

Inclusive Student Services

Impact Update

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Supporting Student Engagement and Attendance

Regular school attendance is a crucial first step for our students as it helps students build the knowledge, skills, and habits they need to succeed. When students attend school every day, they stay connected to their learning, teachers, and classmates, setting a strong foundation for their future. In order to get the full benefit of the learning experience, students need to be present and engaged each day in the classroom. When students feel cared for and genuinely welcomed, they are more likely to attend school regularly. As a result, both social and academic outcomes are strengthened.

About one-quarter of youth in Canada will experience some type of school avoidance (Anxiety Canada). Historically, systems tended to view school avoidance, or “truancy,” as a student-based or family choice that required a discipline-focused approach.

“Partnership with our attendance counsellor/social worker is essential. As administrators and educators, we are often trained to approach attendance from a procedural standpoint. However, our attendance counsellor/social worker offers a critical and complementary perspective. Their involvement helps shift the focus from procedures to people—centering the student, their identity and how they are situated within the school community. They support us in building meaningful connections that directly impact attendance. With their resources, expertise and relational approach, they help create pathways that make a real difference in our students’ lives.”

—Vice-Principal

Reconsidering and examining our engagement processes and approaches in a trauma-informed way invites us to ask: Does this school policy support a culture of care, or a culture of compliance? (Venet)



Attendance Counsellors

At the DDSB, our attendance counsellors are social workers who hold a master's degree in social work and are registered with the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW). The skills, training and experience of social workers position them well to help students, families and educators as we identify and remove barriers to school engagement. Supporting our students takes a whole-team approach, one rooted in partnership and collaboration.

This approach asks us to:

- Know our roles and uphold our responsibilities
- Listen to students and families, and respect their truth
- Leverage professional skill and experience across disciplines
- Be aware of pathways for support

[Our Best Practices For Engagement and Attendance](#) document offers an approach to student engagement and attendance that is equity centred and trauma-informed. It asks us to examine our school-based approaches to prioritize a culture of care. The document is designed to support schools in better understanding the “attendance” process, while encouraging ongoing conversation, collaboration, and partnership.

“Our school social workers/attendance counsellors are invaluable partners who provide wraparound supports for students and families, including attendance. The consistency of publicized and dedicated social worker days, hours and spaces helps to anchor some students to school. For others, the presence of a caring adult highly skilled in trauma-informed practice creates pathways to explore and mitigate barriers that impact attendance. The expertise of our DDSB school social workers/attendance counsellors helps us all in the shift from judgment to understanding, and from barriers to bridges for student re-engagement.”

—Principal



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Inclusive Student Services Impact Update,
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