

# Student Attendance Policies and Procedures: Strategies During School Closure and Planning for a Strong, Healthy Start

## Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide support to supervisory unions/districts (SUs/SDs) as they adapt and/or revise policies or procedures related to attendance that reflect new learning environments and needs due to COVID-19. The Agency of Education issued previous, [updated attendance guidance on April 6](#) which remains in effect. Attendance procedures should be forward-thinking and responsive to various possible future learning environments -- ranging from face-to-face to blended to full remote learning/instruction -- to support a strong, healthy start to next school year.

## Introduction

Student success directly correlates to school attendance. Just as school itself looks different during a time of remote learning, so must how we define, measure and track attendance look different. Attendance policies and procedures during COVID-19 closure and as we plan for the new school year should reflect and foster engagement and refrain from defaulting to a punitive measure against a student or family (e.g., truancy).

Regular checks of students being “present” (now and moving forward) have a larger purpose. Attendance data are an important piece of information schools and educators can use to better design learning environments, instructional practices and interventions, and activities to better meet the needs of students and families. At times, school administrators may need to use attendance data during COVID-19 closure to consider truancy referrals – this should only be considered as a last resort when they have been unable to connect with a student or family even after trying several different methods and modalities. Additional guidance on this latter issue, including how to best meet the needs of vulnerable youth, is forthcoming.

## National Overview

Recording attendance during COVID-19 has presented unique challenges to schools across the country and, in response, state education agencies have allowed for greater flexibility in this area. The Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) found that when 82 large school districts around the country were surveyed, only 16 had an attendance policy in place. Districts from around the country that had an attendance policy for their period of remote learning indicated that attendance was tracked to ensure students had contact with an adult and that resources and other supports could get to those students in need. Please see previously issued, [updated attendance guidance from April 6](#) from the AOE that specifies Vermont’s approach.

The following are several national examples of attendance measures schools and districts are employing:

- Capstone Project Completion
- Assignment Completion
- Attempts of Assignment Completion (within a given time frame)

- Log on information through LMS
- Daily prompts; trivia questions or drawing prompts
- Daily check-ins (call or email) with an adult (teacher, support staff, advisor, etc.)
- Participation in a daily online discussion
- Signing an online form

## **Attendance During School Closure**

In Vermont, SUs and SDs are using a variety of strategies to ensure their students are safe and engaging in their education from home. Most SUs/SDs are implementing some form of daily check-in that is recorded as attendance. Others, however, are implementing a combination of daily, biweekly or weekly student check-ins which vary according to grade level. If a student meets all expectations from their teacher, synchronously and/or asynchronously, within a week, then that would be analogous to them being present for each day of the week pre-COVID-19. Specific attendance/engagement requirements also often depend on the age/grade of the student in many LEAs.

Some SUs/SDs allow the mode of check-in to be determined by the teacher and student, while others require attendance to be taken during specific classes in the day, such as advisory. Most importantly, many have leveraged their Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and Educational Support Teams (EST) to utilize this attendance data to triage and provide remote/virtual behavioral, emotional and physical supports for students. Such activity can include identifying patterns indicative of, or potentially leading to, chronic absenteeism. Several SUs/SDs identified attendance/communication cut-points where escalating levels of intervention are identified and deployed.

## **Vermont Examples**

In adapting to the new world of remote learning, schools in Vermont are using multiple means to connect with their students and take attendance. The following are a few strategies that inform attendance:

- Each student makes contact with their morning meeting advisor every day by responding with an email or text or being present at a video conference.
- Teachers maintain a contact log and report to the principal.
- Submission of homework, communications with student/parent via Google, or paper communications.
- Videoconference, daily writing probe, online chat, learning activity or submitted work in a learning management system, text, email or phone communication with teacher, staff or school.
- Email via online learning management systems (SeeSaw, JumpRope, Schoolology), Google Classroom, Google Meet, and phone calls.
- Teachers maintain attendance on their own, and satisfy attendance requirements by making daily contact with students.

- Personalized contact to student/family based on need (e.g., call, virtual meeting, text, email) that are tracked and maintained.
- Students answer a daily question in their Advisory through Google Classroom to show attendance in school.
- Students complete a "daily attendance ticket" in their PLP/advisory classrooms.
- Student-teacher/class-teacher daily check-in meeting each morning before the start of school.
- On days when there is no advisory check-in, students complete a writing prompt with a social emotional theme.
- Students have daily check-in deadline (e.g., until 1 p.m. daily) to connect through e-mail or phone before being marked 'absent'.

## **Attendance for a Strong, Healthy Start**

A second, broader purpose for tracking attendance data during remote learning is to inform planning for a strong, healthy start to the 2020-2021 School Year. Tracking both student attendance and student engagement through a school's or district's existing MTSS and EST can be used to inform any number of planning, learning and operational considerations for the coming year. Use of attendance data in conjunction with other engagement-related data can help identify students needing additional academic, social/emotional and mental health supports for the coming year. Analysis of attendance data can be used to inform teacher pedagogy in remote environments, distribution of targeted resources, and highlight any connectivity issues that students and families may be facing. Most importantly, it can inform responsive attendance policies and procedures that suit various and modular learning environments.

Many Vermont SUs/SDs, in their Continuity of Learning Plans (CLP), listed attendance data as a primary data point for monitoring the effectiveness of their CLP and ensuring that they are connecting with every student in some way. Please refer to elements one and five in the [CLP exemplar document](#) for further information.

**If you have questions about this document or would like additional information, please contact the following AOE staff:**

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## **Resources/References**

[Continuity of Learning Plan Exemplars](#)

[Memo: Continuation of Learning, School Calendars; Attendance](#)

[CRPE: Remote Classes Are in Session for More School Districts, But Attendance Plans Are Still Absent](#)