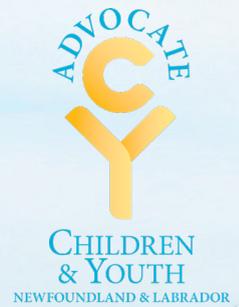


Chronic Absenteeism

When Children Disappear



Office of the Child and Youth Advocate

January 2019

Published by:
The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate
Newfoundland and Labrador
193 LeMarchant Road
St. John's NL, A1C 2H5

Printed by:
The Queen's Printer
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

Cover Photo by:
Janice Mullins

Young Artist Program Photo Credits:
Ellen Lushman, Page 21
Cameron Young, Page 27

Child and Youth Advocate's Message



Many children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador are routinely absent from school without excuse or reason. Once they become disconnected from school, it can be hard to reverse. These children often lose their social connections, they drop behind in the curriculum, they miss opportunities to participate in school activities, and eventually they may disappear from school completely. There is a long list of root causes for these absences. Although this is not a new issue, it is a very troubling one which affects students across all grades and can have lasting impacts throughout their lives.

I have undertaken this systemic review in order to explore this issue further, and to develop recommendations for immediate action. This review shows how children who are absent have needs and require responses from many different government services, and not just schools. We must stop defining this as a classroom issue and leaving it to the schools as to how best to deal with the child who does not attend school. Children's absences are often the symptom of a deeper issue and need. Insisting a child show up for school will not address any of these underlying needs including mental health issues, neglect, family or school violence, learning disabilities, or boredom with curriculum. A collective approach is required for success. Children and their families are dynamic and their needs can sometimes be quite complex. A simplistic approach to chronic absenteeism will not serve children well. They are counting on all of us to take meaningful action now.

The encouraging news is that there are immediate opportunities to work together for improved responses with children who are chronically absent. If it chooses, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is positioned to advance this work through the new mental health and addictions strategy, through the education action plan, and through new child protection legislation. These developments present opportunities for meaningful change for children and youth. This report demonstrates that there is enough research, existing practice models, and best/or promising practices to guide action now.


Jacqueline Lake Kavanagh
Child and Youth Advocate

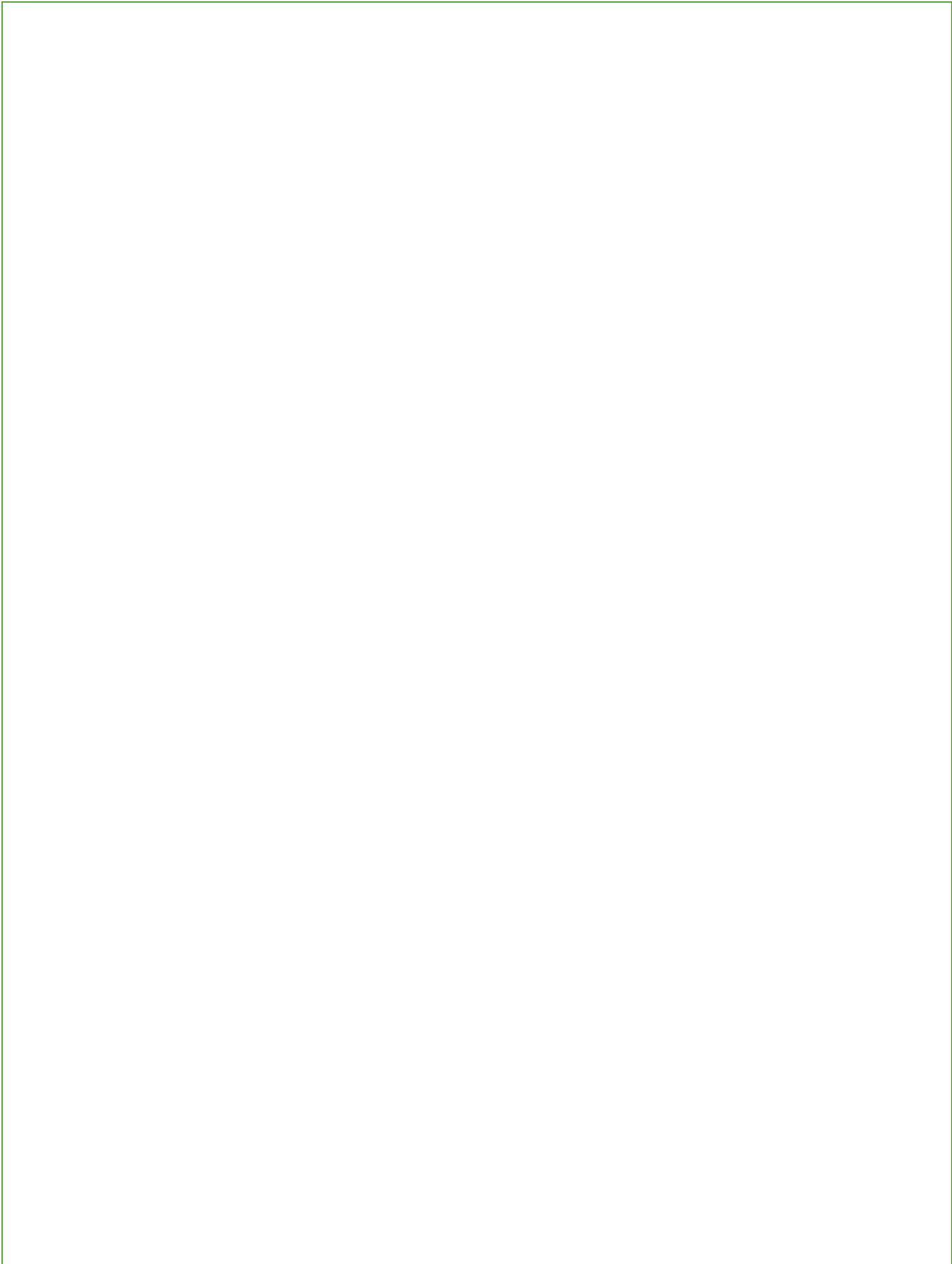
Aknowledgements

This report has been enriched by the input of several people including officials and staff from: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD), Department of Children Seniors and Social Development (CSSD), Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD), and youth who provided their views in focus groups.



Table of Contents

Child and Youth Advocate’s Message	i
Executive Summary	v
1. Introduction and Definitions	1
a. Introduction	1
b. Review Process	2
c. Definitions	3
2. Factors Influencing Chronic Absenteeism	4
a. Scope of the Problem	4
b. Factors Contributing to Chronic Absenteeism	5
c. Student Perspectives	8
3. Impact of Chronic Absenteeism on Child Well-being.	9
a. Problems Associated with Chronic Absenteeism	9
b. Connection Between Chronic Absenteeism and Child Abuse and Neglect	11
4. Current Legislation, Policies and Practices	14
a. Canadian Legislation and Policies	14
b. Newfoundland and Labrador Legislation and Policies	15
c. Canadian Papers, Publications, Processes and Programs	16
d. Newfoundland and Labrador Papers, Publications, Processes and Programs ..	18
5. Elements of Effective Response	21
a. Vision	21
b. Core Themes in Effective Approaches	22
c. Specific Models/Approaches	26
6. Findings	29
7. Recommendations.	30
8. Conclusion	31
Bibliography.	32



Executive Summary

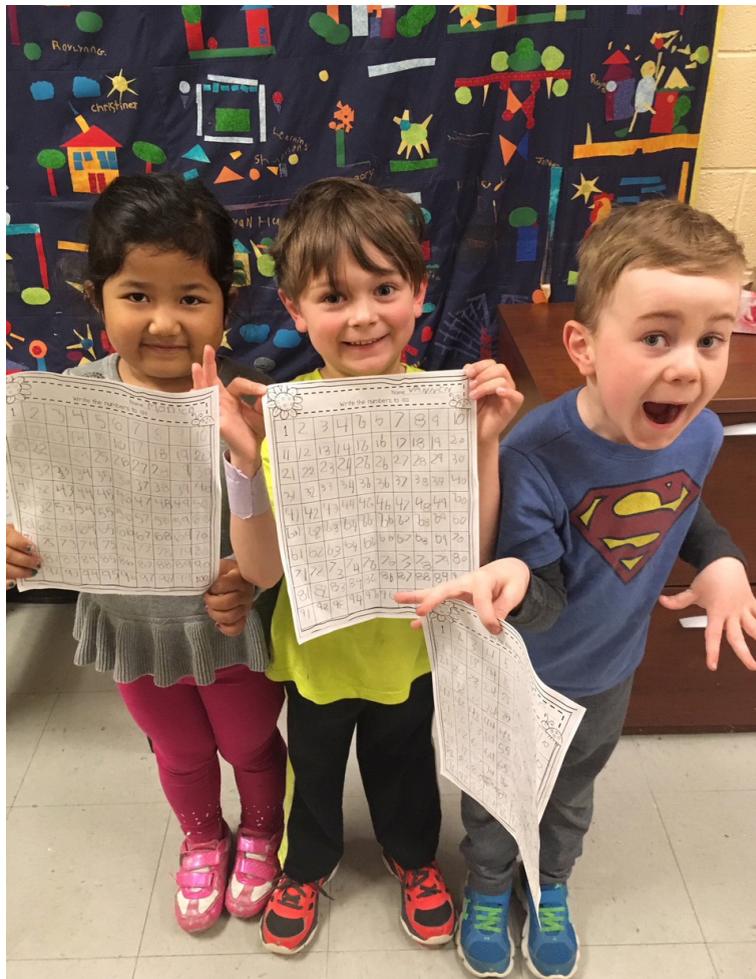
Chronic absenteeism is a quiet problem and it makes children disappear from school. It is complex and establishes itself early in a child's school career and has the potential to create negative impacts for a life time. It is difficult to address and often goes unaddressed. This report describes chronic absenteeism, factors influencing it, its impacts on students, and the promising strategies available to address the problem. It also makes recommendations to government departments and agencies that have shared responsibility for solutions.

