Addressing Chronic Absenteeism in Manitoba: An Action Plan for Student Presence

Executive Summary

Context

Student success requires presence and engagement, which depend upon perceiving the school as a safe and welcoming environment in which success is possible. Educational attainment has strong positive associations with positive social outcomes, and student absence extracts a toll upon those who are chronically absent and significant economic costs upon the societies of which they are members. Because student absence in Manitoba's K-12 system is a serious impediment to the improvement of student educational performance and outcomes, on March 3, 2021, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning contracted with *Directions* Evidence and Policy Research Group to help address persistent absenteeism in Manitoba schools.

Drivers of student absence can include factors within the community, the family/caregivers, the student, and the school or classroom environment, and is symptomatic of a larger constellation of problems that, if not directly addressed, will continue. Improving student success requires dedicated intersectoral attention and resources to address historical injustices, poverty reduction and the coordination of services and supports at family/caregiver, community and provincial levels.

The disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic during the past two years has emphasized the fundamental necessity of presence in school to ensure the well-being and mental health, learning, achievement and social development of children and youth.

The Manitoba government must commit itself to providing the leadership, policies, the legal framework, and the substantial financial and human resources needed to engage government agencies, schools, divisions, and communities to create change for its children and youth and their families/caregivers.

The Pathway to Student Presence: Responding to the K-12 Commission

Principles for Action and Conditions for Success

The priority actions are guided by foundational principles and conditions for success for increasing and maintaining student presence:

Principles	Conditions for Success (Signposts)
Community impact: Student success and well-being contributes to healthy, successful communities.	• A clearly articulated philosophy of early intervention that provides support to students
Multiple contributing factors:	

Principles	Conditions for Success (Signposts)
Absenteeism is typically symptomatic of a range of problems, only some of which can be addressed by the education system.	and their parents/caregivers before persistent absenteeism becomes apparent. • School personnel **notice** changes in students' behaviour, attendance (presence as well as absence) and engagement. • Significant lateral support from and engagement with the organizations representing superintendents; principals and vice principals; teachers; Black, Indigenous, and persons of colour; and 2SLGBTQQIAA+ individuals. • Significant cooperation and communication with provincial departments and community agencies.
Multiple contributing solutions: A focus on student presence and addressing absenteeism as it occurs is the first step in a process leading to student success; the others include a welcoming and safe school climate, student engagement, success planning, mentoring, and monitoring progress.	
Individualized planning and monitoring: Absenteeism is idiosyncratic, requiring planning that considers the distinctive and individual obstacles that prevent regular attendance, and monitoring the implementation of the plan and its impact on absenteeism.	
Collective responsibility: Student success and well-being is a collective responsibility and requires active agency on the part of all who are responsible for children and youth.	• Committed champions at every level (government, community, division, school) combined with strong moral purpose. • Protocols and processes for coordination and cooperation within education and between education and other departments that can ensure that efforts at the school-community level can succeed. • A dedicated student persistence and success unit within Manitoba government to which professionals can turn for information, strategic support, and professional development that can help to achieve coherence in addressing attendance. The unit should have a working relationship with governmental departments to ensure that efforts at the school-community level can succeed. • Cohesion, consistency, quality, and accountability.
Collective coordination: Because many of the factors affecting absenteeism are beyond the jurisdiction of the school, planning must be able to depend upon coordination with other ministries and their agents and clear and frequent communication with them, including but not limited to ministries responsible for health, mental health, social and family services, and justice.	
Enduring commitment: Student absence will always be a challenge requiring consistent and constant attention. Ensuring student presence requires consistent and constant attention; continuity of effort and resources over time is essential.	• A demonstrable commitment from government that this emphasis on student presence and engagement is a continuing, cross-governmental initiative in perpetuity.

Recommended Actions

There are six sets of recommended actions. The actions are urgent, interconnected, and necessary components of a multi-faceted approach to pursuing student presence and success.

Action	Start	Duration	Rationale
1. Change policy on absenteeism			
a) Eliminate suspension as response to frequent absence	Immediately	Enduring	Because suspension takes students out of the classroom when the goal is to have students in the classroom, it is a counterproductive response to absenteeism and student success.
b) Revise policy and practice to require immediate, personal outreach to students whose absence is unexcused			Taking a proactive response to even a day of absence creates opportunities to provide supports and intervention before absenteeism becomes persistent.
2. Collect data on student presence/absence			
a) Collect enrollment data twice in each school year using the Manitoba Education and Training (MET) number	September and February annually	Enduring (twice a year)	Because funding is tied to student enrollment, collecting enrollment data twice yearly provides an incentive to school divisions to ensure student presence.
b) Support school divisions to monitor, investigate, and record presence/absence	Immediately	December 31, 2022, with enduring monitoring and recording	Developing a common language, recording procedures, and metrics on attendance and absence and integrating this into a common student information system will allow for a common understanding of the definition of absence (including increases and decreases), better understanding of factors related to absence, and better predictors of absence, facilitating early intervention with students at risk of becoming persistently absent.
3. Pursue student presence through coordinated case management			
a) Ensure that all students expected to be present are in school	Immediately	Enduring (once a year)	There has been a significant decline in student presence because of the COVID-19 pandemic, with about 6500 students unaccounted for as of September 2020 compared to September 2019.[1] Immediate action should be taken to locate

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[1] See Appendix D: Proposal for Immediate Implementation by School Divisions (June 2021), p. 111.

Action	Start	Duration	Rationale
			these students and provide supports that are needed to ensure their safety and re-engage them with school.
b) Create, maintain, and monitor a coordinated case management approach to persistent or extended absence	July 2022	Enduring	Reducing barriers to student presence requires individualized assessment, planning, coordination, and monitoring of supports for students and their families/caregivers. A case management approach to facilitate this process is required to coordinate the complexity of supports and a provide a stable point of contact to establish relationships with persistently absent students and their families/caregivers.
4. Enhance student engagement, mental health, well-being, and success			
a) Create a safe, welcoming, and culturally responsive school environment for students	Immediately	Enduring	Student engagement with school is strengthened when students experience school as a safe and welcoming environment that recognizes and supports their cultural needs.
b) Improve student nutrition with breakfast, lunch, and snack programs			Addressing gaps in nutrition addresses a basic need that supports student health and well-being and is a barrier to student engagement and success when it is unmet.
c) Improve student and family/caregiver engagement with school			Positively engaging families/caregivers with school, including providing opportunities to connect with school and acknowledging and supporting family/caregiver circumstances, supports the presence of their students in school.
d) Improve student success from K-12			Providing appropriate educational programming and includes flexible options for learning, timetabling, assessment, and credits will provide flexible and relevant programming for students, reduce absenteeism, and contribute to student success.
5. Ensure safe, supportive environments for students			
a) Create and implement a culturally relevant and responsive curriculum	January 2022	Enduring	Students are more engaged in and positive about school when they see their cultures reflected in the curriculum.
b) Establish and implement restorative practice, including restorative justice approaches			Restorative practices provide opportunities to make whole what has been lost and repair relationships. Restorative justice provides opportunities to make amends, repair relationships, and reduces the likelihood of future harms while

Action	Start	Duration	Rationale
			holding individuals accountable. These approaches allow students to understand the impact of negative behaviour on others, and to develop empathy.
c) Expand implementation of anti-racism and anti-discrimination education			To promote inclusion, staff and students need to be equipped with the knowledge and understanding of racial prejudice and discrimination, its expressions, impacts, and how to eliminate it. Systemic contributions to racial prejudice and discrimination must also be addressed.
d) Ensure culturally safe educational environments and cultural competence among all Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning and school division staff			Increased cultural competence among Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning and school division staff will improve their relationships with students and families/caregivers and contribute to cultural safety for students and families/caregivers, which in turn will support student presence in school.
6. Provide intersectoral and implementation supports			
a) Mandate Deputy Ministers to work on Attendance Support	Immediate	Enduring	The complex and multi-faceted nature of the issues and solutions for each student requires regular communication and coordination among departments that work on social services (education; mental health, wellness & recovery; justice; families; health, economic development; sports, culture & heritage; and indigenous reconciliation).
b) Establish a unit in Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning or at arm's length for student persistence and success			The student persistence and success unit should provide leadership and support to districts and schools for identifying barriers to presence, developing solutions, implementing attendance supports, and monitoring progress.

The initiatives to address these goals, when combined with the K-12 Education Action Plan initiatives, are intended to systematically address student presence/absence. A key element is that student presence is at the centre of all interventions whether they occur in schools, in the broader community, or in the relationships between the school and the community. The improvement of student presence requires an enduring commitment by government school divisions and schools and recognition that the factors affecting presence and absence cut across the boundaries of many agencies and departments at both the local and provincial levels. Only government can ensure that the necessary resources, protocols, and processes for coordination and cooperation within the

education sector and between education and other departments and agencies are developed and maintained to support the efforts at the school-community necessary for success. Thus, *Directions* recommends that there must be a unit within government with the mandate for ensuring student persistence and success.

Introduction: Context

Why school success matters

Student absence has been a problem throughout the history of public schooling. Its persistence is evidence of its intractability in the face of episodic efforts to address the problem. COVID-19 has exacerbated student absence and compounded the mental health challenges that children and youth face. The pandemic has produced few benefits, but it has foregrounded student absence and mental health as significant impediments to school success.

Educational attainment has strong positive associations with employment, income, and health outcomes and strong negative associations with encounters with the justice system. The connection between absenteeism and educational attainment is self-evident – absence will affect educational opportunity and persistent absence over years of schooling negatively affects educational outcomes.

Student absenteeism, persistent absenteeism, and truancy have a direct negative impact on student achievement, graduation, transition to post-secondary education, employment, health, mental health, and the likelihood of involvement with the criminal justice and social services systems. The impact of absenteeism on the individual and the community are socially, financially, and politically costly. The cost of doing little or nothing is much greater than the investment needed to re-engage students and their families/caregivers in the education system and the support necessary to help the persistently absent student to succeed.

Student success requires presence and engagement. Presence and engagement depend upon perceiving the school as a safe and welcoming environment in which success is possible.

The disruption to schooling during 2020 to 2022 has emphasized the fundamental necessity of presence in school to ensure the well-being and mental health, learning, achievement and social development of children and youth.

The evolving promise of education

From the late 19th century through the beginning of the 21st century, the entitlement to an education and the requirement to attend school were extended to older youth (14 to 16 to 18). This occurred as society has become aware of the critical need for a well-educated workforce and of the general benefits of a solid, basic education. For many years, schools

were institutions that offered a menu of learning that the student was expected to follow whether it suited that student's needs and aspirations or not. If it did not work for the student, it was the student's problem and not the problem of the school.

In the past fifty plus years, however, school systems have welcomed students who have special needs and have first languages other than English or French, and systems have gradually increased the focus on ensuring success for all students. In the 1970s and 1980s, when apprenticeships and jobs in the skilled trades were available to those without a high school diploma, there was a prevailing attitude that secondary schools were for pre-employment education and preparation for post-secondary education. The responsibility was on the student to meet the standards, not on the school to meet the students and their circumstances. There is a much stronger awareness now in the education community that students' success or failure is the product of their school experience (e.g., whether it is relevant, welcoming, meaningful) and their experience outside of school.

Increasingly, schools recognize that a relationship between students, their families/caregivers, and the school need to be established, nurtured, and maintained. While the school cannot on its own solve every problem that may be encountered, school personnel can play a key role in accessing supports and resources for students and their families/caregivers when they are needed and in finding flexibility to enhance the student's prospects for success. To be able to assist in these ways, school personnel must notice changes in student behaviour, learning, and engagement and respond.

As the responsibilities of schools have expanded, so has society's investment in education. Ensuring student presence will require significant additional investments on the part of government.

The evolving understanding of student absence

Student absence arising from the **family/caregivers** may include aversion to school because of, for example: the child's or caregiver's prior negative experiences; frequent changes in residence; experiences of homelessness (visible and hidden); barriers to accessing food, clothing, supplies, and transportation that are needed for school; family/caregiver illness; children who work to supplement family/caregiver income or care for siblings so that their parents/caregivers can work; peers or family members / caregivers who do not value schooling; and the necessity of attending significant cultural community occasions. The **home** environment may not be conducive to school-related tasks: no quiet place to work, too many people, substance use and/or misuse, challenges in parenting/caregiving, mental health issues, and conflicting demands on time.

Absenteeism can arise because of factors within the **student**, for example: lack of sleep; low self-concept or lack of confidence; boredom; criminal involvement; lack of prior school success; poor health and mental health (e.g., aggression, self-harm, suicidal ideation, anxiety); and dependence upon unreliable others to accompany or transport the student to school.

 The **school or classroom** environment can affect student absence. For example, the school or classroom may not be a welcoming environment. It may lack challenge or remedial assistance. Bullying or shunning by peers, and discrimination may be prevalent. In-school and-out-of-school suspension, placement in special education, and grade retention may impede rather than facilitate success.

The first step in addressing student absence is establishing a positive relationship between the school, the student, and the student's family/caregivers.

The economic cost of absenteeism

Student absence exacts a toll upon those who are chronically absent and costs upon the societies of which they are members. Chronic absenteeism is a strong predictor of early school leaving (dropping out). In the space below, we illustrate our point about the costs with some empirical evidence as well as our own 'back of envelope' estimate.

Montreal Hooked on School (MHS) is a consortium of more than 30 organization that works to promote school perseverance and the success of young people in Montreal. MHS calculated that the 16.3% of dropouts from the public schools in the Montreal region in the 2019-20 school year will earn $261.7 million less over the course of their working lives, depriving the government of $72.0 million in lost tax revenue.

Staying in school pays off for both those who complete high school and for the society. Although there are annual fluctuations, the unemployment rate for persons with eight or fewer years of education is higher than those who have some high school and the rate for those with some high school is greater than for those who graduate from high school.[2]

Higher levels of education reduce the length of unemployment for several reasons. Better educated individuals have more job offers. Because the opportunity costs of unemployment are higher for persons with more education, they are likely to devote greater effort in

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[2] Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0020-01 Unemployment rate, participation rate and employment rate by educational attainment, annual.

searching and seeking employment.[3] Moreover, employment changes early in a worker's employment history are associated with lower incomes.[4]

In 2019, the Evaluation Directorate, Strategic and Service Policy Branch of Employment and Social Development Canada completed an evaluation of Pathways to Education Canada (Pathways) showing that it had a net positive social return on investment. Pathways provides after school tutoring, mentoring, and financial assistance to students whose families/caregivers are living in poverty / disadvantaged communities to keep them in school and encourage post-secondary attendance:

Figure 1. Pathways to Education
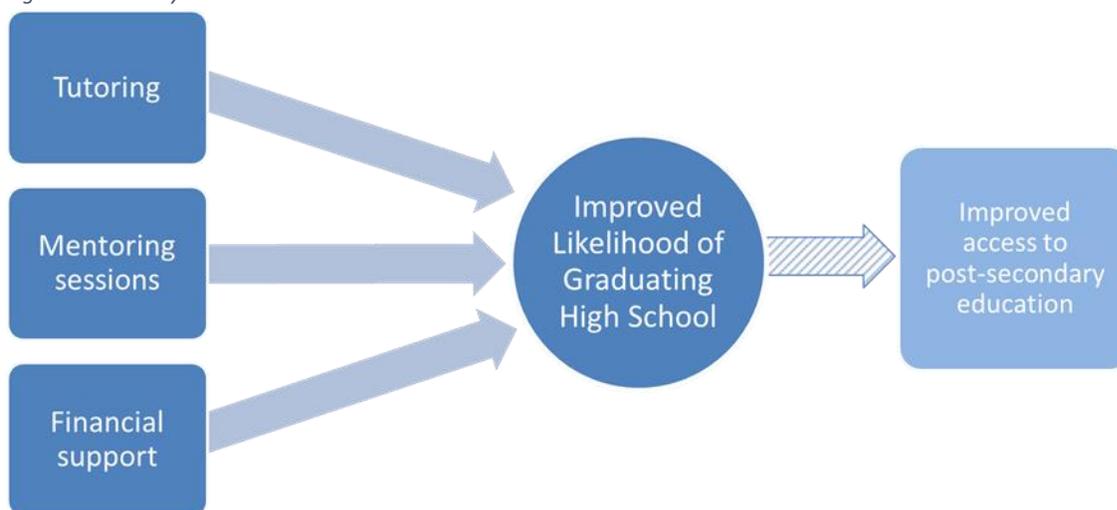
The evaluation's economic impact analysis was focussed on one location, Ontario's Regent Park. The students in Regent Park were compared with comparable students in schools that were not engaged with Pathways. The evaluation found a total net social benefit to both individual participants and to governments. An intervention for a single student represented a return on investment of approximately 50 percent over 25 years. Based on this analysis, an investment in the program 'breaks even' (where the benefits equal the costs) after 22.5

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[3] Lou, Z. (1999), Determination of Unemployment Duration in Canada, A Ph.D. thesis. Department of Sociology, Faculty of Graduate and Research, McGill University, Montreal. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2000. NQ64607.

[4] Krahn, H.J., Howard, A.L., and N.L. Galambos (2015), Exploring of Floundering? The meaning of Employment and Educational Fluctuations in Emerging Adulthood, Youth & Society, 47(2) 245-266.

years from a government perspective and after 20.8 years from a total social net benefit perspective.[5]

The cost of early school leaving

Every government must weigh the costs and anticipated benefits of programs they support. Can a program that seeks to increase the graduation rate be cost effective; that is, can the program's benefits outweigh its costs? To address this question, we have done a conservative, 'back of envelope' calculation of what the benefits and costs for Manitoba for each high school student who does not reach graduation. Our analysis is based upon the 2008 work of Olena Hankivsky, an economist at Simon Fraser University. Hankivsky wrote a report for the Canadian Council on Learning titled Cost Estimates of Dropping Out of High School in Canada.[6] The report was the first of its kind in Canada and remains one of the few reports on the economic cost of failing to graduate. Despite the inherent limitations of that estimate, it contains the best data upon which we can base our back of envelope calculation.

The benefits of graduation are of two main types. There are benefits that pertain to individuals (e.g., due to better health; higher earnings) and there are benefits that pertain to the society (e.g., greater tax revenues; lower costs associated with crime and social assistance). Six categories of benefits are identified by Hankivsky. These are benefits associated with:

- Employment and earnings
- Health and health care
- Social assistance
- Crime and criminal justice
- Education
- Intangibles (e.g., social relations, civic relations)

Appendix C: The Economic Costs of Absenteeism (p. 107) provides a detailed description of how and why these are related to an increase in graduation rates. The analysis concludes with an estimate that the annual net benefit from a 1-percentage point increase in the graduation rate (resulting in an additional 170 graduates) will range from $60 million (under the most conservative assumptions) to $75 million.

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[5] The analysis, however, has its limitations. For example, it does not account for how many of these students would have graduated anyway nor for students who start the program and then leave without finishing. These costs should be in the calculations, but do not appear to be.

[6] Hankivsky, O. (2008) Cost Estimates of Dropping Out of High School in Canada. Canadian Council on Learning in Canada. https://www.ldanb-taanb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/CostofdroppingoutHankivskyFinalReport.pdf

The question when is whether it is possible to establish an efficacious program that "produces" this increase in graduates at a cost that does not exceed these benefits. One possibility for increasing the graduation rate, for example, might be to employ community outreach workers to work with the chronically absent students and their families/caregivers, as is currently pursued in some school divisions. We estimated that the salary and benefits of these individuals would be $70,000.00 per annum. If the net benefit were $75 million as we have estimated, it would be possible to hire approximately 60 outreach workers to work with schools with the lowest graduation rates and provide them with a budget of $1 million per annum for additional family/caregiver and student supports. Even using the more conservative estimate of $60 million that eliminates the intangible costs, one could employ 40 community outreach workers and provide them with $1 million per year for additional family/caregiver supports.

Systemic barriers affecting Indigenous learners

First Nations have an inherent right to self-government and to control of the educational systems and institutions that serve Indigenous peoples.[7] As stated in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:[8]

- Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. (Article 14.1)
- Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination. (Article 14.2)
- States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language. (Article 14.3)

There are impediments to regular student presence in schools for many Indigenous children and youth. Memories of residential schooling and the inter-generational trauma that taking children from their families make parents/caregivers unwilling to send their children to schools that reflect colonial structures, values, systems, and way of life. Although residential schools are no longer tolerated, the public schools that Indigenous children might attend are nonetheless institutions created by colonizers to reflect their values and ways of life.

Provincially supported public schools do not reflect Indigenous epistemologies, languages, or cultures.

Many Indigenous learners do not see themselves reflected in schools. There is an unknown number of Indigenous learners who do not self-identify. There have been efforts to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and understandings into curricula and pedagogy, but the efforts have not reached every classroom. Notwithstanding good intentions, teachers have an insufficient grasp of Indigenous epistemologies to adapt to new pedagogies and curricula even if such curricula were widely available.

In rural and remote communities that have no secondary school, students as young as 12 must live away from their families/caregivers to attend school. Few parents/caregivers are comfortable sending the children away from home to attend school. But parents/caregivers who refuse to send their children are threatened with punishment and the possibility that their children will be taken from them.

Another challenge for some students is the transitions between federally funded on-reserve schooling and the publicly funded provincial schools. These transitions are often accompanied by challenges: transfer of student records, lack of alignment between curricula and programs, making new friends, etc.

It will take significant effort to overcome these impediments, but, unless they are overcome, some Indigenous parents/caregivers will remain distrustful of colonially designed schools and reluctant to send their children. Acknowledging the historic and ongoing harm of Indigenous people by colonizers – and the part that residential schooling played in attempting to systematically eradicate Indigenous languages and cultures – is necessary but not sufficient.

Schools require significant pedagogical and curricular transformation. They need to credit the knowledge that Indigenous children and youth bring to school and learn in their communities. Schools must build upon what children know and can do. Children and youth are more likely to thrive in an environment in which they can see themselves and in which their competencies are recognized and prized.

Engaging Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers in the formal educational process to help educate both students and the professional staff would be another step toward reconciliation. Using land-based learning as the staging point for instruction rather than an extension to current approaches would recognize the value of land-based learning.

Fast-tracking the preparation and hiring of Indigenous teachers will provide examples of Indigenous leadership to the students but cannot on its own transform the curriculum and pedagogy of the system. Informants have suggested that greater vocational emphasis in

school might be perceived as more relevant to some Indigenous learners than what is currently offered. It might be possible to persuade qualified, Indigenous tradespeople to use their knowledge and skill as a foundation for a career in teaching.

Vocational programs are capital intensive, but mobile vocational facilities housed in commercial transport vehicles could be moved from community to community to serve students who wish to pursue trades-training.

If the number of students that complete secondary school each year can be increased, the intergenerational effects will improve conditions for subsequent generations, making the task of schools easier, though not easy.

This possibility of increasing student graduation should be integrated into the Indigenous student support and continuous improvement initiatives of Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning because Indigenous students are overrepresented among the students chronically absent.

The Big Picture

In the 2019 submission to the Manitoba Commission on Education, the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth referred to two common themes in the three special reports about the deaths of youth who were receiving provincially administered services at the time of their deaths: (1) chronic and severe absenteeism and (2) the use of suspensions. The advocate recommended that the Commission prioritize the development of a plan to address chronic absenteeism in Manitoba, writing:

> *This plan must be data-informed, strengthen data collection, and resource school divisions with the capacity to measure, identify, assess, and respond to school absenteeism. This plan must be guided by the UNCRC [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child] to ensure that the best interests of children are paramount and that actions respect the right to education for children and youth.*

Absenteeism and suspensions are symptomatic of a larger constellation of problems that, if not directly addressed, will continue. The constellation of factors includes employment, food and housing insecurity, inadequate physical and mental health services, poverty, and racism. While there are many things that schools can do to make the school environment welcoming, caring, and successful for children and youth, these conditions will not substantially improve school presence on their own. **Improving student presence and success requires dedicated intersectoral attention and resources to poverty reduction and the coordination of services and supports at both community and provincial levels.**

Lessons from the Literature Review and Cross-jurisdictional Scan

Directions conducted a literature review and cross-jurisdictional scan to identify "current research, data and effective evidence-based strategies/approaches being implemented in Canadian jurisdictions and beyond to address chronic absenteeism." The full literature review and cross-jurisdictional scan are presented in Appendix A: Literature review and cross-jurisdictional scan, p. 67.

