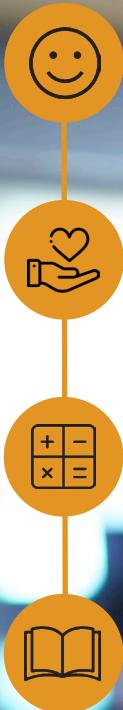




Department of
Education



Every day matters

10-point plan to improve attendance

Our commitment

Our goal is to ensure every student in Western Australia has the opportunity to gain an education and achieve their full potential. Attending school or alternative learning arrangements is a critical foundation for unlocking this opportunity.

We know that every day at school contributes to learning, which leads to better engagement and higher academic achievement. This sets students up for life and creates better social and economic outcomes for Western Australian families and communities.

Improving attendance requires addressing complex factors both inside and outside the school gate, from student learning to community safety. That's why a number of Western Australian Government agencies have committed to working collaboratively to support a more holistic approach to attendance across the State. This plan represents a cross-agency commitment to a new way of doing things that is community-led and strengths based.

We commit to:

- **working with communities to develop and implement approaches that meet their own unique needs and aspirations, based on a shared understanding of what works and what doesn't. This includes earlier support for communities when addressing factors impacting attendance**
- **holding ourselves and each other accountable for outcomes, in recognition that we can all benefit from improved attendance, whether that's better health, getting a job or avoiding contact with justice authorities**
- **culturally responsive approaches that respond to the diverse needs, backgrounds, experiences and knowledge of communities**
- **thinking differently about learning and acknowledging that it does not always take place inside the four walls of a traditional classroom. We need to explore more flexible ways for students to learn that engages and inspires them to attend school and explore a variety of endorsed learning pathways.**

This plan sets out the actions we will take together to strengthen student attendance. We look forward to working more closely with families, schools, communities and service providers across the State.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which our students live and are educated

We acknowledge parents, families and communities as the first educators of their children. Aboriginal people have a long tradition of teaching and learning through sharing their connections with the land and sea, and through their stories and lived experiences that are passed from generation to generation. We recognise and value the learning that Aboriginal children bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom.

We acknowledge the numerous people across the State - including principals, teachers, education support staff, departmental, central and regional services staff, and community members – who contributed to the development of this plan. We would like to thank the Steering Group for supporting the development of this plan. Due to the nature of complex out of school factors the Steering Group included representation from a wide range of State Government agencies that contribute to attendance. We also acknowledge the support of the Research Subcommittee, which provided the Steering Group with expert advice.

The use of the term ‘Aboriginal’ in this report respectfully refers to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders. The term ‘parent’ refers to parents and/or carers with responsibility for the care of their children. The term ‘family’ refers to parents, carers, families and extended families, Elders and community members involved in the education of their children.

The term ‘community’ is used broadly to refer to the local people, groups and organisations in and around schools in remote, regional and metropolitan areas. This includes, but is not limited to, students, families, principals, teachers and other school staff, community leaders, local government agency staff and not-for-profit organisations.



Why school attendance matters

Regular attendance at school is fundamental to student learning

While most students in Western Australian public schools attend regularly, there is a number who do not.

More than a century of research shows that students who do not attend school regularly tend to have lower rates of school achievement and are more likely to drop out of school early. Poor attendance patterns can start as early as Kindergarten, and are linked to long-term cycles of declining attendance, poor engagement and lower levels of student achievement.

For all students across all years, every day at school contributes to learning. There is no ‘safe’ threshold for non-attendance, but more significant effects are likely to occur when students are absent for substantial periods:

- Overall, the learning outcomes for students from highly disadvantaged backgrounds decline more rapidly with any absence from school, particularly in the early years.
- Students with higher rates of achievement are not immune to the potential impacts of absence. These students often experience larger drops in academic achievement through absence.
- While a majority of students who miss school do so for legitimate reasons, such as illness, it is concerning that about a third of all student absences are unexplained. This type of absence is most strongly associated with lower achievement outcomes.

Education sets students up for life

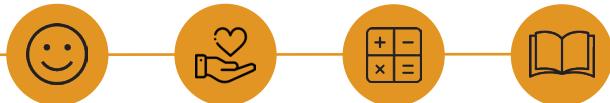
Research also shows that lower rates of school attendance and disengagement from school can be linked to unemployment, lower income, riskier health behaviour and contact with justice authorities.

Not completing school can restrict a student’s future opportunities, including their ability to fully participate in social, civic and economic life. In almost every aspect, this is amplified for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.



Hancock, K.J; Adams, E; Zubrick, S.R (2020). Risks and Consequences of Low School Attendance: A Literature Review for the Department of Education. Telethon Kids Institute.

Hancock, K.J; Shepherd, C; Lawrence, D and Zubrick, S.R (2013). Student Attendance and Educational Outcomes: Every Day Counts. Telethon Kids Institute.

