ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE -"EVERY DAY COUNTS" TOOLKIT

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Introduction

Dear Principals,

Northland School Division No.61 (NSD61) and its school communities have worked together for many years to address student attendance at all grade levels. Despite the progress we have made, far too many continue to miss so much school that their academic futures are at risk. Chronic absence is a trend that starts for some children as early as kindergarten and continues unabated leading to dropout and failure.

With authority and direction from the Northland School Division No.61 (NSD61) Board an *Attendance Improvement Committee* was established in April, 2014 to review current Division attendance practices and offer recommendations for improvement. The committee met on four separate occasions between April, May, June and July, 2014 and future meetings are scheduled for September, October and November, 2014.

Attendance Improvement Committee members include:

 - Louis Cardinal, Board Advisory Committee Member, Peerless Lake
 - Kim Courtoreille, Board Advisory Committee Member, Wabasca
 - Robin Guild, Board Advisory Committee Member, Wabasca
 - Elmer Gullion, Board Advisory Committee Member, Trout Lake
 - Ken Shaw, Board Advisory Committee Member, Gift Lake
 - Maureen Chernipeski, Pedagogical Supervisor
 - Charles Greening, Teacher, Mistassiniy School
 - Curtis Walty, Communications Coordinator, Central Office
 - Peter Bailey, Teacher/Assistant Principal, St. Theresa School
 - Bernard Woodfine, Teacher/Principal, Conklin Community School
 - Nora Yellowknee, First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Curriculum Consultant
 - Don Tessier, Associate Superintendent, Central Office

To help schools increase awareness about the importance of student attendance, the *Attendance Improvement Committee* is pleased to provide you with an *Attendance Improvement Initiative-Every Day Counts* Toolkit. This toolkit offers resources, information and poster samples to help you partner with parents/guardians, community members/leaders, industry/business leaders and community agencies to ensure more students attend every day.

We hope that the toolkit will assist you and your *School Attendance Committee* to mobilize your school staff and the school community to address chronic absenteeism.
The toolkit contains attendance resources and strategies that support a prevention and early intervention approach to school attendance. The toolkit will be of some assistance to you in the following areas:

• Identify opportunities where you can personally convey the message that going to school every day matters to success in school and life

• Mobilize supporters

• Set goals and targets after reviewing school attendance data

• Strengthen or establish your current system of recognizing good and improved attendance.

• Undertake vital self-assessment

Please join us in our efforts to ensure students go to school every day so they can achieve their hopes and dreams. Improving attendance is an investment in their future

Educators and School Administrators

Attendance Improvement Initiative-Every Day Counts Communication Plan

The Attendance Improvement Initiative Communication Plan is designed to help schools develop ideas to address school attendance. The plan assists schools with the formation of *School Attendance Committees,* answering questions relating to strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and identifying target audiences, communication materials and strategies.

Identify key stakeholders in the school community to join the *School Attendance Committee*. For example; teachers, school administrators', students, parents, Elders, community members/leaders, industry/business leaders and community agency leaders.

NAME	Section of the school community represented

GOAL:

What do we want to achieve?

1.
2.
3.

SWOT ANALYSIS:

Strengths (list areas of school strength and advantages offered to teachers, school administrators, students, parents, Elders, community members/leaders, industry/business leaders and community agency leaders)

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

Weaknesses (List all areas that are weaknesses or perceived weaknesses and areas identified for improvement)

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

Opportunities (List new initiatives or other areas of change the school could capitalize on in the coming year)

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

Threats (List issues or circumstances that could negatively impact your school, how it's perceived and how it operates)

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

Attendance Communication Materials (List the full complement of tools you have or want to have to assist in reaching your goals)

Checklist	Status/needs
Website	
Brochure	
Video	
Signage	
Advertising	
Speaking appearances	
Public events	

Target Markets (List key groups you can target your message to in order to reach students, parents, Elders, community members/leaders, industry/business leaders and community agency leaders. How can you reach the people you need to reach?)

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

Key Communication Strategies (What do you need to do to achieve your goal(s) this year? Examples could be increase media exposure for the school or work with community agencies to increase understanding of the school and what it has to offer)

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

Tactics, Calendar, Staffing, Assessment and Budget

For each strategy, map out your tactics (what do you need to do to create and implement the key strategies you've identified?), timeline (when will you implement these tactics?), responsible party(ies) (who will be responsible for the specific tactic?), evaluation measure (how will you know if your tactic worked and produced results?) and any budget implication.

NOTE: The tables below are meant to be used as a guideline for developing strategies. Use information from above to help you develop strategies. If you have more than three strategies, copy and a paste one of the tables below to the next page.

