

SUPPORTING STUDENT ATTENDANCE IN ECSD

May 2025

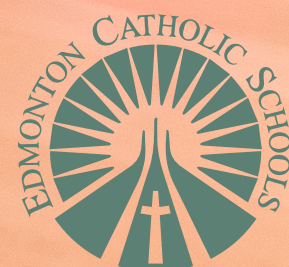
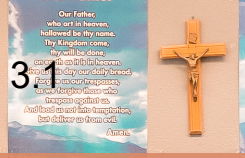




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PREAMBLE



Student attendance is a foundational indicator of academic achievement, emotional well-being, and long-term success. Chronic absenteeism – when a student misses a significant portion of the school year – is a powerful early warning sign of deeper struggles, including mental health challenges, academic barriers, and systemic inequities. Recognizing the serious and lasting impact of chronic absenteeism, Edmonton Catholic School Division (ECSD) is committed to an intentional, trauma-informed, and equity-centered approach to identifying, supporting, and re-engaging students who are chronically absent from school.

Attendance patterns offer critical insight into a student's experience both within and beyond the classroom. Research shows that attendance

problems often begin early, are compounded over time, and are closely linked to mental health issues, academic underachievement, and future life outcomes (Kearney et al., 2023; Klan et al., 2024; Pathways to Education, 2024; National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2023). Chronic absenteeism disproportionately impacts students from low-income families, students with disabilities, racialized students, and English language learners (Pathways to Education, 2024; EdCAN Network, 2023), highlighting absenteeism as a significant social equity issue that schools must actively address.

In response, ECSD has adopted a targeted, action-driven strategy grounded in a trauma-informed Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework.



This approach mobilizes educational teams, families, Family School Liaison Workers, Mental Health Specialists, and community partners such as Recovery Alberta and Child and Family Services. Through MTSS, support is provided at both a universal and individualized level, with interventions carefully matched to the tier of support required based on student needs. Early identification, personalized interventions, and culturally responsive practices are key priorities.

To assist schools in navigating this process, ECSD has developed an Attendance Protocol. This tool provides a clear and accessible guide for determining the appropriate tier of support, ensuring that students, families, and others impacted by

chronic absenteeism receive timely, coordinated, and compassionate intervention grounded in our Catholic belief in the dignity of every child.

This document outlines ECSD's commitment to early intervention, reengagement of students, and the removal of barriers contributing to chronic absenteeism. It provides a comprehensive overview of the Division's legal obligations, operational procedures, and multi-tiered supports that work collectively to ensure every student has the opportunity to succeed and thrive.



The Importance of Attendance

A Key Early Indicator

According to [EdCAN Network](#), attending school matters for many reasons. Chronic absenteeism is a key early risk factor for school dropout, as well as a host of other mental health, financial, and academic difficulties. School attendance problems often serve as a “canary in the coal mine” for schools and mental health agencies, signaling that children are struggling

at school, at home, or in the community long before other issues become more visible (Kearney et al., 2023). Research has also shown that attendance problems have dynamic, compounding relationships with mental health and academic achievement issues, often beginning as early as the elementary years (Klan et al., 2024).

Understanding Why Students Miss School

Chronic absenteeism is often a visible sign of deeper, more complex challenges in a student’s life. Before schools can respond effectively, it is important to understand why students miss school. *Attendance Works* identifies four broad categories that help make sense of these pattern:



Barriers

(e.g., illness, unreliable transportation, housing instability)



Aversion

(e.g., anxiety, academic difficulty, bullying)



Disengagement

(e.g., lack of connection to school, feeling unrecognized or unsupported)



Misconception

(e.g., not understanding the impact of absences, assuming school is not essential)



These root causes are not always obvious – and they often overlap. Recognizing them early allows educators to take a more compassionate, personalized approach to support. This shift from enforcement to understanding is essential to addressing the real reasons behind absenteeism and reconnecting students with their learning. *See Appendix A for a summary table of root causes and examples from Attendance Works.*



Understanding Systemic Barriers

Research conducted by [Pathways to Education](#) suggests that the rise in absenteeism is not solely attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. Barriers such as low income, transportation challenges, lack of educational expectations, and low motivation toward school all contribute to absenteeism. Even before the pandemic, [students in low-income communities were more likely to have higher rates of absences and be chronically absent compared to their more affluent peers](#). During the pandemic, approximately a quarter of low-income schools (24%) reported challenges with student enrollment, compared to 13% of high-income schools.

The statistics above highlight that absenteeism is often a symptom of deeper social equity challenges. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds, students with disabilities, students facing discrimination, and students whose first language is not English all face unique barriers that contribute to higher rates of absenteeism. For this reason, schools must view absenteeism through a trauma-informed lens – addressing underlying, unmet needs and ensuring every student has access to a safe adult and experiences a sense of belonging and purpose within the school community.

