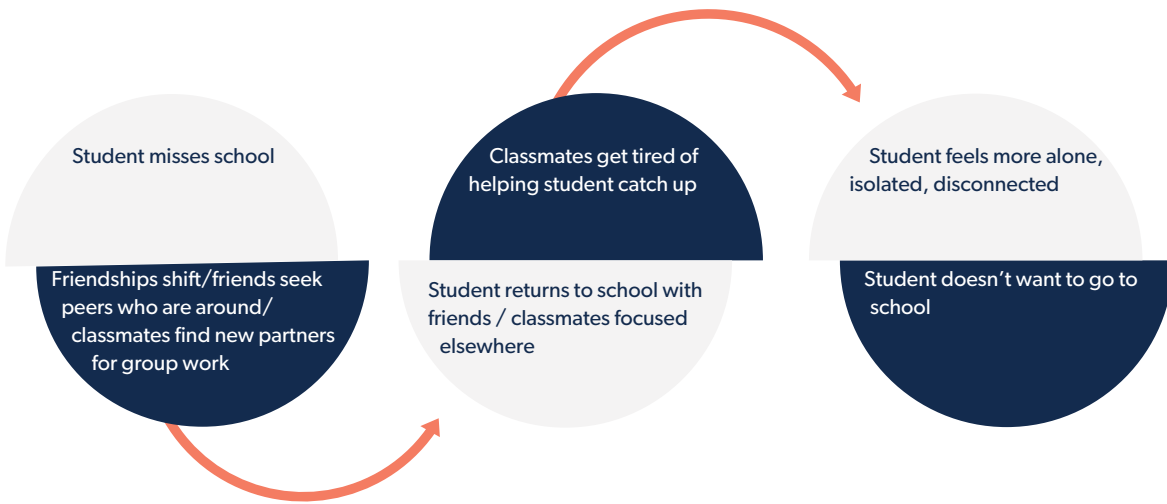
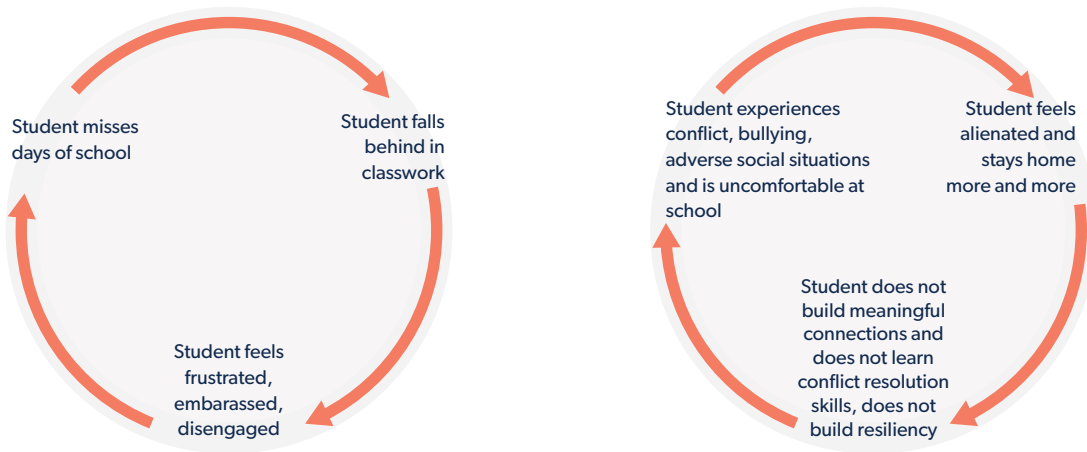
Begin by brainstorming some impacts of good attendance, and/or some challenges related to absenteeism.

FOR THE STUDENT	FOR THE CLASS / SCHOOL	FOR PARENTS / FAMILIES / THE COMMUNITY
<p>Inside School</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>The teacher</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Parents</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>Outside School</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Other students in the classroom</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Families</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>Later in life</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>The school</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Our community</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Step Two

Share some information:

Absenteeism can become a cycle



What Does This Mean?

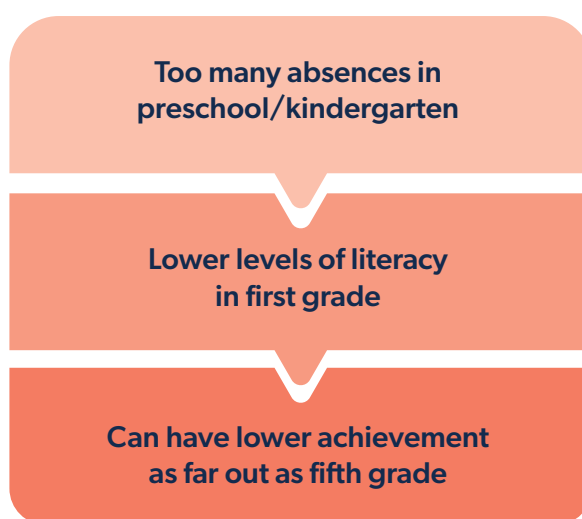
- ▶ By 6th grade, chronic absenteeism becomes a leading indicator that a student will drop out of high school.
- ▶ When students improve their attendance rates, they improve their academic outcomes and their chances for graduating.

Research says that students who attend school regularly and on-time ...

- ▶ Have lower rates of involvement in risky behaviours – including drugs and alcohol and gang activities.
- ▶ Develop important life and employment skills, such as dependability and punctuality, positively impacting their later employment.
- ▶ Are more likely to experience positive outcomes later in life, such as higher-paying jobs, a lower chance of unemployment / underemployment, and even lower rates of incarceration.

Absences matter, even at the early grade levels. Research shows ...

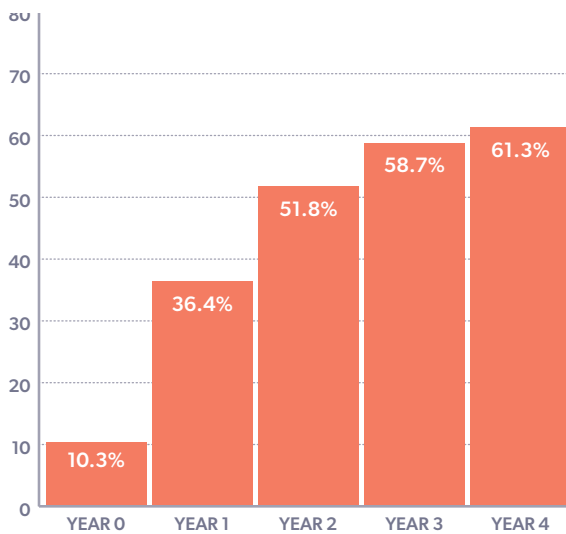
- ▶ As early as kindergarten, regular and repeated practice of skills is critical for ongoing success.
- ▶ Skills build from the foundation set in early grade levels.
- ▶ Early absenteeism predicts later absenteeism.



And research shows the negative effects of absenteeism continue through high school.

Data from the US shows that with every year of chronic absenteeism, a higher percentage of students dropped out of school.

Proportion of Students Dropping Out by Number of Years the Student was Chronically Absent from 8th-12th Grades



How Do We Know When Absences Are a Problem?

Many researchers use the term “chronic absenteeism.” That means a student missed 10% or more of the days school is open for any reason. That represents approximately 18 days for most schools.

If that doesn’t seem like very many days, think of this – 18 days is almost a full month of school.



Considerations for Decision-Making: Myths and Facts About Attendance

MYTH	FACT
Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused.	Being away from school means lost opportunities, whatever the reason.
Sporadic absences (versus consecutive absences) are not a problem.	Learning time is impacted regardless of when absences occur.
Attendance only matters in older grades.	Significant research shows attendance at early grade levels has important consequences.
Attendance is a family's problem.	Students miss school for many reasons, and it is best addressed collectively – by students, families, schools, and the community together.

APPENDIX 6

**CLASSROOM INCENTIVE
PROGRAM SUGGESTIONS**

Adapted from: Sprick and Berg, 2019

Evidence shows that simple classroom motivational systems can be surprisingly effective for maintaining momentum for attendance campaigns. Alone, attendance incentives won't be enough, but they can be a valuable part of a more comprehensive approach. When possible, incentive approaches should reward families, not just students, or at least should keep families informed of the initiatives and successes.

