



Standard Protocol for Chronic Absenteeism

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Department of Education and Early Childhood Development





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Section One: Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic student absenteeism has increased substantially since the COVID pandemic. This is not a problem just for New Brunswick; most Canadian jurisdictions, as well as those in the United States and Europe, are experiencing the same increase, in some cases seeing chronic absenteeism rates that are double the pre-COVID rates. Chronic absenteeism is defined as occurring when a student misses 10% or more of their school days.

In our province, the chronic absenteeism rate for K-5 students has increased from 15.5% in 2018-2019 to 34.3% in 2023-2024. Therefore, a third of our Kindergarten students are missing 10% or more of their instructional time. If this trend is not reversed, these students will have missed a full year of instruction by the time they reach high school.

At middle school, chronic absenteeism rates rose from 20.9% in 2018-2019 to 42.5% in 2023-2024. At the high school level, the levels rose from 26.8% to 42.7% in the same period. Some high schools are experiencing more than 50% chronic absenteeism.

Chronic absenteeism has an impact on student learning. One district's review of high school attendance and marks data found that a student's average will drop 1.2% for every day missed.

While chronic absenteeism has an impact on student learning, it also puts a strain on classroom teachers who are trying to keep absent students caught up and on ESS teachers and administrators who have increased numbers of students who require attendance supports. Research indicates that chronic absenteeism has an impact on students who are present as well, as their teachers often must redirect instructional time to get other students caught up.¹

Chronic absenteeism can raise non-academic concerns for students as well. A sense of belonging in school and strong school connectedness support good mental health. Poor attendance is also correlated with other problems, such as substance abuse and other risky behaviours, and is typically a precursor to dropping out in high school.

Although there may be many causes for the increase in chronic absenteeism, some of them new since the pandemic, the best practices to reduce absenteeism remain the same. Schools in New Brunswick have seen success in reducing chronic absenteeism through the following approaches:

- communication with parents and guardians;
- tracking absenteeism and reviewing data; and,
- implementing data-driven interventions specific to the needs of the students.

Research as well as the experience of teachers, indicates that approaches that are supportive rather than punitive achieve the best results for increasing attendance.² This protocol aims to consolidate these good practices, as well as evidence-based approaches, into a standard procedure that will support New Brunswick teachers and other education staff in their efforts to keep students in school.

¹ Gottfried, M. A. (2019). Chronic absenteeism in the classroom context: Effects on achievement. *Urban Education*, 54(1), 3-34

² Jordan, P. W. (2023). *Attendance playbook: Smart solutions for reducing student absenteeism post-pandemic*. FutureEd & Attendance Works; Gottfried, M. A., Page, L. C., & Daniels, B. (2023). *Reducing student absenteeism* (Research in Action Series). Annenberg Institute at Brown University



Section Two: General Principles

Addressing chronic absenteeism:

- Requires a multi-tiered approach, including:
 - o **Tier 1:** school-wide proactive and preventative strategies which build positive school climate, strong school connectedness, and strong and trusting interpersonal relationships between students, families, and staff.
 - o **Tier 2:** targeted school-based interventions for students who are beginning to develop attendance problems.
 - o **Tier 3:** more intensive interventions for students who are chronically absent, possibly involving support from ISD partner agencies.
- Will require that attendance is a priority in the school.
- Requires new systems and structures for schools and districts to ensure continuous focus on the problem.
- Will require continuous review of data at the school and district level.
- Will require adopting evidence-based approaches, and in some cases abandoning more familiar but less effective strategies.
- Requires adopting a “progress not perfection” mindset and abandoning any “all or nothing” approaches.
- Requires adopting a “no blame” approach that is welcoming and supportive, and avoiding punitive or threatening strategies.

Research and best practices suggest schools will get the best results with processes informed by these basic principles.³ For further information, please see the “General Principles” section of *Chronic Absenteeism: A Multi-Tiered System of Supports*.

³ Jordan, P. W. (2023). *Attendance playbook: Smart solutions for reducing student absenteeism post-pandemic*. FutureEd & Attendance Works; Kearney, C. A. (2016). *Managing school absenteeism at multiple tiers: An evidence-based and practical guide for professionals*. Oxford University Press.



Section Three: Definitions

Chronic absenteeism occurs when a student misses 10% or more of the instructional time.

PROBLEMATIC AND NON-PROBLEMATIC CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Although all chronic absenteeism may be problematic in its own way, this protocol focuses on those cases of chronic absenteeism which are considered problematic under the following definitions. The purpose of this distinction is to facilitate a decision-point at Step 2 in the Responsive Measures that will help schools focus their efforts and resources to support students whose attendance may be improved.

Non-problematic chronic absenteeism occurs when the student is absent from school more than 10% of the time:

- for reasons that both the parents or guardians and school officials agree required an extended absence or reduced attendance, such as significant medical concerns or personal situations; and,
- the school is able to mitigate the academic concerns with common practices and existing structures, such as through a reduced schedule, tutoring, or other academic supports.

Examples of non-problematic chronic absenteeism include when the absenteeism is the result of a medical condition, personal circumstances, or family circumstances which require the student to be absent from school.