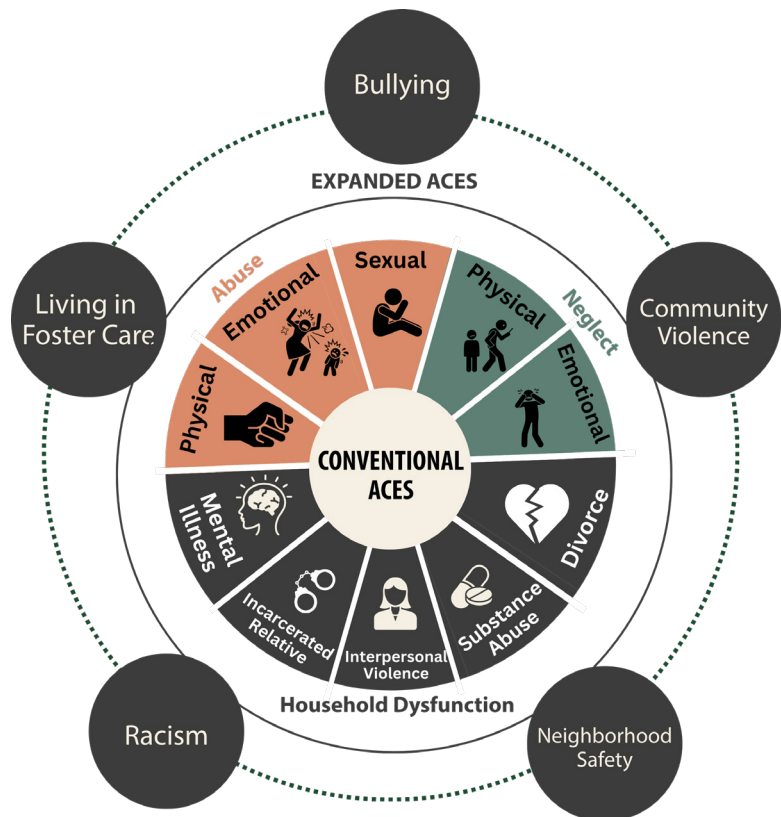


The Impact of Trauma

The understanding that absenteeism often reflects deeper, unmet needs aligns with research from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, outlined in [Creating, Sustaining and Supporting Trauma-informed Schools](#) (A System Framework).

The report examined the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on academic outcomes and found that communities with higher ACE scores had increased rates of suspension and unexcused absences, as well as lower rates of high school graduation and progression to post-secondary education, compared to communities with a lower prevalence of ACEs.

Not only are individual children affected by traumatic experiences, but other students, school staff, and broader communities are also impacted by working with or supporting a child who has experienced trauma. Thus, as schools maintain their critical focus on education and achievement, they must also acknowledge that mental health and wellness are deeply connected to students' success in the classroom and the creation and maintaining of a thriving school environment.



Long-Term Consequences

Studies have shown that students with high rates of absenteeism tend to develop negative views of their academic abilities, which can further erode engagement and achievement. Chronic absenteeism also has direct negative impacts on individual

outcomes outside of school, particularly in terms of employment, health, and community participation. It affects broader social outcomes, such as [the likelihood of involvement with the criminal justice system and dependency on social services](#).

Reaching out Early to Support Students

Chronic absenteeism is often an early signal that a student may be experiencing personal, academic, or social challenges. Early intervention, guided by context rather than just percentage thresholds – allows schools to respond with understanding and support. At Edmonton Catholic Schools, school teams are encouraged to consider the full context of a student's situation – including home life, mental health, learning needs, and school climate when

identifying students who may benefit from outreach.

By initiating connection early, schools can better understand student needs, foster strong relationships with families, and reduce the risk of long-term disengagement. While early outreach remains essential, schools must also work within the legal frameworks that govern across Alberta.

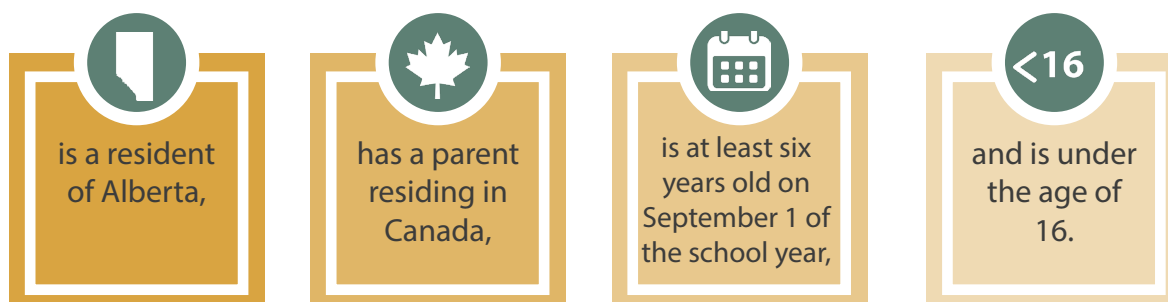
Our Legal and Ethical Responsibility

Alberta's Education Act: Attendance Obligations

The *Education Act* outlines the legal responsibility for children to attend school and the role of school authorities in ensuring that obligation is met. The sections below summarize the key provisions that guide how attendance is monitored, enforced, and supported across Alberta schools.

Compulsory Education

In Alberta, the law mandates that children attend school to ensure their right to an education, as outlined in the *Education Act* under Section 7: Compulsory Education. According to the Education Act, every child must attend school who:



The only exception to this rule is if a student has already completed high school. However, there are also circumstances where a student may be excused from attending school. These include:

- Illness or other unavoidable circumstances
- Religious holidays
- Suspension or expulsion, if the student has not yet enrolled in another educational program
- A valid exemption granted by the school board or the Minister if the parents/guardians provides sufficient cause



While the law requires school attendance, it also places responsibility on school boards to ensure that students are attending regularly. School boards must make every reasonable effort to encourage and maintain attendance by closely monitoring students' attendance records and intervening when necessary to resolve issues before they become chronic.

As part of the Education Act, **attendance officers** are empowered to take action if they believe a student is not attending school as required. To support enforcement, attendance officers may enter non-residential buildings during school hours to search for the student or accompany the student either home or to school to ensure compliance. If it is discovered that a student is not complying with directions, an attendance officer can apply for an order from a judge or a justice of the peace. This order may grant the officer permission to enter a residence or another location to search for the student, or compel the student to comply with the officer's instructions.

While this enforcement is present in other school divisions, at Edmonton Catholic Schools, we work through school administrators and a variety of support staff, such as Family School Liaison Workers, to encourage and support positive attendance habits among students.

If enforcement efforts by the school or the attendance officer are unsuccessful, the matter can be referred to the **Attendance Board**.

Before making any referral, it is critical that the school board has made every reasonable effort to inform the student of their duty to attend school. They must also demonstrate that all necessary interventions have been exhausted. This includes informing students and parents or guardians of the attendance obligation and carefully documenting all steps taken to address the attendance issue. In cases where the student attends a private school, the responsibility falls to the school operator to encourage attendance. If reasonable efforts have been made without success, private schools may also refer the case to the Attendance Board.

These legal obligations and procedures are designed to ensure that all students receive an education while also providing appropriate support and intervention for families facing challenges in maintaining regular attendance.



