

Student Attendance and Engagement Policy

Frequently Asked Questions for Parents



Why a policy now? What happened?

Teachers want to see their students succeed and we know that student success is linked to regular student attendance. Yet too many students are missing too much school. More than 25 per cent miss more than 16 days each year.

Teachers are telling us that attendance problems are getting worse, with many students skipping school because they don't face any consequences.

We also know employers want students to learn good work habits in school that they will carry with them into the workplace.

How will this policy make a difference?

Regular student attendance is a team effort.

Paying attention to attendance and responding early can help students and families who may face challenges get the support they need.

Older students, who are expected to have a greater responsibility for their attendance, will also receive the supports they need if they miss too much school, but the potential of losing a credit can motivate some to come to school.

For teachers, some of the responsibility will be shifted to students and families. Students and families will take on more responsibility for notifying the school of absences and catching up on missed work.

People working in health, community services and justice will also have a role to play in supporting students (and their families) when students are absent for reasons not related to school.

What are my responsibilities as a parent?

We want students to attend school regularly, but we can't do it without the support of parents.

As a parent, it is your responsibility to ensure your child attends school regularly and on time. This may include making commitments for your children outside regular school hours, when possible.

When your child is absent, we would expect you to notify the school and provide the reason why, and help your child catch up on missed work.

If a teacher or principal identifies your child's absenteeism as a concern that will impact their learning, we would expect you to work with the school and community partners, when needed, to help improve your child's attendance.

What will happen if my child misses a lot of school?

Communication between the family and school is key.

We expect students and their families to explain the reasons for absences so we can provide support as needed. Depending on the amount of time a student misses, the communication and supports with you as a parent may increase.

If you have kept the school well informed about an absence (in the case of an injury or illness, for example), an intervention may not be necessary.

In a situation where absenteeism is a concern for the success of the student, you and/or your child will be supported to improve your child's attendance. Each situation is different and the supports, services and approach will be appropriate to the situation.

In high school, students who miss class 20 per cent or more of the time are at risk of losing a credit.

What about missed work?

Teachers are not required to release materials for students in advance of them being absent. Teachers may provide students with materials distributed in class after the student returns, but are not required to do so unless requested by the principal.

What happens if my child misses more than 20 per cent of time?

A potential loss of credit would only happen in high school if a student misses 20 per cent or more of class time. And even then, it would be based on the individual circumstance of the student and the judgment of the principal and teacher.

Our goal, through the policy, is to make sure that it doesn't get to that point by working with the student and families.

The operational guide includes questions for principals and teachers to consider in making a decision about loss of credit. Principals and teachers must fully understand the reasons for the absence.

No student will lose credit within 3 weeks prior to writing a final exam.

How much time is 20 per cent?

Missing 20 per cent is generally a day a week, or one class in every five.

It is difficult to provide an exact number as 20 per cent varies based on the school, grade level, and length and frequency of the class.

It is important to remember that a loss of credit may only happen at the high school level.

What's different than what is already in place?

This is the province's first provincewide student attendance policy. It will mean a consistent approach to managing student attendance for all students across the province.

This policy:

- sets a clear expectation that students come to school regularly and on time
- describes a mix of supports, incentives and consequences that can improve attendance
- shifts some of the work from teachers, to students, families and community partners to take more responsibility
- respects the professional judgment of teachers and principals, and leaves final decisions around attendance with the school

Are there similar consequences to loss of credit at elementary or junior high?

No. Students are expected to take on more responsibility for their absences as they mature, or as they are developmentally able to do so. That means taking on more responsibility for explaining the reasons for their absence and for catching up on missed work.

All students and families, regardless of grade level, will be supported to help improve their attendance.

[If my child has special needs and/or mental health needs and cannot regularly attend school, how will that be treated?](#)

The goal is to help all students attend school as much as they are able. In instances like this, you would work closely with the school (and community partners, when appropriate) to develop the right support for your child.

[How will absences be recorded?](#)

Recording attendance will be very straight-forward. If the student is not in school or participating in a school activity they will be marked absent.

[I used to be able to call the school, and have my child's absence excused? Why has that changed?](#)

Poor attendance is linked to poorer performance, whatever the reason for the absence. Our goal is to have everyone focusing on improving attendance - and, in turn, student achievement.

[Why do I have to share personal information about the reason for my child's absence?](#)

Parents should only share information they are comfortable sharing, but providing a reason for the absence helps schools understand how to best respond to a child's individual needs if supports are required, or the student is in danger of losing a high school credit.

[What about kids that don't come to class because they don't have supports at home?](#)

Student attendance is a team effort and requires the support of principals, teachers, parents, students and the community.

Increased attention to attendance and better understanding around the reason for an absence will help identify when a student or family needs support. Community partners outside the school are expected to provide those supports when the needs are identified.

Building on what is in place now, we are exploring opportunities to partner with the Departments of Community Services, Health and Wellness, and Justice to develop a pilot aimed at connecting students and families with the additional supports they need to help them improve their attendance. This work is under way.

What will this pilot program look like? I understand there will be attendance support workers. Are these truancy officers?

Attendance support workers will work with families to find out why a student is missing a lot of class time and work with the family and community partners to help improve the student's attendance.

What about illness? Death in the family? Vacations? Extracurricular activities?

Your child will be marked absent in all of those cases, unless the extracurricular activity is part of school activities.

The policy recognizes that students may miss school for a variety of reasons. How the school responds will depend on the reason for the absence, making family and school communications key.

What if my child misses time because of factors beyond our control? (e.g., car accident)

If the reason for an absence is unexpected or beyond anyone's control, the school will work with you and your family to find a way to help the student transition back to class as soon as possible.

What about school trips? School Sports? School Field Trips?

Students participating in school activities like field trips and school sports will not be considered absent. However, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is meeting with the Nova Scotia School Athletics Federation and others so more school activities will be scheduled outside of regular school hours.

I want to take my child on vacation. Does the policy take away by ability to do this?

While parents are encouraged to avoid scheduling commitments during regular school hours, parents continue to have the ability to make decisions about school attendance and family vacations. However, teachers aren't required to provide school work in advance. Students will be expected to catch up on missed work after they return.

What if my child participates in activities, such as the Forum for Young Canadians or Canada Games, where we know they will miss a lot of time?

We know there are students who participate in non-school activities that may cause them to be absent. The decision to miss school for these activities is up to the parents and student. In these situations, families have the option to develop an educational plan and submit it to the principal and teacher for review and approval.

[If my child is in a school that has exam exemptions, how are they affected if absences are not defined as excused or unexcused?](#)

Nothing in this policy prevents any board from permitting exam exemptions. Your school will communicate how the policy may impact the exemption criteria

[The policy has targeted interventions that will be used to address absenteeism. What are they? What if the policy isn't working?](#)

The policy identifies targeted interventions for students who miss a lot of class time. The interventions will vary based on the needs and individual circumstances of students. They could include developing an attendance plan or contract, identifying or connecting the student or family with school, school board or community supports.

The operational plan suggests:

- Intervention 1 – after 5% of missed days/classes a teacher will contact home.
- Intervention 2 – after 10% of missed days/classes the principal or vice-principal will meet with the student and potentially the parent/guardian to discuss the reasons for the absences and any supports that may be needed.
- Intervention 3 – after 15% of missed days/classes the principal will schedule a second meeting with the student and potentially the parent/guardian, to identify any additional supports or interventions that may help address the ongoing attendance issues.
- Loss of Credit – loss of credit may occur at the high school level when a student has missed 20% of class time. The final decision around loss of credit rests with the principal and must be communicated to the student and family.

[What if the policy isn't working?](#)

Government will review the policy and operational guide at the end of the 2017-18 school year, and adjust, based on lessons learned and feedback received. You can provide feedback at any time of the year by emailing attendance@novascotia.ca (link sends e-mail).