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STUDENT PRESENCE AND ENGAGEMENT

Philosophy

The St. James-Assiniboia School Division is committed to providing a full and efficient educational experience for all learners. Students who attend school regularly are more engaged in learning, have a greater opportunity to access school and community resources, have a greater sense of belonging, and are more likely to reach their full potential. Student presence and engagement is required for success.

Student absence is a serious impediment to a student's educational performance and well-being. Absenteeism can have lasting negative impacts on student achievement, graduation rates, transition to post-secondary education, employment, and social inclusion, as well as on the community at large.

Attendance issues are often a first sign that a student is experiencing life challenges, and there is a multitude of contributing factors, ranging from academic, social, economic, and psychological. These include and are not limited to:

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

Objectives

The St. James-Assiniboia School Division is committed to following the foundational principles and conditions as outlined in *Safe and Caring Schools: A Policy Directive and Action Plan to Enhance Student Presence and Engagement* (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2023) as follows:

- Presence and engagement begin with relationships. Reciprocal and respectful relationships with students, families, parents, Elders,

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

Definitions

The following definitions are in accordance with guideline 1 of *Safe and Caring Schools: A Policy Directive and Action Plan to Enhance Student Presence and Engagement* (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2023):

Presence: When a student attends and participates in the school or classroom on the days in which they are required. This is an entry point to being able to engage students in the process of learning. Students may be present even if they are not physically within a classroom, depending on their student-specific plan.

Engagement: Students' attitudes towards schooling, their attendance and participation in school activities, disposition towards learning, and working and socializing with others in school. Engagement is expressed in students' feelings that they belong at school, and in their participation in school activities (OECD, 2003).

Regular Attendance: Coming to school and/or participating in learning consistently and on a routine, habitual basis, missing no more than five days for the entire school year.

Absence: Any time that a student is not in class or not participating in a school activity while not being on suspension/expulsion.

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Excused Absence: Any time that a student is not in class or not participating in school activity while not being on suspension/expulsion, with a valid excuse and the mutual consent of a parent and the school principal. In practice, this has also been referred to as a verified absence.

Unexcused Absence: Any time a student is not in class or not participating in school activity while not being on suspension/expulsion, without a valid excuse and parental approval.

Chronic Absenteeism: Where unexcused absences account for 10 or more classes in a single high school course or 10 percent or more of instructional days in kindergarten to Grade 8 in a reporting period.

Severe Chronic Absenteeism: Where unexcused absences account for 20 or more classes in a single high school course or 20 percent or more of instructional days in kindergarten to Grade 8 in a reporting period.

Student-Specific Plan (SSP): A planning, record-keeping, and communication document, as outlined in *Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba* (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022). Student-specific planning is a process through which members of student support teams meet the unique needs of individual students; it may range from short-term strategies applied in the classroom to comprehensive, individualized programming.

Attendance Improvement Plan (AIP): is a component of a SSP and is implemented by the Student Support Team (comprised of school-based Student Services team, Educational Support Services, and school administration) to support a student whose attendance is of concern.

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