

The Attendance Board

The *School Act* requires students aged 6 to 16 to attend school on a regular and punctual basis. In 1988, the Attendance Board was formed to work with schools, students and families to seek solutions for students whose attendance is unsatisfactory.

The Attendance Board is comprised of a diverse group of individuals appointed by the Minister of Education from the community at large. These individuals act in a quasi-judicial capacity to hear cases and work collaboratively with all the parties involved to improve attendance.

How Does the Attendance Board Work?

Students and families are referred to the Attendance Board by school authorities when local efforts to improve attendance are not succeeding. If the referral is accepted, the Attendance Board will work progressively through three steps, interrupting the process at any step if the student's attendance improves.

1. *A warning letter*—sent to the student and parents/guardians advising them of the legal requirement to attend school and the potential for action by the Attendance Board.

2. *A case conference*—an informal meeting between a member of the Attendance Board and the student, parents and school officials to gather information and hopefully solve the problem without the need for further action.
3. *A formal hearing*—in which the student and parents/guardians are subpoenaed to attend. A panel of three members meets with the student, family and school officials and any support agencies involved with the family. Formal orders are issued directing the student and family to take certain actions.

What Happens at a Formal Hearing?

Once a formal hearing is called, a panel is convened to work with the student, family and school. The panel, which will stay with the case until it is closed, gathers information on the student's ability, attendance history, family background and other

issues or challenges that may be relevant. All parties are engaged to explore reasons for non-attendance and to suggest solutions. Supporting documentation, such as attendance and academic reports, are received and entered as exhibits.

Following the information gathering session, the hearing is adjourned to allow the panel to develop a legally binding Order that directs the student and family to take measures which, in the opinion of the panel, have the greatest potential to improve the student's attendance.

The Order may identify the need for outside support agencies, enhanced educational testing for the student or direct the student to a different school or program. The panel also has the ability to impose a monetary penalty against the family (not exceeding \$100/day to a maximum of \$1000.00) for the student's non-attendance.

As a final measure, the panel may also direct the matter to the Court of Queen's Bench for further legal action and consideration.

Is the Attendance Board effective?

The sheer formality of the Board's involvement frequently serves as a catalyst for improvement. Together with an approach that fosters openness and sharing, information frequently comes to light that allows targeted support for the student and their family.

On average, 65% of the students referred show marked improvement in their attendance.

When should a school make a referral?

Early intervention is critical to dealing with attendance issues. Poor attendance in elementary school is a strong indicator of becoming a dropout later in the student's educational career. Once the cycle begins, poor attendance can be difficult to turn around if not addressed in a timely fashion.

If local efforts do not appear to be succeeding, a referral to the Attendance Board may prove to be a useful step. For copies of the referral form, contact:

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