

Long Term Recommendations – Action Plan

(April 2024)

Create Environments Where Learners Thrive



RECOMMENDATION:

Move to address the emerging critical concern of chronic absenteeism and reinforce a culture of learning by working with school districts and stakeholders to draft a provincial action plan on school attendance.



OBJECTIVE:

Reduce chronic absenteeism across all age groups in the school system.



OUTCOME:

A province-wide approach that reduces chronic absenteeism.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

A growing number of children are not attending school on a regular basis. Chronic absenteeism is when a child misses more than 10 percent of scheduled school days, which is approximately the equivalent of four weeks over the school year. In the 2022-2023 school year, just over 37 percent of New Brunswick children in grades K-5 were considered chronically absent, and more than 45 percent in middle and high school.

Regular attendance in school is crucial for several reasons. First, there is a strong link between being in school and academic success. It is difficult to grasp the material being taught when the child is not there to participate, this often leads to poor performance and a failure to complete the required coursework.

While learning curriculum is important, school also helps children with necessary skills development, like critical thinking, problem-solving, and social-emotional learning through social interaction. These skills are embedded in the curriculum and are practised daily. These are all essential life skills shaped during these formative learning years.



The consequences of chronic absenteeism on student outcomes are numerous and severe. Elementary-aged children who regularly miss school experience major losses in the development foundational skills which can result in a cascading effect on future educational outcomes (Childs & Grooms, 2018; Durán-Narucki, 2008; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). Furthermore, absenteeism is “most prominently linked” to eventual school dropout (Childs & Grooms, 2018; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). Lastly, time spent outside of school can be spent on other unproductive and sometimes harmful or delinquent activities (Cole, 2011, as cited in Childs & Grooms, 2018). For example, rates of chronic absenteeism have been associated with “substance abuse, violence, suicide attempt, risky sexual behaviour, pregnancy, delinquency-related behaviours, injury, and illness” (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). In sum, absenteeism is associated with a host of negative outcomes for students, making it a critical issue for schools and policymakers to address.” (Leighton, 2024)

It is well understood that school is the primary place for social development, allowing children to interact with their peers and teachers, building strong social skills and friendships. It also plays an important part of emotional development, positive mental health, and a sense of discipline reinforced by a structured routine that will carry children into adulthood and their professional lives.

Consistent attendance in school can help teachers and support staff identify academic and interpersonal matters more quickly. This includes learning challenges, behavioural issues, or family contexts that may impact the child's performance.

Almost as important as regular attendance is the necessity of punctuality and being ready to learn. There is a strong link between being constantly late for school and chronic absenteeism. Habitually late students may develop poor time management, while a lack of routine and missing out on learning can adversely affect academic performance.

Quite simply, regular, on-time school attendance is key for a child's success in school and in life.

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These absences have consequences, research shows. By third grade, chronically absent students are less likely to read on grade level. By sixth grade, chronic absence becomes an early warning sign that a student may drop out of high school. By ninth grade, it's a better indicator than eighth-grade test scores”.

(Childs & Grooms, 2018)

OUR PATH FORWARD

Chronic absenteeism is a problem throughout every school district and age group in New Brunswick. To ensure we effectively address this province-wide problem, we need a province-wide solution.

The anglophone education sector will adopt a consistent approach, in collaboration with school districts, to address chronic absenteeism which will include a *provincial protocol for expectations, measuring and reporting on school attendance*.

An *Absence Intervention Model* will be developed, which will help schools respond to children who are identified as at-risk for increased absences. This model will identify specific actions that will be, taken at specific intervals, to ensure children are in school when at all possible.

Somewhere along the way, society stopped valuing the importance of being in school. It is crucial for children today and for society tomorrow. As such, a public awareness campaign on the significance of school attendance will be developed and executed. This campaign will be bolstered by the publication of school-based attendance data, enabling stakeholders to tailor local strategies and circumstances to enhance outcomes.

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

A decrease in the number of chronically absent students across all grade levels indicating the effectiveness of interventions implemented by the province, districts, and individual schools.

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