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## COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

### BACKGROUND

Policies and procedures of the District related to school attendance are developed in accordance with the Education Act and its attendance regulations.

Regular and punctual school attendance is a significant contributing factor to student learning, success and maximization of the benefits of effective educational opportunities and resources available in schools. Promoting regular attendance is crucial to developing healthy habits leading to school success.

### PURPOSE

- 1.1 This administrative procedure has been developed to provide direction to school teams related to compulsory school attendance as well as early identification and intervention for attendance concerns. Early identification of school attendance issues is critical to a child's progress. The probability of successful intervention is higher if a plan is created before the student's absence becomes chronic or habitual.
- 1.2 School teams are responsible for creating a student attendance plan to identify and implement strategies at an early stage.
- 1.3 Schools must use the District's Pupil Attendance Toolkit to track, record, and retain specific documentation to support student attendance.
- 1.4 Detailed instructions on recording pupil attendance in the student information system (SIS) are available as separate documents found in Aspen Resources.
- 1.5 The [Enrolment Register Instructions for Elementary and Secondary Schools](#) are available on the Ministry of Education website. These Instructions are updated annually and provide guidance for boards and schools around enrolment, admissions, and attendance.

## 2) GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 Attendance issues are often a first sign that a student is experiencing life challenges and there are a multitude of possible contributing factors, including academic, social, economic, and mental-health related. The greatest gains for students are when systems are in place to respond to individual needs before concerning attendance patterns can become entrenched. In alignment with this approach, the District has identified some guiding principles that will increase the conditions for success.
  - 2.1.1 Presence and engagement begins with relationships. Reciprocal and respectful relationships with students, families, parent/guardian(s), communities, organizations, and the school must be established and nurtured as they are the foundation of success.
  - 2.1.2 Safe, caring, and inclusive learning environments are foundational to student presence and engagement.
  - 2.1.3 Collaborating with students and families in a supportive manner focused on skill development, rather than enforcing punitive measures will increase the likelihood of success.
  - 2.1.4 Welcoming students into the school and classroom at all times irrespective of attendance patterns will ensure that they understand that we are holding space for them and they are valued members of our classroom and school communities.

**3) DEFINITIONS**

- 3.1 **Compulsory attendance:** Subsection 21(1) of the Education Act states that children aged 6 -17 must attend school unless excused. Pupils must continue to attend school until they reach the age of 18 or until they graduate. Once registered, the Ministry expects students in kindergarten to attend school five days per week, with 300 minutes of instruction per day.
- 3.2 **Compulsory school age:** Compulsory school age charts for a specific school year are updated annually in the Enrolment Register Instructions for Elementary and Secondary Schools:

<b>If the pupil's 18th birthday occurs between:</b>	<b>The last compulsory school day is:</b>
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January 1 and June 30	The day before the pupil's birthday
July 1 and August 31	June 30 of the previous school year
September 1 and December 31	June 30 of the previous school year

- 3.3 **Habitual absence:** A significant absence of a pupil of 10 cumulative days per term or 20 cumulative days within a school year (not necessarily consecutive school days).
- 3.4 **Modified Day Plan:** A Modified Day Plan is a temporary plan outlining intentional and specific strategies and goals to gradually increase capacity for a student accessing a special education program, supports, or services to successfully manage the full length of an instructional day and/or week. See AP 333 Modified Day.
- 3.5 **Prolonged absence:** Prolonged absence is defined as the absence of a pupil for 15 consecutive school days without appropriate supporting documentation. It is an unexcused absence. A "G" day, an "N" day, or a "PA" (Professional Activity) day occurring within an otherwise unbroken series of 15 school days of absence does not break or add to the series.