Ideally, reinforcement systems will be engaging and fun, and they should be designed and implemented with the following principles in mind.

- ▶ Base motivational strategies on reasonable yet challenging goals – encouraging students to do more without feeling like the goals are so far out of reach there is no hope for success. For example, set short-term goals that are slightly higher than current levels of attendance, and once students have met that goal, move up the goal an incremental amount.
- ▶ Allow students to earn rewards quickly at first so they are excited about the initiative. If, over time, the students no longer need rewards to attain consistently good attendance rates, continue to provide positive feedback.
- ▶ Avoid arbitrary time limits / goals that require consecutive attainment, such as 90% average daily attendance in the next five days, or for five days in a row. In these circumstances, students could come close to meeting the goal again and again but then fail – which would be discouraging. Instead, provide rewards based on accumulating a set goal with no specified time limit, such as just 5 days of 90% average daily attendance – no matter how long that takes.
- ▶ Seek student input on rewards. Spend a few minutes of class time brainstorming no or low-cost and easily implementable rewards, such as positive letters home, extra recess time, crazy sock day, a pajama reading party, etc.
- ▶ Use surprise to generate more excitement, such as offering a mystery reward or using a spinner to make a game of which reward will be earned.
- ▶ Pre-plan to mitigate any unexpected pitfalls. For example, it is possible that classes will continue to miss a goal because of one or a few students missing school. Anticipate this possibility and make sure that the motivation system will not depend on every individual student's behaviour. For example, make the goal 90% attendance, not 100% attendance.
- ▶ Explicitly teach students the expectations for the system, clarifying details such as whether tardy students will be counted as present or absent.
- ▶ Maintain energy for the system by showing your own excitement and providing feedback on how much progress has been achieved, not on how much more there is to do.
- ▶ Make a graphic to show the class progress and cheer on the students every day.

SAMPLE REWARD SYSTEMS

- ▶ Use a special invisible ink marker to randomly place x's on a wall calendar. Each day, have a student use the invisible marker to reveal whether an x is marked on that day, and offer a reward to students present that day.
- ▶ Randomly select days each month and distribute raffle tickets to students in attendance that day. At the end of the month, draw a ticket to select a reward winner.
- ▶ Award prizes for the most improved attendance in a month.

SAMPLE REWARDS

Classroom

- ▶ Have a class game period
- ▶ Send home postcards to congratulate the class on their achievement
- ▶ Extra recess time
- ▶ Read aloud a book of a student's choice
- ▶ Class party – a pajama reading party, or a flashlight reading party, or ...
- ▶ Free time at end of class
- ▶ Extra class time in the gym or library

Individual

- ▶ Sit where you want for the day ... even the teacher's chair
- ▶ Have lunch with the principal
- ▶ A recognition phone call home
- ▶ First in line for the day
- ▶ A small item (a temporary tattoo, or a Mad Lib game, or a sticker ...)

Suggested incentive awards shared at the 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Sessions with First Nations Parents and First Nation School Staff

- ▶ Lunch with an Elder
- ▶ Gift cards for students (especially for technology) and parents
- ▶ Gas cards and grocery cards (for families and students)
- ▶ Funding to help offset Internet costs
- ▶ Healthy food gift baskets
- ▶ "Privilege tasks" to inspire students
- ▶ An opportunity to be "Chief for the Day"
- ▶ A "pies will fly" event; students win a raffle to throw pies at school staff
- ▶ Graduation gear
- ▶ Movie passes
- ▶ Points to spend at a "school store"
- ▶ Gift cards that can be used for a family night out (e.g. movie passes, gift certificates for local eateries, etc.)
- ▶ Blue tooth speakers
- ▶ Popsicles
- ▶ Recognition certificates

"Students aren't asked enough what they find encouraging. And schools can ask parents what they think will work, as well"

Input at the 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session with First Nations Parents

"It is important to select incentives that will keep kids interested – and in that matter, parents' voices are so important. We do know what our kids want and need. Sometimes big things work. Sometimes small things work. We can help suggest all kinds of ideas."

Input at the 2024 Attendance Capacity Building Session with First Nations Parents

Tips for Planning a School-Wide Attendance Challenge

(Adapted from www.uwswpa.org/be-there)

Students respond well to positive recognition. Be proactive instead of reactive! Challenge students to come to school every day for a set period of time and reward them for their achievement!

- ▶ This could be a school-wide goal ... “if we achieve 90% or higher attendance in this period, we’ll all have ... an ice cream party, an attendANCE, the principal will shave his head, we’ll have a water balloon party, all of our teachers will dye their hair ...”
- ▶ You could award prizes recognizing classes with the Best Attendance, Fewest Lates, Most Improved Attendance, Most Enthusiastic Response ...
- ▶ Students could compete by grade level for Highest Attendance, Most Improved Attendance ...
- ▶ You could make up rewards for everyone ... rewards for Perfect Attendance, Outstanding Attendance, Improved Attendance, Fewer Lates ...

Making sure all students win in some way would be a real celebration.

You can offer different types of rewards ... certificates, extra recess / free time for winning classes, gift cards, a bagel breakfast for students and their families, lunch with the principal, movie day or movie afternoon, a special field trip ...

Perhaps a version of an Attendance Tracker (mentioned in this Toolkit) could be distributed to help families monitor days missed during the challenge, providing encouragement and making people more enthusiastic about the initiative.

PHASES OF AN ATTENDANCE CHALLENGE

1. Planning: One Month Before

- ▶ Schedule a planning meeting
- ▶ Get student input about the challenge and the reward
- ▶ Have teachers communicate their commitment

2. Preparing for Launch: One Week Before

- ▶ Communicate with parents through flyers, social media, letters home ..
- ▶ Invite parents and community members to a kick-off event

3. Launching: Have a Challenge Kick-Off

- ▶ Hold a launch party or assembly
- ▶ Invite families, community leadership, other community members

4. Halfway Check-In

- ▶ Announce the data
- ▶ Remind and encourage students to do their best

5. Celebration

- ▶ Hold an End of Challenge party or assembly
- ▶ Invite families and community members
- ▶ Hand out incentives / share the rewards

6. Follow-Up

- ▶ Debrief as a staff about what worked well and what could be improved
- ▶ Survey students for feedback
- ▶ Start thinking about future challenges

THINGS TO DO**Planning and Prep**

- Schedule a planning meeting
- Encourage staff to join in
- Assign roles and responsibilities
- Select challenge beginning and end dates
- Choose goals appropriate for your students and school
- Brainstorm incentive ideas
- Talk to students about their ideas
- Spread awareness throughout the school – use posters, morning announcements etc,
- Promote the campaign with families and the community
- Keep building excitement

Challenge Kick-Off

- Send home a parent flyer the week prior to the kick-off
- Recruit family volunteers to hold signs and cheer students as they arrive at school to create excitement about the challenge kick-off
- Talk about the event on morning messages
- Hold the kick-off, making sure everyone understands the goals
- Encourage students to attend school whenever they can
- Pass out “attendance counts” stickers, pencils, other age-appropriate items if you can

Half-Way Point

- Announce the results to date
- Send home flyers / letters home / share on social media how well students are doing
- Possibly share stickers or small incentives to encourage students to keep up the good work

Planning the Final Celebration

- Purchase prizes / incentives, if relevant
- Coordinate logistics as a staff
- Invite families and coordinate roles of volunteers

Final Celebration

- Announce the results of the challenge
- Share the incentives
- Celebrate and have a good time

Follow-Up

- Look at your attendance data – before and after
- Talk about what worked well and what can be improved
- Thank all participants and volunteers
- Start planning other activities / future challenges
- Keep reminding students and parents of the value of good attendance

APPENDIX 7

**SAMPLE LESSONS FOR TEACHING
THE IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDANCE**

SAMPLE 1

GRADES K – 2

(Adapted from Sprick and Berg, 2019)

MATERIALS

Copy of the book or video of *Berenstain Bears' Trouble at School* (video is on YouTube).

STEP 1

Explain to students that attendance at school is important, and the class has a goal of being at school every day, unless you are too sick to come.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will identify why Brother Bear had trouble when he came back to school after being sick.
- Students will discuss how missing school impacts on learning.
- Students will identify ways Brother Bear could avoid these problems in the future.