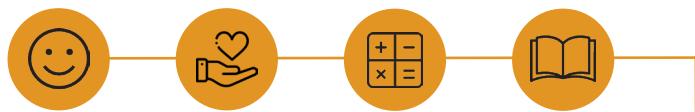


Factors impacting school attendance

The causes of student absence are multi-dimensional, complex and numerous. They are often considered in isolation when, in reality, students may face a range of compounding issues. This is more pronounced when students experience these issues in their early years.

Students are most likely to thrive and attend school when the following factors are met:

 Student factors	 Family factors	 Community factors	 Service factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- school readiness and early childhood development- mental and physical health- feeling safe and a sense of belonging- positive social connections- academic achievement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- education is valued and prioritised- connected to culture and community- resilience and self determination- financial security- stable housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- sound play areas- further education, training and employment opportunities- safe environments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- ability to engage students with diverse needs- positive relationships with students and families- monitor student attendance and provide early intervention support- consistent and clear policies.

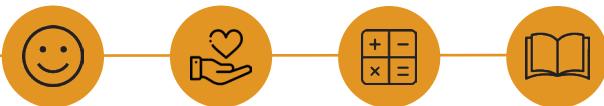
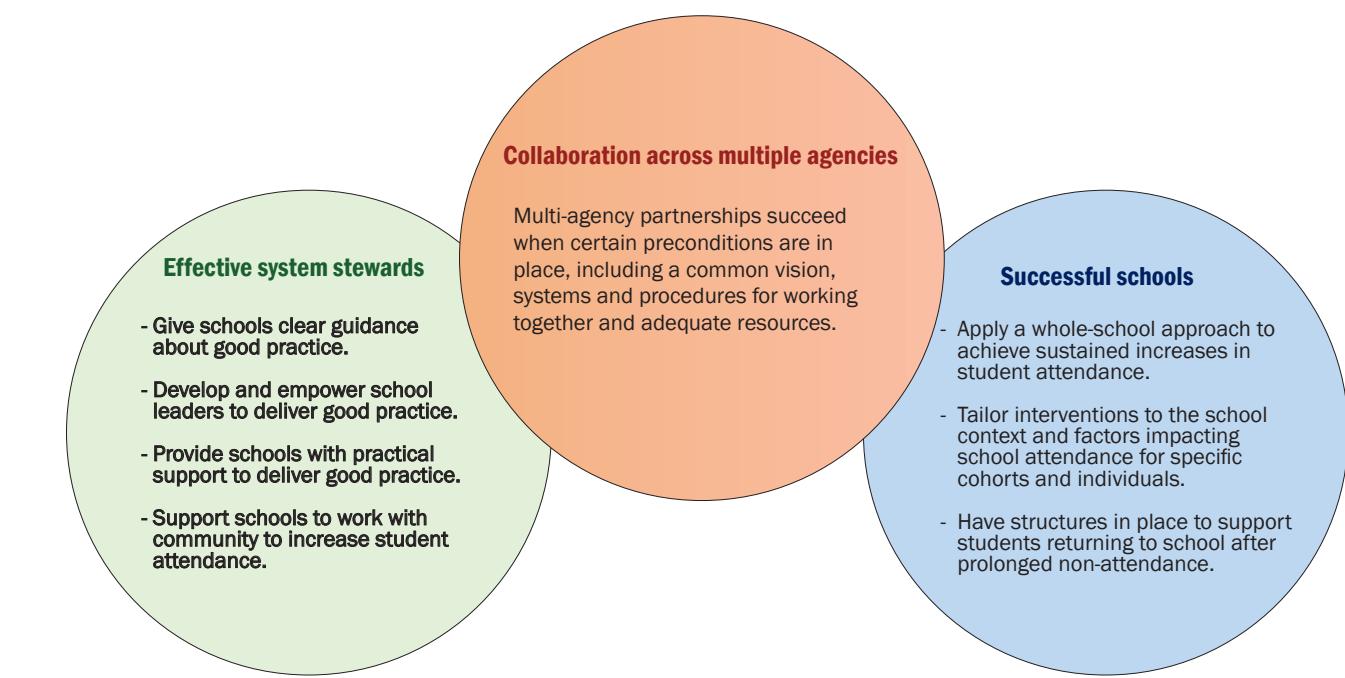


What we know about what works

Attendance patterns and attitudes to school and learning are formed early. Therefore, children need early and sustained support from their families, schools and broader communities to develop positive attendance behaviours. Children who develop good attendance habits in the early years are more likely to continue them throughout their school years.

What practitioners in the field say is important for improving school attendance:	What approaches that have been shown to work successfully:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- localised and context-specific solutions- strong relationships, and shared responsibility between the student, family, school, community and service providers- early identification and intervention in non-attendance, including through the use of granular data- unconditional positive regard for the student- meeting students' basic health and wellbeing needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- incentive programs for students and families (eg: access to recreation facilities)- student engagement programs, including extracurricular and out-of-school activities- literacy and numeracy programs, particularly in the early years- nutrition programs (eg: free breakfast)- providing transport to and from school- pre-school services such as playgroups- incorporating cultural activities in schools.