Problematic chronic absenteeism occurs when the student is absent for school more than 10% of the time:

- for reasons
 - o that both the parents or guardians and school officials agree are inappropriate, or
 - o for reasons that the parents or guardians believe are appropriate, but school officials have grounds to believe are not; and,
- the school is not easily able to mitigate the academic concerns arising from the absenteeism.

Examples of problematic chronic absenteeism include when the student is refusing to attend school because of anxiety, is repeatedly kept home to meet another family member's needs, or simply avoids school to engage in other activities.

The principal or vice principal will exercise professional judgement if the student's absences include both problematic and non-problematic absenteeism.

Additional examples of problematic and non-problematic chronic absenteeism are found in the "Problematic vs Non-Problematic Chronic Absenteeism" section of *Chronic Absenteeism: A Multi-Tiered System of Supports*.



Section Four: Necessary Structures

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE SUPPORT TEAM

Every school will require a School Attendance Support Team. This may be the Education Support Services Team (ESST), the Core Leadership Team, or a team formed specifically for the purpose of reducing chronic absenteeism. The team should, at minimum, include an administrator and school counsellor or guidance teacher.

The role of the team is as follows:

- Ensure chronic absenteeism remains a priority in the school, lead the implementation of the Standard Protocol in the school, and guide its sustained application.
- Review monthly data on the school's chronic absenteeism rate.
- Review on a bi-weekly or monthly basis the lists of students who are chronically absent and respond as appropriate.
- Review impact of Tier 1 attendance supports, review progress of students currently receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports, and make changes as appropriate.
- Ensure attendance is recorded accurately and in a timely manner.
- Set targets for a reduction in chronic absenteeism with a plan to achieve those targets. Reducing the chronic absenteeism rate by five percentage points in a year is an achievable goal for a school.

DISTRICT ATTENDANCE SUPPORT TEAM

Each district will require a District Attendance Support Team. This may be the district leadership team, the district ESST, or a team formed specifically for this purpose. The team should, at minimum, include a Director of Schools, Director of ESS, a Coordinator with school counselling responsibilities, and the Data & Accountability Supervisor.

The responsibilities of the team are as follows:

- Ensure chronic absenteeism remains a priority for the district and each school and lead the implementation of the Standard Protocol in the district while monitoring its consistent application.
- Ensure each school receives its monthly chronic absenteeism data and review the chronic absenteeism data for the district and for each school on a monthly basis.
- Follow up with schools that this data indicates may need additional consultation or support in addressing chronic absenteeism and identify trends which call for additional action or student populations that require additional supports.
- Identify barriers occurring at a systems level and respond as appropriate.
- Report monthly to the superintendent on the progress of the district on chronic absenteeism, highlighting schools that are leading and lagging in improvement.



Section Five: Proactive Measures

Proactive communication with students and their parents or guardians prior to chronic absenteeism becoming an issue may prevent the problem from developing. The following are the minimum proactive communication expectations to prevent chronic absenteeism.

PROACTIVE COMMUNICATION TO ALL PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

Communication at the start of the school year about the importance of attendance and the steps in the Standard Protocol.

At the beginning of the school year, parents and guardians should be advised of expectations for attendance, the key points of contact in the Standard Protocol, and any other key attendance messages from the school. This will include the following points:

- Stating that regular attendance is important for every student's academic success as well as for their social and emotional growth, and that the school staff care about their children and their attendance. Even missing two days a month will have an impact on their child.
- Informing the parents and guardians that, because of the importance of good attendance, they should expect a personal communication from the school when their student misses five days for any reason, with a follow-up personal communication if the student misses ten days. The purpose of these contacts is to ensure good communication between home and school, identify any potential academic concerns arising from the absences, and offer to work together on solutions if the student is experiencing difficulties attending school
- Informing parents and guardians that the school values attendance and is committed to working collaboratively with the family if they or their student is experiencing barriers to good attendance.

PROACTIVE COMMUNICATION TO PARENTS AND GUARDIANS OF STUDENTS WHO MAY BE AT RISK OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

The following three situations have been identified through research as indicators that a student may be at risk of chronic absenteeism. Reaching out to the parents or guardians before an attendance problem develops is always preferable to trying to correct a problem after it arises.



Personal calls should be made by someone connected to the student (e.g., homeroom teacher) and should be positive and supportive in nature.

Because of the importance of the interpersonal relationship between the teacher and parent of guardian for sharing information, identifying concerns, and collaborating on solutions, personal calls are more effective than electronic or automated messages.

The student was chronically absent the previous school year.

Proactively communicating with the parents or guardians of students who were chronically absent the previous school year, and with the students themselves at Grades 6-12, can help prevent absenteeism during the new school year.

The student misses three days or more during the first two weeks of classes for any reason.

Research shows that students who miss three days during the first two weeks of classes are five times more likely to become chronically absent.⁴ Reaching out to these students and their parents or guardians early can help prevent chronic absenteeism

Even if the reason for the absences is known to the school, it is still important to contact the family. Connecting with parents or guardians and students early to express interest and concern in their student's attendance will only be helpful for the student's progress.

The student has three consecutive unexcused absences during the school year.