The evidence of effective approaches to addressing chronic absenteeism is modest and the practices employed across jurisdictions are quite varied. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw lessons from the evidence that exists and thoughtful consideration of the problem. At a minimum, addressing absenteeism requires the following steps:

- Monitor and record attendance and absences daily using common definitions and business rules
  - Attendance measurement should clearly indicate the number of days absent, whether excused or unexcused.
  - Data on chronic absenteeism should be disaggregated by the school, school division, population sub-group, and individual student level (encrypted for the protection of privacy).
  - Determining whether there are significant within-school (between classroom) differences in chronic absenteeism can help to identify whether classroom conditions may be contributing to chronic absenteeism.
- Identify students who are chronically absent
  - Initiatives to promote regular school attendance can occur on a province-wide, community-wide, system-wide, or school-wide basis.
  - Initiatives to address chronic absenteeism cannot occur without identifying the students who are chronically absent.
- Determine why chronically absent students are missing school
  - The factors preventing regular school attendance and contributing to chronic absenteeism are typically unique to the individual student and must be identified to be mitigated or overcome.
- Establish relationships with chronically absent students and their parents/caregivers
  - No initiative to curb or eliminate chronic absenteeism can succeed without engaging the students who are chronically absent and their parents/caregivers.
  - To have an enduring impact on school attendance, chronically absent students and their parents/caregivers must be assisted to overcome the barriers to regular school attendance.

- Plan a course of action to address the barriers to regular attendance.
  - Barriers to regular attendance and the factors that cause chronic absenteeism often are part of a constellation that requires complex, multi-faceted actions.
  - The individualistic nature of chronic absenteeism and the idiosyncratic nature of the action plans to address chronic absenteeism require that there be case managers who oversee and coordinate the action plan.
- Engage community and provincial agencies in the execution of the plan
  - The circumstances that give rise to chronic absenteeism often occur beyond the boundaries and jurisdiction of schools, school divisions, and ministries of education requiring significant inter-agency cooperation and coordination without which chronic absenteeism cannot be addressed.
- Recognize and reinforce improved and regular attendance
  - External rewards and recognition may reinforce regular or improved school attendance, but the chronically absent student must be internally motivated to attend regularly.
  - While attendance is instrumental to school success, it is success in a welcoming school environment that will most likely reinforce regular attendance.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the planned course of action and modify the course of action when evidence suggests changes are needed
  - Every plan should have milestones (indicators) of progress that, if not met, should signal a potential modification of the plan.
- Create an early warning system to identify students who are likely to become chronically absent
  - Develop models that will predict the factors that may cause students to become chronically truant and develop interventions to prevent chronic absenteeism.
- Maintain the commitment
  - Each year a new generation of students enters the system, bringing with them challenges that they and the education system must face if they are going to succeed.
  - Chronic absenteeism is a recurring problem that requires an enduring commitment from individuals and agencies that can be mobilized both vertically and horizontally.

Reflecting upon his 40-year career of scholarship focussed on absenteeism, Ken Reid makes an important point about prevention of absenteeism:

Rather than attempting to find political solutions to the problem, it may be better to start focussing upon the learning needs of all pupils, more especially those from deprived backgrounds, who have poor parental support, literacy and numeracy problems in their early school years, with low self-esteem and related familial, social, psychological and in-school problems. The earlier these issues are identified, the more likely the intervention is to be successful. At present, far too many interventions with pupils like absentees and truants occur far too late in their school careers.[9]

Lessons from the Interviews

The *Directions* team conducted 51 interviews with people working in government (multiple departments and agencies), school divisions and schools, the larger community, and academia. While each interviewee had a unique perspective that influenced their thoughts on the problem of absenteeism and attendance, there was no disagreement as to the existence of the challenge or about factors contributing to the challenge. Interviewees identified many reasons that students do not attend school and reasons that students do attend school; these are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Lessons from interviews: Reasons affecting student attendance

Reasons to stay away from school	Reasons to go to school

• No one cares or notices if I'm there
• Must look after family members:
   o Keep parent/siblings safe from X
   o Look after siblings when parent works
   o Take care of sick siblings, young siblings, adults
   o Must accompany parent to appointments
• No food at home, always hungry, can't concentrate
• My clothes aren't ok for school: shoes, clothes, outerwear
• Getting to the bus/school on time is hard
• I'm too sad
• Trips to grandparents, aunts, and uncles away from home community
	• There are teachers and others at school who care about me
	• There is help at school with my problems:
	   o Help with my emotions
	   o I learn about healthy relationships
	   o Help with practical problems like clothing, food, housing and help for my family
	• There is food at school – breakfast, lunch, and snacks
	• If I get behind, the teacher helps me get back on track
	• School is fun – I like learning
	• There are activities at school that I enjoy: arts, crafts, sports, cooking

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[9] Reid, K. (2012) The strategic management of truancy and school absenteeism: finding solutions from a national perspective. Educational Review, 64(2) 211-222.

Reasons to stay away from school	Reasons to go to school
• Always behind in schoolwork – no place to work, no Wi-Fi • School is boring, subjects aren't interesting to me • I don't have friends at school • My friends are on the street • School feels hopeless • Don't see a future that connects to school • I don't feel safe at school	• There are programs at school that help me learn about my culture • Subjects are taught in a way that makes me see myself as a successful learner • There are programs at school that help me think about my future (Career Trek, experiential learning) • I'm safe at school • I can play safely at school

Manitoba has high levels of children living in poverty and large numbers of children and youth in care compared to other Canadian provinces. Indigenous children are heavily overrepresented among in families living in poverty and among children and youth in care.

What follows is a short summary of what the *Directions* team has learned from the interview process.

High-level observations and recommendations

Remove suspension from the repertoire of responses to absence

Suspension from school is an inappropriate and counterproductive response to absenteeism and should be eliminated from policies and procedures. No interviewee indicated that suspension was an appropriate response and many expressed incredulity about suspending students for absence when what the school wanted was for students to be present. The focus should always be on inviting students back and finding the necessary resources to support attendance.

Actively address pandemic-related absence and learning loss

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated student absence dramatically. An examination of provincial-level data indicated that at least 6,000 students appeared to be unaccounted for (were previously enrolled in school, are no longer in school, no one has heard from them, and they have not graduated or transferred out of province) between 2019 and 2020. During the 2021 school year and since September 2021, additional students may have become unaccounted for. A first order of priority is to find out where the students are (e.g., enrolled somewhere else, home-schooled, disappeared). It is urgent to locate these students and ensure that they are enrolled and attending. Immediate attention must be given at the

school, division, and provincial level to how schools will assess learning loss and provide for learning recovery in 2021-22.[10]

Ensure interagency and interdepartmental cooperation to better serve children and youth

Many children who are chronically absent are receiving support or services from a variety of governmental and non-governmental agencies, including Justice (JUS), Employment and Income Assistance (EIA), and Child and Family Services (CFS). JUS and EIA can play a supporting role by systematically encouraging school attendance in their interactions with clients (children, youth and adult). Both education and child and family services personnel voice a desire for collaboration and cooperation between their spheres of operation but cite continued barriers at the school-agency level. For example, school level personnel cite difficulties in obtaining information from child and family services workers; supporters of children and youth in care cite school-imposed delays when students move from one school to another ("We must have the psychiatrist's report before we can enrol . . . "). School-level personnel and those familiar with CFS observed that schools sometimes appear to set up barriers that seem to intentionally delay enrolment, and CFS workers do not always know what the legal framework says about their obligation/ability to share information with schools.

Staff turnover requires that the sharing of information and policies be addressed again and again (as it should be) with staff both in schools and school divisions and in child welfare agencies. CFS and Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning must work together to ensure students receive appropriate educational programming as soon as possible, preferably in a school building (as per the Manitoba policy on Appropriate Education Programming).

Plan coherently, build shared commitment, and act

We heard of many individual school situations that appear to be supporting students well but did not get a sense of coherence and shared commitment to supportive actions at the division or provincial levels. The supportive efforts were sometimes episodic and not systemic. Systematic evaluations of programs by school divisions would be useful.

Manitoba has a long history of commissioning inquiries and task forces in response to systemic failures in the care and education of children and youth, followed by inadequate responses to the recommendations.

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[10] A letter was issued by Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning on December 21, 2021 asking school divisions to identify students with whom school teams had lost contact during the 2020-21 school year and with whom contact has not been re-established this school year. The letter is included in Appendix E: Lost Students – Manitoba Education Letter to Superintendents (December 2021).

Government and system work does not end with the receipt of reports, it begins there.

School culture and organization discriminate against racialized and impoverished children, impeding student presence and achievement in Manitoba

The challenges of poverty, housing, nutrition, and employment, and the ongoing impacts and challenges of residential schooling on the Indigenous community fall unevenly on the student population. This results in poorer attendance for students from racialized, Indigenous, and low-income communities. Interviewees suggested that boys were less likely to be identified as needing support services or to be offered those services than girls.

Educators ask whether children are "ready for school." Implicit in this question is the assumption that children entering school should know their colours, letters, and numbers, and be able to arrange objects in a prescribed order. When children are not 'school ready' it is assumed to be the fault of the child and/or the family/caregivers. Schools operate on the assumption that most children entering school will be school-ready and that the children who are not 'school ready' will need to have their deficiencies addressed. Another aspect of school readiness at any stage is emotional readiness. Many of the children and youth who are absent have experienced loss and trauma in their families (death, parent/caregiver incarcerated, illness, domestic violence) that can affect their emotional readiness to engage in learning.

Educators might consider entry to school from another perspective, asking: ***Are <u>schools</u> ready for the range of children for whom they will be responsible? What strengths do children entering school possess upon which the school can build? How might we recognize and validate the knowledge that students bring to school?***

One manifestation of racism and discrimination is the underlying assumption of education systems and school personnel that all parents/caregivers and communities see school as a desirable experience. This not true of people whose own school experiences have been negative or who are faced with larger struggles to survive: mental health, nutrition, housing, and adverse childhood experiences. Approaches to families/caregivers that presume a shared appreciation of the school and a capacity to respond immediately to school rules and expectations will not improve the presence of children and youth at school. Approaches that acknowledge urgent family/caregiver issues and assist in the removal of barriers to student presence are more likely to be successful.

For many families/caregivers (and especially First Nations, Métis and Inuit families/caregivers) there is a fundamental paradox: parents/caregivers want their children to be successful in school and in life, but they or their own caregivers, parents, or

grandparents have had bad experiences with education, making the families reluctant to engage with the school. Language barriers and cultural barriers reinforce the distance between some parents/caregivers and the schools their children attend.

Could institutional racism be one of the reasons why the teaching force does not reflect the demographic variety in the population? It might be difficult for individuals who have seen the subtle and not-so-subtle racism in the system to work within that system, even if they believed that being part of the system would help to change it. Harold Johnson, author of *Peace and Good Order: The Case for Indigenous Justice in Canada*, was asked why, after serving as an Indigenous defense lawyer and prosecutor in Saskatchewan, he believes that having more Indigenous lawyers will not lead to better justice or outcomes for Indigenous offenders and victims. He responded:

> To get through that education, you have to allow yourself to be colonized. You have to become one of them. And once you become one of them, then you're outside of your own community. If you believe in that system, then you're put outside. You're going to struggle to connect again.

Johnson's point is that having more Indigenous representation <u>alone</u> will not make the change if the Indigenous "representatives" must "become one of them;" a system that is actively anti-racist, inclusive, culturally relevant, and culturally responsive is required.

At the classroom level, there is often the racism of lower expectations. These lower expectations may also permeate the school, division, and department views of student achievement and success.

The school day and year are organized to address the needs of adults more than the needs of children and youth. Adverse childhood experiences may mean that some students need more time, more attention, more empathy, and more acceptance to learn.

The present curriculum has been designed primarily along the traditional lines of the dominant school culture (grades, subjects, compulsory progressions of learning). There are distinctly different approaches used within First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities that integrate the environment, spirituality, and a holistic approach to learning. A report from the Canadian Council on Learning in 2007 Redefining How Success is Measured in First Nations, Inuit and Métis Learning, Report on Learning in Canada 2007 (Ottawa: 2007) contains holistic lifelong learning models that were developed in collaboration with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis representatives. Diagrammatic representations of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Learning can be found in Appendix B: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Holistic Learning Models, p. 104.

The challenges faced by racialized, Indigenous, and low-income students need to be addressed at both a school and system level through tailored supports for students (intercultural support workers; Indigenous graduation coaches; the presence of Elders and Knowledge Keepers; professional learning for teachers about Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing; and cultural understanding of immigrant communities; flexible programming (continuous intake, alternative programs, credit recovery, etc.); and collaboration between and among agencies to address issues of housing, health, nutrition, and income that impact student presence and achievement.

Division and school-level observations

Interviews with school-level personnel primarily focussed on schools and were recommended to the research team for the work they were doing and its impact. From those interviews we have gathered the following:

- Where school environments are actively welcoming, parents and caregivers are engaged by schools and families/caregivers are supported, attendance increases.
- Breakfast, lunch and snack programs motivate student attendance because food insecurity is an issue for many students.
- Where there are Indigenous graduation coaches and intercultural liaison workers in the school division, a rapid response to absence (inquire, problem-solve, support) results in improved student presence. Where school personnel collaborate successfully with community agencies (employment assistance, family services, housing services), supports are strengthened, and presence improves.
- Recognition of their out-of-school learning (including land-based learning and learning in their cultural communities) and opportunities for experiential learning can increase attachment to learning in school.
- Experiential learning (e.g., Career Trek) for children Grades 5-6 can help them "see a future" and connect this perceived future to in-school learning.
- Experiential learning for credit for older students (tutoring, assisting in extracurricular programs, volunteering at a food bank, shopping for a neighbour, walking a younger child to school, etc.) can provide opportunities for secondary school students to earn credit, increase attachment to school and engage in planning for their future.
- Language and technology can be barriers to parental/caregiver support and student success.
  - Parents/caregivers who are uncomfortable with English or feel that their language skills are lacking are often reluctant to engage on their own with school personnel.

- o Low-income families/caregivers often use pay-as-you-go phones and lack other technology or affordable wi-fi.
- Where absence is episodic for family and/or cultural reasons (festivals, trips to home country, return to home for hunting season, etc.) consideration needs to be given to:
  - o Ways of recognizing within the school context learning that occurs during these experiences
  - o Flexible approaches to making up lost learning from the school context.
- The episodic nature of attendance in some communities and families emphasizes the need for accommodation of the absences through learning packages, remote learning, and prior learning assessment to prevent learning loss and recognize learning that occurs when students are not physically present in school. Where there are intercultural liaison workers or Indigenous graduation coaches, these individuals can help advocate for flexible, positive solutions to absence.
- Teachers sometimes see absence as a "behaviour" to be disciplined and are uninformed or do not inquire about the reasons, perhaps because they feel powerless to affect out-of-school circumstances.
- Students do not always see the school curriculum as relevant and engaging.
- Attendance improves when students see curricula as culturally relevant and responsive.
- School curriculum is important and should be the lens for curriculum development and implementation. Curriculum should be designed (and accompanied by professional learning for teachers) to incorporate Indigenous ways of doing, knowing, and being.
- Mental health issues are real and present for children and youth and their families/caregivers and require resources and supports both at school and in the community. Mental health challenges include students with anxiety and depression and students living with adults who have substance use disorders or mental illness themselves. If the adults in the home have challenges in parenting/caregiving, children and youth are more likely to have difficulty navigating relationships both in school and out of school.
- Land-based learning should be recognized and supported.
- Continuous intake and credit recovery are important components of supporting students to 'restart' when they have been absent for a prolonged period.
- A broad and robust program of extracurricular activities (arts, sports, clubs, drama, choir, instrumental music, etc.) offers additional opportunities for students to engage in and attach to school and for the incorporation of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and immigrant cultures.

- Programs and interventions that help students suffering from various forms of trauma can help them see school as a place where they are supported.
- In some schools, special projects where Indigenous parents/caregivers were invited to be volunteer or paid classroom assistants under the mentorship of willing teachers demonstrated an increase in comfort with, attachment to, and pride in the school's work.
- Other schools worked with community centres to increase parents'/caregivers' comfort with the school and school personnel with "family rooms" and programs to engage and assist parents/caregivers with literacy, numeracy, nutrition, and budgeting.

Credit recovery, continuous intake, and recognition of prior learning are all ways to embed a restorative practice approach that seeks to make the student's learning whole – to fill in gaps and recognize out-of-classroom learning to build student success.

The research team heard of innovative programs that were community-based; community organizations and schools working together to provide supports of many kinds, including family centres, parent/caregiver mentor programs, community-based school alternatives or school supports (e.g., Pathways), and programs that tied community health, mental health, and family resources to school outreach programs. The research team was struck by the short-term nature of some of the programs (e.g., a grant to try an idea, but no follow-up funding) and the apparent absence of any attempt at the division or provincial level to collect and share information and experiences about these programs (key informant interviews).

There are school programs for disengaged students that are housed in storefronts or community spaces like libraries, but these are sometimes operated by community agencies and departments rather than by the schools themselves. There are also intensive support programs for some young people, with one-to-one mentorship. Some of these occur within the schools and others in the community. These programs range from those with a general support focus to supporting specific youth (those in care) or those with externalizing behaviours.

Community Schools with embedded health and social services have been supported by Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning for several years. The program is supported at its present size and government appears unwilling to increase its financial commitment to allow the program to extend to more schools. Within Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, there is currently an effort to introduce Compassionate Schools (schools with staff trained in trauma-informed practice) as part of the Community Schools Program.

Provincial Observations

At a "big picture" level, Manitoba understands where systems have failed and what challenges exist. Legal frameworks and policies have attempted to clarify and establish cooperative interagency and interdepartmental relationships in a manner that would improve outcomes, but these relationships do not appear to be sustained.

According to the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, Manitoba has the highest percentage of child poverty of all Canadian provinces at 28.3% in December of 2020.[11] Manitoba also has the highest ratio of children under the age of 18 in out-of-home care at 33.2 per 1000 children in 2019.[12]

Security of home and food are both essential parts of the stability that is necessary for students to succeed. Schools pursue food security for students largely through philanthropic efforts and report difficulties for students and parents/caregivers in navigating access to housing.

School itself should be seen as relevant and inviting by students. The curriculum should be culturally appropriate and place an emphasis on well-being and healthy relationships as well as the "traditional" subject-oriented focus.

There are many agents providing supports for children and families/caregivers but few who have emerged as leaders respected across departments and agencies. Each tragic death and system failure, including Tina Fontaine and Phoenix Sinclair, generates another inquiry, task force, and report. Recommendations are repeated with each new effort, but never fully implemented. Implementation and maintenance (through ongoing orientation and professional learning, interagency collaborations) of the policies, legal frameworks, and supports are clearly inadequate. Financial resources from the provincial level are not targeted in a systematic way, and there appears to be little accountability.

The Manitoba government must commit itself to providing the leadership, policies, the legal framework, and the resources to engage government agencies, schools, divisions, and communities to create change for children and youth and their families/caregivers.

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[11] Manitoba: Poverty Central, Report Card Update 2020, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg. Uses updated Statistics Canada data.
[12] Canadian Child Welfare Research portal, with data from the Department of Manitoba Families (2019) Annual Report 2018-19.

A visual model for considering student presence and engagement

Figure 2 itemizes (without being exhaustive) some of the factors that promote attendance and presence at schools and some of the factors which prevent or inhibit attendance and presence. It as an illustration of the shift in thinking from the absent student as the problem to considering the home and school environments as having influence on student presence. The factors that promote student attendance in Figure 2 share elements with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning strategies and actions for *Mamahtáwisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With* – An Indigenous Education Policy Framework; this framework emphasizes four strategic/policy areas for the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in teaching and learning (see Figure 3 for examples of Indigenous Way of Knowing, Being, and Doing).

Figure 2. A visual model for considering student presence and engagement: Students at the centre

Students at the centre

FACTORS THAT CAN INHIBIT SCHOOL PRESENCE

- Family needs/demands
  - Caregiving
  - Employment
- Housing & mobility
- Transportation problems
  - Access
  - Timing
- Health & mental health challenges
  - Poor nutrition
  - Anxiety
  - Depression
  - Absent parents/caregivers
  - Substance use and/or misuse by students, family members, or caregivers
  - School refusal
- Failure of school to celebrate the presence of each student
- Rigid, judgemental response to absence
  - Suspension
  - Expulsion
  - Inflexible approach to catching up
- Low expectation of staff for students & families
- Racism

PRESENT, ENGAGED, & LEARNING

FAMILY

Navigators & champions to provide support

SUPPORTIVE FACTORS

- A caring, welcoming, & accommodating school environment
  - Families as partners, not problems
  - School focus on compassion and well-being
  - Strong relationships with peers and adults
  - Aspirational expectations
- Strong focus on numeracy & literacy for all
- Recovery options
  - Continuous entry
  - Additional time for learning
  - Remediation
  - Partial credit
  - Flexible scheduling
- Health & wellness
  - Nutrition
  - Access to breakfast and lunch programs
  - Mental health supports
  - Substance abuse management and support
- Restorative approaches
- Culturally relevant & responsive
  - pedagogy
  - curriculum
- Actively anti-racist
- Staff trained in trauma-informed practice
- Collaboration with community partners

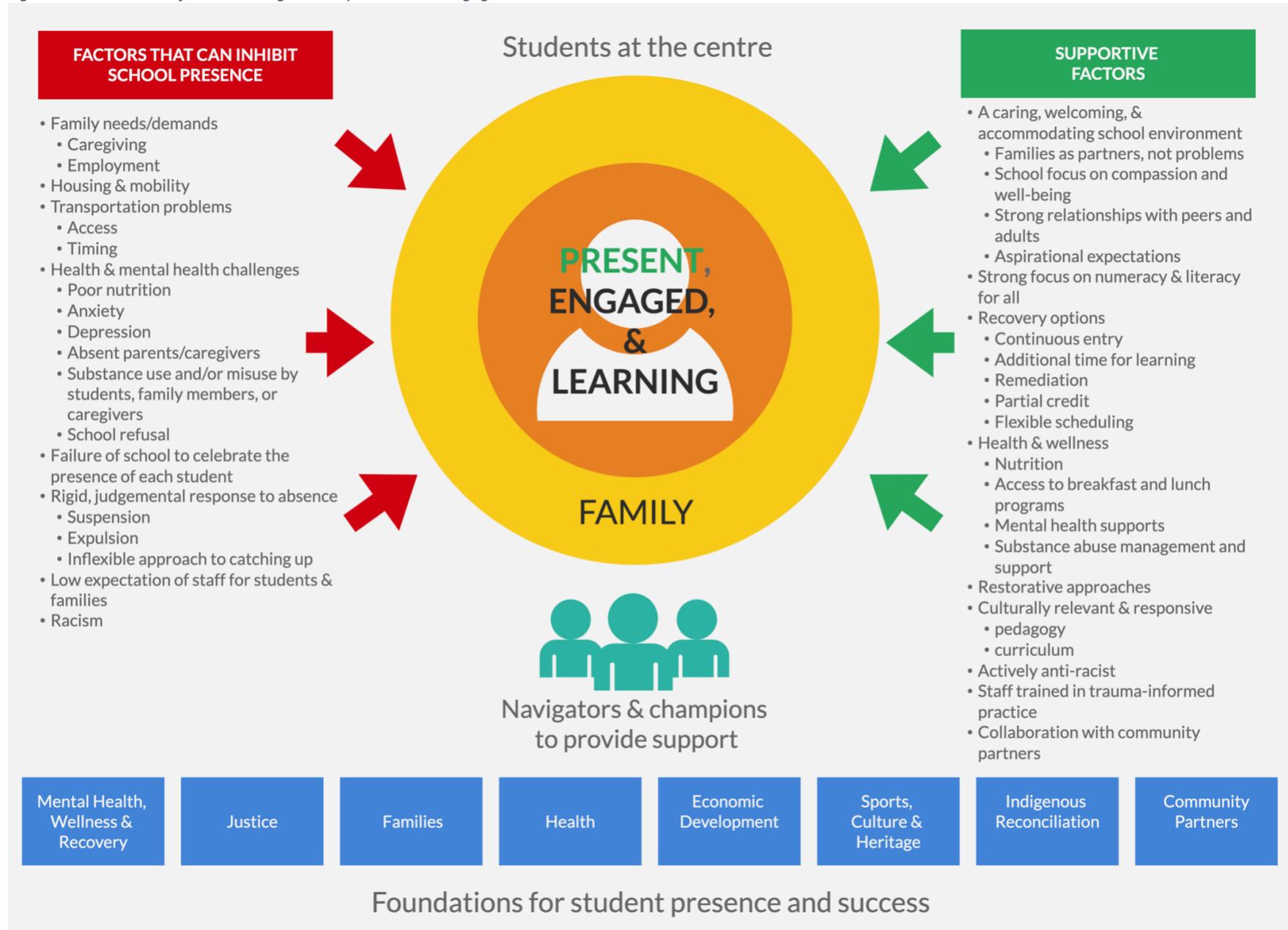| Mental Health, Wellness & Recovery | Justice | Families | Health | Economic Development | Sports, Culture & Heritage | Indigenous Reconciliation | Community Partners |