Chronic absenteeism is defined as unexcused school absences resulting in a student missing at least ten percent (10%) of the school year, or 18 days. Rates of chronic absenteeism vary widely. Canada has no systematic approach to collecting data, and information is incomplete on provincial/territorial government web sites. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD) produced data for school year 2016-17 which indicated that 10% of approximately 66,000 students were absent for at least 18 days, both excused and unexcused.

Research reveals that many factors contribute to chronic absenteeism which show a wide and complex range of problems involving individual students, families, schools, and communities. Some of these factors include: learning disabilities, mental health issues for children and parents, child disengagement from school, negative parental attitudes about education, parental substance abuse, poverty, abusive parenting, domestic violence, weak relationships between teachers and students, inadequate connection between school and parents, racism in school, violence in school, insufficient school personnel, homelessness, and a community environment that does not support education .

While absenteeism is typically seen as an education issue, its complexity truly demands a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach which is led by the education system. Although the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development (CSSD) is concerned with many factors that may contribute to chronic absenteeism, it states that it does not become involved when chronic absenteeism is the only identified problem. Similarly, while the Department of Health and Community Services and the Regional Health Authorities do not directly address chronic absenteeism, they also have a role in providing physical and mental health services to children and their families. It is clear that health conditions are factors influencing chronic absenteeism and are also sometimes the result of this problem.

The most effective approach will include school wide prevention strategies, early intervention, effective absence monitoring, family involvement, collaboration, incentives and sanctions, evaluation, a team based approach and assessment of individual student needs. Effective programs must address the individual needs of children as well as issues in families, schools and communities. Departments and agencies must collaborate and the school system must have reliable and predictable assistance from child protection and health services. There is clear information and knowledge available to guide action and to plan and implement a response now.



1. Introduction and Definitions

a. Introduction

Chronic absenteeism is a quiet problem and it makes children disappear from school. This quiet and partly invisible problem receives limited attention among the noisy, visible problems such as school violence, bullying, behavior disorders and anxiety. Chronic absenteeism when left unattended often morphs into the problems that demand attention. This is often when agencies and organizations outside the school system mobilize to help. This systemic review looks at what is happening to the disappearing children, what is causing them to disappear, and what can be done to help them reappear and reach their potential.

Children who miss 10 percent of the school year unexcused meet the definition of chronically absent. They are absent due to a multitude of issues and some of these are partially addressed by existing services trying to meet overwhelming demands. However, there are children who miss school due to neglect and who never show up on child protection caseloads, do not participate in health care programs, and never receive services to divert them from the negative outcomes associated with chronic absenteeism. Their problems are not yet bad enough, big enough, or disruptive enough to become noticed by the systems that try to help.

It is hardly possible to read much about chronic absenteeism before beginning to wonder if this term is just another name for child neglect. There are jurisdictions in Canada and other parts of the world that have labelled chronic absenteeism, with certain features, as educational neglect. These jurisdictions investigate educational neglect as they would any other form of child maltreatment. A review of the literature reveals that many and possibly most incidents of chronic absenteeism are related to issues in families and in some cases those issues constitute child neglect. However, chronic absenteeism is also linked to conditions within individual children, issues in school environments, and factors in communities. It is very common to see problems in two or more of these areas when chronic absenteeism is occurring. These many faces of chronic absenteeism have created challenges to implementing effective strategies to reduce and/or eliminate the problem.



b. Review Process

This is a systemic review because it addresses an issue that extends beyond an individual situation and impacts a large group of children and youth. This review is not based on an individual complaint. A number of sources have contributed to and helped inform this report:

- Education and child protection legislation and regulations in all Canadian jurisdictions
- Select provincial and territorial policies and publications related to education and chronic absenteeism
- Literature review related to chronic absenteeism, indicators of child abuse and neglect, educational neglect, links between absenteeism and child protection concerns, causes of and factors contributing to chronic absenteeism, strategies to prevent and address chronic absenteeism, school engagement and best practices in addressing chronic absenteeism
- Interviews with personnel from the Department of Education and Early Child Development (EECD) and the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD)
- Written input from the Department of Children Seniors and Social Development (CSSD)
- Focus groups with youth in the St. John's area
- Provincial school absenteeism data



c. Definitions

School absenteeism can be described by several terms. While this report is focused on chronic absenteeism, the following definitions provide a better understanding about the terms used.

Chronic absenteeism is generally defined as unexcused absence from school that results in student missing at least ten percent (10%) of a school year. Parents may be aware of the absence but may not approve of it. It is also possible for parents to permit the absence although it is not considered legitimate by the school system.

Excused absenteeism is a type of absenteeism that causes the least concern. Excused absences are considered legitimate by parents and school personnel and typically occur due to: illness, family emergencies, school related activities, and family vacations. Absences in this category may result in many days of missed school but are rarely identified as problematic by the school or the family.

Truancy is often used interchangeably with chronic absenteeism. Truancy is also defined as multiple unexcused absences but often has the additional feature of the student spending time away from home as well as school and concealing school absences from parents (Lee and Millenberger, 1996). Truancy is also often associated with older students who independently make the decision to be away from school.

School refusal is a type of absenteeism typically associated with a child being unmotivated to attend or stay in school. Children who present in this manner generally have complex problems such as social anxiety, suicidal behavior, depression, self-consciousness, defiant behaviors, non-compliant and aggressive behaviors (Kearney and Bensaheb, 2006).

Educational neglect refers to the failure of parents to provide for basic educational and school needs of children including not giving proper attention to school matters and allowing children to continually miss school (Van Wert et al, 2018). The Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal states that in 2008, 2% of all substantiated neglect cases in Canada were educational neglect. This same source refers to educational neglect as one of four subtypes of child neglect and describes it as failure to ensure a child's formal education needs are met (Blumenthal, 2015). New Brunswick and Quebec are the only provinces in Canada that clearly identify educational neglect as a form of neglect reportable under child protection legislation.

2. Factors Influencing Chronic Absenteeism

There has been much discussion and research focused on finding the causes and factors that influence chronic absenteeism, and research has successfully identified many factors influencing school attendance.

a. Scope of the Problem

The NL English School District reports 10% of its students missed at least 18 days during 2016-17. This is approximately 10% of class time. The absenteeism rates during that academic year ranged from a low of 3.1% in grade one to a high of 25.9% in grade twelve. The rate of absenteeism in 2016-17 translates to 6,604 students each missing almost a month of school. There are inconsistencies in data collection and differences in how absences are noted at various grade levels. EECD is currently working in collaboration with NLESD to improve the absenteeism tracking system. This work was initiated in response to the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes, 2017.

In 2016-17, 6,604 NL students each missed about a month of school.

A look at the scope of the problem offers a glimpse into how many lives and futures are affected by chronic absenteeism. The research is very clear that chronic absenteeism can have serious impacts as outlined by many authors including Stempel et al. (2017); Melander et al. (2017); Orthner and Randolph (1999). It is also known that chronic absenteeism patterns are established in primary and elementary school (Reid, 2005). Students who miss 10% of school in the first month are more likely to be chronically absent by end of the year (Sparks, 2010). A pattern of chronic absenteeism becomes a compelling indicator of future drop out. 75% of grade six students experiencing chronic absenteeism will not complete high school (Stempel et al., 2017).

75% of grade six students experiencing chronic absenteeism will not complete high school

There is currently no standard approach to collecting statistics on chronic absenteeism in Canada. Statistics are collected in some Canadian jurisdictions but are not easily located on government web sites. Government reports and initiatives on absenteeism sometimes identify the number of children affected by absenteeism such as a Nova Scotia report "Be There: Student Attendance and Achievement". This indicates that 28% of students in Nova Scotia in 2014-15 missed 16 or more days. However overall information is inconsistent in its availability, quality and content throughout the country.

