

Procedure Title	Student Attendance		
Date of Issue	June 7, 2017	Related Policy	BP 6201-D
Revision Dates	January 31, 2018; June 30, 2021	Related Forms	AF 6101; AF 6103; AF 6104; AF 6230; AF 6225
Review Date		Originator	Administrative Council
References			
Enrolment Register Instructions for Elementary and Secondary Schools: current school year available at: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/forms/enrol/enrolment_register_instructions.pdf ; Ontario Association for Counselling and Attendance Services: Course Manual for Attendance Counsellors, 2005; Supervised Alternative Learning: Policy and Implementation, 2010, available online at: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/alternative.html ; Education Act; AP 5905-D "Supervised Alternative Learning"; AP 6225-D "Home Schooling"; AP 6230-D "Home Instruction"; AP 6810-D "Safe Arrival"; AP 7521-D "Religious Accommodation"; AP 6820-D "Suspensions and Expulsions"			

1.0 RATIONALE

- 1.1 Bluewater District School Board recognizes the importance of ongoing regular school attendance to support academic achievement, the acquisition of a secondary school diploma, and the development of skills imperative to postsecondary education and/or future employment. Therefore, early identification and intervention related to absenteeism is crucial in order to help children and youth achieve their full potential.
- 1.2 The purpose of this procedure is to provide administrators and board personnel with information regarding identification of and possible interventions for absenteeism, the legal exceptions to compulsory school attendance, and the referral process for and role of student support attendance counsellors.

2.0 COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

- 2.1 It is the expectation of Bluewater District School Board that students of compulsory school age shall attend school, in accordance with Section 21(1) of the Education Act.
- 2.2 Every child must attend school from the first day of school in September after their sixth birthday until the last school day in June in the calendar year in which they become eighteen or until their eighteenth birthday, whichever comes first.
- 2.3 Attendance in both the junior kindergarten and senior kindergarten programs are not compulsory unless, consistent with Section 21(4) of the Education Act, a child has registered and attended either a junior or senior kindergarten program, at which point they are considered compulsory school age, regardless of their age, and attendance is compulsory.
- 2.4 Section 21(2) of the Education Act contains the reasons that a student may legally be excused from school.

3.0 RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS/GUARDIANS AND STUDENTS RELATED TO ATTENDANCE

- 3.1 Parents and guardians are primarily responsible to ensure that their children attend school regularly as required by the Education Act and as outlined in this procedure. According to BP/AP 6810-D "Safe Arrival", parents are required to notify their child's school every time their child will be absent or late and provide information regarding the child's whereabouts, safety, and the reason for the absence. Please see BP/AP 6810-D "Safe Arrival" for more information.
- 3.2 Parents are required to provide medical documentation to the school, if applicable, in the case of their child's absence from school for medical reasons.
- 3.3 Parents are expected to work together with classroom teachers, school administrators, board staff, and community agencies to improve and/or maintain their child's school attendance and request assistance or support when needed. Students are required to attend school regularly as required by the Education Act, and as outlined in this procedure.

4.0 RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOL STAFF, TEACHERS, AND ADMINISTRATORS

- 4.1 Early identification of, and intervention for, absenteeism is crucial to helping children, youth, and families change patterns of poor attendance and work towards achieving their full potential. Absenteeism has a negative impact on student achievement and well-being, and would warrant further investigation by a school administrator when:
- i. cumulative absences exceed more than 10 days in total between September to January or between February to June, or exceed 20 days in total per school year (including unexplained absences, sick days without medical documentation, etc.);
 - ii. regular absences are unexplained, or explanations from student and/or parent/guardian are inconsistent;
 - iii. regular absences are explained as illness but medical documentation has not been submitted to the school;
 - iv. regular absences appear to be having a negative impact on academic performance and/or student's personal/social/emotional well-being;
 - v. secondary student is exhibiting a pattern of skipping class on a regular basis;
 - vi. five to fifteen (5 to 15) days of consecutive absences without explanation.
- 4.2 School administrators are expected to use the following best practices in regards to absenteeism:
- i. School administrators are expected to monitor and track the attendance of all students at their respective school(s) and provide school-level interventions for students with poor attendance before referring a student to the student support attendance counsellor.
 - ii. Request and review school-wide attendance reports, available from the Student Information System, at least monthly to identify students with poor attendance. Many schools review attendance lists during "In School Needs Team" meetings.
 - iii. Communicate with classroom teachers to identify students with poor attendance and ensure the classroom teacher has attempted to make initial contact with a parent/guardian to discuss absences.
 - iv. Use school-level strategies to engage the student to improve attendance, such as timetable changes, peer mentoring, arranging counselling for the student, and/or referral to an alternative program or setting.
 - v. Arrange meetings with the student and the parent/guardian to discuss the reasons for the pattern of poor attendance and discuss how to work together to improve attendance.