STEP 2

State the Goal of the Lesson and Its Relevance

Today we are going to [watch/read] *Berenstain Bears' Trouble at School*. In this story, Brother Bear stays home from school when he is sick and has trouble when he comes back to school. We are going to identify what made it hard for Brother Bear when he came back after being absent, and how he could avoid these problems in the future.

STEP 3

Read the book or watch the video, pausing to ask questions to check for understanding.

When finished, have students discuss the following questions with a partner:

- Why did Brother Bear stay home from school? Was this an ok reason to miss school?
- When Brother Bear came back to school what problems did he have? Why?
- What could Brother Bear do differently next time?
- For each question, have each pair share their responses with the class.

CLOSURE

Close the lesson by emphasizing how important it is to attend school regularly, and what important opportunities students miss when they stay home – such as learning new things and having fun with their friends.

SAMPLE 2**GRADES K – 3**

MATERIALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Story book about going to school. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Why is School Important? Kids Learn Why School is Important.</i> https://youtu.be/olBKixSB3PA?si=ZKqxNuHunr-6l3_H – <i>Our Class is a Family.</i> https://youtu.be/rw9NstM1Q4E?si=MXrXtEaNxGiLBiri – <i>The Pigeon Has to Go to School</i> https://youtu.be/Uo3PnlQWxAs?si=GqkJIR94uQskUai ▪ Printed picture of each student.
BIG IDEA	Attendance Matters
OBJECTIVE	Attendance is important. Students need to come to school every day so they can learn and grow.
GOAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students will identify good habits to help them attend school daily. ▪ Students will create a personal motivation chart / poster to keep at home with their picture on it, to remind themselves and their parents why school is important and why they go to school every day.
“I CAN” STATEMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I can learn routines that will help me come to school every day. ▪ I can talk about what I like to do at school. ▪ I can show what I am learning in school. ▪ I can create a list of ideas that will help me remember why school is important.
STEP 1	<p>Class Brainstorm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why do we need to go to school? ▪ How can we help to make school fun for everyone? <p>Teacher-led class discussion. (Record responses on the whiteboard/chart paper.)</p>

STEP 2

Read the books or watch the video books. Elicit individual student responses.

- What would help you come to school every day?
- Why do you sometimes miss school?
- Why do you like school?
- What don't you like about school?
- How can I help you like school and come to school every day?

Write notes based on the responses to display on the whiteboard, so students can refer to all the brainstorming and responses when they create their own motivation chart / poster.

STEP 3

Students create a personal motivation chart with words or pictures. They will take the chart home and ask their parents to help them remember why they go to school every day.

CLOSURE

Working together to make our class safe and fun for everyone will help all of us learn and grow. (This point might come up in the student discussions). If everyone comes to school every day, we can help each other be successful in school.

RESOURCES**FNESC Attendance Toolkit****Primary Students: We Want You Here!**

- You matter to us.
- Our school is better when you are here.
- We want to learn with you every day.
- What you learn at school is important. It will help you all through your life.
- You can be with your friends when you come to school.
- School is harder when you stay home too much.
- Your community wants you to be in school.
- We all want you to have fun and try new things by being with us every day.

SAMPLE 3**GRADES 4 – 7**

MATERIALS	<i>My Attendance Success Plan</i> template (see following)
BIG IDEA	Attendance Matters
OBJECTIVE	Attendance is important. Students need to come to school every day so they can learn and grow.
GOAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students will identify good habits to help them attend school daily. ▪ Students will create a personal attendance plan to keep at home, to remind themselves and their parents why school is important and why they go to school every day. ▪ Students will create attendance anchor charts and posters.
“I CAN” STATEMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I can learn routines that will help me come to school every day. ▪ I can talk about what I like to do at school. ▪ I can show what I am learning in school. ▪ I can create an attendance plan to help me remember my goals and why school is important. ▪ I can ask for help from people in my life to help me get to school every day.
STEP 1	<p>Class Brainstorm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why do we need to go to school? ▪ How can we help to make school fun for everyone? <p>Teacher-led class discussion. (Record responses on the whiteboard/chart paper.)</p>
STEP 2	<p>Individual student responses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What would help you come to school every day? Why do you sometimes miss school? ▪ Why do you like school? ▪ What don't you like about school? ▪ How can I help you like school and come to school every day? <p>Write notes on responses to display on the whiteboard, so students can refer to all the brainstorming and responses when they create their attendance plan, and develop their skit.</p>

STEP 3

Demonstrate learning: Groups of students create a skit on one of the statements from student responses, either showing a positive effect of going to school every day, or a positive response to someone who does not want to go to school every day.

STEP 4

Students create anchor charts or posters on the benefits of good attendance in school.

CLOSURE

Create a personal plan (see below) to help students commit to coming to school every day with parent support. Share with their families and circles of support.

RESOURCES**FNESC Attendance Toolkit****Elementary Students: Why We Want You Here!**

- You are important to us. Having you here matters!
- Doing well in school will make a positive difference in your life.
- What you learn at school will help you.
- Students who come to school can find good jobs in the future.
- Being in school will let you spend time with your friends.
- The more you attend, the more you learn. The more you learn, the more you will like school!
- School is harder when you stay home too much.
- You might want to stay home if you are having trouble. But missing school will only make things worse. Ask for help, instead! We want you to enjoy school.
- Your community wants you to succeed. You can make your community proud by doing your best in school – and that means being here!

MY ATTENDANCE SUCCESS PLAN TEMPLATE (Grades 4-7)

(adapted from www.attendanceworks.org)

My Attendance Goals

Examples: To increase my attendance by _____, or to maintain my current attendance rate by only missing classes when I am sick or have an important reason to miss school

Possible Strategies to Reach My Attendance Goals

- ▶ I will make attending school and every class on time every day a priority.
- ▶ I will keep track of my attendance and absences.
- ▶ I will maintain a bedtime routine and set my alarm for _____ a.m.
- ▶ I will find a relative or friend who can take me to school if I miss my bus.
- ▶ When I am struggling with a challenge that is keeping me from school, I will talk to an adult at school and seek help.
- ▶ I will attend school every day unless I'm sick.
- ▶ If I cannot avoid missing school, I will contact my teachers to ask for materials and find out what I missed.

To improve my attendance, I commit to the following:

We will review progress to meet this goal in one month.

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

School Staff Signature: _____ Date: _____

SAMPLE 4

SECONDARY STUDENTS

MATERIALS

- Chart paper / access to Padlet or another collaborative tool
- *My Attendance Success Plan* template (see following)
- Attendance cycle diagram

OBJECTIVES

- Students will discuss how missing classes affects their ability to do well in school.
- Students will examine personal factors that result in missing classes and possible strategies to increase their attendance.

STEP 1

“Washing the Elephant” activity (Approximately 30 minutes)

- Ask one person (Volunteer #1) to leave the room.
- Explain to the rest of the group that you are going to “wash the elephant.” Using an imaginary pail of water and cloth, and describing out loud each move, act out washing the elephant’s sides, the legs, and the trunk, lift the ears and tail and wash underneath, and so on.
- Identify a member of the group (Volunteer #2) who would be comfortable demonstrating – with no words – what they saw you do.
- Bring Volunteer #1 back into the room, and then have everyone observe Volunteer #2 silently demonstrate “washing the elephant.”
- Ask Volunteer #1 to demonstrate what they just observed – trying to describe the activity and explain their movements.
- Discuss the experience using the following prompts.
 - Ask Volunteer #1 and Volunteer #2 how they felt when they were demonstrating the activity. What was different for each person?
 - Validate the students’ responses and emphasize how crucial it is for students to be present when someone is sharing information or giving instructions.
 - Ask the class why it is important for students to attend school regularly.
 - Talk about what happens when a student is not present in the classroom and they miss important instructions. The more classes a student misses, the farther behind they fall.
 - Show the cycle diagram and talk about how easy it is for students to get caught in a pattern of missing classes.