Attendance at School

When a student fails to attend school as required under Alberta's Education Act, and all reasonable efforts to resolve the issue have been unsuccessful, Section 9: Attendance at School outlines the process for escalating the matter to the Attendance Board.

In Edmonton Catholic Schools, the board responsible for the student, or the board that oversees the school the student attends, may initiate the referral to the Attendance Board.

Before such a referral is made, the school board must:

- Ensure that the student has been clearly informed of their obligation to attend school. This includes making sure that the student is aware of the attendance requirement as outlined in Section 7.
- Demonstrate that all reasonable efforts to support and enforce attendance have been made and documented.

The referral process ensures that every possible intervention is attempted before formal escalation to the Attendance Board. It reflects the shared responsibility between families, schools, and the Division to promote consistent school attendance and address barriers proactively.



A hand-drawn illustration of a large glass jar filled with numerous heart-shaped cards. Each card contains a name or a message. The jar has a wooden-textured lid. The cards are in various colors (pink, blue, yellow, green, orange) and some have additional drawings or text. The names include H.M., A.L., M.I., D.B., W.S., N.B., M.I., S.A., J.L., N.A., A.D.R., M.S., Z.H., H.M., E.M., and others. Some cards have messages like "I LOVE MY", "Someone told me that I should smile", and "Start to a chant on recess time".



COMPLIMENTS

Colour your ,
write your initials,
add it to the jar!

Grade 6

let
LOVE
bloom

ECSD's Approach

Division Processes and Tools

How Attendance is Tracked

In the Edmonton Catholic School Division, student attendance is tracked using the PowerSchool system and School Messenger platform. Teachers record attendance throughout the day, with the frequency varying by school.

- Elementary schools typically record attendance twice daily (morning and afternoon)
- Junior high and high schools record attendance each period

Parents are able to notify schools of absences in advance through the PowerSchool Parent Portal, the School Messenger mobile app or website, or by calling the school directly.

Recording Absences

When recording absences in PowerSchool, teachers and parents or guardians can select from several non-disciplinary absence codes, such as Illness, Vacation, Appointment.

These codes are attached to categories for tracking purposes, including:

- **Excused Absence:** Used when a student is absent for a valid reason, such as a medical appointment or family function
- **Unexcused Absence:** Used when a student is absent without a valid reason provided
- **Vacation:** Used when a student is absent due to a family vacation



Monitoring Attendance Patterns

The attendance monitoring process includes the following steps:

1. Parent/Guardian Notification of Absence

Parents or guardians can notify schools of absences before they occur via the PowerSchool Parent Portal, the SchoolMessenger website, SchoolMessenger mobile app, or by phone.

2. Teacher Attendance Recording

Teachers record student attendance throughout the school day in PowerSchool. The number of times attendance is recorded varies by school level (elementary, junior high, or high school).

3. Follow-Up on Unexplained Absences

SafeArrival automatically follows up on any unexplained absences by notifying the parents or guardians and giving them an opportunity to explain the absence. In some cases the parents are unaware, and can follow up with the student. This feature is primarily intended to ensure the safety and well-being of students.

4. Staff Follow-Up Reports

Once absences are processed via the system, school staff receive a report summarizing any absences that require further follow-up.



SafeArrival Process

Absence management is supported by the SafeArrival system, which operates as follows:

1

Parent/Guardian Reporting Future Absences

Parents or guardians can report future absences into SafeArrival via the PowerSchool Parent Portal, using the SchoolMessenger mobile app or website, or by telephone (phone number **1-833-788-7662**). (See [Reporting Student Absences](#) on the ECSD website.)

2

Teacher Attendance Entry

Teachers continue to record attendance during the school day – twice daily for most elementary schools (i.e., AM and PM), and each period in junior high and high schools.

3

SafeArrival Notification

SafeArrival collects attendance information entered by teachers into PowerSchool up to the notification time. Automated notifications are then sent via email, text (SMS), and phone call to the parents or guardians of students marked absent. Notifications include the period a student was marked absent in.

- Notifications are sent only for students and periods where they are marked with an AU (Unexcused Absence).
- The notification period lasts 25 minutes, during which parents or guardians have the opportunity to respond.

4

Updating Attendance Records

- After the notification period SafeArrival records any attendance, specifically absences, that has been collected up until the time of the SafeArrival notification.
- SafeArrival updates PowerSchool with the absence reason (if it was collected) and adds a note to the attendance record indicating the reason for the absence, who submitted it, and when it was submitted.
- Attendance is updated every hour as the day progresses, but only if an absence is recorded. SafeArrival does not alter records marked as "present" or blank records.

5

SafeArrival Summary Reports

- After each notification cycle, a SafeArrival Summary Report is sent to the school's administrative support or other relevant staff members.
- This report includes all parent-reported absences and AU notifications received during the most recent notification window.
- Summary reports are also available on the SafeArrival homepage for real-time monitoring. This allows staff to view absences by category and access a list of students along with details of their reported absences for the current day.



School Level Attendance Responsibilities

(Reference Administrative Procedure 330 – Appendix B)

Principal's Role in Attendance

In accordance with Administrative Procedure 330, the Principal of each school is designated as the attendance officer for all enrolled students. This role includes overseeing and implementing a comprehensive school attendance plan in collaboration with school staff.

School-Based Procedures

Each school is required to establish written attendance procedures tailored to its context. These procedures must:

- Outline clear processes for teachers to maintain accurate records of student attendance, including absences and tardiness.
- Provide a framework for parents to report student absences in a timely manner.
- Ensure parents are informed when a student has unexcused absences or excessive late arrivals.

At the start of each academic year, it is the Principal's responsibility to ensure that families, students, and staff are informed of the school's attendance expectations and processes.