Foundations for student presence and success

Figure 3. Strategies and Actions in Mamahtáwisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With – An Indigenous Education Policy Framework

Understanding Worldviews, Values, Identities & Traditions

- **Teach True History**
  - Treaty Education Training
  - Implementation and capacity building for Mamàhtawisiwin
  - Provincial Curriculum Framework

- **Incorporate Cultural Teachings, Experiences and Indigenous Languages**
  - Provincial Curriculum Framework
  - Land-based Education
  - Cultural Safety Training
  - Manitoba Survey on Indigenous Languages Teachings
  - Indigenous Languages Courses
  - Indigenous Academic Achievement Grant

Inclusive and Culturally Safe Learning Environment

- **Demonstrate Respect for Worldviews, Values, Identities, and Traditions**
  - Professional Learning Framework
- **Value and Celebrate Differences**
  - Cultural Safety Training
  - Self-declaration Training (data)
  - Smudging Protocol

Authentic Involvement

- **Promote Elder/Knowledge Keeper and Community Involvement**
  - Elder/Knowledge Keepers and Community in School Initiative
  - Building Student Success with Indigenous Parents Grant
- **Promote Parent Grandparent, and Family Involvement**
  - School Community Councils
  - Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy
  - Community Schools Programs
  - Resources shared with Indigenous parents
  - Community Councils

Putting Student at the Centre

- **Respect and Listen to Students**
  - Resources shared to engage student voice/perspective
  - Successful transitions and adequate supports for First Nations students
- **Employ a Holistic Approach to Supporting Students**
  - Collaborate with First Nations to create a student data sharing agreement
  - Collaborate with First Nations partners to inform the development of a resource document – Promising practices to achieve successful transitions for First Nations students to post-secondary training and the workforce.
  - Collaborate with First Nations partners to discuss a plan for advancing technology education and technical vocational facilities.
  - Indigenous Academic Achievement Grant
  - Mental Health and Well-being Strategy

Source: Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning

Developing a Plan for the Pursuit of Presence

Because student absence in Manitoba's K-12 system is a serious impediment to the improvement of student educational performance and outcomes, on March 3, 2021, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning contracted with Directions to help address persistent absenteeism in Manitoba schools by completing a literature review and inter-jurisdictional scan (completed April 2021 and included in Appendix A: Literature review and cross-jurisdictional scan, p. 67), conducting interviews with key informants (51 interviews conducted), developing an action plan for implementation in September 2021, supporting those implementing plan, and preparing a final report.

In March 2020, Manitoba's K-12 Commission released its report, addressing the whole scope of K-12 education in Manitoba. Student achievement and student absenteeism figured prominently in the report and in its recommendations.

The K-12 Commission report touches on every aspect of K-12 education in Manitoba, including curriculum, classroom innovation, a framework for assessing student learning, early interventions in reading, writing and mathematics, professional learning, initiatives to close the achievement gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and classroom level supports for students with special needs.

The Manitoba government has said that It will work "with intersectoral partners to improve student attendance by designing an action plan, implementing a new provincial attendance policy and developing a system to measure, assess and respond to the root causes that lead to chronic absenteeism, including supporting parents and caregivers in their roles."

Student achievement cannot improve without ensuring that students are present and engaged.

The K-12 Education Action Plan describes what success would look like if the changes proposed for Manitoba's education system produce "Future-Ready Students" (Student Success Pillar 3). It is not surprising that the first success criterion is: "Students are more engaged, and attendance improves."

Cognizant of the Report of the K-12 Commission, the resources being mobilized to design and develop government's response, and the fact that student presence is a key factor in almost every aspect of the response, *Directions* has been asked to develop draft logic models and a critical path for student presence that are consistent with the intentions expressed in the K-12 Education Action Plan and capable of being integrated with the other facets being developed by Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning.

Foundations for school presence

There are several underlying principles and conditions for success that should form the basis of a successful action plan for student presence.

Principles

The lessons from the literature and inter-jurisdictional scan[13] and the advice of Ken Reid[14] prompted *Directions* to develop as set of principles to guide the development of the action plan to address persistent student absence:

- Student success and well-being contributes to healthy, successful communities.
- Student success and well-being is a collective responsibility and requires active agency on the part of all who are responsible for children and youth.
- A focus on student presence and addressing absenteeism as it occurs is the first step in a process leading to student success; the others include a welcoming and safe school climate, student engagement, success planning, mentoring, and monitoring progress.
- Absenteeism is typically symptomatic of a range of problems, only some of which can be addressed by the education system.
- Absenteeism is idiosyncratic, requiring planning that considers the distinctive and individual obstacles that prevent regular attendance, and monitoring the implementation of the plan and its impact on absenteeism.
- Because many of the factors affecting absenteeism are beyond the jurisdiction of the school, planning must be able to depend upon coordination with other ministries and their agents and clear and frequent communication with them, including ministries responsible for health, mental health, social and family services, justice, etc.
- Student absence will always be a challenge requiring consistent and constant attention. The continuity of effort and resources over time is essential.

Opportunities for integration between the *pursuit of presence* and other work underway in Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning can be illustrated by the intersection

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[13] Directions Evidence and Policy Research Group (April 8, 2021). Student Absenteeism (Kindergarten to Grade 12) Literature Review and Cross-jurisdictional Scan. Report prepared for Manitoba Education.

[14] Reid, K. (2012) The strategic management of truancy and school absenteeism: finding solutions from a national perspective. Educational Review, 64(2) 211-222.

between the principles we have articulated above and the values that underpin Manitoba's compassionate schools initiative (Mino-wicehtowin).

<div align="center">**Conditions for success**</div>

If the Action Plan is to have demonstrable impact on student presence, the following conditions must prevail.

1. There needs to be a demonstrable commitment from government that this emphasis on student presence and engagement is a continuing cross-governmental initiative in perpetuity.
2. There must be significant cooperation and communication with provincial departments and community agencies.
3. There must be committed champions at every level (government, community, division, school) combined with strong moral purpose.
4. There must be protocols and processes for coordination and cooperation within education and between education and other departments that can ensure that efforts at the school-community level can succeed.
5. There must be a clearly articulated philosophy of early intervention that provides support to students and their parents/caregivers before persistent absenteeism becomes apparent.
6. School personnel must notice changes in students' behaviour, attendance (presence as well as absence) and engagement.
7. There must be significant lateral support from and engagement with the organizations representing superintendents; principals and vice principals; teachers; Black, Indigenous, and persons of colour; and 2SLGTBQQIAA+ individuals.
8. Manitoba must fund a dedicated student persistence and success unit within Manitoba government to which professionals can turn for information, strategic support, and professional development that can help to achieve coherence in addressing attendance. The unit should have a working relationship with governmental departments to ensure that efforts at the school-community level can succeed.
9. There must be cohesion, consistency, quality, and accountability.

What the K to 12 Commission said

We introduce our recommendations about an attendance/presence action plan with a summary of the Report of the Commission on K to 12 Education (March 2020), *Our Children's Success: Manitoba's Future* because the plan addresses many of the issues and recommendations contained in the report.

As noted in our report, the Commission recognized absenteeism as an "early warning sign" (symptom) of problems with "poor health, poor mental health, family and work responsibilities, transportation, bullying, homelessness, undiagnosed cognitive vulnerabilities, or, in the case of Tina Fontaine, the death of a parent" (p. 60) and "a lack of caring and supportive teachers or under-resourced schools" (p. 61).

The Commission quoted extensively for a submission by the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (June 20, 2019) about the "effects of irregular attendance":

- School absenteeism can have serious consequences for the child. In the short-term, lack of attendance leads to challenges in learning and achievement (Carroll, 2010; Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007, as cited in Maynard, McCrea, Pigott, & Kelly, 2013).
- Over time, school absenteeism is known to increase the risk of dropout by 35% (Cabus & De Witte, 2014).
- Absenteeism can also increase the risk for violence, injury, substance misuse, psychiatric disorders, and economic deprivation due to loss of earning potential (Dube & Orpinas, 2009; Attwood & Croll, 2006).
- Addressing chronic absenteeism is essential for the fulfillment of the right to education, which is enshrined by Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
- Out-of-school suspensions have a detrimental effect on academic achievement and school outcomes (Noltemeyer, Ward, & Mcloughlin, 2015; Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018).
- Suspensions increase the risk that students will fail the curriculum and double the risk that students will repeat a grade (Hemphill et al., 2006; Fabelo et al., 2011).
- More suspensions are associated with worse achievement, even after controlling for differences between students (Hwang, 2018).
- Ultimately, suspensions are associated with an increased risk of dropping out of school; one study found that suspended students are 68% more likely to drop out (Noltemeyer, Ward, & Mcloughlin, 2015; Suh, Suh & Houston, 2007).
- The effects of suspensions extend beyond the classroom. Being suspended was found to increase the likelihood of criminal victimization, criminal involvement, and incarceration in adulthood (Wolf & Kupchik, 2016).
- Suspension is often the first step in a chain of events leading to short- and long-term consequences, including academic disengagement, academic failure,

dropout, and delinquency. (Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014, p.2) (Quoted by the Advocate on p. 8).

- Researchers theorize that suspensions increase unsupervised time for students that are at high risk of further detrimental behaviour while simultaneously reducing access to supportive services (Valdebenito, Eisner, Farrington, Ttofi & Sutherland, 2018).
- There is some evidence to support this theory. A large study of adolescents found that being suspended from school increased the likelihood of arrest in the same month that the suspension took place; this effect is stronger for youth without a history of delinquent behaviours (Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold, & Cauffman, 2014, emphasis added). (p. 62)

The Commission referred to "proven methods to confront poor attendance include those at the school and district level, and those which engage with parents and families" (Bauer, Liu, Schanzenbach, & Shambaugh, 2018):

- Prevention of absenteeism can be realized with the full-time employment of a school nurse or other professional to decrease the likelihood of children leaving school early; free or low-cost lunches; and instruction on sanitary practices to promote health
- Administration of consistent data collection on attendance, and the implementation of accountability systems are key; these are most effective when there is transparency, engagement, and visibility on the part of all stakeholders
- The implementation of accountability measures must not be a superficial act, but must accurately reflect data to be effective
- Coaches, mentors, and teachers can assist in identifying underlying factors involved (such as transportation, illness, financial insecurity, suspensions, household issues)
- Connections between schools and parents or families are also extremely valuable: strategies such as text messages to parents to communicate when their child is absent, to provide reminders about field trips or events, and to create opportunities to connect parents and teachers (p. 61)

Having reviewed the literature devoted to efforts to address absenteeism, we would refer to them as "promising practices" but ones that are nonetheless worth implementing. The Commission also made several specific recommendations:

- Increase public awareness of the right to education and communicate with students, parents, guardians, and all those who have a stake in student achievement, around addressing absenteeism and the expectations, policies, and impact of attendance on student outcomes.

- Increase the capacity to collect, measure, assess, and respond to the underlying causes of absenteeism to inform policies, appropriate interventions, and outreach to mitigate the negative impacts of non-attendance and provide transparent information to the public on suspensions and expulsions, and ensure that absences are reported to the province and to parents in a timely manner.

- Develop a plan to identify underlying factors for non-attendance and address chronic absenteeism in Manitoba to measure, identify, assess, and respond to school absenteeism to ensure that the best interests of children are paramount and that actions respect the right to education for children and youth.

- Review Manitoba's Provincial Code of Conduct: Appropriate Interventions and Disciplinary Consequences (2017) in light of recommendations of Manitoba's Advocate for Children and Youth and, regarding suspensions and expulsions, develop a province-wide strategy to limit, reduce, and phase-out exclusionary practices except in situations of imminent safety risk to students and staff, balancing appropriately the need for at-risk students to receive an education and ensuring that all students have a safe and orderly learning environment.

- Develop and implement a province-wide protocol that clearly defines responsibilities of all those involved in the education of students and their families regarding the documentation of attendance and staged actions to be taken when students are absent, with suggestions on how to build upon and sustain relationships with students who are experiencing absenteeism. (p. 63)

Logic models to support student presence

Directions has developed logic models for the key goals to be achieved. For each goal, the logic model captures:

- the necessary resources
- the intended activities, including the participants
- and the intended short-term, intermediate-term, and long-term results[15]
- underlying assumptions for the achievement of each goal

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[15] Anticipated results are the indicators of progress or success. Metrics for the indicators would need to be developed.

- external factors that can influence the achievement of each goal

Although presented as discrete elements, the initiatives below constitute a collection of complementary actions. Most are aligned with or complementary to initiatives underway or contemplated by Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning in responding to the K-12 Commission. We strongly urge that Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning integrate our recommendations with the initiatives contemplated so that they are woven together as seamlessly as possible and do not appear to be separate initiatives.

The literature we reviewed makes clear the effects of interventions designed to diminish absenteeism are modest at best. However, most studies were focussed on discrete short-term interventions rather than a complementary and continuing set of initiatives. The scan found a few jurisdictions applying a broader range of initiatives, but few, if any, as comprehensive as the ones we envision.

The focus on presence and engagement (and addressing absence) of this current work must be embedded in an overall focus on improving student achievement. John Hattie's significant work in synthesizing meta-analyses of factors affecting student achievement provides a useful focus and discussion of the factors contributing to student achievement over which the school and teachers can have influence. *Visible Learning (2009)* and *Visible Learning for Teachers (2012)* offer an analysis of the factors that have the greatest impact on improving student learning and achievement. *Visible Learning for Teachers* offers a framework with checklists, analysis and discussion that can form a critical part of a collective professional learning effort which could be undertaken as a response to the K-12 Commission's recommendations for improving student achievement.

1) Change Policy on Absenteeism

a) Eliminate suspension as response to frequent absence

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES		OUTCOMES		
Resources	Actions	Audiences	Short-term results	Intermediate results	Long-term results
• Amend School act and Regulations to eliminate suspension for absenteeism • Integrate with policies, standards, and protocols	• Disseminate changes • Provide professional pre and post service education about alternatives to suspension and the need for student-specific planning	• All educational personnel and school trustees • Parents/caregivers • Students • Other stakeholders (for example, Justice, Families, Health) as required	• No further out-of-school suspension of students for absenteeism	• Modification of proposed attendance policy to reflect decision	• Elimination of punitive approaches to non-attendance • Improved attention to analysis of source of absenteeism • Better planning for addressing absenteeism

Assumptions	External Factors
• Manitoba is committed to developing and maintaining capacity for increasing student presence • All audiences recognize that out-of-school suspension and in-school suspension are different, and both are different from expulsion • There is consistent application of the revised suspension policy across province • School personnel employ a strength-based, trauma-informed approach to students	• This logic model aligns with MACY recommendations • Consultation about suspension is occurring with affected and interested stakeholders

b) Revise policy and practice to require immediate, personal outreach to students whose absence is unexcused

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES		OUTCOMES		
Resources	Actions	Audiences	Short-term results	Intermediate results	Long-term results
• Staff time • Create resource material to support goal (guidebook, videos, etc.) • Provide professional learning opportunities for staff regarding effective communication and outreach • Provide funding to ensure community outreach workers are available as required	• Rewrite policy to make attendance outreach and inquiry a professional responsibility of teachers and principals • Make policy widely known • Post policy on Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning website	• Deputy Minister's approval • All education personnel • Everyone with access to Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning's website	• Policy rewritten and approved • Awareness of revised policy	• More proactive response to students who are not present	• Greater student presence

Assumptions	External Factors
• Manitoba is committed to developing and maintaining capacity for increasing student presence • Duties of principals and teachers may require modification requiring that they make a 'best effort' to ensure the participation of students enrolled in their schools and classes	• Objection by professional staff that making such an effort increases responsibilities that requires hiring additional staff

2) Collect Data on Student Presence/Absence

a) Collect enrollment data twice in each school year using the Manitoba Education and Training (MET) number

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES		OUTCOMES		
Resources	Actions	Audiences	Short-term results	Intermediate results	Long-term results
• Mechanism is already established for this goal and will become automatic when new student information system is implemented • Enrollment data should be disaggregated (for example, by ethnicity, age, language, gender, special education status)	• Advise system that there will be a second annual count of students by MET number • Issue directive to school jurisdictions that counts are due Feb. 2022 • Audit school division attendance	• Division Superintendents and Secretary-Treasurer • Schools	• Students present September 30, but not February will be identified • School divisions / schools will become more attentive to ensuring student presence if resources can be reallocated • Disaggregated data analyzed for patterns at school, school division, and provincial levels	• Increased monitoring to identify students who are not present and return them to school • Increase in accountability for ensuring student presence • Disparities in absenteeism among subpopulations are identified, addressed and diminished	• Increased number of students present on a regular basis

Assumptions	External Factors
• Manitoba is committed to developing and maintaining capacity for increasing student presence • Task integrated into the new student information system • In meetings with those developing the student information system, we emphasized the importance of having data that would permit this kind of real-time analysis	• Consider partnering with the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy to explore linkages among data to better inform policy

b) Support school divisions to monitor, investigate, and record student presence/absence

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES		OUTCOMES		
Resources	Actions	Audiences	Short-term results	Intermediate results	Long-term results
• Staff • Funding • Technology	• Develop common language regarding attendance and absence • Develop common procedures ('business rules') for recording attendance and absences • Develop common metrics for attendance and absence • Integrate attendance/absentee metrics into common student information systems • Record results of outreach efforts • Analyze data by subpopulations • Establish thresholds of student attendance and impact on student achievement through data analysis	• School division leaders • School-based administrators and staff • Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning analytics department	• Common definitions of attendance and absence established • Common procedures for recording attendance and absences established • Common metrics for attendance and absence established • Explore relation between attendance/absentees and key elements of student information (e.g., demographics, socio-economic characteristics) • Better record of outreach attempts	• The annual number of absences established • Means of determining increases or decreases in absences established • Better understanding of the causes of absence and what it takes to increase student presence	• Factors predictive of chronic absence determined • Early intervention to prevent chronic absence

Assumptions	External Factors
• Manitoba is committed to developing and maintaining capacity for increasing student presence • Common definitions, business rules, student information systems, and metrics would be used throughout Manitoba • Communications and professional development will be required to introduce definitions, business rules, and metrics • Divisions and departments will work together to develop procedures and responsibilities	• The rate at which the provincial data system (including a common student information system) is developed will affect the ability to undertake detailed analyses

3) Pursue Student Presence through Coordinated Case Management

a) Ensure that all students expected to be present are in school

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES		OUTCOMES		
Resources	Actions	Audiences	Short-term results	Intermediate results	Long-term results
• Enrollment registers • Staff time to make contact and inquire/invite	• Compare registers year over year • Ensure that newly enrolled students are also present • Review unclaimed pupil files • Ensure that home schoolers are registered and receiving an education • Outreach to students and families/caregivers • Coordinate with agencies to remove barriers not under the control of schools	• School superintendents and principals	• Outreach to students and families/caregivers in a supportive and welcoming manner • Outreach to out-of-school agencies	• Students returned to school • Families/caregivers have better connection with schools	• Better educational outcomes for students who return to school

Assumptions	External Factors
• Manitoba is committed to developing and maintaining capacity for increasing student presence • Deputy Minister has the authority to issue directive	• Parent/caregiver contact information up to date • Inter-department and inter-agency communication and cooperation in support of children and families/caregivers

b) Create, maintain, and monitor a coordinated case management approach to persistent or extended absence

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES		OUTCOMES		
Resources	Actions	Audiences	Short-term results	Intermediate results	Long-term results
• Staff • Funding • Technology	• Create policies and procedures • Establish inter-agency and inter-ministerial protocols for communication and cooperation • Develop a case management tool kit • Prepare case managers • Coach case managers on ongoing basis	• Case managers and system and school leaders	• Policies and standard operating procedures developed • Inter-agency and inter-ministerial protocols for communication and cooperation developed • Case management tool kit developed • Case managers prepared and supported	• Case management plans established for the students most often absent • Relationships established with persistently absent students and their parents/caregivers • Working relationships with ministries and agencies established (i.e., consistent, frequent collaboration from ministries, agencies, and service providers)	• Prevalence of chronic absenteeism declines • Fewer students leave school before graduation • Graduation rates increase • Reduction in demands for social services, employment insurance, and health among previously persistently absent students

Assumptions	External Factors
• Manitoba is committed to developing and maintaining capacity for increasing student presence • The Appropriate Educational Programming regulation and Standards for Students process can be leveraged to connect and support schools and school divisions, including the articulation of the case management role/responsibilities	• Community agencies must be willing to work with schools in the interest of students • Removing impediments that families/caregivers face may require additional resources

4) Enhance Student Engagement, Mental Health, Well-Being, and Success

a) Create a safe, welcoming, and culturally responsive school environment for students[16]

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES		OUTCOMES		
Resources	Actions	Audiences	Short-term results	Intermediate results	Long-term results
• Staff (external facilitators as needed) • Funding • Materials (e.g., self-appraisal materials) • Technology (e.g., online surveys, posting of school plans)	• Enhance student engagement, mental health, and well-being by helping schools conduct a self-appraisal to determine how welcoming and culturally responsive they are • Schools develop plans for enhancing student engagement, mental health, and well-being based upon their self-assessments • Provide school staff with trauma-informed professional development	• Students, parents/caregivers, staff, and key stakeholders, including Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, representatives of racialized communities, immigrant and refugee communities, and 2SLGBTQQIAA+ groups	• Schools complete self-assessments and develop improvement plans • Schools implement plans for making their schools safe, welcoming, and culturally responsive	• Staff know students as people • Staff are better able to identify students for whom trauma and mental health are challenges • Students have agency • Students are challenged to achieve beyond previous boundaries • Students are respected regardless of other factors such as ability, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, or religion • Students can express themselves and their ideas without judgment	**Students** • Will be more engaged • Will have better attendance records • Will be physically and emotionally safe • Will not experience racism or discrimination **Educators/staff** • Will intervene when student social, emotional, or physical safety is threatened • Will recognize when discrimination and racism occur and intervene to address the situation **Schools** • Will have student and staff codes of conduct **Parents/Caregivers**

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[16] A safe learning environment is one that is physically and emotionally safe, culturally responsive, and engaging.