It is always a concern when a student misses several days in a row without explanation, and schools should always follow up to ensure there are no concerns. In addition, missing this amount of time in a short period is a risk factor for chronic absenteeism.

⁴ Olsen, L. (2014). Why September Matters: Improving student attendance. Policy Brief. Baltimore Education Research Consortium.



Section Six: Responsive Measures

The steps should begin in September for all schools, though at Grades 9-12 a reset for second semester is appropriate.

01 STEP ONE: THE TEACHER “CARE & CONNECT” CALL

WHEN

The student has missed five days.

WHY

The teacher connects with the parents or guardians to express care and concern for the student and, as appropriate to the situation, have a conversation about academic or social/emotional concerns with attendance.

PROCESS

The student’s teacher will have a personal conversation with the parents or guardians.

- This may be a phone call, a Teams call, or an in-person conversation. Phone conversations are recommended because they are easier to arrange than an in-person conversation. However, many teachers do see the parents or guardians of their students in-person (e.g., if they are dropping off or picking up their students) and may choose to speak to them in person.
- This responsive step is taken regardless of any proactive communications that may have already taken place.
- The tone of the conversation should be positive, expressing concern for the student’s academic success and well-being.
- If the student has reached five days late in the school year, or late in the semester for Grades 9-12, the student may not be at a high risk for chronic absenteeism. However, it is still important to contact the parents or guardians to ensure they are aware of the absences and ensure there are no academic or social/emotional concerns that are not being addressed. A call checking in on attendance will always be worthwhile.

- For students in Grade 6-12, it may be most efficient to have the advisory or homeroom teacher make these calls rather than the subject teachers.
- Key messages for this conversation can be found in Appendix B.
- For students in Grades 6-12, the teacher will also have a personal conversation with the student. The tone of the conversation should be also positive, expressing concern for the student’s academic success and well-being.
- The teacher will make note of the completion of this step as directed by the school administration.

STEP TWO: THE ADMINISTRATOR “CARE & CONNECT” CONTACT

02

WHEN

The student has missed ten days.

WHY

The administrator or designate connects with the parents or guardians to express care and concern for the student, identify any issues that should be addressed, and implement interventions if appropriate.

DECISION POINT

The administrator will determine if the absenteeism is *problematic* (and continue to be managed under this protocol) or *non-problematic* (and will be addressed separate from this protocol).

PROCESS

The student’s teacher will alert the designated administrator that the student has missed ten days.

The administrator (or designate) will contact the parents or guardians of the student. Because schools may have a high number of students missing ten days, this contact may be a personal conversation, such as a phone call, or an email.

Personal communication, such as a phone call, is recommended if the student has missed ten days early in the school year, has a history of chronic absenteeism, or has additional risk factors that increase overall concern for the student. As with the teacher conversations in Step One, the tone of these conversations should be positive, expressing concern for the student’s academic success and well-being. Key messages for these conversations can be found in Appendix D.

For students in Grades 6-12, the administrator or designate will also have a personal conversation with the student.

The administrator will determine if the absenteeism is non-problematic or problematic. In the case of non-problematic absenteeism, the administrator will ensure an appropriate plan is in place for the student.

In the case of problematic absenteeism, the administrator will exercise professional judgement as to 1) whether interventions are required at this time, and 2) if so, what interventions are most likely to be helpful at this time.

- The reasons for chronic absenteeism are highly varied, different students respond positively to different strategies, and the urgency for intervention may differ depending on the time of year and the specific situation of the student.
- Accordingly, the guiding principle is that any interventions should be the *right intervention*, at the *right time*, at the *right intensity* for the specific student in the specific situation.
- Factors that must be considered in a decision whether to implement attendance interventions include the time of year (i.e., the earlier in the year, the greater the concern) and the presence or absence of additional risk factors (e.g., poor academic achievement, social/emotional concerns) and protective factors (e.g., strong academic achievement, strong school engagement).

- Lower intensity interventions the administrator may choose to implement include monitoring, mentoring, or a referral to the school counsellor. The administrator may refer the student to the Education Support Services Team if more intense interventions are being considered.
- The administrator will note that this step has been completed as per school practice.
- If interventions are required at this step, the administrator will follow up with an email to the parents or guardians summarizing the concerns and plan going forward. The student's teacher(s) should be kept advised of any interventions.

03 STEP THREE: ADMINISTRATOR “CARE & CONNECT” FOLLOW UP

This step is for problematic absenteeism only.

WHEN

The student has missed fifteen days.

WHY

The administrator follows up on the ongoing absenteeism with the parents or guardians to keep them informed of the concern, identify barriers to attendance, and collaborate on solutions.

The administrator will have a follow-up personal conversation with the parents or guardians. If there was a recent conversation at Step Two, the administrator may choose to follow up by email. **There must be a conversation, however, at one of these two steps.**

The administrator will make a referral to the Education Support Services Team if one was not already made at Step Two. Exceptions should only be made very late in the school year (or very late in the semester for Grades 9-12). For students in Grades 6-12, the administrator will also have a follow up conversation with the student.