Using Data to Guide Support

All schools in the Division are expected to monitor and respond to attendance concerns as early as possible in the school year. Data monitoring should begin as early as preschool and continue through Grade 12. The Attendance Protocol serves as a navigation tool to help schools use attendance data to identify students with moderate to chronic absenteeism, determine the appropriate tier of support, and respond accordingly. The protocol emphasizes not only the number of instructional days missed, but also the student's overall well-being, school and home environment, and broader contextual factors. By using the Attendance Protocol alongside team-based conversations and inclusive practices, schools can respond with the right level of intervention at the right time. *See Appendix C for the Attendance Protocol decision-making tool.*

Responding to Attendance Concerns

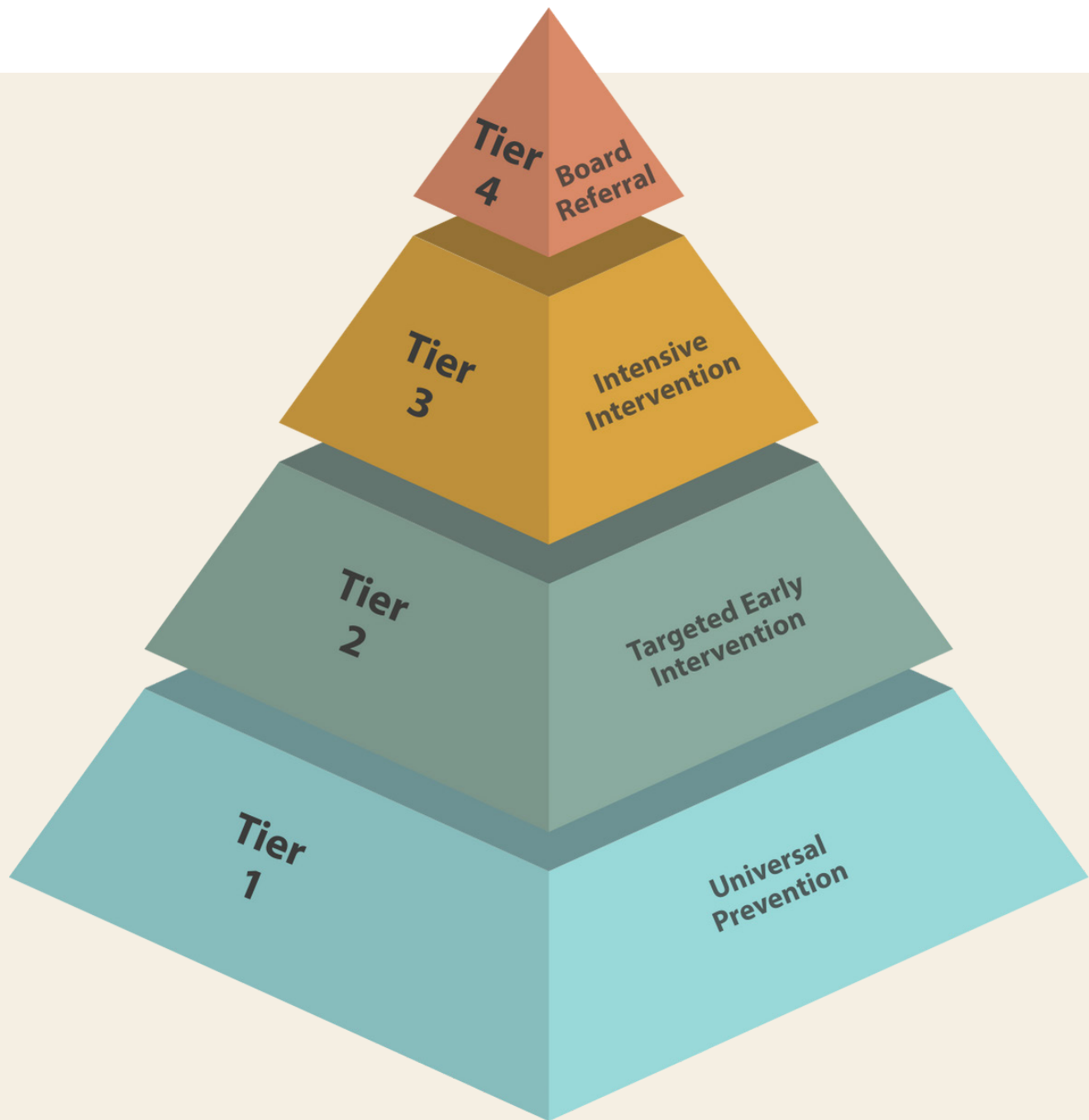
When a student's attendance becomes a concern, the Principal is expected to take all reasonable steps to address the issue in a proactive and supportive manner. These steps should follow the Division procedures and Attendance Protocol (*see Appendix C*): Student Attendance and Re-engagement. If these efforts do not result in improvement, the Principal may refer the matter to the Attendance Board in accordance with provincial criteria. All referrals must be thoroughly documented, with copies submitted to both the Attendance Board and the Superintendent of Leadership Services.



Supporting Students Through Tiered Intervention

Introduction to the Tiered Framework

Edmonton Catholic Schools' approach to attendance intervention is informed by the Four-Tier Intervention Pyramid (see *Appendix D, Jigsaw Learning*). This framework guides the Division's trauma-informed Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), allowing schools to match strategies to student needs – ranging from universal prevention to intensive, individualized support.



ECSD'S MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT
FOR ATTENDANCE INTERVENTION

Tier 1 – Universal Prevention

For students missing 0-9% of instructional days.

At Edmonton Catholic Schools, Tier 1 supports are embedded into everyday school life. These universal strategies focus on prevention, early connection, and creating a sense of belonging for all students. Tier 1 is about reaching students early, before attendance becomes a concern, and ensuring every child feels welcomed, known, and supported in their school community.

Welcoming School Culture and Team-Based Monitoring

Schools regularly review attendance data and reflect on how their environment supports student engagement and connection. The [Teacher and Administrator Walk Around Tool](#) is used to observe learning and communal spaces, helping staff identify areas where students may feel excluded or disengaged. These informal check-ins help promote safe, caring adult relationship and guide schools in building a culture of inclusion, visibility, and responsiveness.