STEP 2**Factors affecting attendance**

- Students will work in groups to discuss factors that affect or could affect student attendance.
- Groups will select 4 of the factors they identified and list them on chart paper / a shared Padlet board.
- Under each of the 4 factors, groups will identify at least 1 strategy that could be used to address the factor.
- Individual students will then comment on at least 3 other factors affecting attendance (can be from their own group's list or another group's list) and include a possible strategy.
 - E.g.: *Factor: Tired from staying up late*
Strategy: Set a sleep mode on my device to remind me when to wind down for the evening and to avoid the distraction of notifications
- Ensure all students have consistent access to this completed resource (post in classroom, maintain student access to Padlet board, etc.).

STEP 3**Attendance Success Plan**

Students will use their learning about the importance of attendance and possible strategies to help them attend regularly to prepare an Attendance Success Plan. This plan should include:

- Personal attendance goals, which relate to their own attendance patterns (i.e. to improve or maintain good attendance)
- Possible strategies to reach their attendance goals, which are relevant given their specific experiences and circumstances

Success plans will be reviewed monthly

PART ONE
Defining and Understanding
Attendance Rates

PART TWO
Why Focus on
Strong Attendance?

PART THREE
What Leads to
Attendance Challenges?

PART FOUR
What to Do About
Chronic Absenteeism?

CONCLUSION

APPENDIX 7

MY ATTENDANCE SUCCESS PLAN TEMPLATE (Secondary)

(adapted from www.attendanceworks.org)

My Attendance Goals

Examples: To increase my attendance by _____, or to maintain my current attendance rate by only missing classes when I am sick or have an important reason to miss school

Possible Strategies to Reach My Attendance Goals

- ▶ I will make attending school and every class on time every day a priority.
- ▶ I will keep track of my attendance and absences.
- ▶ I will maintain a bedtime routine and set my alarm for _____ a.m.
- ▶ I will find a relative or friend who can take me to school if I miss my bus.
- ▶ When I am struggling with a challenge that is keeping me from school, I will talk to an adult at school and seek help.
- ▶ I will attend school every day unless I'm sick.
- ▶ If I cannot avoid missing school, I will contact my teachers to ask for materials and find out what I missed.

To improve my attendance, I commit to the following:

We will review progress to meet this goal in one month.

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

School Staff Signature: _____ Date: _____

SAMPLE 5**SENIOR SECONDARY OR ADULT STUDENTS**

MATERIALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chart paper and markers / post-its or access to a SMART board ▪ <i>My Help Team</i> template (see following)
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students will explore possible factors that affect attendance. ▪ Students will identify strategies and supports they can access to help them attend classes regularly.
STEP 1	<p>Challenges Related to Missing Classes</p> <p>Lead students in a discussion about regular attendance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why is attendance important? ▪ What are the challenges associated with missing too many classes? For the student? For the class / other students? For the teacher?
STEP 2	<p>Factors affecting attendance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Draw a table on chart paper / the Smartboard with the following headings: <i>Family, School, Community, Health, Personal, Other</i>. ▪ Students will brainstorm possible factors that affect attendance and include them in the relevant column (i.e.: <i>“helping my siblings”</i> under <i>“Family”</i>; <i>“conflict with another classmate”</i> under <i>“Personal”</i>). ▪ Ask students to consider their own absences in the past and think about which of the listed factors impacted their attendance most.
STEP 3	<p><i>My Help Team</i>: Create back up plans for getting to school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss the importance of asking for help and having a plan in place to access support when needed. ▪ Distribute the <i>My Help Team</i> resource, which describes 4 levels of “helpers” who can be called upon if needed. ▪ Guide students in identifying their helpers at each level, encouraging students to include specific assistance each “helper” can provide (e.g., <i>My Auntie: ride to school if I miss the bus</i>). ▪ Encourage students to reach out to the people they included on their Help Team, and talk about their commitment to attendance and the possibility of asking for assistance when needed.

PART ONE
Defining and Understanding
Attendance Rates

PART TWO
Why Focus on
Strong Attendance?

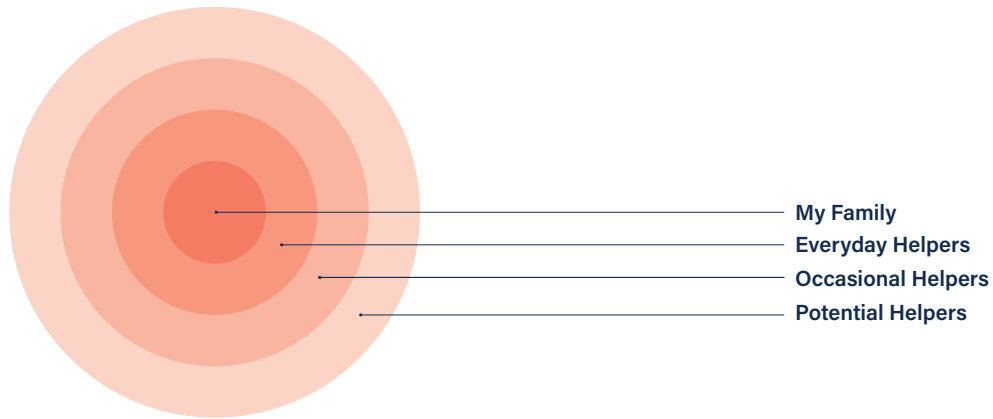
PART THREE
What Leads to
Attendance Challenges?

PART FOUR
What to Do About
Chronic Absenteeism?

CONCLUSION

APPENDIX 7

MY HELP TEAM: BACK UP PLANS FOR GETTING TO SCHOOL TEMPLATE (Senior Secondary)
(adapted from www.attendanceworks.org)



My Family: Identify who lives in your house.

Everyday Helpers: Identify who you can call on often to help encourage you to get to class or address a problem that is making it hard for you to attend. These are people like friends, school staff, and relatives who can help regularly.

Occasional Helpers: Identify people who may not be able to help every day but who can help once in a while. Maybe it's a relative or a friend who lives outside your community, who can offer encouragement remotely and who might be there to help in-person occasionally.

Potential Helpers: Identify people who aren't around all the time, but who might be able to help out in a pinch if you ask.

If I need help getting to and from school or overcoming a barrier to attendance, I will ask the following people to help me out:

Name: _____ Best Contact Number: _____

Name: _____ Best Contact Number: _____

Name: _____ Best Contact Number: _____

APPENDIX 8

**WHAT TO SAY WHEN YOUR CHILD
DOES NOT WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL**
Sample Handout for Parents

YOUR CHILD SAYS...	WHAT MIGHT BE GOING ON?	WHAT CAN YOU SAY?
"I don't feel like going."	It's possible your child is having a hard time at school. The problem could be something very recent or something that's been building for a long time.	"I wonder if you want to stay home because things aren't going well at school. When you get home, let's talk about what's going on and if we can do something to make things better. Is there something we can ask the school to do to help us?"
"I'm too tired to go."	School can be exhausting. That's especially true if kids are struggling in some way. It takes a lot of energy to try to keep up or hide difficulties.	"It surprises me you're tired. I thought you were sleeping well. Is there something you've been working extra hard at or that's using up a lot of your energy? Is there something keeping you up at night?"
"I hate school!"	Sometimes a specific bad experience or trouble with one aspect of school can cast a cloud over everything else.	"I know there's a lot that you like at school. Is there something in particular that's making you so unhappy that you want to stay home?"
"The kids are mean."	It can be tough for some kids to understand social situations and fit in. Making friends can be hard. And kids are sometimes the targets of bullying.	"I'm sorry kids are being mean. What are they doing? Can you tell me about it? Would you like me to talk to your teacher and come up with a plan to help?"
"School's too hard."	School isn't always easy, even when kids seem to be doing OK. Sometimes kids might find it hard to meet class expectations, and they often worry about falling behind or failing.	"It sounds like things aren't going as well as you'd like at school. What's the most challenging thing about school right now? Let's talk to your teacher or principal about how you are feeling."
"I forgot to do my homework again."	For some kids, keeping track of assignments and managing time is really tough, no matter how hard they try. And if it happens a lot, they might feel embarrassed or fear they are going to get in trouble.	"You seem to be having trouble staying on top of your work. Do you feel like that's a challenge for you? Should we ask about some resources and different ways to help you stay organized?"