For a pupil who has been absent for 15 consecutive school days without appropriate documentation to support a certified medical absence or an approved temporary excusal, enter "A" for each day of absence. See the definitions below. The prolonged absence procedure, outlined below, is divided into 15-day subsequent periods of consecutive absence (1 - 15, 16 - 30, 31 - 45, and 46 - 60. (This process can continue beyond 60 days up to the end of the school year for students aged six to 13.) A prolonged absence cannot span two school years. A prolonged absence streak can carry over into a new semester if the absences have been full-day absences but not over two school years.

- 3.6 **Pupil Attendance Toolkit:** A binder held in each school office (one for each panel) that holds a school team plan along with processes and forms for tracking, recording and retaining District-specific attendance documentation.
- 3.7 **School day:** For the purposes of determining prolonged absences, a "school day" is defined as follows:
- Elementary schools: the entire instructional program of five (5) hours, excluding recesses, nutrition breaks and any other scheduled intervals between classes.
  - Secondary schools: all scheduled classes in all courses in which a pupil is enrolled.

- 3.8 **School:** For the purposes of this procedure, specific to two-way communication the term “school(s)” implies the involvement of the Principal, or one of the following as designated by the Principal:
- the Vice-Principal
  - School Attendance Counsellor
- 3.9 **School Attendance Counsellor:** School Attendance Counsellors consult with school personnel and parent/guardian(s), to promote regular attendance and examine patterns of irregularity. School Attendance Counsellors then partner with the student and parent/guardian(s) to develop an intervention plan with strategies to support the student’s continued education in an educational program.
- 3.10 **Temporary Attendance Excusal:** The temporary excusal of a pupil (by the Principal) from attendance at school, upon the written request of a parent/guardian or the pupil themselves where they are an adult.

#### **4) ABSENCE OF 1 – 15 CONSECUTIVE SCHOOL DAYS WITHOUT SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

- 4.1 Determining whether the pupil should be shown as a retirement on the enrolment register (e.g., retired) depends on the age of the pupil (non-compulsory or compulsory age). If the pupil is not of compulsory school age, retire the pupil from the register on the day immediately after the last day in attendance.
- 4.2 The school shall initiate a [School Attendance Support Plan](#) in consultation with the student and parent(s)/guardian(s) to support improved attendance. Between the 11th and 16th day of consecutive absence the Principal must refer the case to the School Attendance Counsellor using an [Attendance Referral and Tracking \(ART\)](#) form. This documentation and the development of a plan supports improved attendance and allows the pupil to remain on the register for the first 15 day period of absence. The School Attendance Support Plan is to be filed in the student’s Ontario Student Record (OSR) and the [ART](#) form is to be retained in the school’s Pupil Attendance Toolkit. The range of days in which the ART form can be made is meant to provide some flexibility to Principals as a pupil approaches a prolonged absence in excess of 15 days.
- 4.3 School two-way contact before a 15 day prolonged absence does not allow a student to be retained on the register. To remain on the register for 15 consecutive days, the prolonged absence procedures must be followed.

Proceed as follows:

- a) Indicate the days of absence with an “A” on the pupil’s Daily Attendance Record; and
- b) Refer the student to the School Attendance Counsellor by initiating an [Attendance Referral and Tracking \(ART\)](#) form between the 11th and 16th day of consecutive absence and develop a [School Attendance Support Plan](#) to support improved attendance. Place a “C” in the pupil’s Daily Attendance Record on the day the referral was made.
- c) If the pupil returns on the 16th day, after 15 consecutive absences, the pupil shall remain on the register. New ART forms are required for any subsequent periods of prolonged absence.

## **5) ABSENCE OF 16 – 30 CONSECUTIVE SCHOOL DAYS WITHOUT SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

- 5.1 Determining whether this pupil remains on the register between the 16th and 30th day of consecutive absences depends on the following conditions:
  - 5.1.1 The School Attendance Counsellor must agree to take on the pupil’s file by indicating their agreement on the [ART](#) form, which is stored in the Pupil Attendance Toolkit.
  - 5.1.2 There must be successful two-way contact/communication between the school and the parent(s)/guardian(s) or the pupil (if they are 16 or 17 years old and have withdrawn from parental control). Enter “C” in the pupil’s Daily Attendance Record on the actual day two-way communication is made.
  - 5.1.3 Record successful two-way communication on the ART form to indicate to the Principal that the file is still active.
  - 5.1.4 The school shall revise the [School Attendance Support Plan](#) in consultation with the student and the parent(s)/guardian(s). The School Attendance Support Plan is to be filed in the student’s OSR and the ART form is to be retained in the school’s Pupil Attendance Toolkit.
- 5.2 If all of these conditions are not met the pupil must be retired from the register on the 16th day of absence. Should a student return to school after they have been removed from the register, they can be re-registered and re-enrolled in classes at that time.

## **6) ABSENCE OF 31 - 45 AND 46 – 60 CONSECUTIVE DAYS WITHOUT SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

6.1 Determining whether this pupil remains on the register between the 31st and 45th day of consecutive absence and the 46th and 60th day of consecutive absences depends on the following three conditions:

6.1.1 There must be successful two-way contact/communication in each 15 day period between the school and the parent(s)/guardian(s) or the pupil (if they are 16 or 17 years old and have withdrawn from parental control). Enter “C” in the pupil’s Daily Attendance Record on the actual day of two-way communication.

6.1.2 Record successful two-way communication on the ART form to indicate to the Principal that the file is still active.

6.1.3 The school shall revise the School Attendance Support Plan in consultation with the student and the parent(s)/guardian(s). The [School Attendance Support Plan](#) is to be filed in the student’s OSR and the [ART](#) form is to be retained in the school’s Pupil Attendance Toolkit.

6.2 If all of these conditions are not met, the pupil must be retired from the register on the day following the last 15 day period of non-attendance (the 31st day, the 46th day, or the 61st day). Should a student return to school after they have been removed from the register, they can be re-registered and re-enrolled in classes at that time.

6.3 Where, for any reason, the School Attendance Counsellor confirms that the pupil’s file has become inactive during a subsequent 15-day period (from day 16-30; from day 31-45; day 46-60, and so on, if applicable), the pupil must be retired from the enrolment register on the day following the date of previous successful contact prior to the file being deemed inactive.

## **7) HABITUAL ABSENCES**

7.1 A pupil is habitually absent from school when they are absent 10 cumulative days per term or 20 cumulative days within a school year (not necessarily consecutive school days). When the School Attendance Counsellor and/or Principal become aware that a pupil is developing a pattern of unexplained absences, it is important to proactively collaborate with the student and parent(s)/guardian(s) to develop a [School Attendance Support Plan](#) to improve attendance.

## **8) LENGTH OF TIME AN ABSENT PUPIL WITH AN ACTIVE FILE MAY REMAIN ON THE REGISTER**

8.1 A pupil with an active file may remain on the register:

8.1.1 Indefinitely, up to the end of the school year, if the pupil is 6 -13 years of age, provided that the procedures required for prolonged absence are followed.

8.1.2 For a maximum of 60 consecutive school days if the pupil is 14 -17 years of age, provided that the procedures required for prolonged absence are followed. Remove the pupil's name from the register on the 61st day of absence.

8.1.3 If a student turns 14 during the prolonged absence, the District will have 60 more days to continue the prolonged absence procedures beginning on the student's 14th birthday, regardless of whether they are in the elementary or secondary panel.

8.2 For charts of the procedures described above, refer to the [Prolonged Absences Flowchart](#).

## **9) EXPECTATIONS FOR TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION**

9.1 Two-way communication is a give-and-take of information between the school and the parent(s)/guardian(s) or pupil (if they are 16 or 17 years old and have withdrawn from parental control). It can be a telephone conversation or a response to a text/email sent by the school. It is not a letter sent by the school either by post or by text/email without a response. Nor is it a telephone message left by the school.