Foundational Frameworks

Tier 1 efforts are supported by a number of foundational Division frameworks, including the [Integrated Health and Well-Being Framework](#), ECSD Learning Conditions and the [Action Plan for Comprehensive School Health](#). Together, these frameworks help ensure that students have the relationships, environments, and learning conditions they need to thrive physically, emotionally and academically.

The Division's Learning Conditions framework outlines the environments, relationships, and expectations needed for students to thrive. It serves as a foundational lens through which Tier 1 supports are planned and delivered.

Learning Conditions Framework

Students experience authentic permeation of faith across subjects and recognize opportunities to serve God in one another.	Students experience a holistic Catholic education that fosters their spiritual and moral development while celebrating and bearing witness to our faith.	Students experience the joy of learning through multiple learning contexts while feeling a sense of belonging in an environment of high expectation.
Students are active participants in their learning, provided with ongoing opportunities and supports to establish and persevere in achieving goals.	Students explore local, global, and ethical issues through their connection to curriculum, with the uniqueness of each student and their learning journey being fostered, respected, and celebrated.	Students see adults engaging in lifelong learning.
Student data informs continuous improvement with student voice being valued.	Student creativity and risk-taking are fostered.	Students apply knowledge, skills, and problem-solving strategies in real life contexts while engaging in opportunities to develop collaborative skills.



Staff Capacity Building

To strengthen early intervention and prevention efforts, the Division prioritizes professional learning in collaboration with Inclusive Education consultants and multidisciplinary teams. Topics include trauma-informed practice, mental health literacy, restorative conversations (such as listening circles), and practical strategies for engaging families around student attendance and success.

Family and Student Engagement

Families are key partners in promoting regular attendance. Attendance awareness campaigns are shared through online newsletters, emails, classroom education, and parent evenings. Resources like [“When is sick too sick?”](#) help families make informed decisions about attendance. Supportive “nudge” tools such as SwiftK12 messages, [posters](#), postcards, and informal check-ins offer low-stakes, encouraging communication that helps families build consistent routines to support their child while maintaining a strong connection to the school. These tools celebrate attendance and gently reinforce its importance in a student’s success.

Culturally Responsive Supports

Tier 1 includes supports that honor the diverse identities of ECSD students and families. Intercultural Liaisons help bridge cultural and language barriers by translating materials and participating in team meetings with families. Indigenous Learning Services provide culturally grounded relationship-building strategies to support Indigenous students and families in feeling seen, respected, and included.

Tier 2 – Targeted Early Intervention

For students missing 10-19% of instructional days.

Tier 2 supports are designed to respond when a student's attendance begins to decline and early signs of disengagement appear. Building on the universal foundation of Tier 1, these targeted strategies aim to intervene early, re-establish student connection, and address barriers before absenteeism becomes chronic.

Student Relationships and Belonging

Teachers at this stage take deliberate steps to strengthen relationships with students. By fostering a sense of safety and belonging, educators help students feel seen and supported, which increases their likelihood of returning to and remaining engaged in school.

Family Connection and Outreach

Tier 2 emphasizes early and positive family engagement. School staff reach out with empathy and openness to better understand attendance challenges and co-develop next steps with families. These efforts may include informal check-ins, invitations to parent evening, and guidance on topics such as routines, school refusal, sleep or technology use. Staff may also connect families to community-based supports and services.

Culturally Responsive Supports

To ensure interventions are meaningful and inclusive, school teams draw on supports from Indigenous Learning Services, through the Bridged Journeys Instructors and Graduation Coaches, and various Intercultural Liaisons. These partners assist during team meetings, translating resources, providing cultural insight, and strengthening family-school trust.

Division and Community Supports

At Tier 2, schools may access targeted supports from ECSD's multidisciplinary teams, Family Liason workers, and Inclusive Education consultants. These staff assist with early intervention strategies to support self-regulation, social-emotional skills, peer relationships, self-esteem, and self-advocacy.

Additionally, Caregiver Education sessions from [Recovery Alberta](#) are available to help families support their child's mental health and well-being. When needed, School Resource Officers may assist with wellness check to reconnect with students.

These supports help schools respond quickly and appropriately before absenteeism becomes chronic.



Tier 3 – Intensive Intervention

For students missing 20% or more of instructional days.

Tier 3 supports are designed for students facing significant barriers to regular attendance. These students require individualized, wraparound support that prioritizes consistency, trust and connection. The goal is to stabilize attendance and reengage students through strong school relationships, mental health services, and targeted family support.

School-Based Relationships and Support

A trusted school staff member, often a principal, assistant principal, or department head, acts as the student's main point of contact. They initiate daily "Check-in, check-out" routines, maintain personal outreach, and coordinate communication with families to ensure the student remains supported and visible within the school community.

Family and Mental Health Supports

Family School Liaison Workers (FSLWs) play a central role in Tier 3 by offering direct support to families, including home visits and connections to services. Mental Health Specialists provide one-on-one counselling to support students' mental health needs. Restorative practices help facilitate a sense of belonging and smoothen school re-entry after extended absences.

Community Collaboration

When attendance concerns persist, school teams collaborate with external partners such as Recovery Alberta, Child and Family Services, Justice, and School Resource Officers (SROs). These connections allow for more coordinated support and ensure students have access to resources that extend beyond the school environment.



Tier 4 – Attendance Board Referral

(In collaboration with School Operations Services)

Tier 4 is reserved for students with persistent chronic absenteeism despite all previous interventions. At this point, the school collaborates with School Operations Services (SOS) to determine if a referral to the Alberta Education Attendance board is appropriate. This process is formal, documented, and designed to ensure accountability and continued support.

Referral Process

The principal begins by consulting with SOS and reviewing the Attendance Protocol and Administrative Procedure 330. Together, the school and Division determine whether the student's situation meets the threshold for referral. If so, a detailed submission is prepared, including a full record of all supports attempted, communication with families, and contextual factors contributing to absenteeism.

Ongoing Involvement

Following a referral to the Attendance Board, school and Division staff continue to support the student and family. This includes maintaining supportive relationships, participating in hearings as needed, and offering ongoing check-ins and re-engagement efforts. Multidisciplinary teams may remain involved to ensure wraparound supports are sustained. While continued documentation is required, the focus remains on providing consistent, compassionate support throughout this process.