APPENDIX 9

FACT SHEETS

9.1 Reasons to Greet Students at the Door

9.2 Why Worry About Attendance Issues?

9.3 Moving From Parent-Teacher Conferences to Student-Led Conferences

FACT SHEET 9.1

REASONS TO GREET STUDENTS AT THE DOOR

What the Research Says

Studies show an effective way to increase student connectedness, student attention to learning (on-task behaviour), and teacher rapport with students: simply greeting students at the classroom door.

It may be tempting for teachers to use the time when students are entering the classroom and getting settled to undertake administrative tasks – such as taking attendance, checking off homework, firing off an email ... But taking the time to set up students for success can be really valuable – for students, and for teachers.

Positive greetings at the classroom door can increase students' academic engagement by 20% and decrease disruptive classroom behaviour by 9%, according to a study published in the *Journal of Positive Behavior (Positive Greetings at the Door: Evaluation of a Low-Cost, High-Yield Proactive Classroom Management Strategy)*. "The results from this study suggest that teachers who spend time on the front end to implement strategies such as positive greetings at the door will eventually save more time on the back end by spending less time reacting to problem behaviour and more time on instruction," the study authors write.

Earlier studies (reported in *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 2007 and 2011*) showed the practice of greeting students resulted in an increase in student engagement and students getting on task faster, in comparison to a control class that was not greeted (Wong and Wong, 2013).

- ▶ Greetings at the door set an immediate and positive tone. The approach promotes a sense of belonging in the classroom; it gives students social and emotional support and helps them feel invested in their learning. It also can reduce students' and teachers' stress levels as the day / class begins.
- ▶ By starting the day or class on a bright note and with a warm greeting, honouring and acknowledging students' presence from the moment they step up to the door, students will feel happier about coming to school and approach learning with a more optimistic mindset.

- ▶ Greetings at the door help build relationships between students and teachers, which is an important part of making connections to enhance learning throughout the rest of the day. Special things — a secret handshake, greeting song or poem, an interesting quote or thought-provoking question to spark discussion — can set a relaxing and positive tone for the class. Even older students who change classes throughout the day can benefit from time to pause and connect about how their day is going when they arrive at the classroom. They may want to take a few moments to talk about things happening in the world and they may not have another adult willing to take the time to hear their perspectives on things. These few moments don't need to drag on and take away from learning time; just a few very short interactions can make a surprisingly important difference.
- ▶ The practice also builds a sense of community in the classroom. Students need to feel that school is a safe refuge for them — a place where they are loved and wanted. By supporting these feelings, teachers are encouraging students to engage more fully in the learning process.
- ▶ The first few minutes of class are often the most chaotic, as students transition from busy areas such as the hallway or playground. Left unchecked, disruptions can become difficult to manage, but a proactive approach to classroom management can help students get focused and ready to learn. For students who have trouble switching classes, greeting them at the door with explicit directions can be helpful, giving students a sense of purpose with a task to do as they enter the room. This can be a whole-class activity, such as preparing their desks for the day, or a few students each day can be asked to take on helping roles, providing everyone an opportunity as the year progresses. For example, the teacher can use reminders of what to do at the start of class, such as “spend the next few minutes reviewing what we covered yesterday.” If a student struggled with behaviour the previous day, the teacher can share a positive message to encourage improvement and suggest a fresh start.
- ▶ Classroom door greetings provide a chance to connect with every student and to gauge their emotional state. Although brief, it's a chance to have a one-on-one conversation with each student. Sometimes directing a small, simple gesture toward a student can help to see if they have something on their mind.
- ▶ The practice provides an opportunity to model (and for students to practice) positive social behaviours that are expected in the classroom, as well as adult behaviours often expected outside of school.
- ▶ In greetings, teachers can ask each student a question to formatively assess their understanding of the previous day's lesson.
- ▶ This simple practice can be a time saver. Even if a consistent classroom routine has been established, greetings at the door allow the teacher to cue students to something that may be different (“please be sure to turn in your homework,” or “please pick up the work you missed yesterday from the absent folder”).

TIPS: When greeting students at the door, use students' names, give a few words of encouragement, and ask how their day is going. Nonverbal interpersonal interactions, such as a friendly handshake or a thumbs-up, can help make greetings feel authentic and build trust — taking care if students feel uncomfortable with physical contact. While remembering that not everyone likes attention focused on them, even a very subtle gesture can let a reluctant scholar know that you see them and value them. It is just necessary to be attentive to students' varying preferences.

Establishing a positive classroom climate in which students feel a sense of connection and belonging is invaluable, given the research demonstrating that motivation, achievement and STUDENT ATTENDANCE can all increase as a result.

And a welcoming classroom environment doesn't benefit students alone; it can improve the teacher's mental health as well. Many teachers feel stressed by student disengagement or disruptions, and many teachers report classroom management to be one of their greatest concerns. Responding to misbehaviour is exhausting and time consuming. It is much better for both student and teacher well-being to instead focus on no-cost, easy-to-implement strategies that can help to prevent problems from arising.

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FACT SHEET 9.2**WHY WORRY ABOUT ATTENDANCE ISSUES?****What the Research Says**

Each year, data collected from First Nations schools that receive funding through the British Columbia Tripartite Education Agreement (BCTEA) shows that a large portion of students would meet the definition of chronically absent – that is, absent 10% or more days in the school year.

Why is this important?

- ▶ Regular attendance is a primary factor in high academic achievement and a powerful predictor of which students are less likely to drop out of school. *It does not matter if absences are excused or unexcused; missing school for any reason means lost learning.* Being in school counts.
- ▶ When students show up for school regularly, they don't miss out on fundamental reading and math skills. Each successive year of chronic absenteeism means the risks of reduced learning compound.
- ▶ Students who attend have the chance to build a habit of good attendance that will carry them into college and careers.
- ▶ Good attendance can influence whether children read proficiently by the end of third grade or whether they fall behind.
 - Who can read at grade level by the end of third grade? 64% of students who had good attendance at kindergarten and first grade, versus 17% of students who were chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade.
- ▶ As students progress through school, those who attend regularly have consistently higher grades and test scores.
- ▶ By 6th grade, strong attendance becomes a leading indicator of whether a student will complete high school with the academic credentials and skills needed to move on to post-secondary education and compete in a 21st century workforce. One study found that a student who is chronically absent in even a single school year between the eighth and twelfth grades is over seven times more likely to drop out of school than a student who has not been chronically absent.
- ▶ Students who attend regularly usually find it easier to build meaningful connections at school, and they often have fewer behavioral and emotional challenges in school.
- ▶ Studies show that students who attend school more frequently have lower rates of involvement in risky behaviours.

- ▶ Research demonstrates that completing high school is not only a strong predictor of adult success, but it also raises lifelong physical and mental health outcomes and lowers involvement with the criminal justice system – all of which is tied to attendance.
- ▶ Regular attendance helps students develop “soft skills” that employers expect, such as dependability and punctuality. Students who don’t develop the habits associated with good attendance in the early years often find it difficult to develop them as adults.
- ▶ Chronic absenteeism is a problem that affects the whole community, not just the students who are chronically absent and their parents.
 - When too many students miss too much school, chronic absenteeism can affect entire classrooms, as teachers slow down instruction to help absentee students.
 - Chronic absenteeism can undermine a community’s efforts to improve school performance and can contribute to higher dropout rates, meaning more young people are unable to hold good jobs or make enough money to support their families.

Data strongly suggests that the long-term consequence of good attendance rates is a population that is better educated, healthier, less underemployed, and more financially stable – benefiting entire communities.

The good news is that attendance can be significantly increased when schools, families and community partners work together to monitor data, nurture a habit of regular attendance, and address barriers that keep children and teens from getting to school on time more often.

For more information, see the First Nations Education Steering Committee and First Nations Schools Association publication:

A Toolkit For Raising the Attendance Rates Of First Nations Students In British Columbia.

This fact sheet was adapted from information found at attendanceworks.org and in Sprick, J. and T. Berg. 2019. *Teacher’s Guide to Tackling Attendance Challenges*. ASCD

FACT SHEET 9.3**MOVING FROM PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES TO STUDENT-LED CONFERENCES****What the Research Says**

“It’s hard to imagine a more high-leverage practice for improving learning than this. It brings the family in as a partner in the child’s growth—instead of being intimidated by facing news from a teacher, the family members are proud to listen to their child present herself with candor and clarity, even when there are challenges.”