## **10) ABSENCE FROM A COURSE FOR 15 CONSECUTIVE SCHEDULED DAYS**

10.1 In accordance with the definition of a "school day" above, if a secondary pupil has been absent from a course (or period if the course is scheduled for more than one period) for 15 consecutive scheduled classes/periods without supporting medical documentation, but has been attending their other classes/periods the pupil will be deemed, for funding purposes, to have withdrawn from the course/period on the day immediately after the last day in attendance. If the pupil no longer qualifies to be a Full-Time pupil as a result of this withdrawal, the pupil's enrolment status must be changed to Part-Time. The pupil's change in status must be recorded on the register as an "internal transfer," as outlined under "Transfer and Retirement."

- 10.2 The pupil is not to be rescheduled in the course, or any additional course, until they physically attend class(es). This is to ensure that the prolonged absence/class absence procedure can be followed for the remaining classes.

## **11) BOARD AND PRINCIPAL RESPONSIBILITIES AFTER A PUPIL'S NAME IS REMOVED FROM THE REGISTER**

- 11.1 The removal of a pupil's name from the register for absenteeism does not mean that the pupil need not attend school. Attendance for pupils of compulsory school age is required under the Education Act, and the Principal must ensure that the name is added to the list of non-attending pupils in the Pupil Attendance Toolkit. The toolkit may be reviewed by the superintendent of schools as part of the monitoring of supporting students who have been removed from the register.
- 11.2 When a student has been removed from the register (either as a result of a lack of successful two-way communication or more than 60 days of consecutive absences), the Principal will send a registered [Removal From Register: Prolonged Absence Letter](#) to the parent/guardian(s) to inform them of the student's removal from the register. A copy of the letter is to be filed in the Pupil Attendance Toolkit attached to the completed [ART](#) form.
- 11.3 Even after removing pupils of compulsory age from the register, districts and/or schools must continue to attempt to re-engage these pupils.
- 11.3.1 If the pupil is 6 - 13 years of age, the school or district must continue to make successful two-way contact with the pupil or the pupil's parent or guardian every 15 school days.
- 11.3.2 If the pupil is 14 - 17 years of age, the school or district is expected to contact these youth, at a minimum, before the start of every semester to encourage them to return to school.

## **12) SUMMARY OF REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION OF UNEXCUSED ABSENCES FOR AUDIT PURPOSES**

- 12.1 Each school is required to retain the following for audit purposes:
- 12.1.1. the Principal's documentation of the written referral to the School Attendance Counsellor recorded on the [Attendance Referral and Tracking \(ART\)](#) form;
- 12.1.2 The School Attendance Counsellor's written acceptance/refusal of the Principal's or Vice-Principal's referral recorded on the ART form;



12.1.3 documentation of successful two-way contact between the school and the pupil or pupil's parent or guardian recorded on the ART form;

12.1.4 a list of non-attending pupils, including the dates the school makes two-way contact, who are 6 - 13 years old and who have been removed from the register;

12.1.5 a list of non-attending pupils, including the dates the school makes two-way contact, who are 14 - 17 years old and who have been removed from the register.

### **13) EXCEPTIONS TO COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE**

13.1 Information regarding how these excusals are recorded can be found in the *Enrolment Register Instructions for Elementary and Secondary Schools*.

13.2 A student may be legally excused from school for a number of reasons, including when:

13.2.1 The child is receiving satisfactory instruction at home or elsewhere. Refer to [AP 231 - Home Schooling](#).

13.2.2 The child is unable to attend school by reason of sickness or other unavoidable cause, including mental health absences. For a child's name to remain on the enrolment registers beyond 15 consecutive days, supporting medical documentation is required which must have a period of time specified. If a child is unable to attend school due to a mental health concern, their absence must be excused under s. 21(2)(b) with supporting medical documentation ("by reason of sickness or other unavoidable cause") of the Education Act. Medical documentation for a mental health related absence may be from a medical professional but also may be from a registered social worker in good standing with the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers. Home Instruction may be approved in such circumstances in accordance with [AP-230 Home Instruction](#). The Principal should consult with the School Support Counsellor and Mental Health Lead to ensure the student is offered appropriate information and support, as needed, to address mental health concerns.

13.2.3 The child is not provided with transportation and there is no school that the child has a right to attend within the walking zone as outlined in the transportation consortium policy.

13.2.3 The child has obtained a secondary school graduation diploma or has completed a course that gives equivalent standing.

13.2.4 The child is absent from school for the purpose of receiving instruction in music and the period of absence does not exceed one half day in any week.

13.2.5 The child is suspended, expelled or excluded from attendance under any Act or under the regulations.

13.2.6 The child is absent on a day regarded as a holy day or cultural day.

13.2.7 The child is absent or excused as authorized under the *Education Act* and the regulations.

#### **14) OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES FOR EXCUSAL**

14.1 A student may be excused by the Principal from attendance at school in the following circumstances:

14.1.1 Request for Temporary Excusal: Requests for temporary excusal from school must be made in writing to the school using the [Request for Temporary Excusal of Attendance Form](#). This request must be submitted to and approved by the Principal prior to the dates of the excusal with the program of study certified on the form by the Principal. The form is to be retained in the Pupil Attendance Toolkit.

14.1.2 Supervised Alternative Learning (SAL): Provision for part-time attendance or excusal for students who are not benefiting from the existing school programs may be made in accordance with the Education Act, Ontario Regulation 374/10. Refer to [Administrative Procedure 306 - Supervised Alternative Learning](#).

14.1.3 Compassionate Grounds: A Principal may authorize under Regulation 374/10, s. 26, a student is at least 16 years old to be excused from attendance at school on a full-time basis (become a part-time student) if all of the following circumstances exist:

- i) The Principal believes that there are compassionate grounds that justify the excusal. The Principal requires the student to attend school on a part-time basis, in which the student will be recorded on a part-time register.
- ii) The purpose of the excusal is not to enable the student to be employed during school hours.
- iii) The student is not excused under this section for more than one school year.

14.2 If granting part-time attendance for a student 16 years or older, Principals must document their decision and the compassionate reason using [Form 306-11 Approval for Part-Time Attendance – Letter to Parent](#) in the student's

OSR. A copy of the documentation must also be filed and retained for audit purposes in the Pupil Attendance Toolkit.

## 15) DUTY TO REPORT

- 15.1 When chronic and habitual absences persist despite support plans, the School Attendance Counsellor or administrator will report to local child welfare services if they have reasonable grounds to suspect that the student absences are related to potential child abuse or neglect. If the absences are negatively impacting the cognitive development of the child or staff suspect abuse they should reference AP 341 for further details.
- 15.2 If the Principal is unsuccessful in establishing two-way communication, it is the obligation of the District to contact Family and Children Services and/or the Ontario Provincial Police to establish if there is any knowledge of the pupil's whereabouts or to confirm a change of address for the pupil if the pupil is of compulsory school age.

### District References

- [Attendance Referral and Tracking Form \(ART\)](#)
- [Prolonged Absences Flowchart](#)
- [Removal From Register: Prolonged Absence Letter Form](#)
- AP 231 - Home Schooling
- AP-230 Home Instruction
- [Request for Temporary Excusal of Attendance Form](#)
- Administrative Procedure 306 - Supervised Alternative Learning
- Administrative Procedure 341- Child in Need of Protection
- [Aspen Scheduling and Achievement Processes](#)
- AP 333 Modified Day

### Legal References

- Education Act and Regulations, Part II – School Attendance
- Education Act, Regulation 298
- Education Act, Regulation 308
- Bill 52 Chapter 28 Statutes of Ontario, 2006
- Regulation 374/10
- Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) 169: Student Mental Health

### Appendices

- [School Attendance Support Plan Form](#)
- [Form 306-11 Approval for Part-Time Attendance – Letter to Parent](#)
- [Prolonged Absences Flowchart](#)

**Procedure History**

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