Sustaining Support Through Collaboration

When intensive interventions are in place (Tiers 3 and 4), collaboration becomes essential in sustaining support. At this stage, school staff, Division teams, and community partners must closely work together to maintain strong relationships with students and families, remove persistent barriers, and promote meaningful, long-term engagement in school.

Principal Responsibilities

Principals play a central role in sustaining coordinated support efforts. Their responsibilities include leading school-based attendance plans, facilitating family communication, and connecting with Division and community supports. This includes:

- Continuing the use of both school-based and Division-level strategies before further escalation
- Documenting efforts and key contextual factors related to attendance
- Working with Inclusive Education to tailor supports to each student's unique needs
- Providing leadership in determining next steps, including possible referral to the Attendance Board when appropriate



Support Network

School-Based Supports

Each school brings together a team committed to re-engaging students and working with families. These supports focus on relationship-building, understanding student needs, and working closely with families to encourage reengagement. School-based teams include administrators, teachers, learning coaches, counsellors, chaplains and high school mentors, who work together to provide tailored programming and ongoing support for students and their families.

Division Supports

In addition to school-based teams, ECSD offers a range of Division-level supports to help address the underlying factors contributing to chronic absenteeism. These specialized services and programs are designed to provide targeted intervention, wraparound support, and early identification of student needs.

Division supports include:

- Access to mental health resources and therapeutic supports.
- Inclusive education consultants and early intervention specialists.
- Multidisciplinary teams including psychologists, therapists, and social workers.
- Ongoing collaboration with School Operation Services through the Attendance Committee.

Community Supports

ECSD also partners with external agencies to strengthen the network of care available to students and families. These supports play a key role in bridging school-based efforts with broader community services, especially when additional or specialized support is needed.

Community supports include:

- 1. The YMCA Alternative Suspension Program, which provides structured support to students who are suspended or at risk, helping them address underlying issues and reintegrate into school.
- 2. The Alberta Education Attendance Board (Office of Student Attendance and Reengagement - OSAR), which coordinates formal attendance interventions when local supports have been fully explored.

Office of Student Attendance and Re-engagement (OSAR)

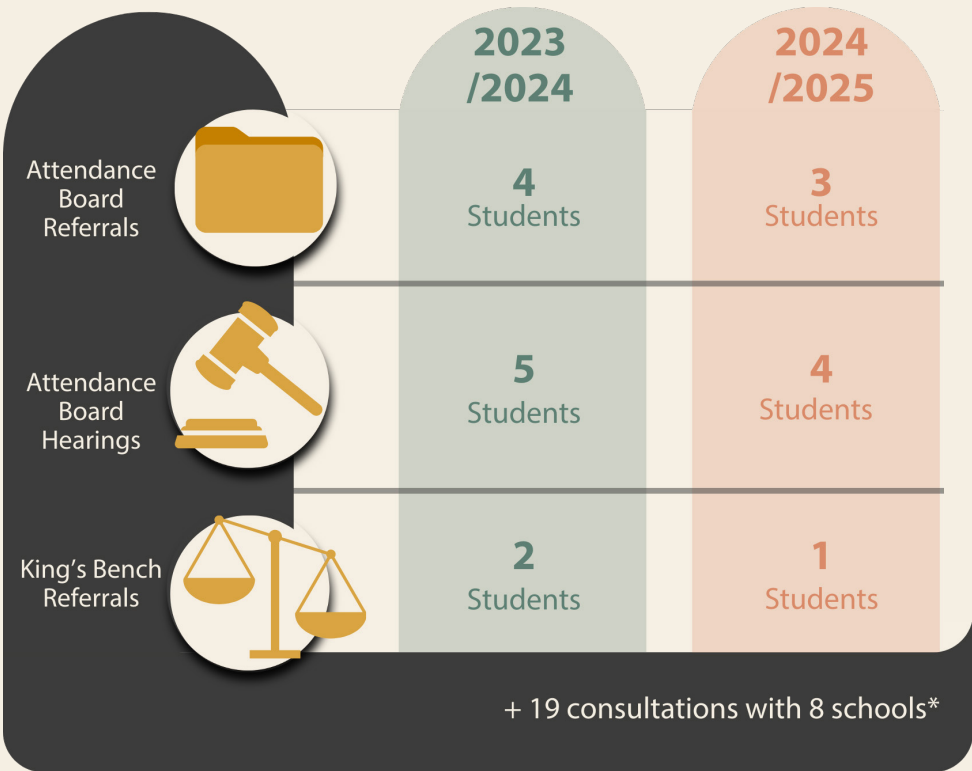
If school-level and Division supports do not result in improved attendance, the principal may refer the case to the Attendance Board in consultation with School Operation Services. The SOS team facilitates the process in accordance with provincial guidelines. All referrals must be thoroughly documented by the SOS team and submitted to both the Attendance Board and the Superintendent of Leadership Services.

It is essential to keep a clear record of all attempts made to contact the student and family before submitting a referral. Such efforts may include letters, registered letters, emails, phone calls, contact with emergency contacts, home visits conducted by school staff, or welfare checks carried out by a School Resource Officer (SRO) or local police.

OSAR Statistics

This snapshot highlights recent referrals and consultations supported by the Office of Student Attendance and Reengagement (OSAR) within Edmonton Catholic Schools.

This does not include any students who had been referred in previous years and who may still be in monitoring.*



Sample School-Based Attendance Strategy in Action

The following sample outlines how a school might apply the Division's tiered framework, attendance protocol, and collaborative practices in a real-world context. It is intended to guide schools in designing proactive, sustainable processes for addressing chronic absenteeism.

Tracking and Reporting Attendance

1. Monthly Attendance Tracking:

Subject teachers track class attendance monthly using PowerSchool.