Most reports on data collection acknowledge the difficulties associated with collecting this type of information and these difficulties are also acknowledged by NLESD and EECD. The task is complicated by several categories of absenteeism including specific lesson absenteeism, post registrations absenteeism, parentally condoned absences, school refusal, and school phobia (Reid, 2005). Children may be present for certain classes and not others and they may be present for half days. They may be present when attendance is registered but then disappear for the remainder of the day. It is also impossible to know if excused absences are legitimate or are a way of hiding a chronic absenteeism problem. Once data is collected it has to be reviewed and analysed to discover trends and identify chronic problems. There may be delays in this process that limit the usefulness of the data as impetus for intervention. Accurate information about the size of the problem helps in planning the resources needed for the response. However, the causes and influencers affecting absenteeism are the most valuable types of information needed to address it.

b. Factors Contributing to Chronic Absenteeism

Research has been conducted over many years and in many countries to identify the causes of chronic absenteeism. There have been many discoveries about factors influencing the existence and resilience of chronic absenteeism. There is general agreement that factors contributing to chronic absenteeism relate to issues and problems within four areas: individual students, families, schools, and communities. Specific influential factors in each of these categories are outlined below.

➤ Student Factors

Children may experience a variety of problems and illnesses that affect their ability to engage in the learning and social tasks at school. Some of the challenges children experience are well known and include:

- Learning disabilities
- Mental health issues
- Mental illness
- Behavioural issues
- Delays in development
- Disengagement from school



➤ **Family Factors**

There are many associations between family problems and school absenteeism. Children who are chronically absent often live in families with one or more of the following characteristics:

- Negative parental attitudes about education
- Lack of parental understanding of importance of school attendance
- Parental substance abuse
- Mental health issues and/or mental illness in one or both parents
- Families living in poverty
- Ineffective parenting
- Inability of parents to assist student with school work
- Child care responsibilities assigned to older, school age children
- Domestic violence
- Abusive parenting
- Neglectful parenting

➤ **School Factors**

The school's structure, environment, policies, procedures and outreach practices all influence attendance. The factors in schools that most often contribute to chronic absenteeism include:

- Lack of strong relationships between teachers and students
- Lack of mechanisms to encourage parental involvement in schools
- Poor communication between school and parents
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Racism
- Inadequate sensitivity to diversity
- Violence/bullying in schools

- Instruction is boring/not challenging (more common concern among high school students)
- Ineffective absenteeism tracking systems
- Failure to respond to chronic absenteeism incidents
- Lack of effective incentives and sanctions related to school attendance
- Insufficient personnel to prevent and address attendance issues
- Failure to help students feel they belong

➤ **Community factors**

Students' neighborhoods and communities where the schools are located can create barriers to regular school attendance. These include:

- Levels of violence that threaten safety of students
- Inadequate transportation systems
- Community climate that does not promote the value of education
- Poverty environment that diminishes hope and opportunities
- Homelessness

There is another way of thinking about why children miss school. It serves a function for them. They may miss school to avoid negative emotions arising from school experiences, to escape from situations that cause stress such as exams or violence, to get attention from family or peers, and to achieve rewards that can be obtained outside school such as paid employment and time to play (Kearney and Graczyke, 2014). This model acknowledges that absenteeism may meet certain needs in students' lives and until they find other ways to meet these needs they will choose to be absent.



c. Student Perspectives

Governments and researchers have studied student perspectives on why they miss school and the possible solutions. Manitoban students reported absences due to financial requirements to support themselves or their household, poor relationships with teachers, need to provide child care to own child or siblings, lack of motivation, substance use, transportation issues, parents were not encouraging, and boring classes (School Attendance in Manitoba, 2009). The Government of Alberta's report, *Every Student Counts: Keeping Kids in School Report, 2014*, indicated students said they missed school because they were bored, not connected to people at school, felt staff did not care about them, felt unwell physically and/or mentally, unsupportive family, and felt they had nothing to which they could look forward. In research by Kinder, et al., 1996, student absences were influenced by peers, poor relationships with teachers, dissatisfaction with content of classes and teaching approach, experiences of bullying, and classroom contexts that were not well controlled by teachers.

In conducting this review, we invited youth to discuss this issue with us. We facilitated focus groups with students in the St. John's area about things that both supported and created barriers for their attendance. Some youth were students, while others had left school. Here are the themes that emerged from the 14 youth we engaged:

Factors encouraging school attendance

- Friendships which help them feel they belong
- Emotional support from family
- Individual learning needs and interests met by school personnel
- Opportunity to join activities and groups and be part of something
- Flexible and/or alternative settings
- Mental health and emotional support in school
- Credit recovery system
- Semester system which allows a course to be finished in one semester rather than a full year
- Innovative school that adapts to student need



Factors impeding attendance

- Lack of access to guidance services
- Not feeling heard in school
- Large class size that prevents getting individual help
- Inadequate accommodation for individual learning needs/styles
- Lack of follow-up after seeking help
- Lack of support from parents/family, such as lack of interest or inability to help with school work
- Teachers who are not supportive, do not communicate caring, are aggressive, pick on students, and do not accommodate to student needs

A few of these students noted that their problems with school started very early and were never properly addressed. Some students said they “got tired of fighting” and left in high school. Several youth also indicated they felt they did not fit in school because they were regularly expelled and told the classroom was “not designed just for them.”

3. Impact of Chronic Absenteeism on Child Well-being

a. Problems Associated with Chronic Absenteeism

In understanding the impact of chronic absenteeism on children, it can be difficult to determine if the identified impacts are the result of being absent or the result of being exposed to conditions that lead to absenteeism. Many children who are chronically absent already have had personal, family, and community problems prior to becoming absent, and these problems may make negative outcomes more likely. Children who have mental illness and learning disabilities, for example, are likely to have difficulties even if they have great attendance at school. Children who enter school and who are affected by poverty or neglect are likely to quickly experience the impact of these issues on their school reality. Therefore, it is possible that chronic absenteeism becomes the symptom identified among children who have personal and family problems pre dating school attendance. Schools try to respond to the diverse and complex needs of these children but are often unable to meet these needs.

Schools try to respond to the diverse and complex needs... but are often unable to meet these needs.

The path to chronic absenteeism needs attention since intervention prior to beginning school has the potential to prevent absenteeism and its consequences. However, those already experiencing the consequences of absenteeism also require help. It is important to know the issues and barriers they will encounter in order to form effective responses. A variety of authors, including those cited below, conclude that students who are chronically absent and who typically have concurrent personal and family challenges may experience short and long term negative consequences such as:

- Poor outcomes in reading and math (Stempel et al., 2017)
- Failure to complete school (Mallett, 2016)
- Psychosomatic symptoms (Melander et al., 2017)
- Mental health problems (Orthner and Randolph, 1999; Melander, et al., 2017)
- Increased substance use and abuse (Chang and Romero, 2008; Fowler, 2015 cited in Mallett; Orthner and Randolph, 1999)
- Increased soft drug use (Tessier et al., 2018)
- Negative relationships with teachers (Melander, 2017)
- Personal harassment (Melander et al., 2017)
- Low academic self-concept and low self-esteem (Reid, 2012)
- Development problems (Van Wert et al., 2018)
- Teen pregnancy (Orthner and Randolph, 1999)
- Delinquency (Kinder et al., 1996)
- Unemployment (Orthner and Randolph, 1999)
- Lower annual income (Orthner and Randolph, 1999)
- Dependence on financial assistance programs (Orthner and Randolph, 1999)

A child who misses two to four days in September is five times more likely to be chronically absent by the end of the school year.

Chronic absenteeism begins very early in a school career and it can result in the end of school participation for a student. A study by Olsen (2014) states that a child who misses two to four days in September is five times more likely to be chronically absent by the end of the year than peers who do not miss this amount of time. Chronic absenteeism is a stronger predictor of drop out than low grades (Stempel et al., 2017). The likelihood of drop out among absent students is also supported by others who state that 75% of students who are chronically absent by grade 6 will not complete school (Melander et al., 2017; Nauer, et al., 2008).

b. Connection Between Chronic Absenteeism and Child Abuse and Neglect

There has been limited exploration of the relationship between child maltreatment and chronic absenteeism. It is clear that there are many situations in which there is no obvious connection between absenteeism and maltreatment at home. Children with individual conditions, for example, may be chronically absent due to the challenges presented by their conditions but not experience maltreatment. Children may also disengage from school because of the influence of a peer group but be very well cared for by their family. These types of examples make it possible to conclude that chronic absence does not automatically mean a child is neglected or maltreated.

An Ontario study on educational neglect in 2013 found that 3% of all neglect investigations focused on educational neglect. This type of neglect was more likely to be substantiated than other types and more likely to be provided services. Such services were typically those available through specialized providers such as psychologists, psychiatrists, education specialists, and mental health professionals. The features of the neglectful situations requiring these referrals included parental drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues, few social supports for family, and history of foster care/group home experiences among care givers. Educational neglect was not seen as placing children at sufficiently high risk to threaten their immediate safety. Types of neglect other than educational tended to lead to removal of the children (Van Wert, et al., 2018). This study suggests that although the families had issues and were not sending their children to school, the situation did not require child protection services; rather, it primarily required health and social services.