Strategy 1

Tactic	When	Person Responsible	Evaluation Measure	Budget
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

Strategy 2

Tactic	When	Person Responsible	Evaluation Measure	Budget
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

Strategy 3

Tactic	When	Person Responsible	Evaluation Measure	Budget
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

Establishing School Attendance Incentives

School attendance is a simple, easily understood measure of student performance. One strategy for improving attendance is engaging students, parents, community members/leaders, Elders, industry/business leaders and community agency leaders in a campaign that offers positive rewards for getting to school on time.

Overarching Issues to Consider:

➢ **Attendance incentives are most effective when part of a comprehensive approach** that includes outreach to families with more significant challenges to attendance. Incentives should be part of creating a school-wide culture and emphasis on attendance and accompanied by a deep commitment to ensuring students are engaged in the classroom once they show up.

➢ **Incentives don't need to be costly**. Simple rewards—recognition from peers and the school through certificates or assemblies, extra recess time, homework passes, even dancing in the hallways—go a long way toward motivating students. Ask students what they consider a meaningful incentive.

➢ **Interclass competition is a powerful motivator**. The sense of competition between classes (for example, a party for the class with the best monthly attendance) can be a powerful motivator. Such strategies encourage students to feel accountable to each other for attending class. To broaden awareness and involve more of the community, schools should also consider launching inter-school competitions for best attendance.

➢ **Avoid recognizing only perfect attendance**. Perfect attendance is not always the goal since it is not wise to encourage children to come to school when they're sick. Students should be rewarded for improved attendance, not just perfect records. Offering weekly perfect attendance awards can allow students to still have a chance to succeed the next week if they are absent.

➢ **Reward timeliness, not just showing up to school**. Since tardiness also has an adverse impact on learning, many schools only count on-time attendance toward rewards. Consider taking this approach to ensure children are arriving to class on-time.

➢ **Send home information highlighting both the value of attendance and incentives and the consequences of poor attendance**. Ensure families know about the incentive program, why school attendance matters for academic success and understand school policies when poor attendance results in failing a course or being retained. Sanctions should never be used without incentives.

> **Offer incentives for families, not just students**. Often, families appreciate access to resources such as food baskets, transportation passes, etc.

> **Implement incentives school wide**. In order to foster a culture of attendance, every classroom needs to participate!

Adapted with permission from materials provided by Attendance Works (www.attendanceworks.org)

Ideas for Incentives:

• Positive comments to children

• Positive notes home to parents

• Extra time at the computer

• Free homework pass

• First-in-line privileges for lunch or dismissal

• Smoothie coupon

• Pencils, pens, stickers, posters, book covers, book marks, etc.

• Team certificate for the best record or most improved record

• Name on the "Attendance Wall" in the classroom

• Chance to act as teacher's assistant

• Recognition during morning announcements

• Certificate/award at student assembly

• Breakfast/lunch with the principal, superintendent, Official Trustee, Local School Board Committee members, First Nation Chief, Métis Settlement Council, mayor, etc.

• School supplies, i.e. pencil with logo

• Lunch/smoothie or movie party for class with best attendance

• "School money" for the school store

• Choice of donated products, like movie tickets, gift certificates, discounts and passes to local activities or venues

• Traveling trophy for grade-level classroom with the best monthly attendance

• Attendance T-shirts/hats/buttons

• Age-appropriate rewards for most improved attendance

Sample Back to School Letter to Parents/Guardians

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Our goal this year is to ensure that every student attends school regularly.

Showing up for school has a huge impact on a student's academic success starting in kindergarten and continuing through high school. Even as children grow older and more independent, families play a key role in making sure students get to school safely every day and understand why attendance is so important for success in school and in life.

We realize some absences are unavoidable due to health problems or other circumstances. But, we also know that when students miss too much school— regardless of the reason – it can cause them to fall behind academically. Your child is less likely to succeed if he or she is chronically absent—which means missing 18 or more days over the course of an entire school year. Research shows:

- Children chronically absent in kindergarten and 1st grade are much less likely to read at grade level by the end of 3rd grade.
- By 6th grade, chronic absence is a proven early warning sign for students at risk for dropping out of school.
- By 9th grade good attendance can predict graduation rates even better than 8th grade test scores.

Absences can add up quickly. A child is chronically absent if he or she misses just two days every month!!