2. School-Wide Reports:

- **Preliminary Report:** School administration generates an initial attendance report to identify students with chronic absenteeism (20% or more). Subject teachers follow up with families before fall break to discuss attendance patterns how absences may be affecting the student's learning.
- **Follow-Up Reports:** Admin generates additional attendance reports in December and February to monitor attendance progress. If no improvement is seen, families are contacted again through phone calls or email.

3. Ongoing Communication:

- Missed assignments or any "Not Handed In" (NHI) work is recorded in PowerSchool and shared with parents or guardians throughout the year.
- Teachers contact parents or guardians to discuss declining attendance so they can collectively identify the cause and help address any barriers.
- Teachers notify administration immediately when serious attendance concerns arise.



Administration Interventions

1. Parent Communication:

- **Teacher Initial Contact:** Teachers initiate contact with families to raise concerns about attendance issues, emphasizing how absences affect learning.
- **Regular Administrative Checkpoints:** Throughout the year, based on the individual calendars and specific context of the school communities, the administration conducts follow-ups with parents or guardians via calls or meetings if issues persist.

2. Supportive Measures:

- **Family School Liaison Worker (FSLW):** FSLWs are involved early on to help support families, particularly for students with high absenteeism. They work directly with families to address any underlying issues (e.g., providing clothing or other resources).
- **Parent Meetings:** Administrators follow up with parents or guardians if there are ongoing issues. In these meetings potential contributing factors – including academic struggles, personal circumstances, or resource needs – are explored.
- **Referrals to Mental Health Teams or External Agencies:** If needed, referrals will be made to provide additional support through outside resources or mental health services.
- **Indigenous Services Support:** When applicable, Indigenous Learning Services are involved, offering culturally sensitive support that has proven effective in engaging families.

3. Accommodations for Missed Work:

When a student misses significant amounts of school, accommodations are made in their assessments. The goal is to ensure that students are not overwhelmed when they return, and their grades reflect only the work they have completed after re-engaging with the material.

4. Seeking Additional Support:

If all efforts have been exhausted and no improvement is made, the school will reach out to School Operations Services (SOS) for further support.

5. Attendance Board Referral:

If chronic absenteeism persists despite all interventions, the Attendance Board may be involved. The school typically begins with a letter from the board before moving to a hearing.

6. Ongoing Engagement with Families:

The school continues to meet with the families of students with severe attendance issues, using FSLWs or admin to maintain open communication and ongoing support.



CONCLUSION

Chronic absenteeism is closely linked to lower academic achievement, increased dropout rates, and long-term challenges in health, employment, and social outcomes. Students from low-income backgrounds and those facing systemic inequities are disproportionately affected, often navigating complex barriers to regular school attendance.

In Alberta, attendance is not only critical to student success – it is a legal obligation. Under the Education Act, school boards are required to ensure that all students attend regularly, and to take reasonable steps to intervene when attendance becomes a concern.

Edmonton Catholic Schools meets this responsibility through a trauma-informed, Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) that emphasizes early intervention, individualized planning, and collaborative problem-solving. School teams, families, and community partners work together to ensure every student has access to a caring adult, a sense of belonging, and the support they need to thrive.

Through this shared commitment, ECSD continues to support students in attending school regularly, feeling connected to their learning, and experiencing success – academically, socially and spiritually.

Appendices

Appendix A

Root Causes of Absenteeism

Barriers	Aversion	Disengagement	Misconceptions
- Chronic and acute illness - Family responsibilities or home situation - Trauma - Poor transportation - Housing and food insecurity - Inequitable access to needed services - System involvement - Lack of predictable schedules for learning - Lack of access to tech - Community violence Reference: Attendance Works	- Struggling academically and/or behaviourally - Unwelcoming school climate - Social and peer challenges - Anxiety - Biased disciplinary and suspension practices - Undiagnosed disability and/or disability accommodations - Caregivers had negative educational experiences	- Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction - Bored - No meaningful relationship to adults in the school (especially given staff shortages) - Lack of enrichment opportunities - Lack of academic and behavioural support - Failure to earn credits - Need to work conflicts with being in high school	- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused - Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning - Lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences - Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness - Attendance only matters in the older grades - Suspensions don't count as absence

Appendix B

Administrative Procedure 330

ATTENDANCE OF STUDENTS

Background

Regular attendance contributes significantly to student learning and the Division encourages parents and students to recognize their responsibility for regular attendance.

Procedures

1. The Principal shall act as attendance officer for students registered in the school.
2. Each Principal, in consultation with the staff, shall develop written school attendance procedures. These procedures will include a process for
 - 2.1 Teachers to keep accurate attendance records (including records of absences and lates) for each of their students,
 - 2.2 Parents to notify the school of student absences, and
 - 2.3 Keeping parents informed of unexcused absences and excessive lates.
3. At the beginning of each school year the Principal shall communicate the school's attendance procedures to parents, students, and staff.
4. The Principal will make all reasonable efforts to resolve student attendance concerns prior to referring the matter to the Attendance Board. Procedures are outlined in Administrative Procedure 330 Appendix A – Student Attendance and Re-engagement.
5. When attempts to enforce school attendance are ineffective, the Principal shall make a referral to the Attendance Board as per Attendance Board criteria (<https://education.alberta.ca/>). A copy of this referral accompanied by supporting documentation shall also be sent to the Deputy Superintendent.