The Education Support Services Team will determine what interventions are most likely to improve the student's attendance. In making this determination, considerations for the ESST include:

- **Situational factors.** This includes the time of year, the student's history of chronic absenteeism, the presence or absence of additional risk factors (e.g., academic, social-emotional), student readiness to engage in interventions, the age and maturity of the student, and the presence or absence of additional concerns.
- **Involvement of other ISD professionals.** If professionals from ISD partners are already involved with the student, these professionals should be consulted and may be involved in any interventions going forward.
- **Mental health.** The ESST should consider whether mental health factors are a barrier to attendance.
- **Learning barriers.** The ESST should consider whether accessing learning is a barrier to attendance (e.g., specific learning disorders that aren't adequately supported).
- The ESST may consult *Chronic Absenteeism: A Multi-Tiered System of Supports*.

Specific interventions the ESST may implement include the following.

- **Support from the school counsellor.** The school counsellor may use this opportunity to establish a relationship with the student, help the student identify barriers and possible solutions to the attendance concern, and connect the student with other supports if needed. A guideline document for the school counsellor is found in Appendix E.
- **Support from Addictions & Mental Health.** The ESST may refer the student to Addictions & Mental Health for direct support for mental health concerns which may be contributing to the absenteeism, such as an anxiety disorder.
- **Case Conference.** The school may hold a Case Conference that includes a school administrator,

parents or guardians, school counsellor, and any other ISD professionals that are involved. The Case Conference is to identify the barriers to attendance and implement a plan to improve attendance.

- **Attendance Support Plan.** The ESST may develop an Attendance Support Plan based on the input by the student, the parents or guardians, the school counsellor, and any information from the Case Conference. A member of the ESST will be responsible for the plan. The Attendance Support Plan is in Appendix G.
- The ESST may assess the behavioural function of the chronic absenteeism (see Tier 2 and Tier 3 in *Chronic Absenteeism: A Multi-Tiered System of Supports*).
- Additional interventions are suggested in *Chronic Absenteeism: A Multi-Tiered System of Supports* and summarized in Appendix I.

The administrator will follow up with a formal letter to the parents or guardians from the school which outlines the concern, the school's efforts, the potential academic impact on continued absences, and a continued willingness to work with the student and parents or guardians. The student's teacher(s) should be kept advised of any interventions.

STEP FOUR: ONGOING CASE MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING

04

This step is for problematic absenteeism only.

WHEN

The student has missed twenty days.

WHY

The administrator follows up on the ongoing absenteeism with the parents or guardians to keep them informed of the concern, identify barriers to attendance, and collaborate on solutions.

The administrator will ensure the ESST reviews interventions to date and initiates additional interventions if needed. Additional supports such as inclusive tutoring services may be considered. Tier 3 of *Chronic Absenteeism: A Multi-Tiered System of Supports* may be consulted. The student's teacher(s) should be kept advised of any interventions.

The administrator or designate will maintain communication with the parents or guardians regarding the absences and status of current interventions. For students in Grades 6-12, the administrator or designate will also maintain open communication with the student about the absences.

The administrator may consult with ISD colleagues in Health and Social Development and explore opportunities for additional support from those partners. A **Common Plan** may be appropriate, especially if there are additional behaviour or social-emotional concerns.

Administrators are reminded of their legal responsibility under the *Education Act* and *Child and Youth Well-Being Act* to report risk of neglect "as a result of being in the care of a person who fails to ensure the child or youth attends school."

The administrator may follow up with a formal letter from the school which outlines the concern, the school's efforts, the potential academic impact on continued absences, and a continue willingness to work with the student and parents or guardians.

At the Grades 9-12 level, the administrator may consider reducing the student's course load for that semester by withdrawing the student from courses in which the student has little chance of passing. This intervention is not punitive but intended to allow the student to focus on the courses in which there is a reasonable chance of passing. This should be a mutual decision of the school, the student, and the parents or guardians. Additionally, placement in an alternate education program, as per EECD 322, may be considered in consultation with the student and the parents or guardians.

Appendices

Appendix A: Responsive Measures Flowchart

STEP ONE

Five Days

Teacher Care and Connect Call

Teacher has a personal conversation with the parents/guardians.
Teacher meets with the student (Grades 6-12).
Teacher notes this step completed as per school practice.

STEP TWO

Ten Days

Administrator Care and Connect Contact

Administrator or designate connects with the parents/guardians.
Administrator or designate meets with the student (Grades 6-12).
Administrator determines if the absenteeism is problematic or non-problematic.
If problematic, administrator uses professional judgement about best interventions, if any are required at this time.
If non-problematic, administrator ensure appropriate plan is in place to support the student.
Administrator notes that this step is completed as per school practice.

STEP THREE

Fifteen Days

Administrator Care and Connect Follow Up

Problematic absenteeism only for Steps Three and Four.
Administrator follows up with the parents/guardians. Personal communication is necessary if it did not occur at Step 2.
Administrator makes an ESST referral (if not done at Step 2).
ESST reviews the situation and determines appropriate interventions.
Administrator sends the parents/guardians a formal letter of concern.

STEP FOUR

Twenty Days

Ongoing Case Management and Monitoring

Administrator ensures a review of existing interventions.
Additional intensive interventions may be considered.
Consultation will occur, as appropriate, with ISD partners.