Exploring the ways in which child maltreatment affects school performance reveals many similarities to the impacts of chronic absenteeism. Thompson and Wyatt, (1999), cited in Leiter, (2007) reports that maltreatment is associated with poor school performance and disengagement from school. Maltreated children are more likely to fail, have increased absenteeism, demonstrate poor deportment, be involved in special education services, and be retained in grades as they progress through their school career (Leiter, 2007; Slade and Wisson, 2006). Small but consistent associations have been found between low reading scores and maltreatment and neglect (Maclean, Taylor and O'Donnell, 2016) and these children are absent more often than non-neglected children (Woodarski et al., cited in Todd Manly, 2013). Poor work habits, trouble working independently, and poor performance are related to the poor



attendance problems that are common among neglected children (Manly et al., 2013). Lower IQ, completing fewer years of school, and poor academic performance were also found to be characteristics of neglected children in a study completed by Perez and Widom (1994) as cited in Todd Manly et al.,(2013). Nauer, et al., (2008) reports that early school absences often signal problems such as domestic violence, child abuse, mental illness, and criminal justice system involvement. Leiter (2007) points out that maltreatment that begins early in life has a more severe impact on absenteeism than maltreatment beginning at a later age. He also cautions that focusing only on absenteeism would be a serious error when trying to help maltreated children improve their connection to and performance in school.

...focusing only on absenteeism would be a serious error when trying to help maltreated children improve their connection to and performance in school.

Schools are one of the logical places for screening to identify children who need help with chronic absenteeism and possibly maltreatment. Schools need the assistance of child protection services for children who are identified as possibly being maltreated. However, child protection services usually do not have a mandate to serve children who are chronically absent from school but not apparently maltreated. They also do not intervene in families where a child is on a path to chronic absenteeism but does not meet criteria for protective services. There is a lack of clarity about which departments, agencies and organizations should be concerned with the well-being of chronically absent children. However, these children are affected by factors and problems that cross into the responsibilities of several departments and agencies with mandates for children's services. The following table illustrates this point.



Table 1: Chronic Absenteeism Factors /Impacts and Relevance to Particular Departments/Agencies

Factors/impacts related to chronic absenteeism	Education	Possible Child Protection	Possible Child Health/ Mental Health
Learning disabilities	X		X
Behavioural issues/externalizing symptoms	X	X	X
Internalizing symptoms: anxiety, withdrawal etc.	X	X	X
Poor academic performance	X	X	X
Failure to complete school	X		
Psychosomatic symptoms	X		X
Delinquency	X	X	
Mental illness	X	X	X
Mental health problems	X	X	X
Substance use/abuse	X	X	X
Personal harassment	X		X
Negative relationship with teachers	X		
Inadequate attention to diversity	X		
Low self-concept/self esteem	X	X	X
Racism in school	X		
Boring/unchallenging classes	X		
Developmental problems	X	X	X
Teen pregnancy	X	X	X
Delinquency	X	X	
Negative parental attitudes re: education	X		
Parental substance abuse	X	X	
Mental illness/problems in parents	X		X
Poverty	X	X	X
Homelessness	X	X	X
Ineffective parenting	X	X	
Parental inability to help with school work	X		
Child care responsibilities for older child	X	X	
Domestic violence	X	X	X
Child abuse	X	X	X
Child neglect	X	X	X

4. Current Legislation, Policies and Practices

a. Canadian Legislation and Policies

In all Canadian jurisdictions, several government departments and agencies may have responsibility for delivering services to children and youth as one aspect of a broader mandate. These may include justice, recreation, and health services. Typically only departments responsible for education and protection services have a primary focus on children and youth services.

A Canadian legislative review reveals that laws and policies contain limited direction about addressing chronic absenteeism. The majority of Canadian provinces and territories acknowledge in either education or child protection laws that school attendance is required and chronic absenteeism may be an indicator of child neglect or abuse. Only two provinces clearly state in law that school absenteeism constitutes potential harm to child well-being and is reportable to child protection services.

1. New Brunswick's **Education Act, 1997** directs that when a parent does not ensure the child attends school and the superintendent believes the child's security and attendance are at risk, the superintendent shall refer to the Ministry of Family and Children's Services. New Brunswick's **Family and Children's Act, 1980** outlines that one of the criteria suggesting a child may be in need of protection is a situation in which a person neglects or refuses to ensure a child attends school.
2. Quebec's **Youth Protection Act, 1984** defines neglect as including a failure to take necessary steps to provide schooling. It states that child security and development may be in danger where a child is not attending school and/or is frequently absent without reason. Quebec's **Education Act, 1988** states that if the school has intervened to attempt to have parents ensure school attendance and this intervention fails, the principal shall report to the Director of Youth Protection.

Consistencies in legislation across the country include:

- All provinces and territories have education laws requiring children to attend school. The age requirements differ among provinces but generally students are expected to be in school from age 5 to 16, or 5 to 19.
- All jurisdictions require parents to ensure that children attend school. Parents who violate this law can be subject to fines and/or prison sentences.
- All education legislation indicates that the departments of education and or school boards/school personnel have responsibility to address chronic absenteeism.

Several jurisdictions offer direction in legislation aimed at ensuring attention is given to chronic absenteeism through specific processes such as:

- Requiring attendance/truancy officers or designated personnel to address absenteeism;
- Referencing child absenteeism as a matter that may be referred to child protection services;
- Providing detailed processes in legislation for responding to absentee problems;
- Providing a list of factors which support the best interest of a child which includes attention to educational needs;
- Outlining possible indicators of child sexual abuse includes changes in school performance and attendance; and,
- Indicating that poor/inconsistent school attendance may be a sign of neglect.



b. Newfoundland and Labrador Legislation and Policies

In Newfoundland and Labrador, CSSD and EECD have clear roles for the well-being of children. A review of their legislation and policies reveals that EECD specifically identifies chronic absenteeism. CSSD does not identify absenteeism within its mandate. This might lead to a conclusion that EECD is alone in addressing chronic absenteeism. However, several departments offer services and programs that intersect with the issues and problems associated with chronic absenteeism. There is a shared responsibility for addressing various aspects of the problem even though it is not explicitly defined in legislation and policy of all departments.

Child protection legislation and policies in this province, like those in most other provinces and territories, make no reference to school absenteeism as a child protection concern. The province's **Children and Youth Care and Protection Act, 2010** says little about neglect as an issue requiring child protection except that attention will be given to neglect that is clearly creating a risk to the child. The nature of this risk is not linked to chronic absenteeism despite the fact that literature on this subject contains clear reference to the impacts of absenteeism on child well-being.

The **Act** refers to various types of abuse that demand attention from child protection, and some aspects of chronic absenteeism would meet the definition for child abuse. An example would be a child who is absent due to untreated medical issues

that parents refuse to have addressed by medical professionals. CSSD's new child protection legislation **Children, Youth and Families Act** received Royal Assent in the House of Assembly on May 31, 2018 but is not yet in force. The new legislation also does not provide guidance on the issue of chronic absenteeism.

NL's **Schools Act, 1997** requires school attendance and contains provision for legal responses for violations. The Act also instructs school personnel to make efforts to have children attend school. The details about these actions are outlined in the NL English School District's Attendance Protocol Intervention Guidelines. This document outlines a process of escalating levels of intervention for truant students. This process is triggered when a teacher recognizes an absenteeism issue. A teacher is required to contact a child's home when there have been absences for three consecutive days. The principal becomes involved when there are five or more absences in a month. The initial contact can be followed by discussions with parents, involvement of school counsellors and psychologists, letters to parents and possibly letters to police to report violations of the **Schools Act**.

c. Canadian Papers, Publications, Processes and Programs

Governments across Canada may not be in agreement on the need to define chronic absenteeism as a form of neglect, but many of them consider it worthy of study. Several highlight the possibility that absenteeism may signal child maltreatment. These concerns are reflected in publications prepared by the provinces/territories to raise awareness about family violence and indicators of child abuse and neglect. Examples can be found on the government web sites of Newfoundland and Labrador, and Saskatchewan where indicators of child maltreatment are listed. Frequent school absences are possible indicator of abuse. Similar information is also contained in material on the Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal.