Adopted: April 3, 2000

Reviewed/Revised: June 13, 2000, March 15, 2005, June 28, 2013, June 30, 2017, January 11, 2018, February 5, 2021

Reference: Education Act, Sections 1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 31, 46, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 196, 197, 222

Appendix C

Attendance Protocol

Level of Absenteeism* (% of school days in which student was absent)		
☐ Mild (0-9%)	☐ Moderate (10-19%)	☐ Chronic (20%+)

* Must be considered in the context of the student's personal situation

Student Well-Being		
Adverse Childhood Experiences ☐ Abuse (<i>sexual, emotional, physical</i>) ☐ Neglect ☐ Household dysfunction (<i>divorce, incarceration, parent mental health, substance abuse, interpersonal violence</i>) ☐ Living Condition (<i>foster home, homeless</i>). ☐ Bullying ☐ Racism/ Identity Safety (<i>racialized minority, gender identity, disability, neurodivergence, newcomer, other</i>) ☐ Unsafe Neighbourhood ☐ Community Violence <i>Any one or more of the above ACEs indicates an immediate referral to FSLW, a mental health specialist, or Community partners.</i>	Well-Being ☐ Social-emotional ☐ Physical Health Concern(s) ☐ Academic challenges ☐ Mental Health ☐ Sleep ☐ Nutrition <i>Any one or more of the above challenges may indicate a referral to one or more of the following disciplines: Occupational Therapy, Emotional Behavioural Specialist, Family School Liaison Worker and/or Inclusive Consultant, or Mental Health Specialist.</i>	Community/External Supports ☐ Agency involvement <i>(child welfare, justice, other)</i> ☐ Other (<i>specify</i>) <i>Assumes involvement of MDT, community partners and school team</i>
NOTES:		

School Environment (Integrated Health and Well-Being Framework)	
☐ Relationship with adults ☐ Relationship with peers <i>(bullying, need for friendships)</i>	☐ Student's negative experiences at school <i>(Suspension, behavioural interventions, bullying, belonging)</i> ☐ School/classroom climate <i>Refer to Tier 1 level of support as well as Restorative Practices.</i>
NOTES:	

Family Considerations		
☐ Basic Needs <i>(Food, shelter, housing, clothing)</i> ☐ Transportation ☐ Sibling caregiving	☐ Work schedule <i>(e.g., work hours, multiple jobs)</i> ☐ Single caregiver household	☐ Living arrangements <i>(Complex/disruptive living situation)</i> ☐ Other (Specify):
<i>Referral to Family School Liaison Worker. Referrals to other agencies and disciplines can be made as needed.</i>		
NOTES:		

Appendix D

The Four Tier Intervention Pyramid, referenced in the Collaborative Response Model, provides a framework within which to articulate interventions to respond to the needs of students beyond foundational classroom instruction. By establishing a school-wide pyramid of interventions, schools can ensure a collaborative response to support inclusive practices.

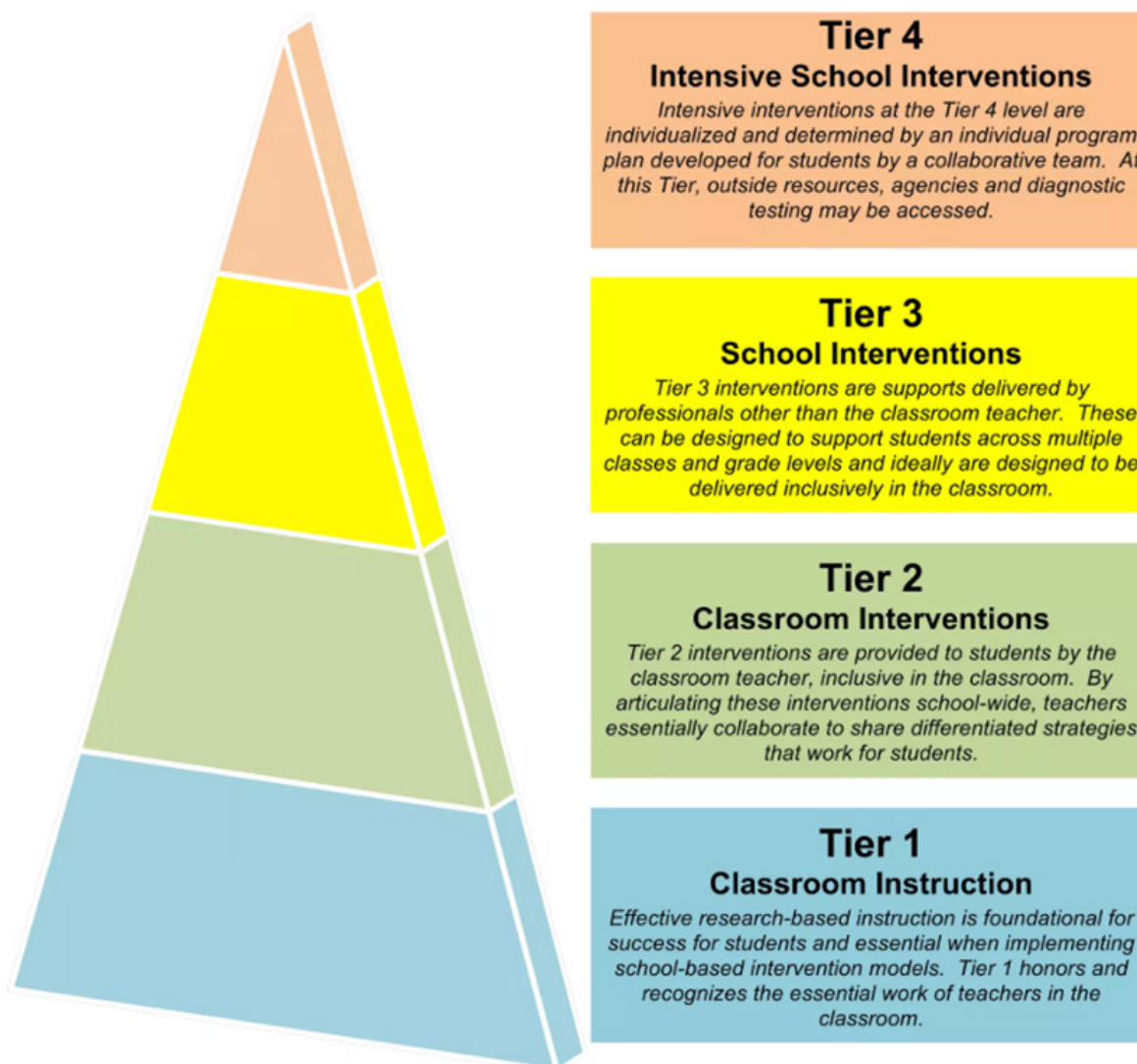


Image: <https://www.jigsawlearning.ca/>

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