Appendix B: Key Messages for Teacher Care & Connect Conversation with Parents/Guardians and with Students Grades 6-12

(Step One: Teacher Actions)

WHEN

The student has missed 5 days.

WHY

The teacher connects with the parents or guardians to express care and concern for the student and, as appropriate to the situation, have a conversation about academic or social/emotional concerns with attendance

- It is important that this is a personal conversation with the parent or guardian, such as a phone call or an in-person conversation. Phone conversations are recommended because they are easier to arrange than an in-person conversation. However, many teachers do see the parents or guardians of their students in-person (e.g., if they are picking up their students after school) and may choose to speak to them in person.
- The tone of the conversation should be positive, expressing concern for the student's well-being and academic success.
- Sometimes parents or guardians are unavailable by phone at the time the teacher calls. It's acceptable to leave a message in these situations, briefly summarizing the reason for the call and inviting the parent or guardian to contact the teacher if there are any concerns. In some limited circumstances, such as when the parents or guardians are newcomers who don't speak English, email may be the best option at this step.

When speaking with the parent or guardian:

- Explain to the parent or guardian that we connect after five days because we care about their student. The purpose of the call is to check in, and if there are academic or social-emotional concerns then we'd like to help.
- Ensure the parent or guardian is aware of the absences.
- Discuss any concerns or supports the student may need (academic or social/emotional). If the student or their family need additional support, follow up as appropriate, including a referral to the school ESST if necessary.
- Explain that someone will reach out after 10 days to check in, and that the parents or guardians are welcome to reach out at any point if there is a concern.

Key Messages for the Conversation with the Student (Grades 6-12)

- The tone of the conversation should be positive, expressing concern for the student's well-being and academic success.
- If the **absences have been excused**, it may still be helpful to inquire about how the student is doing academically and socially/emotionally. If the student expresses a need for additional supports, the teacher may initiate appropriate actions. Advise the student that someone will follow up again if ten days are missed, and that the student is welcome to speak to the teacher anytime about concerns.
- If the **absences are unexcused**, it is important to find out from the student if this is because the parents or guardians simply have not informed the school of the reasons for the absences or if the student has been missing class without permission.
- If the **student has missed time without permission**, the seriousness of the decisions to miss class should be stressed. Asking the student to explain the absences using a no-blame approach can be helpful to find out the underlying reasons for the absences. In some cases, it may be necessary to raise the student's level of concern about their unexcused absences by drawing attention to the

student's academics, responsibilities, potential disciplinary action from the school, or by stressing that the student belongs in and is wanted at school. If disciplinary action is warranted at this time, it should not be done in a manner which undermines the student's sense of belonging or feeling of being welcome and supported in the school. Advise the student that the school will monitor the student's attendance, that there is an expectation it improves, that the student's presence matters to the teachers, and that additional follow-up will occur if necessary.

For the purposes of this protocol, it doesn't matter if the conversation with the student happens before or after the conversations with the parents or guardians.



Appendix C: Barriers to Phone Conversations with Parents and Guardians

BARRIER

The parents or guardians don't answer the phone or return the phone call.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Email the parents or guardians and ask to schedule a time for a phone call.
- Speak to the parents or guardians when they pick up their student.
- Send a note home with the student asking to schedule a time for a phone call
- Explain in the message why you need to speak to them and why this is important.
- If you can't leave a voicemail, please make a second attempt to reach the parents/guardians by phone before sending an email instead.

BARRIER

The phone number on record doesn't work.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Ask the student for the phone number, or to call the parent or guardian on the phone while you are with them.
- Ask the student for the best way to contact their parents or guardians.

BARRIER

The parents or guardians work schedule doesn't allow a phone call during school hours.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Email or send a note home asking to schedule a time for a phone call.

BARRIER

Language barriers.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Consult with your admin team or ESST.
- Consult with the student about the preferred way for the parents to communicate or, if appropriate, involve the student in the conversation.

BARRIER

Cultural barriers.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Show respect and sensitivity to diverse cultural values.
- Educate yourself about the cultural backgrounds of your students and their families.
- Invite parents to share their expectations and preferences.

BARRIER

Concern that the call will be received negatively by the parents or guardians.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Approach the call with a positive and empathetic tone, begin with affirmations about the student before discussing the concern, and focus on collaboration and shared goals for the student.
- Be clear that the call is collaborative, not critical. Stay calm and empathetic, focusing on facts and solutions rather than blame. Acknowledge legitimate concerns from the parents or guardians.
- Use de-escalation techniques and revisit the topic later if emotions run high. Consult with your school administration or ESST as needed.
- Offer follow-up conversations to process sensitive issues.

BARRIER

Avoidance by parents or guardians.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Build the relationship with positive, non-critical communication, beginning early in the year.
- Try to understand the reason the parents or guardians are avoiding the conversation.

BARRIER

Lack of time for teacher to make the calls.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Keep the call concise and focused on the attendance concern at hand.

As many parents and guardians have schedules that may not allow them to easily engage in personal calls, it's acceptable for teachers making the 5-Day "Care & Connect Call" to leave a message. This message should include the purpose of the call and an invitation to call back or otherwise arrange a time for a conversation.