Leaders Of Their Own Learning

Parent-teacher conferences, as conventionally implemented in schools for the past several decades, can be effective for telling parents about their children’s achievement and progress, but they lack one key element: student engagement. To address that issue, more and more schools are moving to the alternative approach of student-led conferences.

A student-led conference is a preplanned meeting with a student, their family, and their teacher, during which the student demonstrates responsibility for their academic performance by reviewing their own work and learning goals. A student-led conference is in some ways similar to a parent-teacher conference, but the student is present and in charge of leading the discussions. Usually ...

- ▶ Teachers act as facilitators for the discussion.
- ▶ Students present their work and guide the discussion.
- ▶ Families listen and talk with their children about their academic and social progress, as well as their needs and plans for growth.

Student-led conferences can take a number of different forms, depending on school size and structure, but they generally allow students to be a part of the conversation about their academic and social progress and goals, and to discuss with their teacher and parents how they can succeed. Student-led conferences allow students to present the process of their learning and the progress they’ve made, with reference to the criteria against which their work is evaluated.

Student-led conferences can be implemented at all grade levels, K-12.

Quick Snapshot of How They Work

Usually, students prepare some kind of presentation for a student-led conference, which differs by grade and is scaffolded to their skill level. Younger students may prepare a poster board or packet to show their parents. Older students may prepare binders with their work, with reflection sheets included. Throughout the year, students can maintain a portfolio; when they complete something they're proud of or want to keep, they simply file that item in their portfolio. When it is time to prepare for a conference, students can go to their portfolio and choose what they want to show their parents.

In addition to deciding what to share, teachers and students can spend considerable time talking about how to present and lead the conference, helping students feel secure talking about their learning. It is important for students to understand that they will be in control of the conversation, and that the conference is intended to show off their strengths and talk about how they can improve even more. Teachers prepare students by setting expectations, facilitating student reflection, and going over the necessary elements of a successful conference through mini-lessons and conversations about quality work, effective ways to lead the conference, planning, etc. Then students practice presenting to each other, to the teacher, to other staff ...

Potential Benefits of Student-Led Conferences

- ▶ Broadening the concept of parent-teacher conferences can allow students to develop leadership skills and take a more active role in their own learning, helping prepare them to self-advocate.
- ▶ For students to be invested in their own learning and develop a growth mindset, they need to be involved in conversations about their strengths, challenges, and learning goals.
- ▶ Preparing for a conference can help students develop skills they'll use long after they've finished school. They offer an authentic opportunity to practice organizational and communication skills, and presenting in the conference builds a student's sense of responsibility, self-confidence, and ability to understand and explain the purpose and outcomes of their assignments and learning targets.
- ▶ Student-led conferences can get students more invested in their own learning. They help students to think critically about their own abilities and achievements, and reflect in their own words how far they've come, what they want to do better, what they still have to learn, and their successes. Even struggling students can find things they're proud to show off and talk about, and student-led conferences give every child a chance to celebrate their learning.

“What may seem like a small change — parent conferences run by students instead of teachers — can change the entire culture of a school in powerful ways. When students must report to their families what they’re learning—what skills and understandings they have, what areas still challenge them, and where they hope to get to—they must understand their own learning and progress. They take pride in what they can do and take responsibility for what they need to work on. Education stops being something done to them and begins being something that they are leading.”

Berger, 2014

- ▶ Experience and research shows that student led conferences also help promote parent involvement. Getting parents to come is often one of the biggest obstacles to traditional parent-teacher conferences, and many schools that have implemented student-led conferences have seen a dramatic increase in parent attendance. Students are excited to tell their parents what they've learned, and parents are more apt to attend because their kids are excited. When they do attend, parents enjoy seeing their child's responsibility and enthusiasm for showing their accomplishments.
- ▶ During student-led conferences, parents become active listeners and learn how they can support their children's learning at home. Parents want to see their children's successes, which student-led conferences naturally highlight.
- ▶ For teachers, student-led conferences contribute to strong instruction. Teachers must ensure that every student can explain their learning in order for the conferences to work. Students learn to select samples of high-quality work and assessments that show they have mastered the related skills and concepts. And students are supported in developing the understandings and presentation skills needed to explain their growth and goals. These are valuable instructional goals.

- ▶ Although teachers see their students regularly, watching students lead a conference and interact in that setting can provide new insights to help make the learning environment more effective.
- ▶ Teachers are better able to connect and build relationships with parents who might not attend a traditional parent-teacher meeting, which can be intimidating for many people. Student led conferences provide a low-stress environment since they are generally more casual and not focused on problems.
- ▶ In student-led conferences, teachers can observe and understand what kinds of supports students have at home, which may inform whether and how the school might provide assistance.
- ▶ Student-led conferences can help students and teachers be active partners in the learning journey.

Some Suggestions

- ▶ Not all teachers are immediately comfortable moving to a new approach. To address uncertainties ...
 - share the benefits of student-led conferences.
 - take time in a staff meeting to discuss ways to make changes.
 - provide professional development if needed.
 - give as much support, modeling, and encouragement as possible.
- ▶ Keep things simple. Remind teachers that most of the procedures used in student-led conferences are just an extension of effective teaching practices they already use. There is no need to overcomplicate what special expertise will be required.
- ▶ It may be useful to gradually shift away from traditional parent-teacher meetings to more inclusive conferences. Simply inviting students to attend the conferences is a good start, and letting them share their favourite piece of work or talk about one activity they particularly enjoy is a way to begin to increase student involvement.
- ▶ Some schools move toward a new model by holding one student-led conference and one parent-teacher meeting at different times during the year.
- ▶ The student portfolio is a central element of successful student-led conferences, anchoring the discussions and telling the story of the students' progress. Their format can vary, but portfolios usually include a selection of the student's work, and some sort of record of their social and academic goals. Portfolios may also honour the student's involvement in extra-curricular learning.
- ▶ The agenda and structure for the conference should be clear so students know exactly what they are expected to do, how much time they have for the planned activities, and what they should be explaining to their parents.
- ▶ Teachers with younger students can set up a system of learning stations where students can show parents what they've learned, and parents can observe and ask questions.
- ▶ In order for student-led conferences to be effective, each participant (student, teacher and parents) must understand their roles.
- ▶ If parents *can't* attend their student-led conference, students might be disappointed.
 - Communicate repeatedly, with reminders, that the conferences will be led by the students so parents know what to expect.
 - Use parent back-to-school events, newsletters, social media and personal invitations to explain what a student-led conference is, the role of parents, and when the conferences are taking place.

- Consider scheduling multiple time slots to accommodate different work schedules.

▶ If parents still want to meet with the teacher one-on-one, accommodate these requests in addition to student-led conferences. Some schools start the scheduled meetings with a student led conference, and then leave a short time at the end for the parent to speak to the teacher alone, if necessary, while students are invited to play in the gym or get a snack in the cafeteria. Some schools encourage parents to speak to the teacher another time. Any approach can be successful. What is most important is expanding opportunities for parents to engage with teachers.

▶ Adjusting to a new conference style can take time. The first year can be difficult, as everyone adapts to students themselves sharing and celebrating evidence of their growth. It is important to listen to feedback about how things are going and make improvements as needed, and allow enough time and experience to see whether this practice can work for the school and families.

The following is a sample checklist for students to use when they are leading a conference.

- Arrive on time for your conference
- Wait with your family outside the classroom until it is your turn, then come inside the room

During the first five minutes ...

- Invite your family to sit down and thank them for coming
- Introduce everyone
- Briefly explain what will happen during the conference

During the second five minutes ...

- Show your family your progress report
- Tell which subjects are your favourites, which subjects are your strongest, and what you find most challenging

During the next ten minutes ...

- Present your portfolio of work, show the samples you chose, what you learned when you did the work, and why you are proud of it
- Share with your family your learning goals and action plan for improvement

During the next five minutes ...

- Talk with everyone about what helps you the most at home and at school

During the final five minutes ...

- Ask your parents if they have any questions
- Thank everyone again for coming

Now relax and enjoy ...

