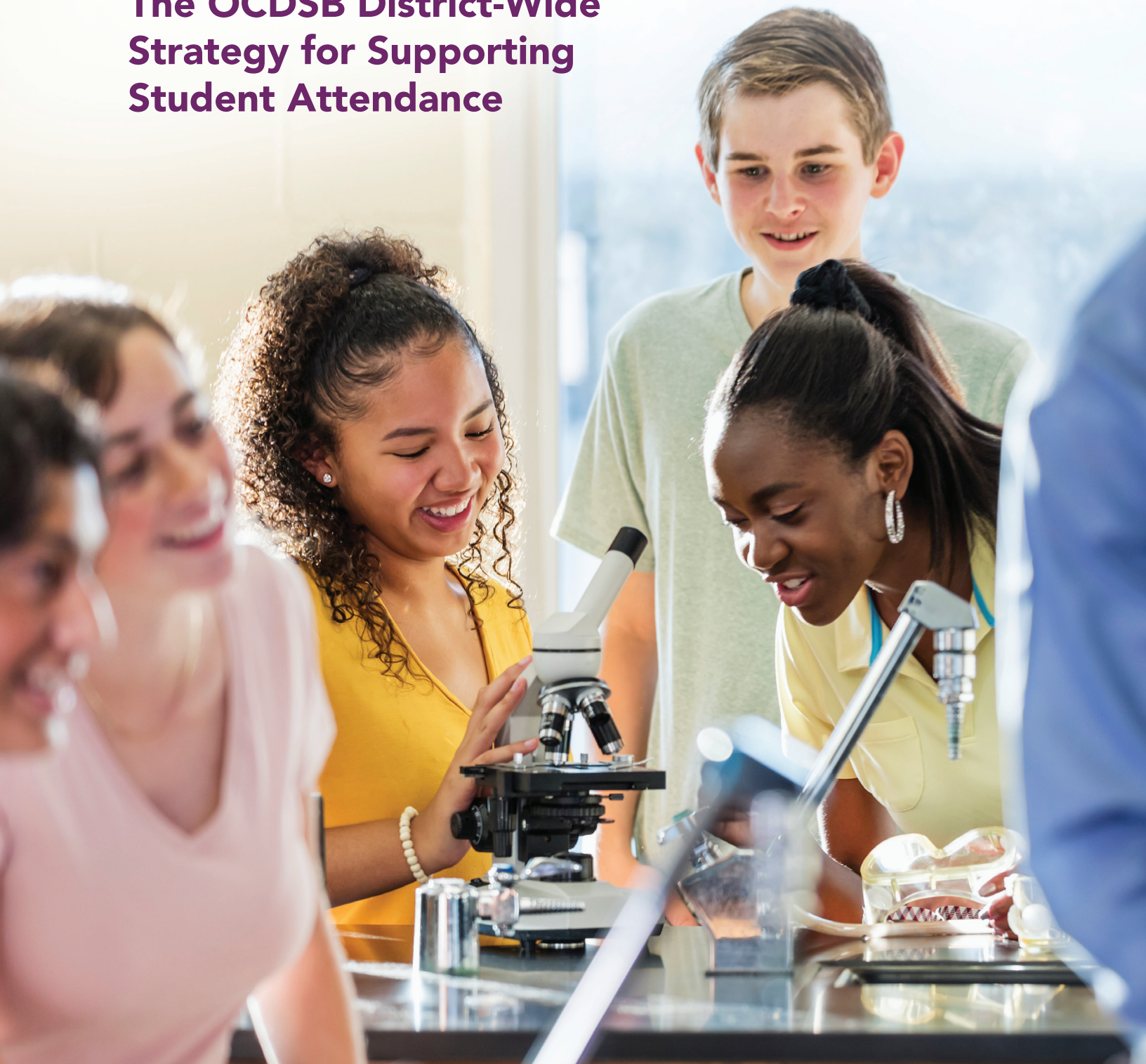




OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Every Day Counts

**The OCDSB District-Wide
Strategy for Supporting
Student Attendance**



At the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB), we believe that regular school attendance is fundamental to students' success, well-being and future opportunities. In alignment with the Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap, we commit to anchoring this work in a holistic and strength-based approach that honours the knowledge and wisdom of the students and families we serve. This includes actively taking time to reflect on our biases and to ground this work in culturally relevant and responsive practices that respect the cultural context and practices of students and their families. This Attendance Strategy outlines our plan to make sure every student feels valued, supported and safe so they can attend school every day.