	• Enhance visibility of all staff to students at transition times • Screen for mental health disorders			• There are established norms that are enforced consistently • There are many ways to be successful • There is rapport between staff and students and among students • Trauma-informed practice allows a more compassionate lens through which school staff are able to work with students and families/caregivers	• Will have greater confidence in public schools

Assumptions	External Factors
• Manitoba is committed to developing and maintaining capacity for increasing student presence • Representatives of staff, students, parents/caregivers, and key stakeholder groups help to define the norms upon which the code of conduct can be based • System-wide communication and professional development will be required • Build upon the many successful initiatives at the school level • Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning is responding to MACY, K-12 Commission recommendations	• Schools are not immune to external influences such as gang recruitment; unsafe neighborhoods, food, income, and housing insecurity; transportation challenges.

b) Improve student nutrition with breakfast, lunch, and snack programs

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES		OUTCOMES		
Resources	Actions	Audiences	Short-term results	Intermediate results	Long-term results
• Grant money • Available space • Leadership	• Assess the adequacy of food and nutrition at the school • Provide grants to elementary and secondary schools to start and maintain community gardens • Create a student-farmer market • Offer extra-curricular cooking programs • Co-locate food banks in schools with empty classrooms • Provide grants to schools to provide breakfast, lunch, and snacks to students	• Students • Parents/caregiver • Community	• Gardens begun • Food provided • After school cooking programs offered • Food banks co-located in schools where space is available	• Attendance improves • Nutrition improves • Engagement in school improves	• School attachment improves • Performance improves • Parental/caregiver support for school improves

Assumptions	External Factors
• Manitoba is committed to developing and maintaining capacity for increasing student presence • Build upon the many successful initiatives at the school level • Manitoba will invest provincial resources to improve student nutrition	• Working with local food banks and community kitchens

c) Improve student and family/caregiver engagement with school

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES		OUTCOMES		
Resources	Actions	Audiences	Short-term results	Intermediate results	Long-term results
• Fund community outreach/liaison workers • Provide space in schools for community – clinics, family rooms, learning opportunities for adults • School social workers	• Establish non-punitive community outreach protocols • Establish protocols for communication and cooperation with and across agencies • Develop a 'navigation guide' to community resources (for example, Winnipeg Outreach Network Resource Guide) • Improve access to housing, income, and health and mental health supports • Provide training for the community outreach/liaison workers • Hold family-friendly school and cultural events with food and activities (storyteller, performances, music, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, etc.) • Consider locating literacy and nutrition	• Students and their families/caregivers • Community leaders and agencies (for example, First Nations leadership)	• Home school communication improves • Rapport developed between school and homes • Better communication and coordination between schools and community agencies	• Attendance improves • Student engagement in school improves • Family/caregiver engagement with school improves	• School attachment improves • Performance improves • Parental/caregiver support for school improves • Strengthening kinship and communities

	programs for parents/caregivers in the school • Accommodations made for meeting outside of school • Ensure transportation and childcare where needed			

Assumptions	External Factors
• Manitoba is committed to developing and maintaining capacity for increasing student presence • Building upon the many successful initiatives at the school level, the Manitoba government will provide funding to extend and sustain community initiatives across the province • Staff are working with students and families/caregivers in a safe, culturally appropriate, and trauma-informed manner	• Government departments and agencies mandated to work with schools • Community-based agencies willing to work with schools

d) Improve student success from K-12

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES		OUTCOMES		
Resources	Actions	Audiences	Short-term results	Intermediate results	Long-term results
- Additional staff devoted to providing short- and long-term remediation and/or catch-up - Access to continuous intake at the secondary school level - High quality remote learning opportunities - Collaborative professional learning opportunities to strengthen teaching practice - Ongoing funding	- Adopt a strengths-based approach to student assessment - Provide instruction from where a student is to the next nearest step - Project-based learning - Experiential learning including land-based, outdoor learning, and workplace learning, Career-trek, etc. - Establish cross-age teaching and coaching programs - Timetable flexibly - Provide credit recovery - Allocate partial credit - Give course credit for learning outside of school	- All educators and administrators - Older and younger students who face challenges to school successes	- Student experience greater success - Bonds form between older and younger students - Older students benefit from preparation for working with younger students (knowledge and behavior)	"I am learning. I am valued for what I bring to school. I am recognized. I am important." - Attendance improves - Engagement in school improves - Students begin to feel they can succeed	- School attachment improves - Performance improves

Assumptions	External Factors
- Manitoba is committed to improving school success for individuals by developing and maintaining flexible and relevant programming, thereby increasing student presence - Build upon the many successful initiatives at the school level	Workplace and career learning will require employers and post-secondary institutions willing to host students

5) Ensure Safe, Supportive Environments for Students

a) Create and implement a culturally relevant and responsive curriculum

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES		OUTCOMES		
Resources	Actions	Audiences	Short-term results	Intermediate results	Long-term results
• Indigenous teachers in each area of study • Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers • Indigenous community leaders • Curriculum specialists • Secretarial support • Release time for revision of curricula and for professional learning	• Review and revise existing curriculum to ensure cultural relevance and responsiveness • Convene Indigenous developers, Elders, Knowledge Keepers and supports by areas of study to modify existing curricula or to develop new culturally relevant and responsive curriculum • Disseminate revised curriculum • Use lead teachers to create just-in-time videos of how to implement the revised curriculum	• Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning staff • Teachers	• Capacity in curriculum development will be increased for participants • Curriculum will be developed for dissemination • Professional learning will commence	• Indigenous students will see themselves better reflected in the curriculum • All students will have a more comprehensive understanding of the history and contributions of Indigenous people • Attitudes toward school and its relevance will further improve	• Attendance and performance will improve

Assumptions	External Factors
• Manitoba is committed to developing and maintaining capacity for increasing student presence	• Some culturally responsive and relevant curricula will require out-of-school experiential learning (land-based learning, working in the community, etc.)

Assumptions	External Factors
• Manitoba is committed to maintaining a culturally relevant and responsive curriculum (e.g., current work of creating teams of classroom teachers/catalysts to support the revised curriculum) • The implementation of the new curriculum should be integrated with the student presence and engagement effort	

b) Establish and implement restorative practice, including restorative justice approaches

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES		OUTCOMES		
Resources	Actions	Audiences	Short-term results	Intermediate results	Long-term results
• Facilitators who are familiar with and who have used restorative practice and restorative justice • Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers	• Develop protocols for the use of restorative practice and restorative justice • Develop guidebook on restorative practices in the classroom and in the school • Create professional learning videos • Create support network	• Teachers • Administrators • Students • Parents/caregivers	• Staff members develop skills in relationship building and maintenance • Students agree to repair the harm they have done • Victims, teachers, and administrators are less frustrated • Staff reframe their own thinking from punishment to reparation and restoration	• Students increasingly understand the impact of their behavior on others • Students develop empathy • Students come to recognize what prompts their negative behaviour • Relationships among student and between students and adults are restored	• Students feel better about themselves and about past offenders • Recidivism diminishes • Behaviour improves • Fewer suspensions due to externalizing behaviour • Students and teachers develop repertoires of constructive behaviours and responses

Assumptions	External Factors
• Manitoba is committed to developing and maintaining capacity for increasing student presence • Relationships are central to the teaching and learning process	• Align youth justice practices with the concept of restorative justice and practice

c) Expand implementation of anti-racism and anti-discrimination education

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES		OUTCOMES		
Resources	Actions[17]	Audiences	Short-term results	Intermediate results	Long-term results
• Facilitators knowledgeable about anti-racism in education • Professional development time and content	• Assess systemic features of schooling to make schools more inclusive and reflective of all students' experiences • Ensure personnel policies and practices are consistent with equity goals and that they provide staff with the knowledge and skills to implement equity programs • Examine historical roots and contemporary manifestations of racial prejudice and discrimination including discrimination against people living in poverty, people with mental health and people who use substances, etc. • Explore the influence of race and culture on one's own personal and professional attitudes and behavior • Identify and eliminate bias and stereotyping in learning materials • Identify anti-racist resources to incorporate into the curriculum in different subject areas • Identify and implement appropriate assessment and placement procedures and practices	• Students • Staff	• Increased awareness of historical roots and contemporary manifestations of racial prejudice and discrimination in Canada • Increased awareness of the influence of race and culture on one's own personal and professional attitudes and behavior	• Bias and stereotyping in learning materials identified and eliminated • Anti-racist resources incorporated in the curriculum in different subject areas • Appropriate assessment and placement procedures and practices identified and implemented. • Systemic features of schooling that impede inclusion and are not reflective of all students' experiences are identified and eliminated. • Personnel policies and practices are aligned with equity goals • Staff have the knowledge and skill to implement equity programs	• Programs and practices implemented to increase both procedural equity and substantive equity. • Racism and discrimination diminish • Staff diversity increases

[17] Adapted from Tator, C. and H. Frances. (1991) Multicultural Education: Translating Policy into Practice. Ottawa: Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada.

Assumptions	External Factors
• Trained personnel familiar with both anti-racism and education can be identified and engaged to carry out the needed work • Build upon the many successful initiatives at the school level and [Creating Racism-Free Schools through Critical/Courageous Conversations on Race](#) • This too needs to be integrated with the curriculum and student presence efforts	• Racism and discrimination in school is a manifestation of societal racism that will require societal change to eliminate

d) Ensure culturally safe educational environments and cultural competence among all Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning and school division staff

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES		OUTCOMES		
Resources	Actions	Audiences	Short-term results	Intermediate results	Long-term results
• Staff and facilitators with cultural competence	• Create and implement a program of personal and professional development to develop cultural competence among all education personnel • Facilitate sharing of successful practices among school divisions	• Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning and school division staff members	• Increased self-awareness • Increased empathy • Improved communication skills • Improved ability to read and understand behavior	• Improved relationships with students, parents/caregivers, and guardians • Better communication with parents/caregivers and guardians	• More respectful treatment of students, parents/caregivers, and guardians • Improved engagement with parents/caregivers and guardians • Schools perceived more positively by parents/caregivers and guardians • An education tailored to the needs of students • Improved student performance

Assumptions	External Factors
• Manitoba is committed to developing and maintaining capacity for increasing student presence	• Availability of culturally competent personnel

6) Provide Intersectoral and Implementation Supports

a) Mandate Deputy Ministers to Work on Attendance Support

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES		OUTCOMES		
Resources	Actions	Audiences	Short-term results	Intermediate results	Long-term results
• Deputy Ministers from departments that work on social services (education; mental health, wellness & recovery; justice; families; health; economic development; sports, culture & heritage; indigenous reconciliation)	• Monthly meetings • Receive monthly report from student persistence and success unit, containing analysis of absenteeism data, and report about impediments to effective communication and coordination among ministries and agencies • Problem-solve solutions to impediments to effective communication and coordination	• Departments and the agencies for which they are responsible	• Improved communication and coordination among agencies/departments • Removal of impediments to effective communication and coordination • Improved accountability • Demonstrates commitment across Manitoba government to improving student presence and success	• Improved student presence • Fewer chronic absentees • Increased knowledge and understanding of barriers to presence and the supports required to address absence	• Better educational outcomes for students who return to school

Assumptions	External Factors
• Manitoba is committed to developing and maintaining capacity for increasing student presence	

b) Establish a Unit in Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning or at arm's length for student persistence and success

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES		OUTCOMES		
Resources	Actions	Audiences	Short-term results	Intermediate results	Long-term results
• Executive Director • Three experienced attendance leaders • Senior Executive Assistant • Data analyst • Annual operating budget (in addition to staff) $200,000.00	• Monitor implementation of action plan • Receive and analyze monthly absenteeism data from school divisions • Develop and implement professional learning opportunities for school division staff responsible for attendance • Provide coaching to school district staff and others • Report monthly to the Deputy Ministers on Attendance Support	• School division staff responsible for attendance • Deputy Ministers from departments that work on social services (education; mental health, wellness & recovery; justice; families; health; economic development; sports, culture & heritage; indigenous reconciliation)	• Increased knowledge of attendance support • Increased ability to apply knowledge to attendance support strategies • Identification of barriers to attendance for the individual student • Respectful support to overcome barriers to presence	• Improve the capacity at the school and school division level to build effective relationships with students and their families/caregivers • Strengthen relationships between schools and school divisions and the external agencies that serve families/caregivers	• Increased student presence • Increased school success, including graduation

Assumptions	External Factors
• Manitoba is committed to developing and maintaining capacity for increasing student presence • Unit established within education or at arm's length to support implementation of attendance support, monitor progress, identify impediments/obstacle to success and recommend solutions	

• Unit provides progress reports to Deputy Ministers about attendance improvement, identification of obstacles in communication and coordination with local agencies	

Summary of Critical Actions

Table 2 summarizes the initiatives that, when combined with the K-12 Education Action Plan initiatives, are intended to systematically address student presence/absence. The onset and duration of each activity is indicated. Most actions are intended to be enduring or recurring annually, without an end date.

Table 2. Critical Actions for Student Presence

Action	Start	Duration	Rationale
1. Change policy on absenteeism			
a) Eliminate suspension as response to frequent absence	Immediately	Enduring	Because suspension takes students out of the classroom when the goal is to have students in the classroom, it is a counterproductive response to absenteeism and student success.
b) Revise policy and practice to require immediate, personal outreach to students whose absence is unexcused			Taking a proactive response to even a day of absence creates opportunities to provide supports and intervention before absenteeism becomes persistent.
2. Collect data on student presence/absence			
a) Collect enrollment data twice in each school year using the Manitoba Education and Training (MET) number	September and February annually	Enduring (twice a year)	Because funding is tied to student enrollment, collecting enrollment data twice yearly provides an incentive to school divisions to ensure student presence.
b) Support school divisions to monitor, investigate, and record presence/absence	Immediately	December 31, 2022, with enduring monitoring and recording	Developing a common language, recording procedures, and metrics on attendance and absence and integrating this into a common student information system will allow for a common understanding of the definition of absence (including increases and decreases), better understanding of factors related to absence, and better predictors of absence, facilitating early intervention with students at risk of becoming persistently absent.
3. Pursue student presence through coordinated case management			
a) Ensure that all students expected to be present are in school	Immediately	Enduring (once a year)	There has been a significant decline in student presence because of the COVID-19 pandemic, with about 6500 students unaccounted for as of September 2020

Action	Start	Duration	Rationale
			compared to September 2019.[18] Immediate action should be taken to locate these students and provide supports that are needed to ensure their safety and re-engage them with school.
b) Create, maintain, and monitor a coordinated case management approach to persistent or extended absence	July 2022	Enduring	Reducing barriers to student presence requires individualized assessment, planning, coordination, and monitoring of supports for students and their families/caregivers. A case management approach to facilitate this process is required to coordinate the complexity of supports and a provide a stable point of contact to establish relationships with persistently absent students and their families/caregivers.
4. Enhance student engagement, mental health, well-being, and success			
a) Create a safe, welcoming, and culturally responsive school environment for students	Immediately	Enduring	Student engagement with school is strengthened when students experience school as a safe and welcoming environment that recognizes and supports their cultural needs.
b) Improve student nutrition with breakfast, lunch, and snack programs			Addressing gaps in nutrition addresses a basic need that supports student health and well-being and is a barrier to student engagement and success when it is unmet.
c) Improve student and family/caregiver engagement with school			Positively engaging families/caregivers with school, including providing opportunities to connect with school and acknowledging and supporting family/caregiver circumstances, supports the presence of their students in school.
d) Improve student success from K-12			Providing appropriate educational programming and includes flexible options for learning, timetabling, assessment, and credits will provide flexible and relevant programming for students, reduce absenteeism, and contribute to student success.
5. Ensure safe, supportive environments for students			
a) Create and implement a culturally relevant and responsive curriculum	January 2022	Enduring	Students are more engaged in and positive about school when they see their cultures reflected in the curriculum.

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[18] See Appendix D: Proposal for Immediate Implementation by School Divisions (June 2021), p. 111.

Action	Start	Duration	Rationale
b) Establish and implement restorative practice, including restorative justice approaches			Restorative practices provide opportunities to make whole what has been lost and repair relationships. Restorative justice provides opportunities to make amends, repair relationships, and reduces the likelihood of future harms while holding individuals accountable. These approaches allow students to understand the impact of negative behaviour on others, and to develop empathy.
c) Expand implementation of anti-racism and anti-discrimination education			To promote inclusion, staff and students need to be equipped with the knowledge and understanding of racial prejudice and discrimination, its expressions, impacts, and how to eliminate it. Systemic contributions to racial prejudice and discrimination must also be addressed.
d) Ensure culturally safe educational environments and cultural competence among all Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning and school division staff			Increased cultural competence among Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning and school division staff will improve their relationships with students and families/caregivers and contribute to cultural safety for students and families/caregivers, which in turn will support student presence in school.
6. Provide intersectoral and implementation supports			
a) Mandate Deputy Ministers to work on Attendance Support	Immediate	Enduring	The complex and multi-faceted nature of the issues and solutions for each student requires regular communication and coordination among departments that work on social services (education; mental health, wellness & recovery; justice; families; health, economic development; sports, culture & heritage; and indigenous reconciliation).
b) Establish a unit in Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning or at arm's length for student persistence and success			The student persistence and success unit should provide leadership and support to districts and schools for identifying barriers to presence, developing solutions, implementing attendance supports, and monitoring progress.

Concluding Recommendations

Being actively present and engaged in school has benefits for students and society that extend beyond academic learning. School is where young people learn to socialize, where relationships and friendships are formed with others (children, youth, and adults), where there are helping adults to support, guide, and facilitate access to external services for students and families/caregivers.

School presence should provide protective factors in students' lives. Students who leave school or are persistently absent are more vulnerable to exploitation, substance problems, mental health challenges, gang activity, and negative encounters with police and the justice system. A school that ensures student presence and has access to supporting agencies and services can help solve problems as they arise and mitigate risks that impede student success.

This report sets out minimum conditions that must be met to ensure a demonstrable impact on student presence. There must be a clearly articulated philosophy of early intervention before persistent absenteeism becomes apparent that supports students and their parents/caregivers when they need it. A key element in that philosophy is that **student presence** is at the centre of all interventions whether they occur in the home, in schools, in the broader community, or in the relationship between the school and the community. Student presence (or absence) is not an add-on task but central to the work of the school.

The provincial government must recognize that the factors affecting presence and absence cut across the boundaries of many agencies and departments (income assistance, families, justice, health, and others) at both the local and provincial levels. Only government can ensure the necessary resources, protocols, and processes for coordination and cooperation *within* the education sector and *between* education and other departments and agencies that are necessary for success.

The improvement of student presence requires an enduring commitment by government and schools. Absence is not a fleeting problem that can be 'fixed' and once addressed requires no further attention. That is why we have said that government must make a demonstrable and lasting commitment to the work required. It is not possible to ensure student presence and success without the resources and support that only government can provide. Moreover, only government has jurisdiction to ensure cohesion, consistency, quality, persistence, and accountability for the work required at the school and community level. A focus on this work will benefit all students and is essential to success for many.

Many Manitobans spoke passionately about student persistence and what it takes to achieve student persistence and success. There are many committed champions for children and youth.

Government must be able to support the champions and engage the support of the organizations representing superintendents; principals and vice principals; teachers; Black, Indigenous, and persons of colour; and 2SLGBTQQIAA+ individuals; of advocates for child and youth in the care of the crown; and of many others. At this time, these champions and supporters appear to have limited opportunities to share practices and experiences, or to obtain the professional learning resources required to scale up local efforts.

It is for these reasons that we say that there must be a unit within Manitoba government with the mandate for ensuring student persistence and success. At a minimum, such a unit requires an Executive Director with the authority to ensure the cooperation of other government departments and action on the part of school divisions. The unit must be able to facilitate local efforts, provide resources, and undertake research and evaluation. The Executive Director will require support from staff to whom professionals can turn for information, strategic support, and professional development. The staff must have sufficient resources to be able to coordinate the elements of which the student persistence and success strategy is composed, monitor their success and weaknesses, make modification as required, and report annually on the progress achieved.

Moreover, school divisions must assign responsibility for leading the efforts to improve presence and engagement within the division. Efforts to improve student presence and engagement are too important to allow them to be addressed 'off the side' of someone's desk, no matter how committed and talented that person may be. This is not another "initiative" but the core of Manitoba's transformation to improve achievement and outcomes for all students.

Appendix A: Literature review and cross-jurisdictional scan

Directions conducted a literature review and cross-jurisdictional scan to identify "current research, data and effective evidence-based strategies/approaches being implemented in Canadian jurisdictions and beyond to address chronic absenteeism." The goals of the literature review and cross-jurisdictional scan were to:

- understand the factors affecting attendance, impacts of poor attendance, and strategies for improving attendance.
- identify evidence-based approaches to attendance management and practices designed to increase and sustain student attendance.
- identify mechanisms in use in other jurisdictions to monitor and evaluate attendance improvement strategies.

The review by *Directions* of the literature focussed on the period from 2010 to the present and emphasized meta-analytic and synthetic articles because such reviews rigorously integrate and evaluate evidence from multiple studies. The focus of the literature review and cross-jurisdictional scan was upon Canadian and selected similar international jurisdictions.

Perspective

> *Student absenteeism is a puzzle composed of multiple pieces that has a significant influence on education outcomes, including graduation and the probability of dropping out. The factors that contribute to it are complex and multifaceted, and likely vary from one school setting, district, and state to another.[19]*

Lost learning time and its impact has been a concern for as long as there have been schools. Student absenteeism, chronic absenteeism, and truancy have a direct negative impact on student achievement, graduation, transition to post-secondary education, and employment. Student absences because of school closures for weather-related events have an impact on student performance.[20]

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[19] Garcia, E. & E. Weiss (2018) Student absenteeism Who misses school and how missing school matters for performance. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, https://www.epi.org/publication/student-absenteeism-who-misses-school-and-how-missing-school-matters-for-performance/

[20] Marcotte, D.E. and S.W. Hemelt (2008) Unscheduled School Closings and Student Performance, Education Finance and Policy, 3(3) 316-338.

Box 1. A common frame of reference for understanding the impact of absenteeism on achievement

<u>A common frame of reference for understanding the impact of absenteeism on achievement</u>

A helpful frame of reference for estimating the influence of absenteeism is to consider its impact on the achievement gain that an average student would make in a year (180 days). Visualize a test of achievement with an average (mean) of 100 score points. A one standard deviation gain would move the student from a score of 100 to a score of 115. A one standard deviation gain is typically achieved in approximately three years of schooling. On average, students gain 5-6 points each year (a standard deviation of 0.3 to 0.4., a metric called an effect size).

An effect size of d = .4 means a student improves by 6 points on the scale after 1 year of instruction. Of course, not all students would do this; some would improve more, some less, but the average improvement across all students would be 6 points on this scale. While average achievement growth may be in that range for all grades, it is likely that there is achievement growth greater than d = .4 in the early years of schooling in contrast to later years of schooling.

Using the 6-point achievement in a year as an average, the average student who loses one quarter of the year due to chrionic absenteeism loses the equivalent of one and a half achievement points. Thus, instead of progressing from 100 to 106, the student progresses from 100 to 104.5. If the student is one who is challenged, the loss would likely be greater. And, if the student was in the early years of schooling, the loss would likely be greater still.

The impact of absenteeism on student achievement varies by how much time the student has been absent. Estimates based upon the [2015 US National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)](#) indicate that an absence of one of two days is equivalent of reduction of -.10 standard deviations (SDs) in achievement, an absence of three or four days would yield a reduction of -.29 SDs, five to ten days a reductions of -.39 SDs and of more than ten days a reduction of -.64 SDs.[21]

We can apply the NAEP performance decline to the illustrative example in the box above. With the mean at 100 and a standard deviation of 15, we would find that a -.10 SD decline would be the equivalent of a decline from 100 points to 98.5 points; a deline of -.29 SDs from 100 to

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[21] Garcia, E. and E. Weiss (September 25, 2018) Student absenteeism: Who misses school and how missing school matters for performance, Washington: Economic Policy Institute, https://files.epi.org/pdf/152438.pdf

95.65 points; a decline of -.39 SDs from 100 to 94.15 points; and a decline of -.64 SDs from 100 to 90.4 points. Thus, it is not surprising that Manitoba is concerned about ensuring that every student attends school regularly.

Data from the United States indicate that chronic absenteeism begins as soon as children enter school. The lowest absenteeism rates during the elementary years usually occur in grade 3 and grade 4, probably reflecting the adjustments that children and their families make to regular school attendance. From this low point absenteeism increases during late elementary and middle years and is often highest during secondary school.[22]

The impact of absenteeism in the early years can have a devastating impact on a child's education. Having missed school, children in kindergarten and grade one are less likely to read at grade level by grade three and four times more likely to leave school prior to graduation. Chronic absenteeism is also a predictor of substance abuse.[23] According to Manitoba, 19% of elementary school students and 20% of high school students in Manitoba were chronically absent in the 2016-17 school year.[24]

The effects of absenteeism are cumulative, affecting the educational and life trajectories of those who are chronically absent. Absenteeism is negatively associated with student achievement, early school leaving[25], graduation, and the likelihood of participation in post-secondary education.[26]

The impact of chronic absenteeism is not confined to the absent student. While individual chronic absenteeism has an impact on the absent student, students who are chronically absent have an impact on their peers, what Gottfried calls a "spill over effect": ". . . having a greater proportion of chronically absent classmates is associated with lower achievement, across both reading and math."[27]

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[22] Balfanz, R., & V. Byrnes (2012). *Chronic Absenteeism: Summarizing What We Know from Nationally Available Data*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools.

[23] Antworth, R. (2008). Factors associated with chronic absenteeism. *University of North Florida Graduate Theses and Dissertations.* https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1362&context=etd

[24] Government of Manitoba (2021). RFP 08V0027913: Student Absenteeism (Kindergarten to Grade 12).

[25] In 2008, Olena Hankivsky of Simon Fraser University estimated the annual per dropout costs in four domains: health, social assistance, crime, and labour and employment. They were respectively: $8,000 per year, $4,000, $200, and $3,000. Canadian Council on Learning, February 4, 2009, No "drop" in the bucket: the high costs of dropping out, *Lessons in Learning*.

[26] Robson, K., Maier, R., Anisef, P., and R.S. Brown (2019). *High School Success and Access to Postsecondary Education*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario; Parekh, G., Brown, R. S., and C.E. James (2020). *Who comes to York? Access, Participation, and Graduation Trends. Technical Report*. York University. Toronto: Ontario.

[27] Gottfried, M. (2015) Chronic Absenteeism in the Classroom Context: Effects on Achievement, Urban Education, 54(1), 3-34.

There are two plausible reasons for the spill over effect. First, teachers in classrooms with high rates of chronic absenteeism likely spend more time responding to the chronically absent students when they return, taking instructional time away from classroom instruction and slowing the pace of instruction. Second, chronically absent students engage in disruptive behaviour more frequently than their peers, requiring teachers to spend more time and attention addressing the disruption than they would if there were no chronically absent students. Because elementary students typically remain together for the entire day, the spill over effect is likely to be greater at that level than at the secondary school level where students do not remain together for every subject.

Chronic absenteeism is a problem for the students, those chronically absent, as well as for their peers. Manitoba has been concerned about absenteeism for some time. It has pursued several related initiatives in its efforts to reduce absenteeism.[28] Manitoba's efforts to improve student attendance and engagement include The Attendance Report Framework for Action and the 2009 report upon which it was based, School Attendance in Manitoba.

Literature Review

Despite the vast literature, evidence is limited

There is a vast literature devoted to absenteeism, chronic absenteeism, and truancy that purports to describe their causes, characteristics, and consequences. There are interventions that are claimed to be effective, but there is "limited evidence on the effectiveness of truancy interventions aimed at increasing attendance for chronic truant students".[29] The limited evidence "makes it challenging to know what, if anything, works to impact truancy. It also prevents practitioners and policy makers from using evidence to make decisions."

The impact of interventions on attendance is modest

Maynard et al. conducted a meta-analysis on truancy interventions in 2012 that focused on published and unpublished empirical studies from 1990 to 2009. They identified several interventions that demonstrated "a significant though moderate, positive effect on attendance outcomes" (p. 50). On average, there was a four-to-five-day improvement in attendance, the equivalent of an effect size of g = .46.[30]

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[28] https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/attendance/index.html
[29] Maynard B.R., McCrea K.T., Pigott TD, Kelly M.S. (2012). Indicated truancy interventions: Effects on school attendance among chronic truant students. Campbell Systematic Reviews 2012:10 Retrieved January 30, 2021 from https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/10.4073/csr.2012.10
[30] Maynard, B.R., McCrea, K.T., Pigott, T.D., and M.S. Kelly, (2013). Indicated Truancy Interventions for Chronic Truant Students: A Campbell Systematic Review, Research on Social Work Practice, 23(1) 5-21.

Tanner-Smith and Wilson published a meta-analysis in 2013 assessing the impact of dropout prevention programs on students' absenteeism. Although dropout prevention is not an intervention that is directly addressing absenteeism, there is a relationship between absenteeism and dropping out. The authors point out that, when resources are scarce, decision-makers may wish to address multiple purposes with a single program. The calculated mean effect size for the randomized control trial studies was small (g = .23). An effect size of .23 is about the same as improving the average daily attendance from 85% to 89%, or the equivalent of reducing the number of absences in a six-week period from 1.31 to .93. The authors concluded, "Based on the findings from this systematic review and meta-analysis, there is _insufficient evidence_ to conclude that dropout prevention programs are effective in reducing absenteeism"9 p.477) [emphasis supplied]. But they also note that, ". . . although these findings suggest dropout prevention programs may not be effective in reducing school absenteeism outcomes, it does not mean that dropout prevention programs are ineffective" (p. 477).

> _Thus, results from this study merely cast doubt on the assumption that dropout prevention programs may also decrease absenteeism, or that absenteeism is simply a point along the "dropout continuum." Although absenteeism may be correlated with school dropout, perhaps it is not the harbinger of dropout as previously theorized. Or, perhaps the attendance-as-change-agent mechanism only operates for younger students. Rather than merely focusing on dropout prevention to reduce absenteeism, other kinds of remediation may be needed in dropout prevention programs to increase engagement, attendance, or academic performance, especially among older students (p. 478).[31]_

After-school programs are popular interventions for the academic improvement, socio-emotional development, delinquency prevention or reductions, school engagement, and attendance. Kremer and her colleagues examined the effects of after-school programs but "found a lack of evidence of effects of after-school programs on school attendance and externalizing behaviors for at-risk primary and secondary students." [32]

In 2020, Eklund and her colleagues published a meta-analysis of behavioral interventions, family–school partnerships, and academic interventions addressing chronic absenteeism from 2000-2018. That study yielded an effect size of g = .38 for the research focussed on the

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[31] Tanner-Smith, E.E., and S.J. Wilson (2013). A Meta-analysis of the Effects of Dropout Prevention Programs on School Absenteeism, Prevention Science, 14, 468-478.
[32] Kremer, K.P., Maynard, B.R., Polanin, J.R., Vaughn, M.G., and C.M. Sartechi (2014). Effects of After-School Programs with At-Risk Youth on Attendance and Externalizing Behaviors: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. Journal of Youth Adolescence 44, 616-636.

elementary level, and an effect size of g = .14 at the secondary school level, effects even more modest than those found by Maynard.[33]

Freeman and her colleagues conducted a systematic review of evidence about improving attendance that did not undertake a meta-analysis of the results. The approach Freeman et. al. took is much less rigorous than a meta-analysis. Their review defined "desired effects" of interventions as ones that produced statistically significant results or "evidence of a functional relation as determined by visual analysis." Programs that produced desired effects on attendance most often had three common elements: skills training, family support, and incentive-based strategies.[34]

Researchers are reluctant to make recommendations based on existing evidence

The small number of studies sufficiently rigorous to be included in the Maynard analysis prompted the authors to say that they were hesitant to make recommendations about the approaches studied. Nonetheless, they noted that, although the clinical impact of efforts was limited, "truant students benefit from interventions targeting attendance behaviors."[35] Because the studies reviewed by the Maynard team did not track attendance beyond the short period following intervention, it was not possible to say how long the effect would last.

The Eklund team observed:

> *Despite the voluminous research on the causes, correlates, and consequences of chronic absenteeism (Maynard et al., 2013), there were relatively few intervention studies available that met inclusion criteria. This aligns with previous research reviews on attendance interventions that identified only 16 and 8 studies in their respective systematic reviews (Maynard et al., 2013; Sutphen et al., 2010). As indicated by the relatively few studies, there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of truancy interventions.[36]*

As pointed out above, although the interventions were successful, the rates of absenteeism remained above levels regarded as acceptable. Despite claims of success and effectiveness in the literature, the Maynard team advises:

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[33] Eklund, K. Burns, M. K., Oyen, K., DeMarchena, S. & E.M. McCollom (2020): Addressing Chronic Absenteeism in Schools: A Meta-Analysis of Evidence-Based Interventions, School Psychology Review, DOI: 10.1080/2372966X.2020.1789436

[34] Freeman, J., Wilkinson, S., Kowitt, J., Kittelman, A. and K.B. Flannery (2018). Research-supported practices for improving attendance in high schools: a review of the literature, Educational Research and Evaluation, 24(8), 481-503, https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2019.1602546

[35] Maynard, op. cit. p. 51.

[36] Ibid. p. 11.

Taking a "buyer beware" approach and being able to critically evaluate claims of effectiveness and research will be important to practitioners and policy makers who want to implement interventions that are based on rigorous evaluation and evidence.[37]

The variety of interventions reflects the varied reasons for absenteeism

Student absence arising from the **family/caregivers** may include aversion to school because of, for example: the child's or caregiver's prior negative experiences; frequent changes in residence; experiences of homelessness (visible and hidden); barriers to accessing food, clothing, supplies, and transportation that are needed for school; family/caregiver illness; children who work to supplement family/caregiver income or care for siblings so that their parents/caregivers can work; peers or family members / caregivers who do not value schooling; and the necessity of attending significant cultural community occasions. The **home** environment may not be conducive to school-related tasks: no quiet place to work, too many people, substance use and/or misuse, challenges in parenting/caregiving, mental health issues, and conflicting demands on time.

Absenteeism can arise because of factors within the **student**, for example: lack of sleep; low self-concept or lack of confidence; boredom; criminal involvement; lack of prior school success; poor health and mental health (e.g., aggression, self-harm, suicidal ideation, anxiety); and dependence upon unreliable others to accompany or transport the student to school.

 The **school or classroom** environment can affect student absence. For example, the school or classroom may not be a welcoming environment. It may lack challenge or remedial assistance. Bullying or shunning by peers, and discrimination may be prevalent. In-school and-out-of-school suspension, placement in special education, and grade retention may impede rather than facilitate success.[38]

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[37] Maynard, op. cit. p. 52.

[38] See, for example, Reid, K. (2008) The causes of non-attendance: an empirical study. Educational Review, 60(4) 345-357.

Box 2. The impact of suspensions

The causes of school suspensions, a form of disciplinary action, are typically different from the reasons for absenteeism. However, students suspended from school are deprived of the instruction that students receive. Suspensions, like absences, have an impact on student educational and life trajectories, including post-secondary participation. Evidence from the Toronto District School Board, the largest school authority in Canada, devoted to the intersection of disability, achievement, and equity found that students from the TDSB who did not apply to a post-secondary institution had a suspension rate of 44%, in comparison to a suspension rate of 9% for those who had confirmed an offer of admission to university.

Brown, R. S. & Parekh, G. (2013). *The intersection of disability, achievement, and equity: A system review of special education in the TDSB*. Toronto: Toronto District School Board.

A different perspective on absenteeism

Ekstrand's review article took a different perspective, asking the question: What does it take to keep children in school? Because different questions yield different answers, Ekstrand argues:

> *Of course, school absenteeism may turn out to be a risk behaviour, and of course it is not a healthy protest, given that the school is seen as important, but it is nevertheless a protest. The individuals who absent themselves experience schoolwork as meaningless, entailing no challenges, and react to it. Research today indicates that school must have meaning for the individual (cf. Englund 2007) and that school needs to challenge students (cf. Biesta 2005). Truancy is resistance and a demonstration against traditional school culture, class reproduction, and bad treatment. These students are questioning the legitimacy of the educational system (Zhang 2007). This could be compared to what is happening on other levels in the school system, such as questioning the legitimization of the university (cf. Delanty 2001).[39]*

He argues that it is necessary to "divert attention from the characteristics of individuals and truancy to study what success in school requires, drawing out children's strengths rather than weaknesses; success stems from a positive school climate, bonding with adults, and the

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[39] Ekstrand, B. (2015). What it takes to keep children in school: a research review, Educational Review, 67:4, 459-482, DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2015.1008406

development of core competencies."[40] Ekstrand's calling attention to children's strengths, the importance of a positive school climate, bonding with adults, and developing core competencies are certainly worthy goals. While it may be tempting to focus only on the things that schools should be doing, doing so will not address the many reasons why students are chronically absent.

Age, ethno-linguistic and economic background, and geography are factors to consider

Although it is problematic whenever it occurs, chronic absenteeism varies by age, a factor affecting the kinds of initiatives one might pursue. Using data from the Toronto district school Board over a four-year period, Brown found that the rates of absenteeism among four- and five-year-old students were higher compared with their older elementary school peers, but significantly lower than older, secondary school students.[41]

Figure 4. Mean absenteeism rates by student age (TDSB 2004-5, 2005-6, 2006-7, and 2007-8)
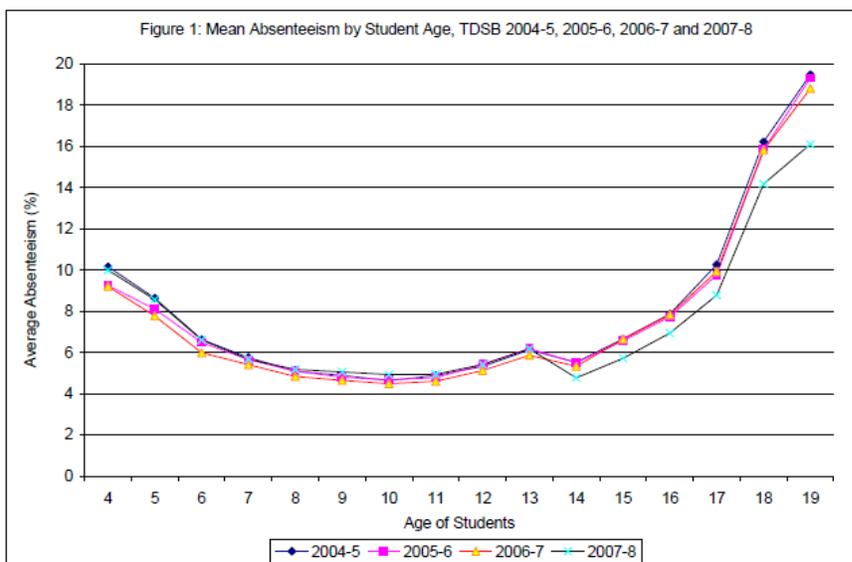
Absenteeism also varies by ethno-linguistic and economic background as well as by geography. In 2013-2014, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) reported higher rates of absence for Indigenous students (whom the report referred to as Aboriginal Heritage students). Indigenous students in kindergarten had an absence rate of 10%, one percentage point high than the TDSB average for that grade. The rate for Indigenous students from grade one to grade eight was 9%,

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[40] Ibid. p. 473.
[41] Brown, R.S. (2009). *Absenteeism in the TDSB*, Research Today, Organizational Development/Research and Information Services, 4(1).

three percentage points higher than the TDSB's average attendance for those grades. In grades nine to 12, the rates were 14% for Indigenous students, but 10% overall.[42]

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A one-dimensional approach has limited effectiveness

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It is not surprising that programmatic interventions are not very effective. Programmatic approaches – whether to absenteeism or any other phenomenon – are based on large-scale patterns. But, for most students, absenteeism arises from many different sources and for many different reasons.

Box 3. The limits of a one-dimensional approach: Nudge theory

An often-cited study illustrates the limitations of a single approach to absenteeism. Rogers and colleagues conducted a randomized experiment based on "nudge" theory, the idea that a small, unobtrusive encouraging gesture might persuade people to behave in the desired fashion.[43] To encourage better attendance, post cards were mailed to parents urging them to help improve their children's attendance. The postcards also contained information about the child's past attendance record. Parents of students in an equivalent control group received no postcards.

The students whose parents had received the postcards improved their record of attendance by approximately 2.4%. The experiment conducted between October 9 and December 31, 2014, reduced absence by .13 days or the equivalent of 2.4%. There are a few limitations to keep in mind about this study. First, the time frame was very brief (43 school days). Thus, if the average student not in the study was absent for 3 days, the intervention could at most have reduced absences by a maximum of three days. Second, students without a mailing address were excluded from the study. Arguably, such students are among the ones most likely to be chronically absent. Their absence from the study was a serious limitation.

Maynard and her colleagues enumerated student-targeted and parent-targeted interventions in their systematic review of the literature.[44] The number of studies (N) for each intervention is noted and ratio (%) of each type of intervention to all interventions in the studies they reviewed. The variety of interventions is vast.

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[42] Toronto District School Board (2014) Environmental Scan: The 2013-2014 Environmental Scan of the Toronto District School Board.

[43] Rogers, T., Duncan, T., Wolford, T., Ternovski, J., Subramanyam, S., & Reitano, A. (2017). A randomized experiment using absenteeism information to "nudge" attendance (REL 2017– 252). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic. Retrieved from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs

[44] Maynard, op. cit. p. 12.

Table 3. Components of Student- and parent/family-targeted interventions

Student-Targeted Interventions	N (%)	Parent/Family-Targeted Interventions	N (%)
Counseling, social work, other therapeutic intervention	5 (31)	Family therapy	2 (13)
CBT—Individual	0 (0)	Educational group meetings	1 (6)
CBT—Group	1 (6)	Interdisciplinary team meetings/conferences	1 (6)
Group Therapy (non-CBT)	4 (25)	Criminal prosecution	0 (0)
Individual therapy (non-CBT)	1 (6)	Referrals for services	1 (6)
Behavioral interventions (contracting, incentives/rewards)	4 (25)	Parenting skills/training	1 (6)
Mentoring	3 (19)		
Court proceedings	1 (6)		
Pharmacotherapy	0 (0)		
Individualized plans	1 (6)		
Student health center services	1 (6)		
Alternative education programs	3 (19)		
Positive behavioral supports (PBS)	1 (6)		
Case management	1 (6)		
Peer support	2 (13)		

Note. CBT = cognitive behavioral therapy; PBS = positive behavioral supports.
Categories are not mutually exclusive.

Source: Maynard et al., 2013.

Why one-dimensional initiatives have limited impact

There are many reasons why a student may be chronically absent and the barriers to regular school attendance are varied (student, family, classroom/school, community, society). Because of the variability in the 'causes' of absenteeism, it is difficult, if not impossible, to design a program to increase attendance for all student unless there are many students for whom the reason is the same. This is one reason why programs that appear 'effective' only improve attendance by 4-5 days per year, many fewer than would be needed to ensure regular attendance.

Only some of the obstacles to regular school attendance are ones over which schools, or school boards, have influence. Significant inter-agency cooperation is necessary to address many of the obstacles preventing students from attending school regularly. A permanent, successful solution can only occur by tailoring it to the individual, addressing the sources of the problem.

Cross-jurisdictional scan: Canada

Directions conducted a cross-jurisdictional scan to complement the literature review, addressing the same objectives as in the literature review. We conducted a limited cross-jurisdictional scan of all Canadian jurisdictions, and selected similar international jurisdictions, to identify the strategies those jurisdictions have implemented to address absenteeism.

Alberta

The Province of Alberta has a well-developed set of resources, tools, and advice for school districts, schools, educators, parents, and students. This work is led by the Office of Student

Attendance and Re-engagement (OSAR) and these materials can be found at
https://www.alberta.ca/attendance-supports.aspx.

The province features five strategies to maintain and improve attendance among all students:
tracking progress, student engagement, successful transitions, collaborative partnerships, and
positive connections. When these general strategies are not sufficient to curb some individuals'
absenteeism, more targeted strategies are recommended. School-based interventions included
instructional strategies and supports, mentoring programs, after school and homework clubs,
participation in school clubs and activities, and attendance incentives. More individualized
strategies could include counselling, home visits, and more. In some instances, a community
conference may be organized that would include the student, family and supporters, school
staff and other professional staff, and a community-based professional facilitator. The outcome
of a community conference is a written agreement that includes actions and assigns
responsibility to all those who have a part to play in supporting the student to improve
attendance.

These strategies are also spelled out in the 2015 report, *Every Student Counts: Make the
Attendance Connection – A school reference guide for student attendance*. Chronic absenteeism
is defined in this document "as a student who has missed 10 per cent (about 18 days) or more
of the school year in the previous year, missed a month or more of school…for any reason."

Schools that have not been successful in re-engaging students who have problematic
attendance may be referred to the Attendance Board. The board convenes hearing with
individual students, parents or guardians, and other relevant witnesses it may identify. Options
for getting each student re-engaged with school are explored. The board may give direction to
the student and/or the parent/guardian that it considers appropriate and enforce the ruling by
registering it as an order of the Court of Queen's Bench. The legal underpinning of the
Attendance Board are spelled out in the Alberta Education Act, Chapter E-0-3, Part 1, Sections
7, 8 and 9.

Alberta requires that its school boards submit a Three-Year Education Plan and an Annual
Education Results Report. The required elements of both the Plan and the Report are listed.
Outcome and performance measurements are also spelled out. Attendance/absenteeism is not
among the required indicators upon which to be reported. Nevertheless, the abundant
attention paid to attendance/absenteeism signals clearly that improvement in attendance is an
important strategy aimed supporting improved academic and school completion results.

Alberta does have a student identification number for each individual student that allows
individual-level data to be collected and analyzed from the school to board to province levels. It
is unclear from the public record whether school- and board-level attendance/absenteeism
data is reported to the province, though enrolment data certainly is.

British Columbia

British Columbia collects attendance data using [MyEducationBC](#) (MyEdBC), the Student Information System of the Province of British Columbia. Individual student attendance information flows from the school to the school board/district and is accessible to the Ministry of Education. At present, British Columbia does not audit attendance data, recognizing that there is more work that could be done on data standards (Deputy Minister, personal communication). What auditing occurs is primarily for funding purposes, but not for the purpose of monitoring attendance. The Ministry has no formal policy about the action that should occur after a certain number of consecutive absences, cumulative absences, or the identification of a pattern of absences. Schools use a variety of measures to contact parents of absent students (automated calling, counsellor contact, e-mail, and letters). To the extent that there are intervention programs to curb chronic absence or to increase student attendance, these occur at the school board or individual school level.

New Brunswick

Under the [Education Act, SNB 1997, c E-1.12](#), parents or guardians have a responsibility to have their school age children attend school [13(1)(c), and students have a responsibility to do so [14(1)(d)]. The principal of a school has a duty to investigate instances of non-compliance with compulsory school attendance. A principal must notify in writing the parent or guardian of a student whose attendance is not in compliance. The parents or guardian are required to then send their child to school and, failing that, may be subject to prosecution under the Provincial Offences Procedure Act. The Act itself does not elaborate any further levels at which attendance matters are addressed.

Policies regarding student attendance/absenteeism are more fully elaborated at the district level. The [School Administration Regulation, NB Reg 97-150](#) states that the district Superintendent must ensure that every pupil "attends the particular grade or class to which he or she is assigned" (Sec 14c). The [Anglophone South District Policy No. ASD-S 365](#) describes enforcement of its attendance policies as a cooperative effort between the "DEC (District Education Council), Superintendent, District Office Staff, Administrators, Core Leadership Team, Education Support Services Teams, teachers, students, parents and community partners."

Teachers have a duty to monitor student attendance, to contact parents or guardians should irregular attendance occur, and to create individual plans for intervention. Education Support Services Teams (ESST) monitor school attendance data and develop school-wide and individual intervention plans. The ESST may also contact parents or guardians of students with irregular attendance. Similarly, the Core Leadership Team (CLT) analyzes attendance data and develops school-wide and individual intervention plans. The school administrators share the same responsibilities as the CLT and the ESST, but they have the additional duty to share the school

attendance data with the CLT, ESST, teachers, school staff, and the Parent School Support Committee. Among the administrator's duties is ensuring the use of a pyramid of interventions when addressing attendance issues. Finally, the District Education Council and the Superintendent are to assist schools in analyzing their attendance data and provide regular systems reports.

In no place does the district policy refer to reporting attendance/absenteeism data to the province. Nevertheless, the Province of New Brunswick, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, has a publication entitled, "Information Technology and Data Standards," in which a system linking schools to districts to the department is described.