Education is delivered throughout Canada by multilayered systems which typically include a department of education, school boards or authorities, school districts, and individual schools. Discussion papers, position papers and programs related to absenteeism exist at all levels. The structure for child protection services also tends to include multiple layers of service planning and delivery. The resources and activities referenced below provide a sample of the types of resources existing across the country. This sample has been primarily identified on government web sites with some detail being obtained from interviews with various government and school officials in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Throughout the country, broad ranging educational reports exist which include chronic absenteeism. Other reports have specifically focused on chronic absenteeism. Some of these include:

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2017	Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2017	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development - Bullying Awareness and Prevention
Government of New Brunswick, 2016	Expecting the Best from Everyone: Recommendations for a 10 Year Education Plan
Government of Alberta, 2014	Every Student Counts- Keeping Kids in School Report
Government of Nova Scotia, 2014	Disrupting the Status Quo: Nova Scotian's Demand a Better Future for Every Student
Government of Ontario, 2014	Achieving Excellence. A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2013	Department of Education. Safe and Caring Schools Policy
Government of Nova Scotia, 2009	Promoting Student Engagement: Report of Minister's Working Committee on Absenteeism
Government of Nova Scotia (not dated)	Be There: Student Attendance and Achievement

Several provinces have created position statements, strategies, committees and programs designed to address chronic absenteeism. While not exhaustive, samples of the efforts that have been implemented include:

- Education attendance strategies in Alberta
- Nova Scotia pilots in individual schools and certain boards/authorities, such as School Plus sites, a mentoring program, and the Positive Behavioral Supports Program
- Truancy or attendance officers responsible for monitoring and investigating school absenteeism in Saskatchewan, Ontario, Alberta and Yukon
- School attendance committees/boards with a mandate to investigate and issue orders to respond to absenteeism in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia
- Nova Scotia Working Committee on Absenteeism
- Various committees/working groups(including community partners) that have a mandate to create responses to absenteeism that involve incentives for school attendance

d. Newfoundland and Labrador Papers, Publications, Processes and Programs

Chronic absenteeism has not been specifically reviewed by either EECD, CSSD, or NLESD. Chronic absenteeism arises as a concern in broader reviews but has not been studied outside such contexts. However, there is no shortage of reports and papers related to education issues. The Premier's Task Force on Improving Education Outcomes (2017) references thirty reports and manuals related to education issues, some of which date back to the 1960's. Chronic absenteeism is noted as a problem in the Task Force report where recommendations are made related to a tracking system for absences, a dropout prevention program, and a program to facilitate a return to school for school leavers.

i. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

EECD has established several committees to work on all recommendations of the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes report. This includes work on recommendations related to chronic absenteeism. Department officials indicate they are not aware of any recent initiatives, prior to the current response to the Premier's Task Force report, which directly focus on improving attendance and/or reducing chronic absenteeism. They also acknowledge that the issue of chronic absenteeism is not monitored by departmental staff and they do not have expertise on this issue. EECD does not have arrangements with other departments outlining roles in relation to chronic absenteeism, and it does not have specific programs/initiatives to address this issue.

Department officials hold the view that addressing chronic absenteeism is a shared responsibility requiring involvement from government departments, government agencies and community partners. They note that current working committee membership reflects this view and they are expecting the approaches to address absenteeism will rely on improved collaboration and communication among all who have a role in addressing the issue.

ii. Newfoundland and Labrador English School District

NLESD officials are concerned about the level of absenteeism occurring throughout the province and are especially aware of the age creep of absenteeism. They note that it was once mainly an issue in high school but now is also prevalent in primary and elementary grades. School staff regularly attempt to address the issue with limited success.

NLESD schools follow the Attendance Protocol Intervention Guidelines. While this

ensures that absenteeism is noticed and directs engagement with absent children and their parents, it does not offer much guidance regarding intervention strategies. The protocol essentially outlines a process involving calls to the parents about the absences, a file review by the psychologist, meeting with the parents to develop plans, and letters to parents and police in extreme cases. The protocol is seen to have limited effectiveness in complex cases.

NLESD officials are concerned about the level of absenteeism occurring throughout the province and are especially aware of the downward age creep.

A major frustration for district and school personnel is the lack of assistance available from other departments and programs who have roles in delivering services to children and their families. This frustration is best illustrated through the words of officials themselves who say “we are in this alone” and “we need people who can go where we cannot go on this issue.” School staff have typically sought assistance from CSSD and have been informed that chronic absenteeism is not within the department’s mandate. They also commonly refer children to children’s mental health services and find the wait lists to be long and the school year is often over before the children receive services. These realities leave school personnel trying to manage situations that truly require departments working together. These limited school resources include principals/vice principals who have absenteeism tracking and response as part of their duties, school counsellors who are allocated with a ratio with 1 counsellor to 500 children, school psychologists who provide very specialized services that leave little time for absenteeism, and classroom teachers who try to help chronically absent children catch up while continuing with regular teaching duties.



There have not been any major initiatives to address chronic absenteeism through the use of specific strategies, the use of interdisciplinary approaches, or the involvement of community partners. The practice had been for schools to try to address the problem. Referrals to CSSD by school officials have been mostly abandoned since child protection staff have been clear that they do not have a legislative mandate to deal with absenteeism. There have also been rare occasions when extreme cases of chronic absenteeism have been referred to the police in accordance with provisions in the **Schools Act**. These actions have rarely led to successful outcomes.

Programs such as those aimed at reducing bullying, creating safer schools and providing nutritional food to children are valuable in addressing some of the factors affecting school attendance. There have also been short term programs that have helped struggling children. One such program noted by NLESD officials is Positive

Action for Student Success (PASS). This program was initially funded as part the Poverty Reduction Strategy. It is viewed as having a positive impact on helping children stay in school and return for credit completion. While funding for this program under the Poverty Reduction Strategy has ended, the NLESD has continued to support the program in partnership with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. An allocation of 12 teaching units has been provided for the PASS program for the 2018-19 school year due to need and its success.

Individual schools sometimes implement initiatives aimed at improving attendance such as connecting children to sports and school sponsored activities as a way of helping them engage with the school, involving parents with school activities to also strengthen connection, doing home visits with families of children who are chronically absent, and implementing incentives for perfect or excellent attendance. Schools also use phone contact systems to advise parents of absences. The educators consulted believe that parents have the most influential role in reducing chronic absenteeism and effective strategies have to include efforts to engage parents and convince them of the importance of education. These efforts need to be recognized, however there is no mechanism to share information about the strategies used in individual schools. Therefore there is little opportunity to learn from activities occurring within schools.

NLESD began an information campaign in the 2017-18 school year which aims to raise awareness about the importance of attendance. Information is shared with staff and parents. Discussions occur with organizations whose activities may take students out of school due to extracurricular activities. Identifying the problem is clearly an important step.

District and school personnel believe good attendance rates are closely linked to communities and families. District officials suggest that social workers might be part of the solution to bridge the gap between the school, parents and communities. They believe an effective model of service delivery could be similar to the current school health promotion liaison positions where staff are employed by health boards but deliver services in schools.

iii. Department of Children, Seniors, and Social Development

CSSD does not identify the investigation of chronic absenteeism and educational neglect as part of its mandate and does not have specific initiatives, policies, protocols or training related to chronic absenteeism. The child protection services division of CSSD sometimes receives referrals on chronic absenteeism and referrals are screened to identify any factors outside of the absenteeism that may require assessment for child maltreatment. The case is not accepted for assessment if chronic

absenteeism is the only issue presented. However other factors may be present which are not readily identifiable without further exploration or investigation.

iv. Other Departments and Agencies

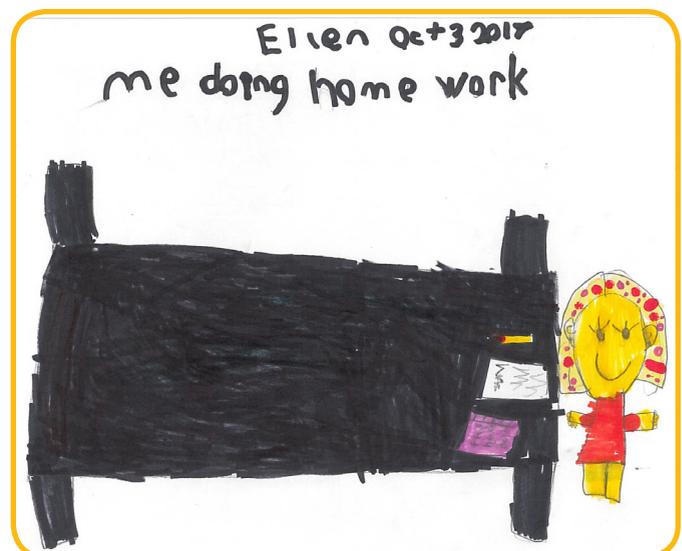
Other provincial government departments and agencies have responsibility for children's services within their broader mandates. The most obvious examples are the Department of Health and Community Services and the Regional Health Authorities. Health services are available to all citizens including children. While the Department of Health and Community Services and Regional Health Authorities do not have mandates to address chronic absenteeism, they have mandates to provide health services to children and youth who present with conditions associated with absenteeism. The contributions of the health sector are essential to addressing chronic absenteeism.