- vi. If these school-level strategies are not effective in improving a student's attendance at school, the principal may refer the student in writing to the student support attendance counsellor using AF 6101 "Attendance Referral Request".

5.0 ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE STUDENT SUPPORT ATTENDANCE COUNSELLOR

- 5.1 Reporting to the learning services administrator, the student support attendance counsellor will provide services related to helping students experiencing social, emotional and behavioral problems in the context of the family, the school, and the community in order that the student will be better able to handle expectations of social and academic learning in the school setting. These students are exhibiting attendance problems and are under the age of 18 years old.
- 5.2 Responsibilities of the student support attendance counsellor:
 - i. Investigates attendance referrals from superintendents, principals, vice-principals, school teams, teachers, parents, community agencies and citizens in the community.
 - ii. Visits school and/or family to assess cases, negotiate intervention strategies and deliver services.
 - iii. Delivers services including observation and assessment, consultation, counselling, referral plans and implements intervention strategies.
 - iv. Counsels students whose symptom of non-attendance appears to reflect social/emotional, education, family, or peer issues.
 - v. Communicates with all school/board staff and families, specifically related to the attendance needs of students.
 - vi. Participates in collaborative planning meetings to discuss program referrals and intervention strategies.
 - vii. Participates in school/system and community agency case conferences.
 - viii. Liaise with community agencies, court officials and probation officers as required.
 - ix. Assists educators and families in assessing and utilizing the services of appropriate community agencies.
 - x. Explores alternative learning opportunities for chronic non-attendees.
 - xi. Acts as a resource for alternative education programs.
 - xii. Works with the school, student, parents and employers by preparing and presenting pertinent information at Supervised Alternative Learning (SAL) Committee meetings.
 - xiii. Assists students in re-entering regular school programs, if applicable.
 - xiv. Engages in early intervention/prevention work by identifying, counselling and acting as liaison for high-risk students with potential for future attendance problems.
 - xv. Provides professional development to school and system personnel, and to the community on issues pertaining to at-risk students as required.
 - xvi. Responsible for possible enforcement of compulsory attendance, including court intervention, as required.

6.0 CUMULATIVE ABSENCES, CONSECUTIVE ABSENCES, PROLONGED ABSENCES, AND ATTENDANCE REFERRAL

6.1 Cumulative Absences

No student should be absent more than 20 days total per school year, except in extenuating circumstances. If any student reaches approximately 15 days of **cumulative** absence, the principal will contact the parent/guardian of the student by telephone and/or letter. A letter template for principals is available in the Administrators' Handbook. The principal will attempt to discuss the reasons for the absences with the parent/guardian and develop a plan to improve attendance. If these efforts are not effective in improving the student's attendance, the principal may refer the student to the student support attendance counsellor using form AF 6101 "Attendance Referral Request". A copy of letters sent to parents regarding attendance and the attendance referral should be sent to the student support attendance counsellor and filed in the student's OSR.

6.2 Prolonged Absences from School (15 days or more)

If any student has been absent for 15 **consecutive** school days without being legally excused from attendance, a principal shall:

- a) retire a student from the school register

OR

- b) refer the student using form AF 6101 "Attendance Referral Request" to the student support attendance counsellor to maintain the student on the school register.

The attendance referral must be dated for the 16th day of consecutive absence to maintain the student on the school register. This document is filed in the student's OSR and submitted to the student support attendance counsellor. If the principal has reason to believe that attendance counselling services are not required or needed, the principal may decide to retire the student from the school register. **However, principals must consult with the student support attendance counsellor prior to making this decision.**

6.3 Please refer to the Enrolment Register Instructions for Elementary and Secondary Schools for the current year for further guidance regarding the following:

- a) 15 Consecutive Absences from a Secondary Course
- b) Prolonged Absences (30, 45, 60 days consecutive)
- c) Retirement for No Contact with Student Support Attendance Counsellor
- d) Retirement for Maximum 60 Days of Consecutive Absence

7.0 FLEXIBLE ATTENDANCE FOR MEDICAL REASONS AND HOME INSTRUCTION PROGRAM**7.1 Flexible Attendance for Medical Reasons**

If appropriate medical documentation is submitted to the school, it will be retained on file at the school, and will maintain the student on the school register in the case of regular absences from school. **A referral to the student support attendance counsellor is not required in this case.** Attendance expectations will be flexible, and it is recommended the parent/guardian and principal decide upon an attendance schedule based on mutual agreement that best suits the medical needs of the student. Medical notes should contain some information regarding the reason why the student is not able to attend school regularly and an estimated duration of time the student will be absent from school.