Newfoundland and Labrador

Newfoundland and Labrador has an established practice of reporting K – 12 education statistics and indicator data to the school, district and provincial levels. However, attendance/absenteeism data are not found within these public reports.

Attendance/absenteeism has become a matter of public concern as indicated by the Jan 11, 2019 CBC News segment, "N.L. students are missing 'staggering' amount of school, and it's time to take action: report." The report refers to, "Chronic Absenteeism: When Children Disappear," released by the province's Office of the Child and Youth Advocate. The CBC reported that, "Statistics from the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District state that 10 per cent of the provincial student body — some 6,600 children — missed at least 18 days, or 10 per cent, of the 2016-17 school year."

A report of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils stated, "…as of January 19, 2017, 5354 students in NL had accumulated 16 or more unexcused absences for the 2016-17 school year. This represents approx. 8% of our student population."

Under the Schools Act, 1997, teachers are required to keep a record of attendance. The principal is responsible for maintenance of the official attendance record for a school's students. Principals are required to make every effort to have students absent from school return to regular attendance. Where a principal believes every step has been taken and that the student is in breach of the Act, the principal must provide a written report to the district director. When the director determines that every effort to encourage a student to return to school has been unsuccess, the director must refer that matter for investigation to the nearest detachment of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary or of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

A major Premier's Task Force report on Improving Student Outcomes, Now is the Time (2017), reported 6.8% of high school students were missing 20% or more of their classes and recommended that "The early identification system outlined in Recommendation 13 include

markers for **attendance**, mental health and addictions, as well as early signs of youth homelessness."

There are more detailed descriptions of escalating levels of intervention within schools that appear at the district level. The example from the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District describes that progression of interventions as applied to a range of student issues including missed assignment, behavior, attendance, and other matters. The interventions can involve teachers and school professionals, parents, academic tutoring, individualized education plans, and more.

The findings above indicate a present and growing focus on student attendance/absenteeism; the collection of the relevant attendance data at the school, district and provincial level; and a practice of interventions to improve student attendance in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Northwest Territories

Attendance/absenteeism is a public issue in the Northwest Territories and was so prior to the pandemic. CBC news on May 31, 2019 reported that school attendance in some small communities was dropping: "School attendance declining in some N.W.T. communities." The reporter stated, "In 2008, average attendance at schools in small communities was 83 per cent. By 2013 it had dropped to 79 per cent. Last year students attended an average of only 75 per cent of the time." By contrast, the decline in Yellowknife was less pronounced: "school attendance in Yellowknife dropped slightly, from 91 per cent in 2008 to 89 per cent last year."

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment oversees education policy in the Northwest Territories. The Minister, under section 151 of the Education Act is responsible for school attendance regulations. Under Section 5(1) and Section 5(2) of these regulations the duties of District Education Authorities (DEA) "provide for the encouragement and enforcement of regular and punctual attendance at schools...under its jurisdiction." The Act requires school principals to prepare attendance reports and send them to the DEA. The DEAs are responsible for identifying chronic attendance problems and procedures for prosecution under the Act, and procedures for notifying parents of any enforcement action under the Act.

According to the Northwest Territories School Handbook, the Department of Education monitors excused and unexcused absences and provides a list of types of excused absences (Sec. 2.2). Student records contain an annual summary of attendance and participations (Sec. 2.3). The handbook refers to using PowerSchool as the school information system for submitting data (Sec. 2.3.6 and 2.3.7).

Nova Scotia

The Province of Nova Scotia, in an Attendance Fact Sheet, reported that 25% of students miss 16 or more school days. It also reported that, in the 2015-16 school year, 6% of students missed

more than 35 days. "Absence", as defined in the Nova Scotia Provincial Student Attendance and Engagement Policy, refers to any time that a student is not in class or not participating in a school activity. This definition is set in provincial policy to ensure consistent application across the province.

The Nova Scotia policy to improve school attendance is based on the provisions under [Nova Scotia's Education Act](). It is a duty of the school principal to keep a record of attendance and report on attendance to the Regional Director (Sec.39, 2b). It is also the principal's responsibility to "take all reasonable steps to secure full and regular attendance at school by the students enrolled in the school" (Sec. 39, 2c).

Nova Scotia's Provincial Student Attendance and Engagement Policy (October 1, 2017) flags not just attendance but also late arrivals as matters of concern. This document describes a variety of interventions and cautions the reader to consider a range of approaches consistent with "the age, grade, and development of the student, the professional judgment of teachers and principals, and the individual circumstances of the student." Early intervention responses are to be used when a combination of absences and lateness reach 10% to 15% of class time. More targeted interventions will be used when the student begins missing more than 15% of class time.

This policy also describes the roles that students, parents, teachers, principals, attendance committees, boards (now "regional centres"), the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and community partners have in ensuring regular attendance and reducing absences. Students are responsible for catching up on missed work. Parents are responsible for ensuring their child attends school regularly and arrives on time. Teachers monitor attendance and take reasonable steps to ensure good attendance including communicating with students and parents or guardians when issues arise. Principals work with teachers and staff to promote attendance and identify supports and resources useful to that end.

The Department of Education is responsible for setting attendance policy and monitoring its implementation and its effectiveness. Board (Regional Centre) Attendance Committees are required to monitor and analyze attendance data and take steps to increase attendance and reduce absenteeism. Community partners are responsible for working with the attendance committees and the Department of Education to help support regular school attendance and reduce barriers to student attendance.

The statistics quoted in department reports and fact sheets point to an information flow of attendance data that links schools to regional districts to the provincial Department of Education. Teachers and administrators are encouraged to use PowerSchool.

Nunavut

According to the Nunavut Department of Education, "The Education Act calls for the Minister to develop programs to encourage regular attendance (section 36), and for District Education Authorities (DEAs) to create a policy to promote attendance in their community (section 36-37). This policy must be implemented by the principal, School Team, and School Community Counsellor in accordance with Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (i.e., Inuit values) . . . this policy should outline how to handle parents that have not registered their children in school, how to promote and support attendance, the provision of counselling to students and families in the event of non-attendance, and the involvement of Elders in encouraging attendance." The Act states "it is the duty of a parent to promote regular and punctual attendance by the student."

"Regional Schools Operations offices (RSOs) play a critical role in community and family engagement, as well as informing the Department about community issues and concerns. . . Working primarily with DEAs, RSOs can assist in the development of policies and activities that enhance the Education Program and encourage family and community participation in schools and in their child's success. These measures can increase school attendance, contributing to improved student outcomes."

The Annual Report also provides attendance rates by ethnicity, gender, and region. Attendance rates are reported by region, community, school, ethnicity and gender. The method of data collection is not described, but clearly school level attendance data is being aggregated and a percentage calculated based on the known school age population. In a Q&A posted on the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs website it is mentioned that schools in Nunavut use the Maplewood student information system.

Ontario

Ontario collects attendance data through the Ontario School Information System (OnSIS). Data on individual student attendance flows from schools to school boards to the provincial Ministry of Education according to an established schedule. A detailed guide exists which explains how attendance is to be recorded under many different circumstances.

There is provision for attendance audits which are led by a ministry financial branch. There are funding consequences for prolonged absence. A prolonged absence is defined as absences of more than 15 consecutive days. Students who reach the 15-day threshold are to be contacted by the school board's Attendance Counsellor. If student attendance does not resume or there is not a successful two-way conversation between the counsellor and the student, students' parent or student's guardian, then the student is removed from the enrolment register. Removal from the enrolment register has a financial impact for boards. School boards still have a responsibility under the *Education Act* to attempt to re-engage student who have been

removed from the enrolment register as long as they are under 18 years of age and have not graduated.

The Ministry of Education has used school boards' own attendance data to draw boards' attention to trends among their student population and to inspire actions to improve students' attendance. The ministry does not prescribe interventions apart from the duties of the Attendance Counsellor.

Prince Edward Island

Prince Edward Island's Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has a well-articulated set of operational procedures pertaining to attendance / absences. The procedures represent a progression of interventions rising in five absence increments.

Absences are flagged for attention first at the school level by a teacher to an administrator when a student has been absent for five days in a reporting period in grades K-9 or five days or periods per subject in grades 10-12. Initial intervention involves teachers contacting parents of guardians, and the responses escalate with each additional five days/periods absent. A school administrator may also provide report cases of chronic absences and actions taken by the school to the Department of Family and Human Services where absenteeism is suspected to be a symptom of neglect.

At ten days/periods, teachers notify the school administrator, who in turn sends a notification of absenteeism to the parent or guardian. At this time, the case is also referred to the school-based Student Service Team. After 15 days/periods the school administrator sends home a second notification of absenteeism. At this point the school administration is to meet with the parent or guardian to develop a written support plan. After 20 absences, a third notification of absenteeism is issued, and the administrator sends a report of frequent absences to the department's Director of Public Schools Branch. The Director will investigate and has various recourses for action, including course reduction, removal from school, or a program of credit recovery. Additional details regarding these operational procedures can be found [here](#).

This progression of interventions relies on communication between the various levels of the system regarding students' increasing numbers of absences, but it does not mention attendance/absenteeism data moving between the levels. That being said, a [CBC news report](#) from November 18, 2020, states that the Public Schools Branch (of the PEI Education Department) reports on attendance/absenteeism rates this past fall as compared to the year prior to the pandemic. This clearly indicates that the department has timely attendance data from the districts, but it does not distinguish whether the data is individualized or aggregated. The article reports on data from a week in October 2020 compared to a similar week in October 2019.

Quebec

The Quebec Education Act states that parents must take necessary measures to ensure that their school-age children attend school. The school service centres (previously called school boards), upon request of the Minister and using information provided by the Minister about a child who may not be attending school regularly, must "take any action with the child and his parents that is specified by the Minister to ascertain and, if applicable, regularize the child's situation." The school service centre must inform the parents (or guardians) of their obligations under the Education Act.

> *The principal shall ascertain, in the manner determined by the school service centre, that students attend school regularly. . . . Where a student is repeatedly absent without a valid excuse, the principal or the person designated by him shall intervene with the student and his parents to come to an agreement with them and with the persons providing the school social services with respect to the most appropriate measures to remedy the situation. . . .When the intervention does not allow the situation to be remedied, the principal, after notifying the parents of the student in writing, shall report it to the director of youth protection.*

The Quebec Education Act provides for penalties such as fines for anyone who obstructs or contributes to a student's chronic absence or who fails to cooperate with designated officials or who makes false statements in relation to a student's absence.

Quebec's Action Strategy for Student Retention and Student Success, which aims to increase the percentage of students who complete their secondary education, signals in its Path 11 that schools are monitoring student attendance in order to detect signs of student disengagement.

The province has an information system for reporting attendance/absenteeism called Charlemagne.

Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan has a system of reporting attendance data from schools to districts to the province. The provincial Ministry of Education provides guidance, definitions and templates for standardized reporting. Schools send data to school divisions and the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises via Blackboard. And the school divisions and the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises send data to the ministry in care of its Business Operation Group.

School districts and the Conseil Scolaire have Attendance Counsellors, who are responsible for administering requirements under the Education Act pertaining to attendance under the Education Act. A referral to the Attendance Counsellor is initiated by a principal when a student

has four absences in a month unless the principal determines that the absences were unavoidable or justified. When the Attendance Counsellor receives a referral, the counsellor conducts an investigation in accordance with the procedures described in the by-laws of the districts and the Conseil Scolaire.

The Attendance Counsellor tries to gain cooperation of the student and parent or guardian in addressing the matter of absenteeism. The Attendance Counsellor reports his or her findings to the principal. The Attendance Counsellor may initiate proceedings against the parent or guardian. And the Attendance Counsellor submits a report annually to the ministry to report on cases where proceedings have been undertaken and about the state of attendance in general.

Notwithstanding the prescriptive nature of the provisions in the Act, implementation is shaped by policies and practices of schools, districts and the Conseil Scolaire. For instance, guidelines and protocols for attendance published for high school student in Regina Public Schools indicate an earlier intervention—after two absences—than prescribed in the Act. The local document also refers to an attendance team involving some or all of the students Advisory Teacher, a designated administrator, guidance counsellor or an Indigenous Advocate.

Yukon

The Education Act of Yukon requires all school boards or school councils to establish an attendance policy for students. If a child fails to attend school and the parent neglects or fails to take reasonable steps to ensure the child's attendance, then the parent is guilty of an offense and can be fined up to $100 per day that the child is absent. A child over the age of 12 may also be found guilty of an offense if he or she is absent without a valid excuse. The deputy minister or the school board may appoint an Attendance Counsellor to assist in enforcing the compulsory attendance requirements described in the Act.

On March 1, 2019, the department issued a policy on attendance provide direction to boards and councils for the sake of consistency across the territory. Appendix B of the department's policy statement provides a model school board or school council policy. Some of the provisions in the model policy are required to be included in board or council policies. Under the model policy, when a student is going to be absent, the parent is to contact the school. If a student is absent and the school has not been contacted by the parent, the school administrator or the home room teacher will attempt to contact the parent.

The model policy provides guidance on how to deal with chronic unexcused absenteeism. Identifying the reasons for the absences is the starting point. Addressing the reasons may require involvement of the student, parents, teachers, counsellors, administrators, and, in some cases, community agencies. Some or all of the follow steps may occur:

- Meetings and conversations to resolve the issue between the student, parents, teachers, counsellors, administrators and in some cases community agencies;
- Assistance in making up missed instructional time;
- Determining whether a student can no longer successfully complete a course(s); and/or
- Consideration of alternative education program.

The policy envisions an escalation of interventions. After five unexcused absences, the school administrator is to talk with the student and inform the student's parents to seek support to address the problem. After 20 unexcused absences, appropriate school staff will meet with the parents and consider how to address the issue including accessing resources in the school and considering alternative education programs. Upon a decision of the appropriate school staff, the administrator will write a formal plan to address the problem.

The Appendix C of the department's policy statement also includes Student Information System Standards for data collection and the classification of types of absences. Schools use the Aspen student information system.

The Yukon reports on absences publicly on the [Yukon.ca website](#).

The [CBC reported on June 1, 2020](#) that Yukon Child and Youth Advocate, Annette King, is raising concerns about increased absenteeism. She is preparing a report for the Deputy Minister to be submitted in the spring of 2021. In the context of this new article, King mentions making use of attendance / absence data provided by the department.

Cross-Jurisdictional Scan: United States

Directions searched the websites of the largest school district in the United States because they are located in urban areas where absenteeism is known to be high, and because the largest boards also have the capacity to undertake initiatives that smaller boards do not.

The Los Angeles Unified School District

[LAUSD](#) determines that a student has been chronically absent if the student has been enrolled for 31 days or more and was absent for 10% or more of the instructional days they were expected to attend. In 2012, the district, Los Angeles County, and the City of Los Angeles passed a joint resolution about keeping students in school, proclaimed September as "School Attendance Month. [In 2017](#), an attendance campaign was launched to focus on attendance and drop-out prevention to reduce chronic absenteeism to no more than 7% and raise the attendance rate to 96% or higher. Under this initiative, LAUSD produced posters and short videos, and partnered with many of the region's professional sports team (Rams, Dodgers,

Lakers, Sparks, Clippers, Galaxy, Kings, and the L.A. Football Club) to encourage student and staff attendance.

It should be noted that, although it is not explicitly mentioned as part of its efforts to reduce absenteeism, LAUSD serves 130 million meals each year, about 680,000 meals (breakfast, lunch and supper after school) each day to the approximately 85% of the students enrolled in LAUSD qualify for free or reduced-price meals. This measure is an attendance incentive for both students and parents.

Miami Dade County Public Schools

Miami Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), in accordance with Florida law, defines a "habitual truant as a student who has 15 unexcused absences within 90 calendar days with or without the knowledge and consent of the student's parent." M-DCPS employs the five-prong strategy recommended by Attendanceworks, a non-profit organization that seeks "to advance student success and help close equity gaps by reducing chronic absence."

Figure 5. Miami Dade County attendance strategy
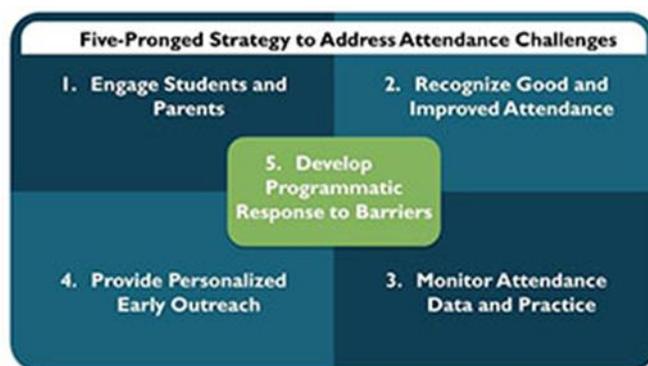
M-DCPS employs school-wide programming for attendance support (calls home, home visits, parent conferences, etc.); targeted school interventions with external community supports (student mentoring, mental health services, etc.); intensive school and community interventions (case management in coordination with police, Department of Children and Families, etc.); and communications (peer-to-peer engagement, school-focussed communications strategies; and multi-lingual community-wide communication, etc.).

New York City Department of Education

Like LAUSD, the New York City Board of Education (NYCDOE) considers school attendance as "vital to a student's academic progress and success." NYCDOE students are considered chronically absent when they have missed 10% of the total days of instruction if they have been enrolled for a minimum of 20 days (whether present or not). The New York Board of Education maps absenteeism by region.

NYCDOE sees the school as essential to ensuring that students attend school regularly and for addressing absenteeism and truancy:

> *School personnel must ensure that appropriate outreach, intervention, and supports are provided for students with patterns of absences. The school's Attendance or Pupil Personnel Committee should review cases of absenteeism, chronic absenteeism, and/or truancy and should involve attendance teachers, deans, guidance counselors, teachers, social workers, and other school staff to facilitate a resolution.*

Peer and adult success mentoring are among the strategies recommended by NYCDOE, as well as making use of community and social services, and school attendance planning. These and other strategies are set out in Every Student, Every Day – a guide for reducing chronic absenteeism.

Poverty is a major factor affecting attendance and chronic absenteeism and one over which schools and school boards have little control. The table below provides NYCDOE attendance percentages and percentages for chronic absence for students who families live in poverty (P) and for students whose families do not (Np). In every case, the percentage of students chronically absent among the former are much greater than the percentage of chronically absent among the latter and the attendance percentage for students in poverty is lower.

Table 4. Rates of attendance and chronic absence for students whose families do not live in poverty (Np) and for those whose families do live in poverty (P): 2013-2014 to 2018-2019[45]

Year	2013-2014		2014-2015		2015-2016		2016-2017		2017-2018		2018-2019	
Category	**Np**	**P**	**Np**	**P**	**Np**	**P**	**Np**	**P**	**Np**	**P**	**Np**	**P**
% Attendance	92.6	90.6	93.2	91.2	93.1	91.4	93.1	91.1	93.8	90.6	93.9	90.7
% Chronically Absent	18.9	29.8	17.2	27.8	17.5	27.3	17.8	28.3	15.6	30.5	15.5	30.4

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[45] https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/school-quality/information-and-data-overview/end-of-year-attendance-and-chronic-absenteeism-data

Box 4. New York Success Mentors

In 2010, the then mayor of New York, Michael Bloomberg, established an *Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism and School Engagement.* The initiative was designed to improve the behaviour of and outcomes for students living in low-income communities who were deemed to be at risk of "getting off-track" in school or in life. *Success mentors* were a key component of the multi-faceted initiative. The mentors were people trained to advise, motivate, and build confidence in students. The Success Mentors were senior-level school personnel with access to student data and were able to mobilize school and community resources in support of students.

Each mentor was responsible for 10-15 students whom they saw at least three times each week, engaging them and their families by, among other things, greeting them each morning, calling home when they were absent, and linking the students and their parents to community services to overcome the barriers to the students' regular attendance at school.

In addition to their access to community agencies whose resources could be enlisted, the Success Mentor Model included a secondary school peer-to-peer mentoring system and "transition coaches." The former were grade 11 and 12 students who helped their grade nine peers. Transition coaches were specially trained personnel who would assist the return of students to school from suspensions, foster care, homeless shelters, and juvenile justice facilities. The Success Mentor model was also augmented by parent engagement models, data sharing agreements, celebrity phoning campaigns, public service messaging, etc.

In a system with more than 1 million students and 1700 schools, during the 2011-2012 school year, chronically absent students engaged in the program gained 11,800 days of attendance. At the elementary level, 49% of students with full year mentors left "chronic absenteeism status" in comparison with 42% of those without mentors. At the high school level, the figures were 23% and 18%, respectively. The task forces work was dependent upon an infrastructure that

Chicago Public Schools

Attendance is a fundamental pre-requisite for instruction in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). CPS considers students chronically absent when they have missed 10% or more of days enrolled (whether excused or unexcused). CPS maintains a Truancy Hotline that helps with truancy concerns. Schools whose daily attendance falls below 95% are required to develop a plan to increase attendance. Schools above 95% attendance rate are encouraged to develop a plan to maintain that status. Schools with rates of chronic absenteeism or truancy are also required to develop a plan to reduce those rates.

CPS considers low or decreasing attendance as "symptomatic of other issues, most of which can be positively influenced by proactive efforts of the school team." Guidelines for Attendance

[Improvement and Truancy Reduction in Chicago Public Schools](#) is a 186-page document that attempts to comprehensively address chronic absenteeism and truancy. CPS has two core strategies for absenteeism prevention and intervention. One uses the Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) lens, a universal approach to strengthening the "attendance culture" in schools. The other approach is the use of targeted interventions to address the unique needs of students who are chronically absent or truant.

CPS identifies a broad suite of internal elements (they use the term partners); partners include teaching and learning, safety and security, health and wellness, legal, etc. External partners include the Illinois Department of Human Services, Department of Children and Family services, Chicago Housing Authority as well as community-based organizations, businesses, and religious institutions.

The Guidelines set out expectations for each stakeholder, including students, families, teachers, schools, etc. Reproduced below is a section of a table outlining expectations for four of the nine stakeholder categories.

Table 5. Chicago Public Schools: Stakeholder expectations

STAKEHOLDERS	ROLES
STUDENT	– Come to school every day. – Be on-time for school and your classes. – Come prepared to learn. – Talk to your teachers. – Ask for help. – Stay informed. – Be a positive peer. – Know you are our number one priority.
STUDENT'S FAMILY	– Get your student(s) to school every day. – Get your student(s) to school on-time. – Check that your student(s) is ready to learn. – Encourage your student(s) to come ready to learn. – Ask questions and know your student(s)'s school. – Stay informed with what is happening with your student(s) and their school experience. – Attend important events at your student(s)'s school. – Check Parent Portal regularly to stay updated on your student(s)'s progress. – Know you are our partner in your student(s) success.
TEACHER	– Expect your students every day. – Expect your students to be on time every day. – Be excited about the learning that will happen each day; plan engaging, meaningful instruction. – Have structures in place to respond to tardies, absences and good attendance. – Build positive relationships with students and their families that promote student accountability (behavior, attendance, academics). – Take action when students are tardy or absent. – Update Gradebook regularly and on time so families can stay informed as to their student's attendance and grades. – Use your school as a support to handle attendance hurdles.
SCHOOL	– Be prepared to greet students every day. – Start the school day on time. – Let no distractions take the school off the goal of learning. – Ensure there are procedures and protocols for all attendance needs, including but not exclusively, tardies and truancy. – Maintain and be consistent about discipline procedures so student behavior is managed fairly beyond suspensions. – Have a clear, consistent and public attendance policy. – Reinforce the attendance policy regularly and apply it consistently. – Support teachers with resources for struggling students with attendance issues. – Provide engaging clubs, teams and activities that appeal to multiple student interests. – Establish a viable team to respond to attendance needs and to be proactive about data trends. – Review and share data for timely, evidence-based decision making.

The Guidelines provide detailed advice, including descriptions of many of the interventions to which the literature refers. Appendix A.2: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) for Attendance and Truancy (p. 99) contains a full list of the interventions, many of which received attention in the systematic reviews to which we referred earlier. The Guidelines document and the CPS website are as comprehensive as any we were able to find.