5. Elements of Effective Response

a. Vision

Chronic absenteeism is resistant to change (Reid, 2005). A strong vision is an essential component of any plan to address chronic absenteeism. The research identifies a number of elements to inform and support such a vision:

- Families will be connected to schools, as attendance improves when families are connected (Mallett, 2016).
- Parents will believe in the value of education and be involved in their children's education, as these factors increase the likelihood that their children will attend school (Teasley, 2004; Mallett, 2016).
- Schools will be welcoming, interesting and challenging, as these qualities increase likelihood that children will want to be in school (Nauer, et al., 2008.)
- Social emotional learning will be part of the curriculum, as this helps students manage emotions, make better decisions, and improve social connections thus helping them attend (Mallett, 2016).



- Classes and learning groups will be smaller, as smaller class size and learning units improves school attendance (Gase et al 2016; Sutphen, et al., 2010).
- Efforts will be focused on keeping children in school, as exclusionary measures tend to reinforce school disengagement (Gase et al., 2016).
- Development of personal assets such as resilience, commitment to learning, positive values, social competence and positive identity will be addressed, as these are linked to educational success (Tessier et al., 2018).
- Students will be emotionally engaged, as students who are highly engaged are less likely to drop out and are more likely to internalize the values of the school and have better outcomes, (Markowitz, 2017; Wang and Peck, 2013).

b. Core Themes in Effective Approaches

There is no single approach that has been identified as the best solution. A variety of possible approaches has led to identifying important program elements. The following core themes have been identified in the research as important for developing models:

➤ **Universal Prevention Strategies/School Wide Strategies**

Activities at this level include:

- Communicating clear attendance guidelines and protocols to staff and parents
- Communicating with parents and students about the importance of attendance
- Using incentives for good attendance
- Involving community partners in promoting attendance
- Offering information sessions for staff and families on fostering student engagement
- Offering orientation programs designed to improve family connection to the school
- Supporting behaviours and attitudes known to increase student engagement and attendance
- Addressing problematic behaviors such as bullying and violence (Kearney and Graczyke, 2014)
- Creating a welcoming and positive school climate

- Using teaching methods that engage and challenge students, particularly at the high school level
- Facilitating activities outside class time, flexible schedules, and regular celebrations (Nauer, et al., 2008; Gase et al., 2016; Epstein, and Sheldon, 2002).

The strategies that are school wide can be collaboratively designed and delivered with community partners particularly child and youth serving agencies, programs and cultural organizations.

➤ **Early Intervention**

There is overwhelming agreement among those who study absenteeism that early identification and intervention is vital to effectively addressing chronic absenteeism (Reid 2012). The opportunity to intervene occurs very early in a school career as chronic absenteeism can be identified in first grade (Epstein and Sheldon 2002; Alexander et. al. 1997, cited in Cook et al., 2017). The value of an early response is significant as early intervention is six times more likely to be successful than interventions that occur after a pattern has been established (Reid 2002). The first unexcused absence demands a response is how Kearney (2014) underlines the importance of early intervention. This approach requires a monitoring system that is sensitive enough to find the first absence in a timely manner. It also requires the presence of personnel who will immediately contact the parent and child to discuss the absence and the prevention of future occurrences. The roles in this early response process may be filled by clerical staff who can make phone calls to advise that an absence has been noted but also requires input at various points from teachers, principals and counsellors.

Early intervention is six times more likely to be successful than interventions that occur after a pattern has been established.

➤ **Effectively Monitoring Absences**

Absences can easily become habitual if no one notices. This is particularly an issue in large high school where students move among classes and where teachers may not know all students well. Absenteeism may also be missed due to staff workloads, and when unacceptable behaviors, rather than absent students, demand priority attention. Monitoring systems are essential in order to identify students who need help with attendance but also to identify patterns

Absences can easily become habitual if no one notices.

and factors that may be contributing to absences. Daily assessment of attendance and analysis of individual cases are also important features of effective monitoring (Kearney, 2014). A monitoring system can be more effective if it moves beyond the school taking attendance and making note of absences. The involvement of family, combined with student support, increases the effectiveness of monitoring programs (Kearney and Graczyke, 2014).

➤ **Family Involvement**

Families are critical in children's lives and are essential to the success of any intervention. Work with families is often complicated by the fact that they can be both a source of the problem and part of the solution. Several types of family involvement are considered particularly valuable in addressing chronic absenteeism:

- Provide help with parenting practices that support attendance. This may include helping children be school ready and reinforcing the value of education. Home visits to provide this assistance and or to simply meet the family and discuss the needs of their children have been shown to improve attendance in primary and elementary grades (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002).
- Communicate regularly between home and school. This is valuable to help families engage and to obtain their cooperation with action plans. Workshops about school attendance, identifying a contact person for parents to speak about attendance concerns and student progress have also proven helpful (Gandy and Shultz, 2007; Epstein and Sheldon, 2001).
- Support parents with strategies and resources to help their children study. This support is particularly helpful in cases where absenteeism is linked to learning difficulties but can also help when a child is struggling due to missed time (Sheldon, 2007).
- Recruit parents to volunteer in schools in order to engage them and give them a meaningful role in helping children (Epstein and Sheldon, 2001). Involving families on decision making school committees helps them obtain some control regarding school processes, and signals that they are valued contributors. Their stronger connection to the school increases their commitment to supporting attendance.



➤ Collaboration

Because various factors influence school attendance, working together is important and must include schools, families, government, and community organizations. All have roles in preventing and responding to chronic absenteeism. A collaborative approach establishes a shared view of the issues and responsibility for the solutions. Collaboration also helps to identify, organize, and integrate resources (Sheldon, 2007).



➤ Incentives and Consequence-based Strategies

Using punitive approaches alone has not been shown to be particularly effective in reducing chronic absenteeism. They may actually push the student towards further disengagement from school (Gase et al., 2016). There is some evidence that referring student to truancy officers impacts daily attendance but not chronic absenteeism (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002). Consequences can be helpful when designed to increase student engagement such as having children make up lost time for missed classes. Incentives for attendance for all students is also valuable as a prevention and intervention strategy (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002). A restorative approach that focuses on student engagement and relationship building is an emerging practice that is showing positive impacts.

➤ Team Based Approach

The factors influencing chronic absenteeism are complex and effective responses must reflect this. An interdisciplinary team is needed to design a comprehensive program addressing the variety of issues that accompany absenteeism. A core team includes staff who are in schools and those who can be assigned to schools. These may include regular stream and special needs teachers, principal/vice principal, counsellor, social worker, nurse, and psychologist. The team participates in assessing the needs of the absent children and their families and assessing the school and community factors influencing attendance. The team members also accept roles in delivering and/or coordinating delivery of services. The core team will need support from other professionals, service providers and programs outside the school. (Kearney, 2008; Kearney and Geaczyke, 2014; Ekstrand, 2015).

➤ Assessment of Individual Student Need

Approaches need to differ according to grade level and individual needs. Students at primary and elementary levels do not have control over their attendance and are most influenced by their parents and teachers. Students at high school level can choose to miss school and they are more influenced by peers. They are also less likely to be affected by discussion on future outcomes because their focus is the present (Mallett, 2016). Assessment of need must be mindful of these realities. Individual students will have different needs despite having very similar experiences. Each student's circumstance, including cultural realities, needs to be understood in order to inform a solid approach. The types of assessments could include those that identify individual issues such as learning disabilities and mental health problems as well as those identifying family problems. Functional behavioral assessments may also be used to determine the functions being served by student absenteeism (Kearney and Graczyke, 2014).

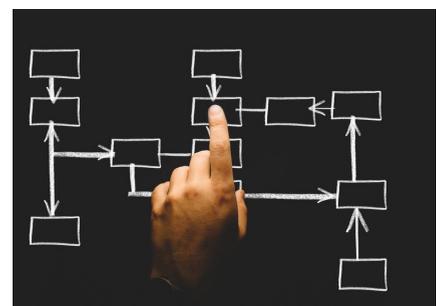


➤ Empirically Based Processes and Protocols

With limited resources and a complex problem like chronic absenteeism, it is important to use approaches that have demonstrated value and success. Responses addressing all aspects of the problem are needed. Schools need to respond to student needs and take steps to modify the environment and programs in keeping with best practices. Accessing this type of information will lead to interventions that make best use of limited resources.

c. Specific Models/Approaches

A number of specific models have been designed to address many aspects of absenteeism. Several dominate the literature and elements of these have been incorporated into pilot projects and protocols in various jurisdictions in Canada and in other countries. A selection of models with positive impacts are described in this section.



