Every day counts

# Attendance Support Group

## Schools can have a positive influence on student attendance.

One way to do this is to convene an Attendance Support Group and to develop an Attendance Improvement Plan, a Return to School Support Plan and/or an Individual Education Plan.

Early intervention is the most effective way to manage absences so that disengagement patterns do not become entrenched.

When student attendance issues are identified and/or it becomes apparent that a student might require ongoing intensive support in order to remain engaged in school, an Attendance Support Group should be convened and an appropriate plan developed.

Meetings with parents of students with attendance issues should be supportive rather than disciplinary, with a focus on positive and proactive solutions.

Schools should convene an Attendance Support Group when:

* The absence is having a significant impact on the student’s educational achievement, attainment, development and connectedness to school and peers
* The student is:
  + Truanting
  + Involved in the youth justice system
  + Experiencing homelessness
  + Experiencing mental or physical illnesses
  + Absent for more than five days in a term for any reason (when attendance is falling below 90 per cent), even for parent approved health-related absences
* A parent reports that a child refuses to attend school
* There has been no explanation for the child’s absence
* A parent repeatedly fails to provide a reasonable excuse for their child’s absence

The purpose of the meeting is to work collaboratively with students and their families to develop attendance improvement strategies for the student and to examine why non-attendance continues to be a problem.

The Attendance Student Support Group should be convened by the principal (or nominee) and attended by:

* The parent of the student
* A parent’s advocate (if requested or required)
* A teacher identified as being in regular contact with the student and/or a source of support
* The principal or nominee (to act as chairperson)
* The student (where appropriate)
* Relevant school based wellbeing staff

The Attendance Student Support Group may invite input from any other person with knowledge of the student or with information relevant to the educational or social needs of the student. Appropriate professionals from other agencies (such as youth workers or counsellors) and/or allied health professionals may also attend with permission of the parent.

The Attendance Student Support Groups should meet as needed and focus on:

* Identifying the reasons for the student absences
* Positive and proactive solutions
* Ensuring all members are aware of the absences and understand the educational implications for the student
* Working collaboratively to develop strategies & a plan to support the student’s attendance via a Student Attendance Improvement Plan, a Return to School Plan (after an extended absence) and/or an Individual Education Plan as appropriate. LINK TO EACH OF THESE
* Considering if a referral to a reengagement program is needed – LINK TO PAGE

All attendance improvement strategies and interventions must be consistent with other supports and frameworks in place for students and family (e.g. students experiencing homelessness or Koorie families).

Schools should consider any cultural and language differences and, if required, organise an interpreter and translated material. The family should be given the opportunity to discuss cultural practices, or to invite a cultural leader to discuss cultural practices on their behalf.

**All students in receipt of Program for Students with a Disability funding and students living in out-of-home care should already have a Student Support Group established which should be used for attendance issues.**

### Tips for Attendance Support Groups and developing a supportive and appropriate plan

* Be proactive – act early so that patterns don’t form
* Be collaborative – schools need to work in partnership with the student, the family and any other involved agencies
* Be mindful of overloading students and families - if a plan has been developed, do not initiate further actions until it has been completed and evaluated
* Set SMART goals that can be easily monitored such as packing a school bag the evening before or increasing weekly attendance by a day
* Remember the importance of positive recognition of improvements and the critical role of positive relationships between students and staff
* Consider a staged return to school to support a student’s transition following a prolonged absence or significant mental or physical illness
* Support a student to initially only catch up on essential tasks/content that they have missed and consider special arrangement or exemptions for upcoming assessment tasks such as exams
* Provide an opportunity to hear the student’s concerns and encourage them to nominate a school-based support person
* If required, make appropriate referrals to re-engagement programs, Student Support Services or community services/agencies
* Tailor improvement strategies to the individual student according to their circumstances, age, education level and their aspirations
* Focus the attendance improvement strategies on creating pathways back into school, accredited training or employment
* It may also be helpful to bring along the Attendance Facts for Secondary Students or the Attendance Facts for Primary Students that are available on website