7.2 Home Instruction Program

If a student is **unable** to attend school due to medical reasons and is "confined to home or hospital" by a physician, a principal may submit an application for the Home Instruction program to the appropriate superintendent of education. Upon approval by the superintendent of education, the Home Instruction program will provide a teacher to work with the student up to a maximum of five (5) hours per week in home or hospital until the program expires and/or the student returns to school. Please refer to AP 6230-D "Home Instruction" for more information.

8.0 STUDENT RELOCATION- INTERNAL TRANSFER AND OUT OF DISTRICT RELOCATION**8.1 Internal Transfer between Schools**

If a parent/guardian has notified the principal of the school that they plan to transfer their child to another school of the board but does not enrol the child at the new school within 15 consecutive school days, the principal should refer the student to the student support attendance counsellor for follow up. In this case, the principal must use form AF 6101 'Attendance Referral Request' to maintain the student on the school register until an OSR request is received. The student support attendance counsellor assigned to the school at which the student is still enrolled will contact the family to encourage the student/parent to enrol at the new school within the board or attend their current school.

8.2 Out of District Relocation

If a parent/guardian notifies the principal that they plan to move or have moved out of the district but an OSR request has not been received at their original school within 15 consecutive school days, the student should be retired from the school register as of the last day of attendance. The principal must consult the student support attendance counsellor before making the decision to retire a student from register if the student is of compulsory school age. In some circumstances, the student support attendance counsellor may assist the principal in making an attendance referral to the board or district in which the family has relocated.

9.0 TEMPORARY EXCUSAL FROM SCHOOL

- 9.1** If a student will be absent for an extended period upon mutual agreement between the principal and parent/guardian, the parent may use form AF 6104 "Temporary Excusal from School" as an application for this purpose. This form should only be used for a maximum of 30 school days. Upon completion, this form is filed in the student's OSR. In this case (example: extended vacation over 15 days, medical reasons or treatment, etc.) a referral to the student support attendance counsellor is not usually required but they should be consulted. Signature from the student support attendance counsellor is also required before final approval. Please refer to the "Use of Computerized Enrolment Registers for Elementary and Secondary Schools" for the current year for additional information.

- 9.2** In accordance with subsection 23(3) of Ontario Regulation 298, "Operation of Schools – General", the principal will retain AF 6104 "Temporary Excusal from School", in which the parents request that the pupil be excused or, if the pupil is an adult, the pupil may make this request to be excused. If the school provides a program of study for the pupil, it must be certified by the principal and retained.

- 9.3** If the school does not provide a program of study for the pupil, an elementary or a secondary school pupil who has been excused from school for 15 or more consecutive school days in accordance with subsection 23(3) of Ontario Regulation 298 will be retired from the register on the day immediately following the last day of attendance.

10.0 SUPERVISED ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAM

- 10.1** Bluewater District School Board recognizes that some students may not experience success in a regular school setting. Therefore, the Supervised Alternative Learning (SAL) program provides an alternative for students of compulsory school age between 14-17 years of age. The purpose of SAL is to provide students who have significant difficulties with regular attendance at school. Further, an individualized plan is developed to enable the student to progress towards obtaining an Ontario secondary school diploma or achieving his or her other education and life goals. Examples of alternative programming available in the SAL program are, working on courses from home, participation in counselling and/or treatment, participation in a co-op placement, or paid employment.

- 10.2** Prior to the school submitting a SAL application, the student support attendance counsellor **must** be consulted. It is also recommended a meeting be arranged by the school for the student, parent/guardian, school administration team, and the student support attendance counsellor to determine the appropriate SAL program and complete/sign the SAL paperwork. The student support attendance counsellor will present the student's SAL application to the SAL committee at the next available meeting for consideration.

- 10.3** Students who are approved for the SAL program by the SAL committee are legally excused from attendance at school, however must be connected to a primary contact at their respective school for the purposes of monitoring their participation in the program. The primary contact must have two-way communication with the student on a minimum monthly basis and provide an update on the student's progress to the SAL Committee upon request. For more information, please refer to AP 5905-D "Supervised Alternative Learning".