We know that the reasons for missing school can be complicated and often happens because of things outside of a student's control. That is why this strategy focuses on being proactive and preventative, bringing together school staff, families and community partners to help all students be present and engaged in their learning.

Missing a lot of school can significantly affect a student's achievements, social and emotional growth and chances of graduating. Acknowledging that historical and current systemic discrimination in schools can affect school attendance for Indigenous, racialized and marginalized students, the OCDSB is committed to build trust with students, families, staff, and communities that have experienced harm. Recognizing that students may face many different barriers and challenges, this strategy shows our commitment to working with students and families to provide the right support for their individual needs.

Consistent with the District's [Mental Health and Well-being Strategy](#), this strategy focuses on three priorities: **Belonging**, **Building** and **Bridging**. It outlines actions, roles, responsibilities and resources to help everyone support students.

Why Early Attendance Habits Matter

Regular attendance at school is more than just showing up for classes. It's about being part of a community where children interact with others and build the life skills they need to succeed. Here is why consistent attendance in school is so important:

- 1. Academic and Skill Development:** Regular attendance helps kids build a strong foundation in literacy, math and other subjects, preventing gaps in their knowledge.
- 2. Social-Emotional Growth and Routine:** At school, children make friends and develop social skills. A regular routine helps them feel secure and develops a sense of responsibility.
- 3. Mental Health and Well-Being Support:** Often, attendance issues can be an early sign of mental health concerns such as anxiety or stress. Addressing attendance problems early is essential for supporting students' well-being.
- 4. Graduation and Long-Term Success:** Consistent attendance in the early years and in high school is a strong predictor of whether a student will graduate. It builds academic achievement, personal responsibility and an understanding of the value of education.
- 5. Family and Community Engagement:** Regular attendance helps parents/caregivers stay involved with their child's education and connects them with support when concerns begin to arise.

By addressing attendance concerns early, we can get to the root of the issue before it grows, preventing academic setbacks and helping children build habits for a successful future.

Understanding Absences

Definitions and Types of Absences

Ontario's Ministry of Education has set a target attendance rate of 90% for students. Mandatory attendance starts at age 6 or Grade 1.

When a student misses 10% or more of the school year (approximately 20 days), this is known as chronic/persistent absence.

Absences can be:

- **Non-consecutive:** when a student misses school on separate, non-sequential days.
- **Consecutive:** when a student misses school for two or more days in a row. Parents/caregivers should expect to be contacted by an Attendance Counsellor if a student reaches 11-15 days of consecutive absences.

Impact of Absences on Student Learning

Absent days throughout the school year can add up quickly. The table below shows how various student absences equate to lost instructional time:

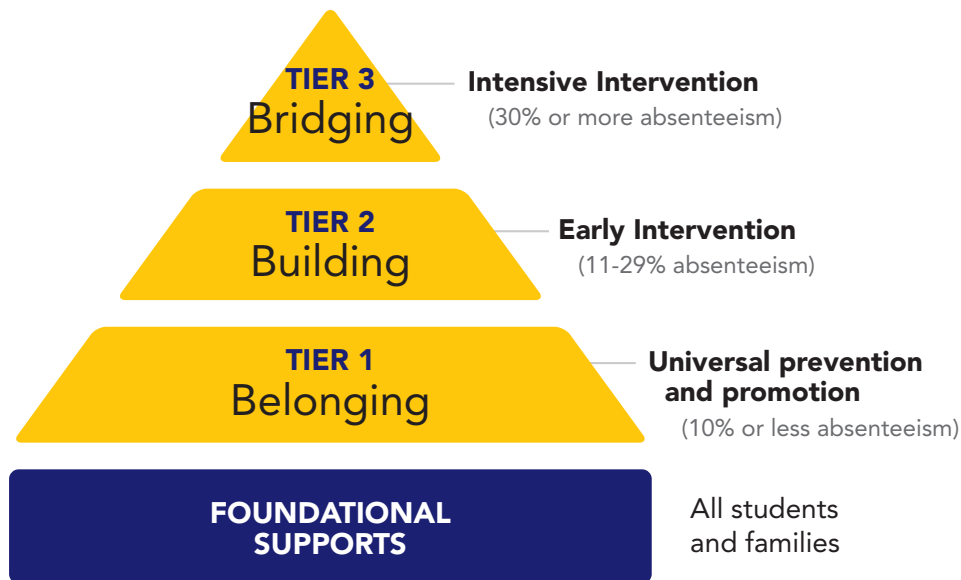
Elementary Students – Grades 1-8 <i>(Based on 187 instructional days per year)</i>			
<i>Percentage of time absent</i>	<i>Missed days per month (approximately)</i>	<i>Missed days per year (approximately)</i>	<i>Hours of missed schooling per year (approximately)</i>
10% or less	2 days or less	20 days or less	100 hours or less
11-29%	3-5 days	21-59 days	101-299 hours
30% or more	6 days or more	60 days or more	300 hours or more
Secondary Students – Grades 9-12 <i>(Based on 92 periods of instruction per class, per semester)</i>			
<i>Percentage of time absent</i>	<i>Missed periods in a class per month</i>	<i>Missed periods in a class per semester</i>	<i>Hours of missed schooling in a class per semester</i>
10% or less	2 periods or less	10 periods or less	11 hours or less
11-29%	3-5 periods	11-29 periods	12-32 hours
30% or more	6 periods or more	30 periods or more	33 hours or more

Why Students Miss School

Students miss school for various reasons, and each situation is unique. When a student is missing school, we need to approach the conversation with curiosity, working with families to understand the root cause. This helps us find solutions that meet each student's specific needs. Some of the common reasons for missing school are:

- Medical issues or illnesses that may require frequent appointments or treatment
- Not feeling safe or comfortable at school due to racism, discrimination, oppression or bullying
- Stress related to learning, social issues or difficulty in relationships
- Difficulty adjusting to transitions or separating from their parent/caregiver
- Symptoms of mental health concerns interfering with daily life
- Family needs at home (e.g. caring for a sick parent/caregiver or babysitting a younger sibling)
- Difficulty accessing transportation
- Life-changing event or emergency in the family
- Extended visits to home communities/countries
- Technology or substance over-use
- Financial insecurity
- Sleep issues

A Multi-Tiered Approach to Attendance and Re-Engagement



The OCDSB Attendance Strategy uses a tiered intervention model to make sure we are meeting each student's needs, from proactive school-wide support to personalized help. This approach allows us to address attendance concerns at different levels, ensuring every student has the chance to succeed.

Foundational strategies are practices for the whole school that promote [positive conditions for learning](#), which make students more likely to attend and be engaged.

Tier 1: Belonging strategies aim to encourage better attendance for all students and prevent absenteeism before it impacts their academic achievement.

Tier 2: Building interventions help students who are at risk of chronic absenteeism (such as those who have missed up to 29% of the school year). We provide personalized support to remove barriers to attendance for these students and their families.

Tier 3: Bridging interventions provide intensive, customized support to students missing the most school (30% or more of the school year). This often involves working with schools and other agencies, such as health, housing and social services, to address complex challenges and help students get back on track.