In some cases, parents and guardians may not engage with the school staff after multiple and varied attempts to contact them. It is acceptable at any step in the protocol, after reasonable efforts have been made to engage the parents in a conversation, to send an email outlining key messages and inviting the parents or guardians to contact the sender to schedule a conversation. The goal is always to strengthen relationships with parents and guardians, not to strain those relationships through excessive outreach.

SENSITIVE SITUATIONS

In some very sensitive situations, such as absences due to a death in the family or absences resulting from a traumatic event, school administrators should exercise professional judgement with any communication steps in this protocol. Although it is still essential for the school to maintain open communication with families during difficult times, how and when that communication occurs as well as who initiates it will vary with every situation. Very often in these situations, the school will already be supporting the student on concerns other than attendance and calls such as Step 1 (5 days) and Step 2 (10 days) may be inappropriate.

Appendix D: Key Messages for Administrator Care & Connect Contact with Parents/Guardians and with Students Grades 6-12

(Step Two: Administrator Actions)

WHEN

The student has missed 10 days.

WHY

The administrator or designate connects with the parents or guardians to express care and concern for the student, identify any issues that should be addressed, and implement interventions if appropriate.

DECISION

The administrator will determine if the absenteeism is problematic (and will be continued to be managed under this protocol) or non-problematic (and will be addressed separately from this protocol).

- While it is recommended that the administrator or designate have a personal conversation with the parents or guardians at Step 2, this will not always be possible. Administrators will need to prioritize which situations require personal conversations and which require an email.
- However, if no personal conversation happens after 10 days (Step 2), there needs to be a personal conversation if the student misses 15 days (Step 3).
- When the concern is low and an email is sent in lieu of a personal conversation, the key messages should be summarized in the email and there should be an invitation for the parent or guardian to respond and/or schedule a personal conversation.
- Personal conversations should be followed up with a short email thanking the parent or guardian, summarizing the concern and any actions that arise
- The tone of the conversation should be positive, expressing concern for the student's well-being and academic success.

When speaking with the parent or guardian:

- Explain to the parent or guardian that we connect after 10 days because we care about their student. The purpose of the contact is to check in, and if there are academic or social-emotional concerns then we'd like to help.
- Ensure the parent is aware of the absences. Even if all absences have been excused, it is good practice to check in with the parents or guardians. Even excused absences may add up without the parents or guardians realizing the cumulative impact.
- Discuss any concerns or supports that might be needed to address the absenteeism.
- If the student has been missing without the knowledge and permission of the parents or guardians, explain that the school will be required to put in place supportive corrective actions if the absences continue.
 - o Ask the parent or guardian to have a discussion with the student about their attendance. At Grades 9-12, ensure the parent or guardian understands the impact these absences will have on marks, including on the student's transcript, and that if the student's attendance does not improve it may result in withdrawal from one or more courses, which may delay graduation.
 - o In all cases, communicate to the parents or guardians that the teachers want the student in school and being successful, and that supports and solutions can be found to attendance problems and other concerns.

- The principal or vice principal will determine if the absenteeism is **problematic** or **non-problematic**.
 - If the absenteeism is non-problematic, the principal or vice principal will ensure an appropriate plan is in place, if required, to support the student and to mitigate the academic and social/emotional impacts of the absenteeism.
 - If the absenteeism is problematic, the principal or vice principal will take action as appropriate.
- If a personal conversation is held with a parent or guardian, the administrator or designate will follow up with an email to the parents or guardians. This is helpful to summarize the conversation, ensure understanding of the parents or guardians, and create a formal record of the conversation and next steps.

For students in Grades 6-12, the administrator or designate will also have a personal conversation with the student.

- The tone of the conversation should be positive, expressing concern for the student's well-being and academic success.
- If all absences are excused, it is still important to check-in with the student about the reasons the student is missing so much time and to explore options for supports, if appropriate.
- At Grades 6-12, if absences are unexcused, this is an opportunity to determine if the parents or guardians simply have not informed the school of the reasons for the absences or if the student has been missing class without permission.
- If the student has missed time without permission, the seriousness of the decisions to miss class should be stressed.
- Asking the student to explain the absences using a no-blame approach can be helpful to find out the underlying reasons for the absences.
- In some cases, it may be necessary to raise the student's level of concern about their unexcused absences. This may be done by drawing attention to the student's academics, responsibilities, potential disciplinary action from the school, or by stressing that the student belongs in and is wanted at school. If disciplinary action is warranted at this time, it should not be done in a manner which undermines the student's sense of belonging or feeling of being welcome and supported in the school.
- Advise the student that the school will monitor the student's attendance, that there is an expectation it improves, and that the student's presence matters to the teachers, and that the school will take additional measures as needed to keep the student in school. At Grades 9-12, the student should also understand the academic impact of the absences, including on student's transcript, and the possibility of course withdrawal, which may delay graduation.