In addition to the Guidelines document itself, CPS provides [guidance to schools](#) about creating deliberate efforts (what CPS calls Milestones), the impact of which are expected to be reflected in the school's data. See Box 5 and Box 6 below for samples of Milestones for elementary and secondary schools. The table below illustrates a plan developed by a high school that is addressing attendance and truancy:

Table 6. Chicago Public Schools: Sample plan to address attendance and truancy

School's Current Level	Sample Focus Areas	Milestone Examples
• High school has consistently been at an 87% attendance rate	• 9th, 11th, 12th grade attendance hovers around 88% • 10th grade attendance has consistently been =<85% • 1st period attendance and 8th period attendance has highest percentage of absences • Chronic truancy is at 30% YTD and 45% at EOY • Chronic absenteeism is at 20% YTD and 28% EOY • OSS rate is 20 per 100 YTD and 35 per 100 EOY	• Provide attendance communication to enrolling freshmen, and their families • Provide attendance communication to all grade levels and their families at the start of the school year • Utilize lunch periods in Semester 1 and Semester 2 to review attendance expectations quarterly • Survey students around interest for out of school time program options to encourage student engagement • Display regular and updated signage around attendance expectations and growth in hallways, lunchroom, and classrooms • Allocate funds for weekly attendance team meeting to establish target lists, and timely interventions to address truancy and absenteeism early • Install tiered incentive program for each grade level • Establish 9th period credit recovery for off-track sophomores • Utilize support from LSC to garner stronger parent support; provide necessary workshops through PAC funds • Enroll 90% of parents/ guardians with Parent Portal • Acquire Restorative Justice training, and CHAMPS training • Contract with a community-based organization for home outreach to identified students

Box 5. Chicago Public Schools: Sample Elementary School Milestones

Instruction, suggested Milestones:

- Include Pre-K in attendance signage around the building
- Ensure that Pre-K, K and 1st grade have attendance highlight stations in theirclassrooms
- Evaluate middle school classroom location. 6th grade infractions are highest during change of teachers. Locate 6th grade teachers in one section of floor. Start the year and continue with structured period changes.

Professional Development, suggested Milestones:

- Utilize designated PD time to review attendance metrics and progress; gather feedback on best practices within classrooms; compile and share out with all teachers each quarter

School Culture, suggested Milestones:

- Summer: Review incentive plan in correlation with grade level data
- Summer and start of Q1: Strengthen incentives for Pre-K, K and 1; include grade level teachers on planning efforts; come to consensus and announce plan
- Q2, 3, and 4: Review data and efforts; adjust as needed

After School/ Extended Day Activities, suggested Milestones:

- Allocate funds for K and 1st grade after school activities. These grades are usually excluded; so a joint K and 1st grade activity with parent involvement will be a useful way to build culture as well

Parental Involvement, suggested Milestones:

- Q1 and Q3: At the start of school, provide Pre-K, K and 1st grade a family orientation focusing on the need for students to be present for progressive learning and the development of good habits
- Q1: Share monthly family events calendar for Semester 1, highlighting positive behaviors of students and families
- Q3: Share monthly family events calendar for Semester 2, highlighting positive behaviors of students and families

Box 6. Chicago Public Schools: Sample High School Milestones

Instruction, suggested Milestones:

    a.   Require school attendance goals to be posted in all classrooms
    b.   Meet weekly with the Attendance Team to review student data, and identify students who need extra support; review procedures and hurdles that are emerging
    c.   Provide data updates to all school staff in an effort to make it a priority for all

Professional Development, suggested Milestones:

    d.   Partner with the Office of Social and Emotional Learning to provide Restorative Justice training in order to decrease the # of incidents that result in out of schoolsuspensions
    e.   Partner with the Office of Social and Emotional Learning to provide CHAMPStraining in order to provide better support around behavior management

School Culture, suggested Milestones:

    f.   Install year-long incentive program tailored for each grade level; prepare in thesummer with identified Attendance Team
    g.   Display regular and updated signage around attendance expectations and growth inhallways, lunchroom, and classrooms
    h.   Identify classrooms/departments with positive attendance growth, and recognize teachers for their efforts

After School/ Extended Day Activities, suggested Milestones:

    i.   Provide 9th period accelerated online credit recovery to target demoted 10th graders. Goal to stop the 8th period cutting, and to put the 10th graders back ontrack to their junior year
    j.   Contract with community-based organization to reach out to students and theirfamilies who are identified by the Attendance Team

Parental Involvement, suggested Milestones:

    k.   Q1 and Q3: Host an Open House to talk about school level data, goals andexpectations
    l.   Sign up parents/guardians for Parent Portal during registration, Report Card PickUp, and any opportunity where home communication is being had
    m.   Provide quarterly family nights hosted by the LSC

Cross-Jurisdictional Scan: Australia

Queensland Education

[Queensland Education](#) acknowledges that ensuring student attendance is the shared responsibility of schools, parents, and communities. The government's site explains the

obligations of parents and educators and provides brief suggestions and resources about communicating high expectations, developing a positive school culture, providing intervention and support, monitoring student attendance, and recording and following up on students' absences. The government also provides two-page fact sheets on these and related topics such as school anxiety, preparing for and getting one's teen to go to school, as well as *Performance Insights: School Attendance*, a 50+ page guide. The guide highlights ten Queensland state schools that, between 2007 and 2011, made the largest attendance gains and describes the practices employed by two of them.

New South Wales Education

New South Wales Education differentiates among universal approaches, targeted interventions, and individual interventions. Its website provides a compendium of suggestions under each of those headings. NSW advises that the strategies and interventions should be appropriate to the underlying cause of non-attendance. A strategic attendance design process is described to help schools works through a sequence of actions or phases: "Discover > Define > Decide > Develop > Deliver." NSW provides on-line professional learning specifically focussed on attendance, including the recommended tiered approach.

Lessons from the literature review and cross-jurisdictional scan

The evidence of effective approaches to addressing chronic absenteeism is modest and the practices employed across jurisdictions are quite varied. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw lessons from the evidence that exists and thoughtful consideration of the problem. At a minimum, addressing absenteeism requires the following steps:

- Monitor and record attendance and absences daily using common definitions and business rules
  - Attendance measurement should clearly indicate the number of days absent, whether excused or unexcused.
  - Data on chronic absenteeism should be disaggregated by the school, school division, population sub-group, and individual student level (encrypted for the protection of privacy).
  - Determining whether there are significant within-school (between classroom) differences in chronic absenteeism can help to identify whether classroom conditions may be contributing to chronic absenteeism.
- Identify students who are chronically absent
  - Initiatives to promote regular school attendance can occur on a province-wide, community-wide, system-wide, or school-wide basis.

- o Initiatives to address chronic absenteeism cannot occur without identifying the students who are chronically absent.
- Determine why chronically absent students are missing school
  - o The factors preventing regular school attendance and contributing to chronic absenteeism are typically unique to the individual student and must be identified to be mitigated or overcome.
- Establish relationships with chronically absent students and their parents
  - o No initiative to curb or eliminate chronic absenteeism can succeed without engaging the students who are chronically absent and their parents.
  - o To have an enduring impact on school attendance, chronically absent students and their parents/caregivers must be assisted to overcome the barriers to regular school attendance.
- Plan a course of action to address the barriers to regular attendance.
  - o Barriers to regular attendance and the factors that cause chronic absenteeism often are part of a constellation that requires complex, multi-faceted actions.
  - o The individualistic nature of chronic absenteeism and the idiosyncratic nature of the action plans to address chronic absenteeism require that there be case managers who oversee and coordinate the action plan.
- Engage community and provincial agencies in the execution of the plan
  - o The circumstances that give rise to chronic absenteeism often occur beyond the boundaries and jurisdiction of schools, school divisions, and ministries of education requiring significant inter-agency cooperation and coordination without which chronic absenteeism cannot be addressed.
- Recognize and reinforce improved and regular attendance
  - o External rewards and recognition may reinforce regular or improved school attendance, but the chronically absent student must be internally motivated to attend regularly.
  - o While attendance is instrumental to school success, it is success in a welcoming school environment that will most likely reinforce regular attendance.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the planned course of action and modify the course of action when evidence suggests changes are needed
  - o Every plan should have milestones (indicators) of progress that, if not met, should signal a potential modification of the plan.
- Create an early warning system to identify students who are likely to become chronically absent
  - o Develop models that will predict the factors that may cause students to become chronically truant and develop interventions to prevent chronic absenteeism.
- Maintain the commitment

- o Each year a new generation of students enters the system, bringing with them challenges that they and the education system must face if they are going to succeed.
- o Chronic absenteeism is a recurring problem that requires an enduring commitment from individuals and agencies that can be mobilized both vertically and horizontally.

Reflecting upon his 40-year career of scholarship focussed on absenteeism, Ken Reid makes an important point about prevention of absenteeism:

> *Rather than attempting to find political solutions to the problem, it may be better to start focussing upon the learning needs of all pupils, more especially those from deprived backgrounds, who have poor parental support, literacy and numeracy problems in their early school years, with low self-esteem and related familial, social, psychological and in-school problems. The earlier these issues are identified, the more likely the intervention is to be successful. At present, far too many interventions with pupils like absentees and truants occur far too late in their school careers.*[46]

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[46] Reid, K. (2012) The strategic management of truancy and school absenteeism: finding solutions from a national perspective. Educational Review, 64(2) 211-222.

Appendix A.2: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) for Attendance and Truancy

Source: [Guidelines for Attendance Improvement and Truancy Reduction in Chicago Public Schools](#) (pp. 22-25).

Supportive Learning Climates and Universal Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Instruction

Advisory (Middle and High School) is a class in which students remain with the same advisor and peer community throughout middle or high school. It provides a venue to help students set goals, learn skills of self-management and relationship building, reflect on their academic growth, and plan for their lives in high school and beyond. All schools can access the Advisory Framework Toolkit and lesson plans at https://tinyurl.com/cpsadvisory, and the Office of Social and Emotional Learning (OSEL) of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) offers ongoing professional learning community sessions for advisory leadership teams.

Caring School Community (K-6) is an evidence-based approach that focuses on strengthening students' connectedness to school. Class Meetings, a cross-age buddies program, Homeside Activities, and Schoolwide Community-Building Activities help students develop respect for each other and take ownership for their learning and behavior. The OSEL provides professional development and coaching for a small cohort of schools to adopt this approach.

CHAMPS Classroom Management is designed to help the K-12 teacher develop or fine-tune an effective behavior support plan that is proactive, positive, and instructional. This model focuses on creating clear structure and routines, teaching expectations explicitly, interacting positively with students, and correcting classroom misbehavior in ways that are calm, respectful, and restorative. This training is offered periodically and is best for classroom teachers and those who support them.

Coaching Classroom Management is a model for a collaborative, partnership-based approach to coaching colleagues in positive and proactive classroom management. OSEL provides a one-day training and is best for instructional coaches, mentor teachers, and department leads.

Cultivating SEL for Adults is a section of the Chicago Public Schools OSEL website that contains ideas, resources, professional development activities, and a literature review focused on building positive relationships and strengthening social and emotional skills among school staff. Resources are broken out into six categories: strengthening staff connectedness, staff recognition activities, practices for school/network/central office leaders, self-care and re- energizing, reflecting on personal SEL skills, and building staff SEL skills/buy in for SEL.

Developmental Designs is an evidence-based approach that focuses on building student community and collaboration, promoting student self-management and critical thinking, and creating engaging learning experiences. Developmental Designs is specifically designed for Middle School. OSEL provides professional development and coaching for a small cohort of schools to adopt this approach.

Integrating SEL with Academic Instruction is a workshop designed for teacher teams who plan lessons and units together. In this workshop, teachers will learn to recognize what they are already doing to teach SEL, and how they can be more explicit and mindful in planning academic instruction that provides clear opportunities for students to practice social and emotional skills. This workshop can be conducted before or after school or during common planning time. A self-guided workbook is also available.

Morning Meetings/Class Meeting: Classroom-based morning meetings are a core component of many evidence-based SEL strategies, including Responsive Classroom and Caring School Community. They provide structured, daily opportunities for students to practice social skills and build a sense of community. OSEL offers an introductory session for teachers who wish to begin implementing morning meetings in their classrooms.

PATHS (K-5) is an evidence-based classroom program for teaching SEL skills, promoting positive behavior, and preventing risk behavior. The U.S Department of Education is funding Penn State University (PSU), The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), and CPS to implement PATHS in 28 schools.

Responsive Classroom is an evidence-based approach that focuses on building student community and collaboration, promoting student self-management and critical thinking, and creating engaging learning experiences. The Responsive Classroom approach can be used in K-8 classrooms. OSEL provides professional development and coaching for a small cohort of schools to adopt this approach.

Restorative Conversations guide students through reflection, problem solving, and repairing harm after a behavior incident. Restorative Conversations help identify root causes and place responsibility on students to understand the impact of their behavior and take steps to make things better. OSEL offers professional learning on Restorative Conversations through district-wide Restorative Practices 101 training, school-wide Restorative Conversations professional development, the CPS Restorative Practices Guide and Toolkit, and intensive short-term Restorative Practices Coaching Projects.

Restorative Mindsets and Language are the core components of Restorative Practices. A restorative mindset describes how a person understands community and one's role in the community. Restorative language encourages positive interaction through empathetic listening, "I" statements, and restorative questions. OSEL offers professional learning on Restorative Mindsets and Language through Restorative Practices 101 training, school-wide Restorative Practices PD, the CPS Restorative Practices Guide and Toolkit, and intensive short- term Restorative Practices Coaching Projects.

School Climate resources and professional development are coordinated through a SEL specialist at a local CPS network office and includes CPS School Climate Standards.

Second Step (PK-8) is an evidence-based social-emotional learning curriculum that helps students succeed both socially and academically. Second Step teaches skills for learning, empathy, emotion management, and problem solving— tools students need both inside and outside of the classroom. CPS schools can receive professional development and curriculum materials if they commit to fully implement the curriculum school-wide.

Talking Circles proactively build relationships within a classroom or team through a structured process. Talking circles may be used as daily check-ins, and to set classroom norms and agreements, teach social and emotional skills, provide feedback, and discuss pertinent issues and topics. OSEL offers professional learning on Talking Circles through district-wide Talking Circles training, school-wide Restorative Practices in the Classroom PD, the CPS Restorative Practices Guide and Toolkit, and intensive short-term Restorative Practices Coaching Projects.

Youth Mental Health First Aid is an eight-hour training designed to support any adult who spends time with adolescents. Participants review typical adolescent development, are introduced to the signs of common mental health challenges (e.g., depression, anxiety, eating disorders, suicidal ideation, nonsuicidal self-injury, psychosis, ADHD, etc.) for youth, and learn a five-step action plan for helping students in both crisis and non-crisis situations. Training is offered through OSEL.

Targeted Supports for Some Students

Anger Coping/Think First are cognitive behavioral group interventions that focus on developing social problem-solving and anger management skills in students exhibiting conduct problems and reactive aggression. This intervention is delivered by school counselors, social workers, psychologists, and/or community partners. OSEL offers professional development and support with implementation.

Alternatives to Suspension in schools provide meaningful opportunities for students to learn skills, repair harm caused by their actions, and take ownership over their behaviors. OSEL offers professional learning on Alternatives to Suspension through district-wide Alternatives to Suspension training, the Guidelines for Effective Discipline: An Administrator's Addendum to the CPS Student Code of Conduct, the CPS Restorative Practices Guide and Toolkit, and intensive short-term Restorative Practices Coaching Projects.

Behavioral Health Teams are collaborative problem-solving teams that support the identification, support and monitoring of students with social, emotional and/or behavioral needs through a multi-

tiered approach. Behavioral Health Teams work to establish criteria for providing supports, referral and screening protocols and a menu of social, emotional and behavioral interventions for students. OSEL offers professional development and support with implementation.

Bounce Back is a skill-building trauma-focused intervention for young children (grades K-5) who have been exposed to significant stressful events. In this intervention, students and their parents learn normal reactions to stress and trauma, helpful ways to think about self, others and the world, and social problem-solving skills. OSEL provides professional development and support with implementation for a cohort of selected schools.

Check-In/Check-Out is a school-based, targeted intervention, which provides daily support and monitoring for students who exhibit low-level problem behaviors across multiple settings and/or have few positive connections with staff. It is based on a daily check in/check out system that provides students with immediate feedback on their behavior and increased positive adult attention via a teacher rating on a Daily Progress Report. OSEL offers professional development and support with implementation.

Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) is a skill-based group intervention developed to relieve symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, and general anxiety in students who have been exposed to trauma. CBITS can be used with students in grades 3-12 and is delivered by school counselors, social workers, psychologists and/or community providers. OSEL offers professional development and support with implementation.

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Evidence-Based Behavioral Strategies (EBBS) is a classroom-based intervention for individual students and can be delivered by teachers. The two-part training, offered by the Office of Diverse Learner Supports and Services (ODLSS) provides school staff with the tools to design, implement and evaluate customized individual interventions in the classroom setting.

Impact of Exposure to Trauma on Students, Staff and the School Community trains all school staff to increase awareness about the impact of trauma exposure on students' development and learning. The training supports school staff to adopt a "trauma lens" to be better able to recognize signs of trauma as well as develop effective school-wide and classroom-based strategies for creating an environment that is supportive of students. OSEL offers professional development.

Peace Circles are a planned, structured meeting between a person or people who caused harm, the person or people who were harmed, and both parties' family and friends, in which they discuss the consequences of wrongdoing and decide how to repair harm. OSEL offers professional learning on Peace Circles through district-wide Peace Circles training (day 2 of the two-day Restorative Circles training), school-wide Restorative Practices in the Classroom professional development, the CPS Restorative Practices Guide and Toolkit, and intensive short-term Restorative Practices Coaching Projects.

Peer Conference is a voluntary, student-led process in which a small group of trained Peer Conference members provide a positive peer influence as they work to empower referred students to understand the impact of their actions and find ways to repair the harm they have caused. OSEL offers professional learning on Peer Conference through intensive short-term Restorative Practices Coaching Projects and Peer Conference Technical Assistance sessions for schools with existing Peer Conference.

Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents Responding to Chronic Stress (SPARCS) is a skill-building program geared towards adolescents (grades 6-12) who have been exposed to chronic stress or trauma who may still be living with ongoing stress and are experiencing problems in several areas of functioning. In this intervention, students learn to recognize the impact of trauma/stress on one's functioning, create meaning for one's life, increase communication and connectedness with others, and improve coping skills. OSEL provides professional development and support with implementation for a cohort of selected schools.

S.S.GRIN is an evidence-based small group intervention intended to address gaps in social skills and self-awareness for students in grades Pre-K through 2; specifically, it enhance children's confidence, communication, and cooperation skills. S.S. GRIN is facilitated by school counselors, social workers and psychologists. OSEL provides professional development and support with implementation.

Individualized Supports for a Few Students

Alternatives to Expulsion Behavior Intervention include programs from a range of community partners that provide complex interventions for students referred for infractions related to gang involvement, substance abuse, conflict-resolution, self-regulation, or decision-making. Participating students are able to continue to attend their home school while completing an intervention program. The intent of the program is to select an intervention that best matches the cause or function of the misconduct in order to meet the academic, social, emotional and behavioral needs of referred students.

SMART Program (Saturday Morning Alternative Reach-out and Teach) is an alternative to expulsion for students in 6th through 12th grade who violate categories 4, 5 or 6 of the CPS Student Code of Conduct. The SMART program works to mediate behavior by providing students with an educational alternative and provides a comprehensive and integrated multi-week program using a conflict resolution and social emotional skill development curriculum.

Appendix B: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Holistic Learning Models

The following models of learning are from Canadian Council on Learning (2007), *Redefining how Success is Measured in First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Learning,* Report on Learning in Canada 07, Ottawa, ON.

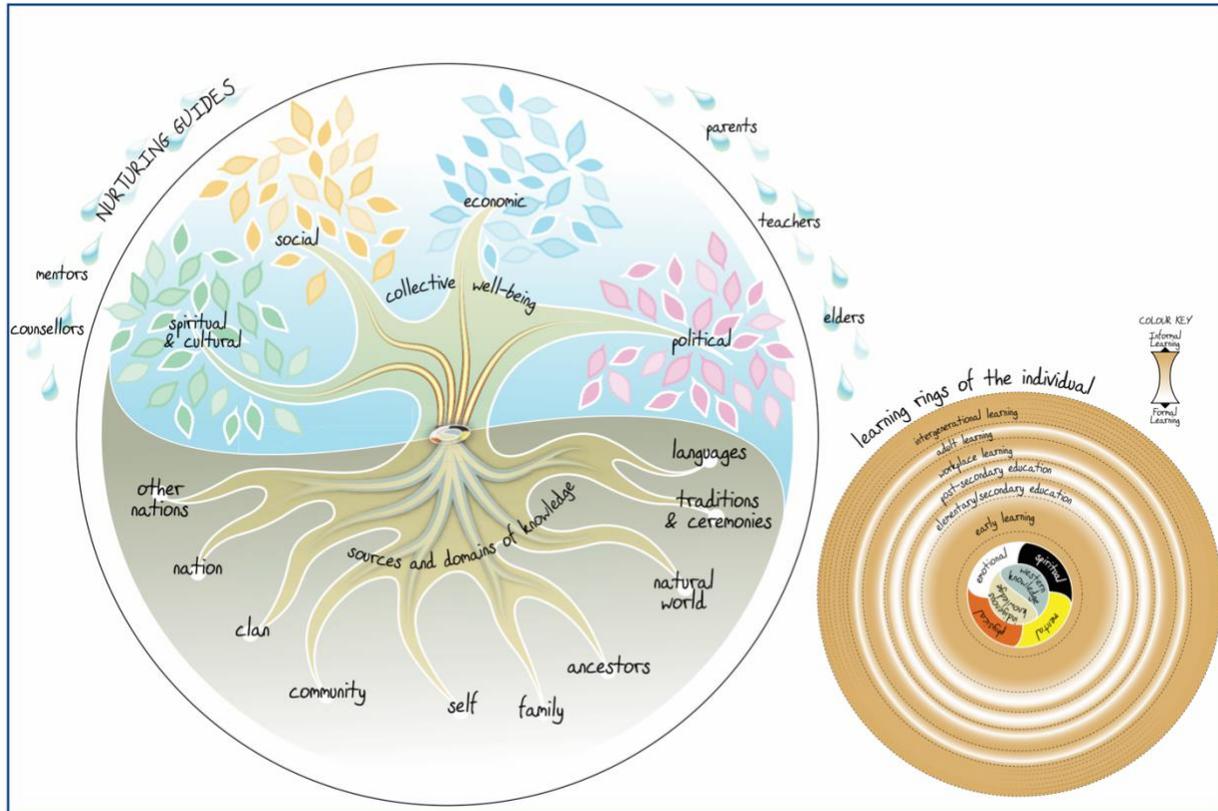*Figure 6. First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model*

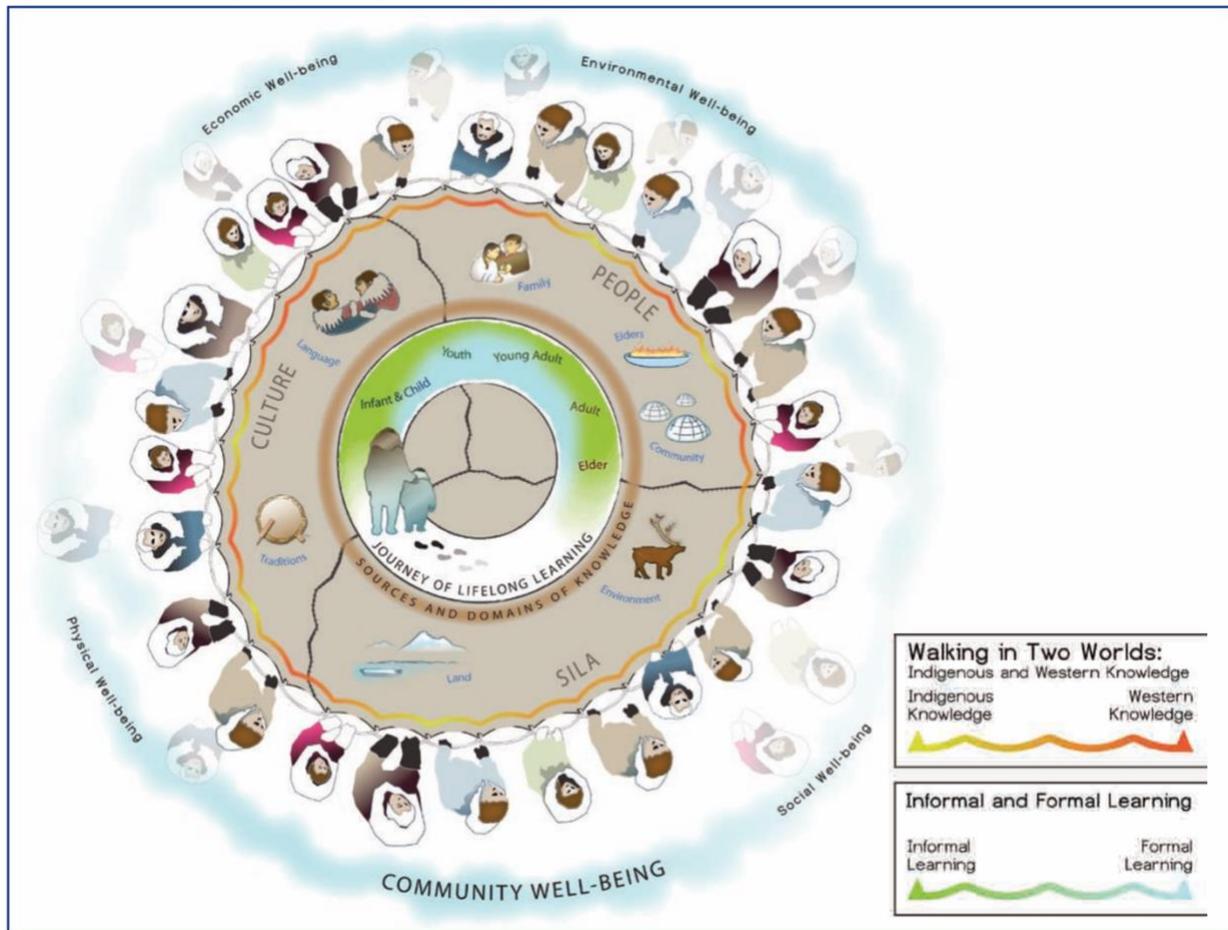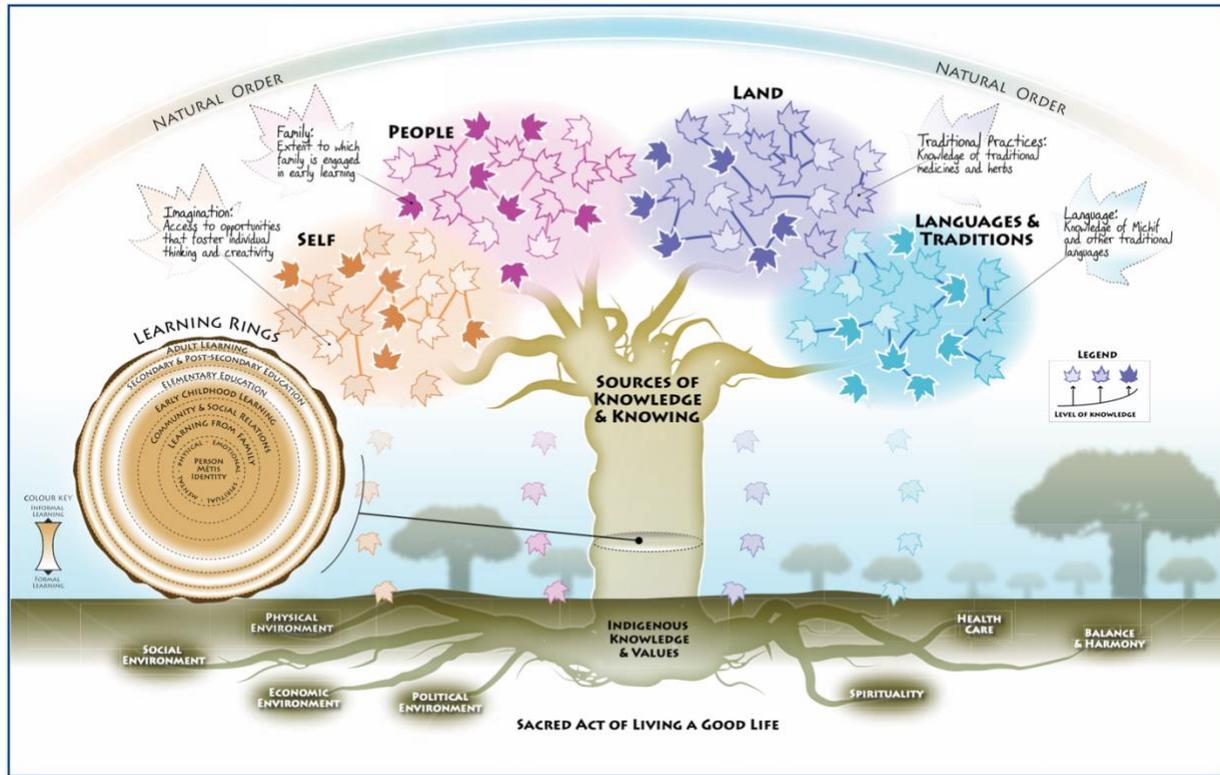*Figure 7. Inuit Holistic Lifelong Learning Model*

Figure 8. Métis Holistic Lifelong Learning Model

Appendix C: The Economic Costs of Absenteeism

Hankivsky[47] provides an analysis to estimate the costs associated with dropping out of high school before completing diploma or graduation requirements (Hankivsky, 2008). Working from a well-established literature base documenting the general consequences of dropping out, and employing methodologies found in US studies of drop-out behaviour, she applied available Canadian data to arrive at cost estimates.

Her work went beyond estimates of the costs of lost employment and productivity that were available from previous studies to include the relation between dropping out and health, crime, and social services costs. She estimated both public and private costs.

Private costs (those incurred by the individual) of dropping out would include lower current and lifetime earnings, poorer health and lower life expectancy, and an increased need for social services.

Public, or social, costs might encompass the loss of productivity and Gross Domestic Product, social assistance, or housing subsidies, reduced tax revenues, and higher costs of health-care services. Costs could be direct and tangible - for example actual government expenditures - or intangible (and indirect) such as a breakdown in family/friend relationships, reduced quality of life, or lost employment opportunities. Her estimates are acknowledged as conservative and, in some cases (health and continuing/adult education programs) significant categories of costs are omitted due to a lack of data.

Table 7 summarizes the costs per dropout (Hankivsky). The estimates for 2008 are from the study; the estimates for 2021 are inflation-adjusted values from the Bank of Canada.

Table 7. Estimates of the Costs per Dropout

	Annual costs per dropout	
	(2008 dollars)	(2021 dollars)
Labour and Employment: Private earning loss	$3,491	$4,294
Labour and Employment: Public tax revenue loss	$226	$278
Labour and Employment: Public revenue in employment insurance premium	$68	$84
Labour and Employment: Public employment insurance cost	$2,767	$3,403
Health (private)	$8,098	$9,961
Health (public)	N/A	N/A
Social Assistance (public)	$4,230	$5,203
Crime (public)	$224	$276
Education	N/A	N/A

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[47] Hankivsky, O. (2008) Cost Estimates of Dropping Out of High School in Canada. Canadian Council on Learning in Canada. https://www.ldanb-taanb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/CostofdroppingoutHankivskyFinalReport.pdf

	Annual costs per dropout	
	(2008 dollars)	(2021 dollars)
Intangible costs	$5,391	$6,631
Total (tangible & intangible costs)		**$30,129**

Source: Hankivsky, 2008

The costs associated with lost opportunities in the labour market are substantial and, when public and private costs are combined, are second only to health costs. There is a large body of literature that indicates that high school dropouts experience lower earnings per year than those who have completed high school, and lower earnings over their lifetime. Even holding for natural ability and skills, and excluding any impact from post-secondary credentials, the research shows that there is a premium in annual wages for high school graduates compared to those who do not complete high school. Moreover, lifetime earnings will be lower for dropouts as well. Among other things, dropouts experience (1) greater instability in keeping employment, (2) longer and more frequent periods of temporary unemployment, (3) lower job mobility, and (4) less likelihood of adjusting to technological changes needed for the labour market. High school dropouts also tend to experience poorer working conditions and lower fringe benefits.

With respect to public costs, lower productivity and reduced earnings lower economic growth, reduce tax revenues, and reduce revenues from unemployment insurance premiums. Employment instability also results in higher expenditures on unemployment insurance benefits. (Because these are conservative estimates, the loss due to lower productivity and lower GDP is assumed to be captured in the loss of earnings.)

Hankivsky cites several studies that show a positive relationship between health and educational attainment, even while controlling for income and socio-economic status. The studies suggest that the relationship is causal and not simply correlational. With more education individuals are more likely to invest in health, including health management and maintenance. They are also less likely to engage in behaviour detrimental to health, such as substance abuse and smoking. Education is also positively associated with greater life expectancy and lower mortality rates. To arrive at the estimate in Table 7, the study used the idea of a quality-adjusted-life-year (QALY) methodology. One QALY is one year spent in perfect health, which is then monetized. Less than perfect health results in a lower QALY. The health cost over time for a high school drop-out (the value of the health loss from dropping out) would be the number of QALYs lost times the value of each QALY. Note that these health losses from drop-out behaviour do not consider costs that would be associated with increased use of health services such as physician care, hospital emergency services, hospital in-patient services, treatment, pharmaceuticals, or psychology and counselling services. Due to a lack of data these public costs are shown as NA (Not Available) in Table 7.

It is not surprising to find that social assistance costs would be higher for high school dropouts, given the relation between educational attainment and the labour market. If dropouts are less likely to be employed, if they have greater instability in maintaining and improving employment over time, and if they earn lower wages when they are employed, it would be expected that they would have greater cause to rely upon social assistance programs. And while high school graduates are also claimants for social assistance, Hankivsky cites several studies that indicate that dropouts are more likely to be on public assistance and that a higher proportion of high school dropouts receive such assistance compared to graduates. Studies also show that a higher proportion of total social assistance support goes to dropouts compared to graduates. One study concluded that, considering the other factors that determine an individual's use of public assistance, high school graduation would reduce an individual's social assistance funding by 50 - 75%.

In general, social assistance costs include direct financial assistance for basic living requirements and goods and services provided in kind. The latter may be direct provision of housing or food. For Table 7, Hankivsky's estimates consider only the direct costs of social assistance.

The direct costs of crime would encompass the costs of detection and apprehension, the costs of jailing, institutionalization, and rehabilitation, and the costs of prosecution and the courts. In addition, there are third-party effects, considering victims' direct financial losses and the loss of quality of life. The benefits gained by reducing crime by one "unit" can be substantial. To estimate this in relation to drop-out behaviour would require reliable findings - which we do not have - on the propensity of dropouts to commit crime. Hankivsky's estimates adopt a different methodology and considers the cost per capita and the per capita savings from an increase in the high school graduation rate.

Hankivsky notes that there is not a great deal known (at least at the time of her study of drop-out costs) about the relation between crime and educational attainment. We expect that higher incomes are associated with lower crime (crime has a higher opportunity cost the greater is income to begin with). We also expect that reducing criminal behaviour in early adulthood will work to reduce criminal behaviour over the lifetime. And there is evidence that high school dropouts are a disproportionally high percentage of the prison population. Thus, one would expect there to be positive returns to increasing the graduation rate, but while there are studies that conclude that more time spent in school reduces criminal behaviour, there are more studies that reject a causal relation between crime and dropouts than ones that conclude that there is a causal relationship. Using the results of a US study that estimates the savings from crime of a 1% increase in the graduation rate, Hankivsky calculates that the crime-cost savings per drop-out would be $276.

The intangible losses from dropping out of school, as shown in Table 7, are estimated to be quite significant. Included in the intangible effects are:

A loss in the quality of relations: with family, friends, peers, teachers, and other adults; a breakdown of social cohesion.

A loss in the quality of life: reduced self-esteem; dissatisfaction with personal life; feelings of loss in control of one's personal life; a sense that there is no opportunity to improve one's life; emotional instability; loss of social networks.

- Disengagement from civic life: lower participation in community political and social councils; reduction in charitable activities and volunteerism; less engagement with democratic institutions such as voting.

- Intergenerational effects: those who experience these types of issues are more likely to pass their views and attitudes on to their children, leading to future losses.

These intangible losses are all non-market costs and difficult to quantify. Further, there is some overlap and interdependence between these effects and the tangible costs that have been identified. Hankivsky suggest that their importance is such that they should be identified and costed separately. She accepts an estimate that the losses per drop-out are equal to 50% of the total tangible costs. Thus, such costs would be $6631, adjusted to 2021.

The economic benefit of improving school completion by 1%: An illustration

Given Hankivsky's estimates, we considered for the sake of illustration what savings might be made if the Manitoba high school completion rate were increased from its current rate (82%) to 83%, a change that would produce 170 more graduates in a year. Using the adjusted figures from Hankivsky, increasing the completion rate by 1 percentage point would produce a net <u>annual</u> benefit of $5,121,904.50 (present value not calculated) based upon this 'back of envelope' estimation. Hankivsky's estimates are annualized based upon costs calculated over a span of 35 years. We are reluctant to claim that the benefits estimated above would remain constant over that period. We know, for example, some dropouts will return to school later in their lives improving their workforce attachment and income.

It is reasonable, however, to estimate that such benefits might accrue for 15 years, putting the savings at more than $75 million for each cohort of 170 additional graduates. One could take an even more conservative approach by eliminating the intangible costs from the estimate. Doing so reduces the $75 million for each cohort to about $60 million for each cohort.

Appendix D: Proposal for Immediate Implementation by School Divisions (June 2021)

The following proposal was to identify missing students was prepared by Directions in June 2021. Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning sent out a letter in December 2021 (see Appendix E: Lost Students – Manitoba Education Letter to Superintendents (December 2021)).

Although the primary focus of Directions' efforts will be on the development of a critical path and logic models for pursuing and ensuring student presence, it has advanced suggestions about the immediate steps that can be taken to address absences.

Absenteeism and persistent absenteeism are of major concern in Manitoba and have been for a long time. Enrolment and absenteeism are obviously different; however, by assessing the magnitude of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on enrolments, one can get a sense of the number of students who are unaccounted for various reasons. There was a decline in student enrolment between 2019 and 2020 of -4.8% when during the period from 2013-2014 to 2018-2019 enrolment in Manitoba's public-school divisions increased on average by approximately .8%.

Figure 9. Severe Enrolment Decline from September 2019 to September 2020
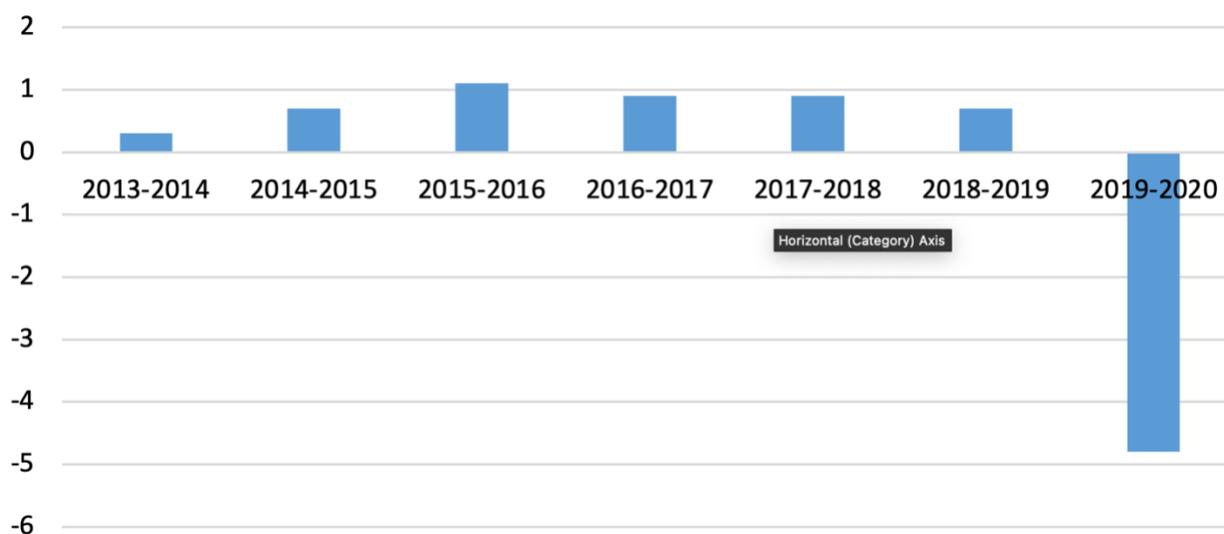
Derived from: Manitoba School Enrolments https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/finance/sch_enrol/index.html

Enrolments declined by 9306 students between September 2019 and 2020 in all 37 of Manitoba's school divisions, a reduction of 4.8%. The largest declines occurred in Winnipeg (3,148), Frontier (650), Hanover (593), River East Transcona (452), Garden Valley (449), and Louis Riel (421). The greatest declines as a proportion of the 2019 numbers occurred in Garden Valley (9.9%), Frontier (9.7%), Winnipeg (9.6%), Border Land (9.0%), Flin Flon (8.3%), and Turtle River (8.3%).

Some of the student declines in school divisions can be explained by a home-schooled enrolment increase of 117.6%. That would make the home-schooled population of students in 2019 approximately 1800 students versus 4300 in 2020.

Removing the 2500 students who migrated to home-schooling from the enrolment decline of 9306 leaves about 6500 students unaccounted for, 3.6% of the enrolment in school divisions in September 2020.

Smaller communities had lower enrolment declines likely because the inhabitants of those communities are known to one another and have stronger bonds among them than is typically the case in urban areas where individuals are less well known to one another and more loosely connected with social bonds. The implication of these differences is that it is likely easier to find students missing from school in the smaller closely-knit communities and encourage their return to school. Conversely, the challenge of locating missing or absent students in larger communities where individuals are more anonymous and have weaker social connections will be more challenging.

Another implication is that, in urban areas where families with similar backgrounds are congregated in enclaves for various reasons, use should be made of individuals who know the communities well and are, in turn, known by those communities. We understand this is happening in Winnipeg and Frontier school divisions.

There are four take-aways from this brief analysis:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically reduced student presence in many Manitoba school divisions.
2. The impact of COVID-19 on student presence has been greater in some, typically more populous, urban areas.
3. Communities where people are known to one another and have closer social relationships are better positioned to locate and re-engage students who are not present.
4. Having workers in schools that are familiar with a particular ethno-linguistic community, its norms, values, traditions, and language capitalizes on the shared social relations and language of those communities helps to forge a bond between parents and the school their children attend.

The disruption caused by the pandemic over the past 18 months means that virtually every student has had an attendance problem of some sort and that learning loss, while varied from student to student, has been nearly universal. For schools and school systems, this will require the consideration of how to reorganize the traditional routines of school opening and organization to optimize learning opportunities and recovery.

First, students and families should be invited to return to school. Planning for the opening of school should consider locating all students and ensuring that they are enrolled; assessing student's learning from the past year and developing flexible delivery models that will permit students who are far behind to catch up.

Directions developed a **draft** protocol that **might** be implemented immediately by school divisions across the province to re-engage students whose absences may have been exacerbated by COVID-19. The goal of the implementation of this immediate effort is to re-engage students who are absent/missing from schools without resort to punitive measures. The recommended steps are:

Step One: Identify all students who were enrolled as of September 30, 2019, who were not accounted for by September 30, 2020.

> Eliminate all who are known to have graduated, formally transferred to another school, school division, or private school whose attendance in 2020 has been verified, or who are pursuing a formal, approved program of home schooling.

Step Two: Obtain from student records the full contact information for parents, guardians as well as the full emergency contact information.

> In many instances this will be challenging because with the advent of cell phones numbers can change often.

Step Three: Reach out to student, parent, guardian, and/or emergency contact to inquire about the well-being of the student.

> Preparation is needed to ensure a culturally appropriate and non-punitive approach: "_____ hasn't been in school this year. We just want _____ to know s/he is missed. Will _____ be in school in September?" If contact cannot be made, deploy Intercultural Worker or Indigenous Support Worker or another appropriate staff person to visit the home and make inquiry (**not** a truant officer).

Step Four: For students whose parent, guardian or emergency contact could not be reached, inquiries should be made of other agencies (employment and income assistance, families, health, justice, etc.) that might know how to contact those families.

> In-person contact should be attempted by appropriate personnel, avoiding a punitive or accusatory approach. Do not use Truant Officers. Advice should be sought about how best to pursue this avenue from provincial privacy commissioner. This is a child-safety issue.

Step Five: As a last resort, for students whose parent, guardian, or emergency contact could not be reached through the agencies that might know how to contact them, referral should be made to those responsible for child protection.

> It is essential to avoid punitiveness or the appearance of punitiveness. The objective is to re-engage the student in school with the help and support of parents and guardians.

Directions strongly encourages the immediate implementation of these or similar steps and the continuation of the effort to find and re-engage students missing from schools for whatever reason.

The restart efforts must demonstrate a commitment that "the work begins now and will continue". The project invites the adults in the education community (teachers, administrators, support staff, social workers, etc.) to actively engage, and promises to provide supports (professional learning, time, connections to agencies) where needed.

Professional learning foci:

- How to connect with parents in an invitational and supportive way
- Understanding what trauma-informed practice is
- Culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy and curriculum
- Pedagogy for assessment and recovery of lost learning
- Exploration of alternative delivery models to "one class together with one teacher, all the time"
- Mental health and well-being – building the Compassionate School.

Resource requirements:

- Leaders of the "reconnect and be present" project at the school, division, and Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning
- Time for teachers and educators to participate in professional learning together
- Time for educators to collaborate and work with community agencies
- A data management system at each school, in each division, and in the province that allows tracking student presence at the school level and aggregating that data from school to division to province.

Appendix E: Lost Students – Manitoba Education Letter to Superintendents (December 2021)

Manitoba 🦬
Education
Indigenous Inclusion Directorate
510 Selkirk Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R2W 2M7
T 204-945-7886 **F** 204-948-2010
www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12

Manitoba 🦬
Families
Community Service Delivery Division
Regional Social Services Branch
105–114 Garry Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3C 4V4
T 204-945-6770 **F** 204-945-0082
www.gov.mb.ca/fs/

December 21, 2021

To: Superintendents of School Divisions

Dear Colleagues:

At this time, Manitoba Education is looking to identify more clearly the students you were unable to establish contact with during the previous school year and confirm their presence this new school year. We recognize that school divisions have made many varied and sustained attempts to contact and stay connected with students.

While acknowledging the considerable efforts made to ensure that all students are safe and accounted for, we are concerned there may be a smaller group of students/families whom may not have been responsive to any outreach efforts. These may or may not be children in care and we are all concerned about any student for whom you are unsure of their whereabouts. Many of our students have interagency involvement and successful engagement of students depends on a collaborative and multidisciplinary approach.

We would ask that you please complete the attached XLS form with information about students with whom your school teams lost contact with during the 2020-21 school year, and with whom contact has not been re-established this school year. This may identify a need for collaborative services and information sharing. The completed form may be submitted by January 21, 2022, to the Department of Families at provservic@gov.mb.ca. For further information or clarification, please contact Shari Block at shari.block@gov.mb.ca.

Thank you for your continued work and collaboration in support of Manitoba children and youth.

Sincerely,   Sincerely,

Helen Robinson-Settee   Brian Malkowich
Director, Indigenous Inclusion Directorate   Executive Director, Regional Social Services
Chair, Attendance Task Force   Member, Attendance Task Force
Department of Education   Department of Families

Attachments

c.   John Mikula, Executive Director, Employment, Income and Health Supports
       Allan Hawkins, Director, Inclusion Support Branch
       Meeka Kiersgaard, Manager – Program Development and Supports to Authorities, Child Protection
       Shari Block, Consultant, Indigenous Inclusion Directorate