➤ Response to Intervention Model

Early intervention and strategies to respond to individual student needs are key elements of this approach. It uses a hierarchy of decision making to implement evidence based strategies at three different levels. The first tier of intervention

focuses on general prevention, school improvement, and efforts to help students showing very early sign of problems. The second tier identifies and responds to at risk students using in-home and counselling interventions. The third level addresses highly complex situations requiring intense intervention. Individual plans are typically needed at the tier three level as well as increased supervision (Kearney and Graczyke, 2014). A multidisciplinary team approach is essential and at the most intense intervention level a variety of home based as well as counselling services are required. This approach has been promoted as a way to directly improve attendance (Austin et. al., 2014, cited in Mallet, 2016)



➤ **Family and Individual Collaboration Model**

This model extends the work of the school to include coordination of health, education, and social services for students and families. Success relies on the commitment of community partners and leadership within the school. A site coordinator is required to operate the program. The outcomes for this model include small change in academic achievement, improved graduation rate, increased parent and teacher satisfaction, and improved attendance (Valli, Stefanski and Jacobson, 2014).

➤ **Full Service Schools**

These are often referred to as wraparound schools, as the school establishes a program that integrates a full range of academic, health, and social services. This program typically requires an agreement with community partners, a steering committee, a multidisciplinary site team and a site coordinator. Community and government partners have a shared vision and goals and use a shared decision making model. A wide variety of services can be provided such as family assistance, support for school transportation, community outreach, counselling for students, and academic assistance (Valli, Stefanski and Jacobson, 2014). Challenges associated with this model involve costs, and partner commitment. However, this service model shows positive outcomes in student achievement in math and reading, problem behaviors and attitudes, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and attendance.

➤ **Full Service Community Schools**

This model involves changing school culture and inviting greater involvement from the community. There is an emphasis on school and community working together to establish and achieve student goals. A site team and site coordinator are required in this model. Outcomes include increased parental involvement, increased trust among partners, and decreased suspensions. The impact on academic outcomes is described as mixed (Valli et al., 2014).

➤ **Community Development Model**

The goal of this model is transformation of neighborhoods and communities. The model is guided by the belief that the distressed community must be changed to facilitate improvements in child development and educational outcomes. This approach develops services in and around schools such as fitness and nutrition programs, and financial and legal counselling. There is an expectation that as the community improves, then children will do better. The scope of this approach requires a big investment from community partners, leadership, and organizational and cultural change (Valli, Stefanski and Jacobson, 2014). This approach has not been extensively studied but limited studies indicate changes in reading and math outcomes and absenteeism.



➤ **Check and Connect**

This model builds relationships between the school and family, monitors absences, uses cognitive behavioural strategies, problem solving, and school based monitors to check in with students. (Kearney and Graczyke, 2014). The monitors are often professional social workers. This approach has had some success in positively affecting attendance (Cook et al., 2017; What Works Clearinghouse).

The fact that no one approach is identified as the best solution to chronic absenteeism leaves schools and partners with the opportunity of creating approaches that work for them while using the best ideas and strategies that are available in current models. This offers educational leaders in Newfoundland and Labrador with flexibility in planning and implementing strategies.

6. Findings

This systemic review provides information on the issues and factors associated with chronic absenteeism, the type of collaboration needed to address the problem, and the interventions and programs that are likely to be effective. This review has found:

- Newfoundland and Labrador is not effectively addressing chronic student absenteeism
- Chronic absenteeism is complex and is influenced by the individual characteristics of students, their families, their schools, and their communities
- An effective response must be comprehensive by addressing factors associated with individual children, families, schools and communities
- Chronic absenteeism negatively impacts children on multiple levels, and severely limits future economic, social and emotional well-being
- Child protection services and health services are vital collaborators in the design and delivery of responsive services and are not effectively engaged currently
- Chronic absenteeism is a possible indicator of child maltreatment
- Child protection involvement is not required for all chronically absent children
- Early intervention is essential to successfully address absenteeism and is achievable since a pattern of absenteeism is established and identifiable during the early school years
- Newfoundland and Labrador lacks an effective data collection system that provides accurate and timely information
- Schools are in the best position to identify and lead responses to chronic absenteeism, but they do not have the capacity and mandate to independently provide a complete response
- Interdisciplinary and multiagency responses are important for success
- Leadership and resources are required for effective strategies
- Information and research is readily available to guide program development

7. Recommendations

- 1. Within one year, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in conjunction with the school districts, the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, the Department of Health and Community Services and Regional Health Authorities develop an action plan to address chronic absenteeism. This action plan should:**
 - a. Incorporate knowledge of best practices and results**
 - b. Include community partners that provide services to children and youth**
 - c. Provide appropriate resources for any pilots that emerge from the action plan**
 - d. Implement professional staff development highlighting chronic absenteeism as a possible indicator of child maltreatment**
 - e. Include an evaluation plan**

2. The Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the school districts, the Department of Health and Community Services and Regional Health Authorities develop and implement policy specifically identifying how staff will effectively assess and respond to chronic absenteeism.

3. The Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and the school districts, collaboratively develop and implement policies and protocols specifically defining the point at which chronic absenteeism situations require referral to the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

4. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Department of Health and Community Services, and the school districts develop agreements with the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development and the Regional Health Authorities defining how all these partners will collectively contribute to addressing chronic absenteeism.

8. Conclusion

Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child speaks to a child's right to a quality education. In the case of chronic absenteeism, other factors impede this right. It is vitally important to ensure a shared response to this issue so that children do not continue to fall through these gaps. Without a solid education to ground them in life, children will be disadvantaged in their opportunities for success, both as children and as adults. A collective strategy to address chronic absenteeism is required. We must do more to ensure the quiet problem of chronic absenteeism does not continue.

As this report demonstrates, there is sufficient research, existing practice models and understanding of best/promising practices to guide action now. There is ample room for flexibility. Any further delay to address this issue is not an option.



Bibliography

- Belfanz, R. (2016). Missing school matters. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 98 (2), 8-13.
- Chang, H. and Romero, M. (2008). Present Engaged and Accounted for. The Critical Importance of addressing Chronic Absenteeism in early Grades. A Report. National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University. Retrieved from: http://nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_837.pdf
- Blumenthal, A. 2015. Child Neglect 1: Scope, consequences, And Risk and Protective Factors. Information sheet. Retrieved from: <http://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/en/141E.pdf>
- Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal. Retrieved from: cwp.ca
- Chang, H., Russell-Tucker, C., and Sullivan, K. (2016). Chronic early absence: What states can do. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 98 (2), 22-27.
- Cook, P., et al. (2017). A new program to prevent primary school absenteeism: Results and pilot study in five schools. *Children and Youth Services Review*. Vol. 82, 262-270.
- Davison, C. and Howe, P. (2012). School engagement among Aboriginal students in northern Canada: Perspectives from activity settings theory. *School Health*, 82, 2, 65-74.
- Ekstrand, B. (2015). What it takes to keep children in school: A research review. *Educational Review*, 67, (4), 459-482.
- Epstein, J and Sheldon, S., (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *Journal of Educational Research*, 95 (5), 308- 318.
- Gandy, C. and Shultz, L (2007). Increasing school attendance for K-8 students. A review of research examining the effectiveness of truancy prevention programs. Retrieved at <https://www.wilder.org/Wilder-Research/Publications/Studies/Increasing%20School>
- Gase, L., et al. (2016). Youth's perspectives on reasons underlying school truancy and opportunities to improve school attendance. *The Qualitative Report*, 21, (2), 299-320.

- Gottfried, Michael, (2009). Excused vs unexcused: how student absences in elementary schools affect academic achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 31, 4, 392-415.
- Government of Alberta. Child Youth and Family Enhancement Act, 2000. Retrieved from: http://www.qp.alberta.ca/1266.cfm?page=c12.cfm&leg_type=Acts&isbncln=9780779780532&display=html
- Government of Alberta. Education Act, 2012. Retrieved from: <https://education.alberta.ca/legislation-and-regulations/education-act>
- Government of Alberta, (2014). Every Student Counts. Keeping Kids in School Report. Retrieved from: <https://education.alberta.ca/media/158760/everystudentcountskeepingkids.pdf>
- Government of British Columbia. Child, Family and Community Services Act, 1996. Retrieved from: https://search.employment.gov.bc.ca/cgi-bin/a/searchjobs_quick.cgi
- Government of British Columbia. School Act, 1996. Retrieved from: https://search.employment.gov.bc.ca/cgi-bin/a/searchjobs_quick.cgi
- Government of Manitoba. Child and Family Services Act, 1985. Retrieved from: <http://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/c080e.php>
- Government of Manitoba. Learning to 18, Interim Report on Attendance. Retrieved from [Learning to 18???](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/attendance/documents/park_west_school.pdf)http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/attendance/documents/park_west_school.pdf
- Government of Manitoba, (2009). School Attendance in Manitoba. Prepared by Probe research for Manitoba Education, Citizen and Youth. Retrieved from: <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/reports/attendance/>
- Government of Manitoba. The Public School Act, 1997. Retrieved from: <http://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/p250e.php>
- Government of New Brunswick. Education Act, 1997. Retrieved from: <http://laws.gnb.ca/en/showdoc/cs/E-1.12>