Appendix E: School Counsellor Support for Attendance

- Because of their specific training in mental health and counselling interventions, school counsellors may be asked to support students with chronic absenteeism. Counsellors should rely on their professional training to develop a working relationship with the student, identify any barriers to attendance, and work through solutions as needed.
- While working with students who are chronically absent, counsellors may draw on their training in such therapeutic modalities as person-centered counselling, single-session counselling, Solution Focused Brief Therapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Reality Therapy, and Motivational Interviewing.
- Guidance teachers (i.e., teachers in a guidance role who do not have graduate degrees in counselling psychology and are not certified counsellors) should not engage in the above psychotherapy approaches but should instead focus on relationship building, skill building, and problem solving with the student. This may include social skills training (e.g., to resist peer pressure to skip class) and self-regulation skills (e.g., to manage anxiety).
- Counsellors should familiarize themselves with Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions in the resource document *Chronic Absenteeism: A Multi-Tiered System of Supports*.
- Counsellors should keep notes of the meeting with the student in the same location and format as their other counselling notes.
- In some schools, there may be a school social worker or behaviour intervention mentor asked to support the student instead of the school counsellor. Because of their specific training and education in mental health interventions, social workers may engage with the student in a similar manner as the school counsellors; behaviour intervention mentors, who are not mental health professionals, should use an approach consistent with guidance teachers.

Appendix F: Education Support Services Team (ESST) Responsibilities at Step 2 & Step 3

The principal or vice principal may refer a student with problematic chronic absenteeism to the ESST at Step 2 of the Standard Protocol or wait until Step 3, depending on the judgement of the administrator.

The Chronic Absenteeism Standard Protocol and Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) are concerned with problematic absenteeism, in which the absenteeism is the main concern. In these situations, the following steps are recommended.

- The ESST will review the student's attendance concern through their usual processes. This is no different than how the ESST would handle academic, mental health, or other behaviour concerns. This may be through a regular ESST meeting, a 15-minute problem-solving meeting of those staff involved with the student, or other process the school has in place.
- The ESST will determine what interventions, if any, are warranted at this time. ESSTs will rely on their professional training and experience and may refer to resources such as *Chronic Absenteeism: A Multi-Tiered System of Supports*. Factors to be considered in this decision are on page 12. As a rule, interventions should be the *right intervention* at the *right time* at the *right intensity*.
- If interventions are warranted, they will generally fall into three levels of intensity.
 - Low intensity interventions include monitoring the student's attendance, mentoring for the student, and regular communication with home.
 - Moderate intensity interventions include a referral to the school counsellor, a referral to Addictions and Mental Health for direct support for mental health concerns that may be contributing to the absenteeism, or behavioural interventions such as those found at Tier 2 in *Chronic Absenteeism: A Multi-Tiered System of Supports*.

- o Higher intensity interventions include a formal Attendance Support Plan, a Case Conference, and a Common Plan with ISD partners.
- If the ESST determines that monitoring is sufficient at this stage, someone will be appointed to monitor the student's attendance. Monitoring should include regular check-ins, relationship-building, and encouragement, not just checking the number of absences.

Appendix G: Attendance Support Plan

An Attendance Support Plan is a formal, written plan to improve the student's attendance.

If the ESST determines an Attendance Support Plan is warranted:

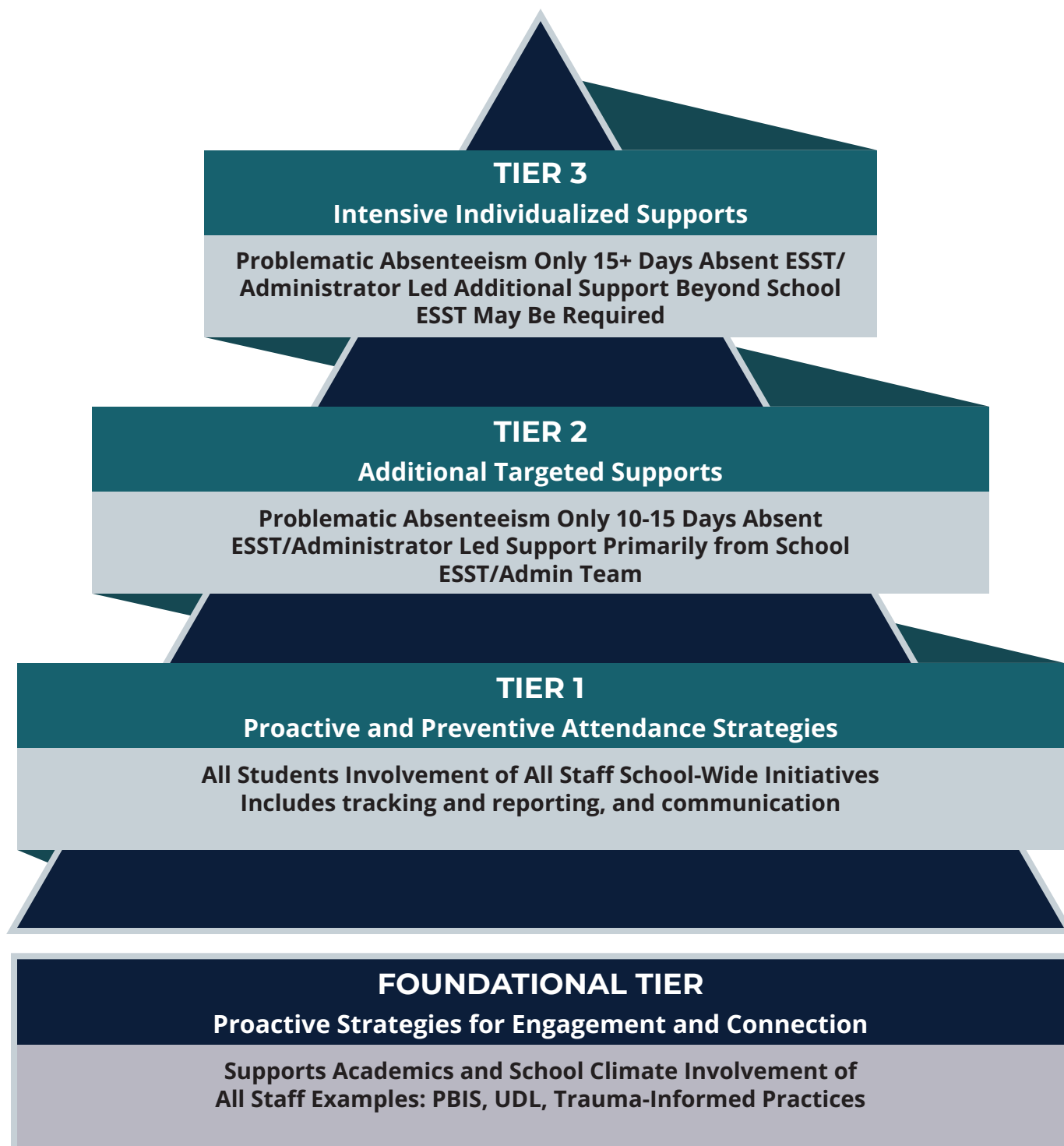
- An owner of the plan should be determined. This may be the vice principal, counsellor, or other ESST member.
- The plan should be reviewed on at least a bi-weekly basis until the attendance concern has been resolved.
- The parents or guardians should be given a copy of the plan.
- Like all ESS documents, the plan should be kept in ESS Connect.