- Take your family to get refreshments
- Make sure your family fills out the conference survey
- Invite your family to write comments / share their ideas on your learning goals and action plan
- Put the survey and action plan in the return box
- Congratulate yourself for a job well done!

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FACT SHEET 9.4

BELIEVE IN COLLECTIVE EFFICACY: Share the Message That You Can Achieve Success As a Team

“When teams of educators believe they have the ability to make a difference, exciting things can happen in a school.”

Donohoo, Hattie and Eells, 2018

Addressing attendance is a complicated and challenging goal. But students can be encouraged to attend school regularly and on time – through sustained commitment and the combined efforts of school staff, families, and the community.

The power of collaborative action is well recognized. For example, the concept of “collective efficacy” is applied to the fields of health, business, community improvement, and education.

Collective efficacy refers to a group of people sharing the belief that by working together they can overcome challenges and achieve their desired results. The concept can be applied to a team, an organization, or a community believing that by working together they will be more effective, and they can implement actions that will achieve their goals.

In the field of education, evidence shows that when educators genuinely believe in their combined ability to influence student outcomes, there are significantly higher levels of academic achievement. Models for collective efficacy in schools have been tested, and researchers have found that promoting a belief in collective efficacy strengthens teachers’ confidence, resulting in greater student success.

- ▶ The beliefs teams hold about their ability to make positive change can influence outcomes – and can be especially valuable in overcoming difficulties.
- ▶ Conversely, when a feeling of collective efficacy is lacking and people do not believe they can change outcomes, people generally make less effort, feel more stress, and are more likely to blame external factors for problems.

Collective efficacy occurs when teachers in a school believe that, as a team, they have the power to help their students learn more effectively—and this belief is based on their own shared experiences of success. A culture of collective efficacy does not simply happen; it is built intentionally.

(Sugarman, 2021)

What Can Help Build a Sense of Collective Efficacy For Tackling Attendance?

- ▶ Promote the narrative that high expectations for student attendance can be met through deliberate and collaborative efforts.
- ▶ Continually share the message that student attendance will be more positively impacted when school staff, families, and communities combine their efforts and build on their various strengths and understandings to help students get to school.
- ▶ Highlight the links between the team actions and positive results. Showcase examples of collective actions making a difference in student outcomes.
- ▶ Talk about the strengths that everyone brings to attendance efforts. The confidence team members have in the ability of others and their belief in the impact of the team's work are key elements that set successful teams apart.
- ▶ Build trust and confidence by modelling the attitude that not every approach will work as expected. When things don't turn out as you hope, you can make adjustments, try new approaches, and keep working to find solutions that make a difference.
- ▶ Set goals together as a team, and periodically take time to reflect on your collective progress. When successes are achieved – no matter how large or small – take time to celebrate together.
- ▶ Helping all students attend school regularly and on-time takes sustained time and effort. Teams can encourage each other to persist in their efforts, take risks together, and keep trying.

Collective efficacy is achieved when people are encouraged to believe that they can work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish on their own.

Adapted from:

Jenni Donohoo, John Hattie and Rachel Eells, March 1, 2018. The Power of Collective Efficacy. ASCD. Vol. 75. No. 6. www.ascd.org

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APPENDIX 10

SAMPLE NEWSLETTER ARTICLES, SHORT MESSAGES, AND SLOGANS

Message, message, message ...

Research suggests the value of communicating persistently – continually reminding people about the importance of attendance

What can be done?

- ▶ Sample newsletter articles related to attendance are attached.
- ▶ The intention of these samples is to share information sheets that can be adapted as necessary to match the relevant audience and specific circumstances.

How can newsletter articles about attendance be shared?

- ▶ School newsletters to families
- ▶ Community newsletters
- ▶ Newsletters sent by parents clubs to other parents and caregivers
- ▶ Posted to a Facebook page or sharing excerpts through other social media mechanisms
- ▶ Other?

How else can the information be used / how might it be adapted?

- ▶ Would it be useful to host coffees / lunches with families to review the information together?
- ▶ Could the information be shared as “fact sheets,” possibly handed out at school or community events?
- ▶ Other ideas?

What can help make newsletter articles more positive and engaging?

Photos of students doing exciting learning activities can help. Adding photos of students having fun can emphasize the benefits of students attending school.

APPENDIX 10.1

Newsletter Article Template 1

Please Know: We Care About Our Students' Health and Well-Being

We know that the COVID pandemic left some people feeling uneasy about sending students to school.

It is not easy for any of us to forget the days of social distancing and wearing masks all day long. But please know ... we are doing everything possible to make our building a safe and healthy place.

- ▶ We encourage everyone to wash their hands often and thoroughly.
- ▶ Hand sanitizer is available throughout the school and in our classrooms to help.
- ▶ We are more careful than ever to clean things really well. We have great staff who work hard every day to wipe surfaces, disinfect, and make sure our school is spic and span – and healthy!
- ▶ We ask people to stay home when they are sick. If someone comes to school with mild symptoms (like a runny nose or signs of an allergy) ... we have masks available for them to wear, just to be extra cautious.

If you are not sure “how sick is too sick” to keep your children home, please ask. *It is critical that your children and teens come to school regularly.*

- ▶ Research shows that good attendance is one of the most important factors in student success.
- ▶ Did you know that missing school only 1 or 2 days every few weeks can impact student achievement?
- ▶ Students who attend school regularly have more opportunities to make friends and build very important relationships with our staff and students.

We are happy to be together each day. We look forward to your children and teens being here with us, learning, laughing, and helping each other grow.

We appreciate you sharing your children and teens with us. They help make this school a special place.

APPENDIX 10.2

Newsletter Article Template 2

Calling All Parents: We Need You, and You Are Welcome Here

The COVID pandemic was a challenging time for us all. Unfortunately, the pandemic also made some parents and caregivers feel less comfortable coming to the school.

During and right after the pandemic, our school – like schools everywhere – had to make difficult decisions about who could come in and out of the school. That may have made some parents feel less welcome. We are sorry that happened.

We value families and want them to be with us as much as possible.

- ▶ Having families in the school helps students feel a stronger sense of belonging.
- ▶ When you are here with us, it shows your children and teens that you value education and want them to do well in school.
- ▶ Your involvement helps make sure we are doing what families want for their children and teens. You know your children best. You can help us know what is right for them.

Did you know that seeing their family members in the school also helps students want to attend school each day? And attendance is vital if our students are going to succeed.

Children have to be in school in order to learn. Even missing a few days of school each month can impact on their achievement and their well-being.

Please feel confident that our school is open to you, and we have done everything we can to create a safe place.

- ▶ We encourage everyone in our building to wash their hands often and thoroughly.
- ▶ We have installed hand sanitizer dispensers throughout the school.
- ▶ We have great staff who work hard every day to keep things clean and safe.
- ▶ If someone comes to school with mild symptoms (like a runny nose or signs of an allergy) ... we have masks available so they can safely be here with us.

Please let us know if we can do anything else to make our school a comfortable place for everyone. You are welcome here..

APPENDIX 10.3

Newsletter Article Template 3

Why Encourage Your Children and Teens to Attend School Each Day?

It is More Important Than Many People Think

We all know that attending school is critical to students' success in their classes.

But did you know that helping your children and teens attend school does much, much more?

- ▶ By attending school regularly, your children are learning to plan and follow routines, which can help students feel more secure, confident, and competent.
- ▶ Getting into the practice of arriving at school on-time is building lifelong skills. It helps develop good habits that children and teens can use throughout their education, into their careers, and throughout their lives.
- ▶ Making an effort to arrive at school on-time each day improves students' organizational skills. It helps students think about ...
 - how they can prepare ahead (such as getting organized the night before).
 - how important it is to go to bed on time, so they can get up in the morning feeling ready for the day.
 - time management -- paying attention to the clock and planning how long it will take to complete their morning routine.

What can you do?

- ▶ Talk to your children and teens about the importance of regular attendance and arriving on time
- ▶ Set a reasonable bed time and check to make sure everyone is getting up in time each morning
- ▶ Help your children plan to have things ready ahead (such as organizing back packs and lunches the night before)

Our lives get busy and it is sometimes hard to stay on top of everything we have to do.