Strengthening student attendance requires a whole community approach.



We have worked with key government agencies and stakeholders to develop a 10-point plan that includes supports at every level of the system, all of which are designed to improve attendance outcomes for students.

The plan is based on a community-led approach, as opposed to ‘one-size-fits-all’ interventions that may not be suitable for all schools and communities. As part of this approach we will:

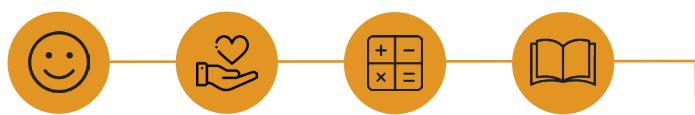
- **focus on the needs of the individual student and work with communities to tailor interventions that build on their strengths, and address their particular needs, challenges, constraints and aspirations**
- **acknowledge that schools have significant discretion around how and where they facilitate learning, including outside the traditional classroom setting**
- **prioritise building and maintaining collaborative relationships between students, their families, schools and key service providers**
- **intervene early and tackle the full breadth of social and economic factors that impact student attendance**
- **implement approaches that are based on evidence, including ongoing evaluation, and a shared appetite to test bold interventions.**

The plan seeks to improve attendance outcomes for students by:

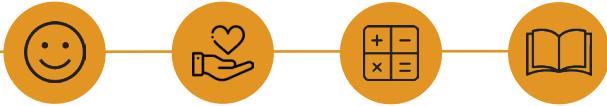
- **improving accountability and coordination at a system level**
- **strengthening the supports and resources provided to schools and communities**
- **working with communities to implement actions that work for them.**

The plan sets out how we will work together with families, schools and communities, government agencies and service providers to strengthen student attendance.

We intend to embed the plan across agencies to ensure effective implementation. This includes aligning the plan into Western Australia’s Implementation Plan for the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which will be developed in partnership with the Aboriginal Advisory Council of Western Australia.



The plan is underpinned by the following principles with the needs of the student at the centre.



Community-led action		Actions
ACTION 1	Support local action groups to co-design attendance strategies that meet the unique needs and aspirations of their community.	
ACTION 2	Establish cross-agency initiatives to support the delivery of local attendance strategies.	
ACTION 3	Pilot a flexible wrap-around services model in remote communities enabling multiple government agencies to work together to holistically address both in and out-of-school factors impacting school attendance.	
Support for schools, families and communities		
ACTION 4	Support every student to gain an education and achieve their full potential by attending school or an alternative learning arrangement.	
ACTION 5	Establish an online one-stop-shop for schools, families and communities with information and resources to support the delivery of local attendance strategies.	
ACTION 6	Introduce a new attendance data system and an early warning system for schools, as part of a broader plan to collect and use attendance data more effectively.	
ACTION 7	Enhance recruitment, retention and development of school staff in remote areas.	
System action and accountability		
ACTION 8	Embed culturally responsive approaches to strengthen student attendance, including incorporating local Aboriginal culture and language, building collaborative community relationships and defining what student success looks like in local contexts.	
ACTION 9	Raise community awareness about the importance of school attendance through promotional campaigns.	
ACTION 10	Establish mechanisms to facilitate young people's input into their education.	

Community-led action

Best practice research and consultation with schools and communities tells us that ‘one size fits all’ and ‘top down’ approaches are generally not effective. Schools and communities need to be able to design and deliver their own approaches to improve school attendance.

Many schools and communities are already undertaking promotion, prevention and response approaches to support student attendance, based on:

- **the rate and type of absences within the school**
- **individual students and specific student cohorts**
- **the community context**
- **the local understanding of what works to strengthen school attendance.**

However, we also know that the quality and extent of initiatives varies significantly across different regions and communities. Community-led action enables schools and communities to take ownership of school attendance and tailor actions that build on their strengths, and meet the specific needs and aspirations of their community. It fosters buy in from all members of the community, including students, families, cultural leaders, government agencies and service providers. This plan aims to strengthen community-led action to improve school attendance.

Collaborative approach

Best practice research and consultation with schools and communities also tells us that cross-agency collaboration can create the right conditions for effective community-led approaches to improve school attendance. In particular, it:

- **provides a range of integrated services to support complex community and societal issues impacting school attendance**
- **creates the catalyst for whole community approaches to improve school attendance, and brings a range of different stakeholders together**
- **champions best-practice across different policy areas and supports communities to tailor their approaches.**

Effective cross-agency collaboration takes a holistic and strength based approach to meet the needs of students and looks for opportunities to better integrate services. They also work effectively with non-government organisations.

Data

High-quality data collection, use and monitoring is critical to understanding how attendance is playing out at an individual, community and regional level. It also helps to:

- **identify factors impacting attendance**
- **design and deliver approaches to strengthen attendance**
- **test whether the approaches are working.**

Schools can access data about attendance and other key indicators. However, we can strengthen the capability of schools and communities to use this data more effectively. This includes using existing data in new ways to better understand factors impacting attendance for individual students and specific student cohorts.