In developing the Attendance Support Plan, the ESST should consider the following:

- Information from a meeting with the student (Grades 6-12).
- Information from a meeting with the parents or guardians.
- Any information regarding academic, behavioural, and social-emotional concerns for the student.
- Information from the student's teacher(s).
- Consultation from any ISD partners involved with the student.

The plan should include the following information:

- A statement of the main cause of the student's absenteeism
- Actions to be taken by the student (Grades 6-12 only).
- Actions to be taken by the parents or guardians.
- Actions to be taken by the school.
- Any additional school-based supports
- Any referrals for additional supports for the student or the parents/guardians (e.g., district supports, supports from ISD partners).
- A review date by the plan's owner (i.e., ESST member managing the plan).
- The Attendance Support Plan should be signed by the plan owner, the parent or guardian, and by the student (Grades 6-12).



Appendix I: Framework of MTSS Strategies

LOW INTENSITY INTERVENTIONS

- Regular monitoring of the individual student's attendance
- Communication with individual student's parents/guardians
- Regular positive check-ins with the student
- Mentoring (formal or informal) for the student
- Incentives that are meaningful to the student
- Designating a safe space or go-to adult for the student
- Soft start for the student
- Enhancing peer connection for the student
- Regular recognition of improved attendance (e.g., weekly private recognition/congratulations from teacher for improved attendance)
- Cultural supports (e.g., Indigenous resources)
- Additional responsibility for student (e.g., help the teacher with a small task to build connection, purpose, and motivation to attend school)

MODERATE INTENSITY INTERVENTIONS

- Support from school counsellor, school social worker, BIM, or other school based professional or para-professional. This may include counselling (school counsellor or social worker only), problem-solving, skill-building, coaching, and advocacy.
- Academic support (e.g., to catch up after an absence or to address a barrier to learning).
- Problem-solving meeting with the parents/guardians (and student if Grades 6-12, as appropriate).
- Case Conference to develop a plan (may involve ISD or community partners if they are involved)
- Attendance Contract (Grades 6-12)
- Behavioural Interventions based on the function of the school attendance problem (see Chronic Absenteeism: A Multi-Tiered System of Supports).
- Referral to Addictions and Mental Health for mental health concerns creating a barrier to attendance (e.g., anxiety disorders, trauma).

HIGHER INTENSITY INTERVENTIONS

- Attendance Support Plan (Attendance Success Plan? Attendance Action Plan)
- Services from Addictions and Mental Health
- Services from Social Development
- Common Plan
- Alternate Education Program (Grades 9-12)
- Inclusive Tutoring Services
- Reduced schedule or adjustments to the student's day at school
- Gradual reintegration into school after extended absences
- Report to Social Development as per Education Act and Child & Youth Wellbeing Act (i.e., situations of suspected neglect)

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

- All interventions must be in the context of building a positive, empathic, and supportive relationship with the student and their parents/guardians.
- Interventions should be non-punitive.
- All interventions must also be culturally appropriate and trauma-informed.
- All interventions must be applied consistently and with fidelity.
- All interventions should follow a Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle.
- Parents/Guardians must be treated as partners in their student's education. Older students must also be treated as partners in their education.