- Government of New Brunswick, (2016). Expecting the Best from Everyone. Recommendations for a 10 Year education Plan. Retrieved from: <http://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/ed/pdf/Publications/ExpectingTheBest-Anglo.pdf>
- Government of New Brunswick. Family Services Act, 1980. Retrieved from: <http://laws.gnb.ca/en/ShowTdm/cs/F-2.2/>
- Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Children and Youth Care and Protection Act, 2013. Retrieved from: <http://www.assembly.nl.ca/Legislation/sr/statutes/c12-2.htm>
- Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Bullying awareness. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Retrieved from: <http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/bullying/index.html>
- Government of NL, (2017). Premiers Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes. The Time is Now. Retrieved from: http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/task_force/report.pdf
- Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Safe and Caring School Policy. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Retrieved from: <http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/safeandcaring/>
- Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Schools Act, 1996. Retrieved from: <http://www.assembly.nl.ca/legislation/sr/statutes/s12-2.htm>
- Government of Nova Scotia. Be there: Student Attendance and Achievement. A discussion Paper. Retrieved from: <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/student-attendance.pdf>
- Government of Nova Scotia. Disrupting the Status Quo: Nova Scotia's Demand for a Better Future for Every Student. Retrieved from: <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/disrupting-status-quo-nova-scotians-demand-better.pdf>
- Government of Nova Scotia. Children and Family Services Act, 1990. Retrieved from: <https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/children%20and%20family%20services.pdf>
- Government of Nova Scotia. Education Act, 1995/96. Retrieved from: <https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/education.pdf>

Government of Nova Scotia, (2009). Promoting Student Engagement- A Report of the Ministers Working Committee on Absenteeism and Classroom Climate. Retrieved from: <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/promotingstudentengagementten.pdf>

Government of North West Territories. Child and Family Services Act, 1997. Retrieved from: <https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/child-family-services/child-family-services.a.pdf>

Government of North West Territories. Education Act, 1995. Retrieved from: <https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/education/education.a.pdf>

Government of Nunavut. Children and Family Services Act, 1997. Retrieved from: https://gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/cfs_act_eng.pdf

Government of Nunavut. Education Act, 2008. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/e2008snc15.pdf>

Government of Ontario. Achieving Excellence. A renewed Vision for education in Ontario. Retrieved from: <http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/renewedVision.pdf>

Government of Ontario. Child and Family Services Act, 1990. Retrieved from: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/17c14>

Government of Ontario. Education Act, 1990. Retrieved from: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90e02>

Government of Prince Edward Island. Child Protection Act, 2000. Retrieved from: <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/legislation/C-05-1-Child%20Protection%20Act.pdf>

Government of Prince Edward Island. Education Act, 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/legislation/E-.02-Education%20Act.pdf>

Government of Quebec. Education Act, 1988. Retrieved from: <http://legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/ShowDoc/cs/l-13.3>

Government of Quebec. Youth Protection Act, 1984. Retrieved from: <http://legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/ShowDoc/cs/P-34.1>

- Government of Saskatchewan. Child and Family Services Act, 1989/90. Retrieved from: <http://www.publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=460>
- Government of Saskatchewan. The Education Act, 1995. Retrieved from: <http://www.publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=487>
- Government of Yukon. Child and Family Services Act, 2008. Retrieved from: http://www.gov.yk.ca/legislation/acts/chfase_c.pdf
- Government of Yukon. Education Act, 2002. Retrieved from: http://www.gov.yk.ca/legislation/acts/education_c.pdf
- Kearney, C. (2008). An interdisciplinary model of school absenteeism in youth to inform professional practice and public policy. *Educational Psychology Review*, 20, 257-282.
- Kearney, C. and Bensaheb, A. (2006). School absenteeism and school refusal behaviour: A review and suggestions for school based health professionals. *The Journal of School Health*, 7, (1), 3-7.
- Kearney, Christopher and Graczyke, Patricia (2014). A response to intervention model to promote school attendance and decrease school absenteeism. *Child Youth and Care Forum*, 43, 1-25.
- Kinder, K, Wakefield, A. and Wilkin, A. (1996). *Talking Back: Student Views on Disaffection*. Slough, National Foundation for Educational Research. Retrieved at <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/91171/91171.pdf>
- Lee, M. and Millenberger, R. (1996). School refusal behaviour classification, assessment and treatment issues. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 19, (4), 474-486.
- Leiter, Jeffrey (2007). School performance trajectories after the advent of reported maltreatment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29, 3, 363-382.
- Maciver, M. (2012). Aboriginal student's perspectives on the factors influencing high school completion. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 14, 3, 156-162.
- Macleane, M., Taylor, C., O'Donnell, M., (2016). Pre-existing adversity, level of child protection involvement and school attendance predict educational outcomes in a longitudinal study. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 51, 120-131.

- Mallett, Christopher (2016). It's not about skipping school. *Child Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 33, 337-347.
- Markowitz, A. (2007). Association between emotional engagement with school and behavioral outcomes across adolescence. *AERA Open*, Vol. 3, 3, 1-21.
- McConnell, B., Kubina, R. (2014). Connecting with families to improve student school attendance: A review of literature. *Preventing School Failure*, 58, (4), 249-258.
- Melander, H. et al. (2017). Evidence for a relationship between child maltreatment and absenteeism among high school students in Sweden. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 27, 41-49.
- Muzychka, Martha, (2008). Learning What They Live: The Impact of Witnessing Family Violence. Newfoundland and Labrador, Women's Policy Office. Retrieved from: https://www.gov.nl.ca/VPI/publications/learning_what_they_live.pdf
- Nauer, Ken, White, Andrew and Yerneni, Rajeev, (2008). Strengthening School by Strengthening Families: Community Strategies to reverse Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades and Improve Supports for Children and Families. Retrieved from: http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/NYC_Strengthening%20Schools1.pdf
- Olsen, L. (2014). Why September Matters: Improving student attendance. Policy Brief. Baltimore Education Research Consortium, 2pp.
- Orthner, D. and Randolph, K. (1999). Welfare reform and high school dropout patterns. *Children and Youth Service Review*, 21, 9-10, 881-900.
- Reid, K. (2005). The causes, views and traits of school absenteeism and truancy. An analytical review. *Research in Education*, 74, 1, 59-82.
- Reid, K. (2012). The strategic management of truancy, school absenteeism: finding solutions from a national perspective. *Educational Review*, 4, (2), 211-222.
- Sheldon, Steven, (2007). Improving student attendance with school, family and community partnerships. *Journal of Educational Research*, 100, 5, 262-265.
- Slade, Eric and Wisson, L., (2006). The influence of childhood maltreatment on adolescents' academic performance. *Economics of Education Review*, 26, 5, 604-614.

- Sparks, Sarah (2010). District begins looking harder at absenteeism. *Education Week*, 30, 6, 1-3
- Stelmach, B, Korach, M., Steeves, L. (2017). Casting a new light on a long shadow: Saskatchewan Aboriginal high school students talk about what helps and hinders their learning. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 63, 1, 1-20.
- Stempel, H. et al. (2017). Chronic school absenteeism and the role of adverse childhood experiences. *Academic Pediatrics*, 17 Issue 8, 837-843.
- Sutphen, R., Ford, J., Flaherty, C. (2010). Truancy intervention. A review of the research literature. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 20, (2), 161-171.
- Teasley, Martell L. (2004). Absenteeism and truancy: risk protection and best practices implications for social workers. *Children and Schools*, 26 (2), 117-128.
- Tenkate, I. (2006). Considering the Aboriginal perspective in relation to attendance and School achievement. *Alberta Counsellor*. Alberta Teachers Association, p.15.
- Tessier, N., O'Higgins, A., Flynn, R., (2018). Neglect, educational success, and young people out of home care: Cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 75, 115-129.
- Todd Manly, J., Lynch, M., Oshri, A., (2013). The impact of neglect on initial adaption to school. *Child Maltreatment*, 18, 3, 155-170.
- Van Wert, Melissa, Fallon, B., Trocme, N., Collin-Vezina, D., (2018). Educational neglect: understanding 20 years of child welfare trends. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 75, 50-60.
- Valli, L., Stefanski, A, Jacobson, R., (2014). Typologizing school community partnerships. A framework for analysis and action. *Urban Education*, 51, 7, 719-747.
- Wang, M. T. and Peck, S. (2013). Adolescent educational success and mental health vary across school engagement profiles. *Developmental Psychology*, 49, 7, 1266-1276.
- What Works Clearinghouse. National Center of Education, evaluation and Regional Assistance, Washington, DC. Retrieved from: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>





Office of the Child and Youth Advocate

193 Lemarchant Road
St. John's, NL A1C 2H5

Telephone: **(709) 753-3888**

Toll Free: **1-877-753-3888**

Fax: **(709) 753-3988**

Email: **office@ocya.nl.ca**

Twitter: **@OCYANL**