<u>Clearly going to school regularly matters!</u>

We don't want your child to fall behind in school and get discouraged. Please ensure that your child attends school every day and arrives on time. Here are a few practical tips to help support regular attendance:

- Make sure your children keep a regular bedtime and establish a morning routine.
- Lay out clothes and pack backpacks the night before.
- Ensure your children go to school every day unless they are truly sick
- Avoid scheduling vacations or doctor's appointments when school is in session.
- Talk to teachers and counselors for advice if your children feel anxious about going to school.
- Develop back up plans for getting to school if something comes up. Call on a family member, neighbor, or another parent to take your child to school.

Let us know how we can best support you and your children so that they can show up for school on time every day. We want your child to be successful in school! If you have any questions or need more information please contact your child's school.

Sincerely,

Attendance Routines & Practices

In an effort to improve school attendance, administrators are asked to implement the following attendance routines and practices:

- ➢ Student attendance is entered into Maplewood on a daily basis

- ➢ Teachers are requested to enter student attendance into Maplewood using their ConnectED profile. Principals are asked to ensure that teachers have a ConnectED profile. The Records Management Clerk for central office will assist with teacher profile set up and, if necessary, the resetting of teacher passwords.

- ➢ When the principal is certain that a student no longer attends the school, he/she are requested to report the exit date into Maplewood which will then show the student is not attending school. If this action is not taken then the student record will show as "Present" and skew the attendance data.

- ➢ At month end, the following Maplewood attendance reports are due at Central Office: (a) Principal Monthly Reports (PMR), (b) Student Admissions, (c) Student Retirements and (d) Daily Attendance Registers.

What can the school community do to support student attendance efforts?

What can schools do to improve student attendance?

➢ Ensure teachers take daily attendance so students know someone cares when they miss school.

➢ Ensure all classrooms are nurturing and engaging so children want to come to school every day.

➢ Invest in accurate collection and entry of attendance data into student data systems.

➢ Calculate and analyze chronic absence and good attendance to discern patterns for students and schools.

➢ Partner with families and community groups to develop and address attendance challenges.

➢ Educate parents and children about the importance of attendance starting in the early years.

➢ Develop and implement a school-wide system of incentives and rewards for good attendance

➢ Reach out to frequently absent students to find out in a supportive manner why they are missing school and what would help them attend more regularly.

➢ Invest in professional development to help teachers and administrators understand chronic absence and the power of positive school climates

What can school administration do to support student attendance improvement efforts?

➢ Help educate families and students about the importance of attendance and helping each other get to school.

➢ Partner with the school community to establish a system of incentives for good attendance.

➢ Reach out to chronically absent students and their families to identify and address barriers to attendance.

➢ Advocate for your school to set up an attendance team charged with analyzing data on chronic absence. Participate in the team and help your school community identify common barriers to getting to school and effective interventions.

➢ Work with teachers to help chronically absent students make up for material they missed while they were absent.

➢ Track, monitor and share information about student attendance.

➢ Work with central office on setting attendance policies, including late comers.

What can parents do to support improved student attendance?

➢ Establish and stick to the basic routines (going to bed early, waking up on time, etc.) that will help your child develop the habit of on-time attendance.

➢ Talk to your child about why going to school every day is critical and important unless they are sick. If your child seems reluctant to go to school, find out why and work with the teacher, administrator or afterschool provider to get them excited about going to school.

➢ Come up with back up plans for who to turn to (another family member, a neighbor or fellow parents) to help you get your child to school if something comes up (e.g. another child gets sick, your car breaks down, [missed the bus] etc.).

➢ Reach out for help if you are experiencing tough times (e.g. transportation, unstable housing, loss of a job, health problems) that make it difficult to get your child to school. Other parents, your child's teacher, principal, social worker, school [counselor], afterschool providers or community agencies can help you problem solve or connect you to a needed resource.

➢ If your child is absent, work with the teacher to make sure she or he has an opportunity to learn and make up for the academics missed.

What can Early Child Care Providers do to support student attendance improvement efforts?

➢ Collect and analyze attendance data for each child not just at the classroom or program level so you notice when chronic absence or tardiness is a problem.

➢ Hold an activity at the beginning of the morning – such as show and tell – that children are excited to participate in and don't want to miss.

➢ Educate children and parents about the importance of on time attendance. If you are in a neighborhood with high rates of chronic absence, partner with schools to build awareness throughout the community.

➢ Recognize and reward parents who regularly get their children to school on-time!

➢ Reach out to families who have trouble getting to your program regularly and help connect them to resources that could improve their attendance.

➢ Help families connect and help each other attend regularly through carpools and ride sharing (there's nothing like peer pressure to get your kids up and out the door).

➢ Train all adults in your early childhood program (teachers and volunteers) on the importance of attendance, so there is shared awareness of the prevalence and negative consequences of chronic absence.