OCDSB Attendance Strategy

Goal: increase the percentage of students attending 90% of the time			
Tiers	Board-Wide Actions	School-Based Actions	Classroom Actions
<p>TIER 1:</p> <p>BELONGING</p> <p>– Universal Prevention and Promotion</p> <p>(10% or less)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement an attendance promotion campaign • Provide parent/caregiver resources about the importance of attendance and strategies to support school attendance • Review and maintain policies and procedures around attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on school-wide initiatives that create welcoming spaces that foster a sense of belonging for all students • Reach out to families early to establish positive communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build meaningful connections with students • Establish regular positive communications with parents/caregivers about what is happening in the classroom, show genuine interest in getting to know students and explain the benefits of regular school attendance
<p>TIER 2:</p> <p>BUILDING</p> <p>– Early Intervention</p> <p>(11-29%)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather data on student attendance and use trends to identify areas where targeted support is needed • Maintain and promote early intervention supports for schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an attendance support team at each site and determine key contacts for families • Use school-based data to determine area of focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice and reflect upon who is absent and when • Bring names forward to school administration when concerns are emerging
<p>TIER 3:</p> <p>BRIDGING</p> <p>– Intensive Intervention</p> <p>(30% or more)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and grow partnerships with community organizations to support students returning to school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Attendance Counsellors to create plans of support for students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continually work with parents/caregivers to further understand the barriers for students

Roles and Responsibilities in Promoting Attendance

A successful attendance strategy requires a commitment from all members of the school community. This section outlines how staff across the District will work to support student attendance.

School Board Leadership and Administration

The school board is responsible for making sure that all schools handle attendance in a supportive and consistent way.

- **Policy and Procedures:** Ensure clear policies and procedures for tracking attendance, identifying absenteeism and implementing support systems.
- **Data Monitoring:** Provide centralized tools and support for schools to accurately monitor attendance data and identify trends.
- **Resource Allocation:** Allocate resources for attendance initiatives, including funding for Attendance Counsellors, social workers and targeted interventions.
- **Professional Development:** Offer training and professional development for all staff on trauma-informed and anti-oppressive practices, identity-affirming mental health promotion and prevention and effective strategies for addressing attendance barriers.

School Administrators

Principals and Vice-Principals are pivotal in cultivating a positive school culture and leading attendance initiatives at their school.

- **Cultivating a Welcoming Environment:** Foster an inclusive and engaging school climate where students feel safe, valued and included.
- **Data-Driven Decisions:** Regularly review school-level attendance data to identify patterns and specific student needs, implementing targeted interventions as required.
- **Communication:** Communicate openly and often with families about attendance policies and why regular attendance is important.
- **Collaboration with Staff:** Facilitate collaboration among teachers, support staff and Attendance Counsellors to address student attendance concerns.

School-Based Staff

Educators are the first to make connections with students and help those who are struggling.

- **Relationship Building:** Develop strong, positive relationships with students and their families, creating a supportive, inclusive classroom environment.

- **Early Identification:** Monitor daily attendance and identify students who are often absent or late.
- **Proactive Outreach:** Reach out to families when absences begin to occur, expressing concern and offering support, starting from a place of curiosity and compassion.
- **Engaging Instruction:** Ensure lessons are engaging and relevant, emphasizing the value of classroom participation and collaborative activities.

Central Support Staff

Social Workers (Attendance Counsellors) – Psychology Staff Members, Itinerant Educational Assistants, Student Support Coordinators and Graduation Coaches

Attendance Counsellors and other support staff provide specialized intervention and connect students to resources in the community.

- **Case Management:** Work directly with students and families facing chronic absenteeism to identify barriers and develop individualized support plans.
- **Liaison with Community Services:** Connect families with appropriate community agencies and services (e.g., mental health, housing, food security, transportation).
- **Advocacy:** Advocate for students and families within the school system and the community to ensure they can access the supports they need.

Resources

Parents/Caregivers

OCDSB Parent Portal – School Attendance
ocdsb.ca/parent-portal/supporting-our-youth/school-attendance

PLEO – Parents’ Lifeline of Eastern Ontario
pleo.on.ca/information-brochures

CMHO – Children’s Mental Health Ontario
family.cmho.org/school-avoidance