But helping your children and teens learn how to attend school regularly and on time will have positive and lasting benefits.

And it might make mornings a little less stressful for you, as well.

APPENDIX 10.4

Newsletter Article Template 4

Should We Worry About Our Kids Missing a Few Days of School Once in A While?

Well ... yes and no.

We all want the best for our children and teens. We want them to do well in school and graduate with every opportunity for success. To do that, students have to be in school to learn.

People who study the effects of missing school often use the term “chronic absenteeism.” That means missing about 10% of school days in a year – which is about 2 days each month.

Students who are not chronically absent are less likely to fall behind in their school work, and they often find it easier to maintain friendships.

Two days per month does not sound like much, but it is almost a month of learning time.

So should we worry about our kids missing a few days of school once in a while?

Maybe not ... if the absences don't happen often.

- ▶ We all get sick every so often ... and students attending school when they are not feeling well is not good for them or for other people.
- ▶ Sometimes it might be impossible to avoid scheduling an appointment on a school day.
- ▶ *Perfect* attendance is not necessary for students to be successful.

But if absences are regular and frequent, we should all be paying attention, because it can impact learning.

The good news is that we can work together to help our students get to school regularly.

- ▶ We can talk about the value of education and the importance of attendance, so all students know we expect them to be in school.
- ▶ We can remind each other to track how many days our children and teens are missing.
- ▶ We can help each other get our children to school if something unexpected comes up.
- ▶ We can help celebrate students who are trying hard to make it to school and who are improving their attendance.

Families, community members, and schools can make a difference together. We all have a role to play.

APPENDIX 10.5

Newsletter Article Template 5

When the Weather Outside is Frightful ... Students Still Need To Be In School

Snow. Slush. Freezing temperatures. High winds and heavy rains. BC winters have it all – in addition to fewer hours of daylight. It is also the time of year when colds and other winter time illnesses can strike. All of which can sometimes make getting to school more challenging.

What can families do to prepare?

- ▶ Develop back up plans for getting your children to school in bad weather.
- ▶ Can our families form a “walking school bus” to make sure students get to school safely and on time?
- ▶ Contact the school if you are having transportation challenges. Don't hesitate to ask for help.

And here are a few ideas that might help keep students healthy this time of the year.

- ▶ Maintain a regular bedtime and wake up time.
- ▶ Children need a good breakfast every morning – either at home, or with the school's breakfast program.
- ▶ Remind your children about the importance of hand washing and coughing/sneezing into their sleeve to help them (and others) stay healthy.
- ▶ Help your children understand that they should try not to share cups or utensils with others. It's important to avoid sharing germs.
- ▶ Bundle up your children to keep them warm when it is cold outside. If you need any assistance to make that happen, please let us know. We're here to help.

- ▶ If your children seem anxious about going to school, ask their teacher, the school counsellor, or your doctor for advice about how you can help your children feel comfortable and excited about attending school.

What can you do if your child or teen does have to miss a day or two because they get sick?

- ▶ Ask the teacher for resources that you can use at home to keep your children learning.
- ▶ If they are well enough, kids can read books, play board games, do puzzles ... there are lots of fun things they can do at home that are better for their brains than television and computer games.
- ▶ Encourage your child to call classmates or email the teacher to find out what they missed.

Let's not let the winter weather limit our students' success in school.

APPENDIX 10.6

The Value of "Nudges"

Research suggests that nudges make a real difference to attendance.
Nudges are gentle, non-judgmental reminders about the importance of attendance.

The following sample short messages and attendance slogans might be shared using social media, in short memos home, or adapted into letters or postcards to parents.

There may be a range of other ways these messages might be used, adapted, and shared as appropriate to your circumstances.

Attendance Counts – Right From the Start

- ▶ Does regular attendance matter when children are young?
- ▶ Starting in preschool and kindergarten, too many absences can cause children to fall behind in school.
- ▶ Missing just one or two days every few weeks can impact their learning.
- ▶ It's never too young to begin developing good habits that will last a lifetime.

Every Day In School Is Important

- ▶ Attending school regularly helps children feel better about school—and themselves.
- ▶ Starting in preschool, students can learn that going to school on time, every day is important.
- ▶ Eventually good attendance will help them succeed in high school and post-secondary.

Practice Good Attendance –

Early in the Year, and Early in School

- ▶ Learning builds over time and from grade to grade.
- ▶ For example ...
 - What students learn in November is built on what students learned in September and October.
 - What students learn in grade 4 is built on what students learned in grades 1, 2 and 3.
- ▶ Focus on good attendance – right from the start.

Early to Bed, Early to Rise –

Which Means Getting to School On-Time

- ▶ Set a regular bed time so your children are able to wake up ready for school each day.
- ▶ School works the brain; kids need plenty of rest so they feel fresh and alert all day long.

Healthy Mind AND Healthy Body = School Success

Let's all remind our kids what will help them succeed in school.

- ▶ Nutritious foods and enough sleep
- ▶ Movement and physical activity, such as walking, running, playing sports, dancing ...
- ▶ Time outside ... away from technology and screens

What You Do Really Matters

- ▶ Parents are their children's first and most important advocate.
- ▶ You can make a positive difference to their educational success just by letting them know you value education!
- ▶ You can also keep them learning every day by encouraging them to be in school, so they are prepared and empowered for the future.

Keep Your Teen On Track for Graduation

- ▶ Did you know that students who attend school regularly have a better chance of graduating from high school?
- ▶ Going to school regularly and on-time also builds strong habits that will help your teen succeed in post-secondary and their careers.
- ▶ If a teen is not attending regularly, it could be a sign that they are losing interest in school, struggling with school work, or possibly feeling unsafe or unwelcome at school.
- ▶ If you know a teen who is missing too much school ...
 - talk to them about the value of attending regularly.
 - ask the school and other family members how they might be able to help.
- ▶ Attendance is important and complicated.
- ▶ A team approach is often the best way to get all of our kids to school.

Every Absence Counts – So Count Every Absence

- ▶ Research says that missing just 10% of school days (only about 2 days each month) can seriously affect a student's success in school.
- ▶ Do you know how many times your child or teen has been absent this year?
- ▶ Check on their attendance – and ask for help if you have any concerns.

Missed Days of School = Missed Learning Time

- ▶ Make school attendance a priority.
- ▶ Talk about the importance of being in school.
- ▶ Let your child or teen know you expect them to attend.

Attendance Counts –

We Want Our Students In School All Day, Every Day

- ▶ Encouraging our students to attend helps them do well in school.
- ▶ It also sends a message that we think education is important for their future.

Even Though They Are Growing Up ...

Remember That Our Teens Still Need Us

- ▶ Even as teens become more independent, families can play a key role in making sure they get to school safely every day.
- ▶ If your teen is missing too much school, find out why.
- ▶ Let them know that you can find solutions – together.

We Need Your Help

- ▶ Our goal is to help all of our students attend school regularly and on-time.
- ▶ Attendance matters – every day.

We Need Your Help

- ▶ Our goal is to help all of our students attend school regularly and on-time.
- ▶ Attendance matters – every day.

Tell your children and teens – you care if they are in school.

- ▶ Attending school regularly helps children feel better about school – and themselves.

Take the Attendance Pledge

- ▶ You can make a difference by making a commitment to help your children and teens get to school on time each day.

**Are You Tracking Your Child’s Absences?
You can make a difference in your child’s educational success!**

	<p>On track for 18 or more absences this year (about 2 days each month)</p>	<p>Take action. This many absences can limit students’ success in school.</p>
	<p>On track for 10 to 17 absences this year</p>	<p>Be careful. The absences are adding up, which can negatively impact learning.</p>
	<p>On track for 9 or fewer absences this year</p>	<p>Congratulations for making attendance a priority. Keep up the good work.</p>

Every School Day Matters

Regular attendance = more learning

Being at school = opportunities to learn and succeed.

Attendance matters

Attendance Matters. Be Smart. Be There.

Attend School. Every day.

All day. All the way.

Attend today. Achieve tomorrow.

Good school attendance matters.

Bright futures begin with good school attendance.

It’s cool to be in school

Be an Attendance “HERO”

– Here, Everyday, Ready, On-Time

On Time: On Target for Success

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