➢ Partner with health providers to screen and assess the level of unmet physical and mental health needs among children and then use the results to help forge partnerships to address the most significant health issues.

➢ Build public awareness and consensus.

What can Central Office do to support improved student attendance efforts?

➢ **Leadership:** Set attendance goals and division policy.

➢ **Data:** Ensure attendance data is accurately entered and reports are produced, widely available, and regularly reviewed.

➢ **Attendance Incentives**: Promote effective school wide approaches to recognizing good and improved attendance.

➢ **Individual and Programmatic Intervention:** Use both individual intervention and systemic problem solving.

➢ **Community Partnerships:** Help schools identify and forge partnerships with community agencies.

➢ **Peer Learning & Professional Development:** Create opportunities for school staff to learn about the importance of attendance and share effective strategies for improving student attendance.

➢ **Student Data Base:** Ensure the [Division] has a longitudinal student data base—ideally beginning in preschool—that tracks attendance for each student using a unique identifier.

➢ **Policy Priority for Chronic Absence:** Make chronic absence a policy priority and work with schools to identify contributing factors and include in school improvement plans.

➢ **Common Definition for Chronic Absence:** Works towards developing a common definition for chronic absence and request that it be tracked.

➢ **Share Attendance Data:** Support sharing [non-specific] data with health and social services agencies to target intervention efforts.

➢ **Financial Support:** Seek grants for attendance tracking and chronic absence reduction.

These lists are taken with permission from materials provided by Attendance Works (www.attendanceworks.org)

Bulletin Board Advertisement Examples

These images are examples of posters or bulletin boards to promote good attendance in our communities. Schools can work with the Communications Coordinator to develop posters with similar messages.

Help our children achieve excellence!
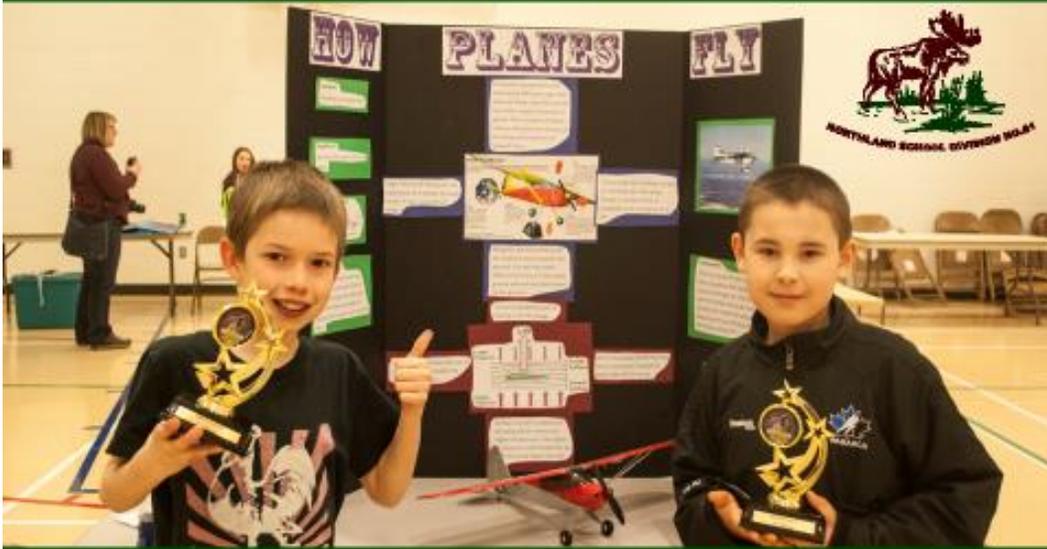
Attendance boosts school success!

Is your child at school today?

Youth of today, tomorrows leaders!

Radio Advertisement Example

Radio public service announcements (PSAs) are offered as a community service by stations and are reserved for non-profit organizations publicizing initiatives, events or services and requesting volunteers. PSAs can play an important role in an overall communications strategy and can be done quickly with a short script and few minutes of recording time. Schools can work with the Communications Coordinator to develop public services announcements and help begin conversations with local radio stations.

Example PSA:

Did you know that your children can suffer academically if they miss 10 percent of school days? That works out to just one day every two weeks, and that can happen before you know it. So get your children off to a good start. Make sure they attend school on time every day….Because Every Day Counts!

Sources Consulted

Attendance Works - http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Attendance-Works-PPT-v-4.pdf

Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2012). *Chronic Absenteeism: Summarizing What We Know From Nationally Available Data*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools.