



Employee and Workplace Health

ATTENDANCE SUPPORT

District Guide

OKANAGAN LABOUR RELATIONS COUNCIL

★ WELLNESS

★ DISABILITY MANAGEMENT

★ ATTENDANCE SUPPORT

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Introduction

Employee and Workplace Health is an integral part of organizational culture - achieving optimal conditions is the goal. Building awareness, developing concepts, creating processes and effective behaviours within the foundational pillars of Wellness, Disability Management and Attendance Support will go a long way to ensuring employees are at their best and the district is accomplishing its mission.

While it is recognized that there are times when employees may have an illness or injury that prevents them from attending work, frequent absences can disrupt overall functioning of the workplace and have a negative impact on student learning.

This document sets out the key concepts for Attendance Support, which is the promotion and monitoring of regular attendance at work. It is a means to identify and address incidental absenteeism through communications with employees whose absence rates are higher than average.

What It Is

- A process to increase awareness (for both district and certain employees) of absence rates and patterns within employee groups (support, teaching and excluded/admin)
- A way to encourage well-being and provide support to employees not already being support via existing benefits programs
- A process that promotes regular and consistent attendance at work in an atmosphere of mutual respect
- A procedural framework, tools and training for managers/admin to connect and communicate with employees about regularly attending work and to identify those who may be struggling and in need of support

Why It's Important

- Districts depend on employees contributing their knowledge and skills at work regularly and consistently – this creates a stable and positive learning environment for students and contributes to good employee morale.
- Research shows that 52% of absences can be caused by factors other than illness such as social, personal and workplace influences.
 - Improved employee wellness and attendance also provides the district with an opportunity to reduce operating costs without reducing staff and educational programs or closing facilities.
 - Direct and indirect costs related to employee absenteeism include, wages (to absent employee and to replacement employee), continuity for students, administrative costs,

benefits premiums, increased workload to others (which can lead to decreased engagement, increased turnover, increased stress and decreased productivity).

Key Elements

- Attendance Support entails the promotion and monitoring of attendance at work.
- The Attendance Support process addresses non-culpable absences only (those that are outside the control of the employee). Culpable absences are addressed via labour relations processes.
- The legal duty to accommodate requires that the District speak with employees about their absences to determine whether there is a medical disability that impacts his/her employment and may require a workplace accommodation.
- The Attendance Support Program is NOT disciplinary or punitive. It is not intended to diminish the benefits outlined in the Collective Agreement or influence employees to attend work when they are unable to do so because of illness or disability.
- Attendance Support starts with objective analysis and careful review of absence data – the absences used for this process are only those less than 6 days in length (referred to as “incidental” absences).
- Identification of employees with highest incidental absences leads to efforts to increase awareness about it and/or conduct informal conversations with employees – the focus is on providing resources and support as appropriate to the employee to assist them in the direction of improved wellness.
- Increasing awareness and offering support is initially done by way of an information package provided to employees identified through attendance data. Follow-up monitoring will take place with additional meetings scheduled if required.
- All managers and principals will be provided with the tools and training in supportive methods of communicating with employees about their attendance. This also includes addressing workplace issues that may be impacting attendance.
- Employees are not required to share medical details and all information provided will be treated as confidential and in accordance with Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy legislation.
- Employees whose absences are due to a known medical disability are dealt with through the Disability Management process.
- Other absences are tracked and managed through different internal processes and may include 3rd parties such as WSBC, JEIS, LTD, BCTF Health & Wellness and ICBC – these employees are already receiving supportive care and **they will not be included in the Attendance Support process.**

Attendance Support Process

The Attendance Support process is designed to be applied in a fair and consistent manner to all employees. The general guiding framework is as follows:

Step 1	Absence Data Analysis
Step 2	Assessment & Consultation
Step 3	Raising Awareness & Attendance Support Meeting
Step 4	Monitor Progress and Follow-up

Step 1 Absence Data Analysis

Human Resources (HR) will review absence data regularly for all employees. For the purposes of the Attendance Support process, incidental absences (up to and including 5 days in length and over a 12 month period) are analyzed to determine the average absenteeism rate for each employee group - this is used to compare individual absenteeism rates. From there the employees within the top percentiles will be reviewed (in Step 2) to determine whether they will be referred to the Attendance Support process.

Each district should have on hand their district specific instructions for extracting data from their HR database and importing it into the Absence Analysis Excel tool.

Step 2 Assessment and Consultation

Consistency, judgment and discretion are critical elements of a fair and legally defensible attendance support program.

Each person's attendance pattern tells a story. Even if an employee has relatively high absenteeism based on the data, this does not mean there is an attendance issue that should be addressed through the Attendance Support process. The goal of the Attendance Support process is to increase awareness and offer support to those employees who may be experiencing challenges with non-culpable, incidental absenteeism and may need additional assistance to attend work regularly and consistently.

Once the attendance data has been analyzed and the top 95th percentile identified, the results then need to be assessed by HR including consultation with the manager/principal. This stage of the process focuses on two key questions:

1. What is known about the story behind an employee's attendance pattern? AND

2. Given the employee's unique circumstances is it fair and reasonable to involve the employee in the attendance support process at the current time or would another process better suit his/her situation?

The following guidelines apply in the Assessment & Consultation process:

- **An employee should be referred to the Attendance Support process** if the employee has a pattern of high absenteeism compared to his/her employee group AND the district does not know the story behind the attendance pattern and/or the employee is not currently being supported by another process (such as a disability management program).
- **HR may decide NOT to refer the employee to the Attendance Support process** even though the data shows a pattern of high absenteeism if there are reasons to believe that this pattern will not continue in the future. For example:
 - The employee may be involved in a Disability Management process such as a graduated return to work program
 - It becomes known that the employee is adjusting to new medication
 - A regularly scheduled medical treatment is required over a prescribed period of time

In these circumstances, referral to the Attendance Support process would serve little purpose and should not occur. Instead HR may:

- Choose not to refer the employee to the Attendance Support process at this time - depending on their absence rate and percentile ranking in regular data reviews, referral for Attendance Support in the future may be required.
- Refer the employee to a Disability Management process such as JEIS or the BCTF Health and Wellness Program. Although absences may not initially be attributed to a medical condition, once it is known the employee should be managed by way of Disability Management processes.
- If an employee's attendance record shows a mix of absence days related to known, unique circumstances such as a medical condition, as well as absence days unrelated to a known circumstance or disability claim, the absences related to the former will be removed from the employee's attendance rate to see whether the employee's absenteeism remains high and warrants referral to the Attendance Support process.
- If information suggests an employee's pattern of absenteeism may be related to workplace factors, HR will first investigate and address relevant concerns.
- If an employee's pattern of absenteeism suggests culpable absenteeism, Human Resources will first investigate in accordance with Labour Relations processes.

To ensure consistency and fairness, it's important that notes are recorded as to why an employee's pattern of high absenteeism is not considered suitable for the Attendance Support process.

Step 3 Raising Awareness & Attendance Support Meeting

As noted above, once the data has been reviewed and suitable employees identified and referred to the Attendance Support process, HR will consult again with the manager/principal to discuss next steps. A brief informal meeting will be held between the manager and the employee during which an Attendance Support information package (provided by HR) will be provided to the employee (see ASW Admin Guides and ASW Employee Awareness folders for additional information). The information package should be shared with the employee in a sensitive and confidential manner.

The objective is to raise the employee's awareness about their absenteeism as compared to their peers, provide information about the Attendance Support process and other wellness resources (including EFAP information) they could consider accessing to support their health and wellness so they are able to attend work more consistently (see ASW Employee Awareness folder).

Prior to any conversations taking place, HR will ensure managers and principals have received training in supportive methods of communicating with employees about their attendance, and are aware of the Wellness Directory located within the information package.

ASW Admin folder contains further information about conducting supportive conversations and the key messages to convey.

Step 4 Monitor Progress and Follow-Up

A follow-up analysis of the employee's attendance data should be conducted by Human Resources approximately three months after each awareness / informal conversation phase (as part of the district's regular absence date analysis and review). After consulting with HR, managers/principals will hold an informal follow-up conversation with the employee to review and discuss changes in the employee's absence rate.

Attendance Action Plan

If the employee has continued to struggle with attendance, the manager/principal will work with HR to decide whether:

- A more formal (non-disciplinary) approach to Attendance Support is required
- Attendance will continue to be closely monitored
- Referral to the Disability Management process is appropriate

Districts can consult with OLRC to formulate an appropriate plan – ideal next steps are driven by what is known about each unique situation.

Recognizing an Employee's Attendance Efforts

If the employee's attendance has improved, there may be no need for further Attendance Support action at this time beyond acknowledging their improvement, however districts may still wish to meet with the employee at this stage. Key messages to deliver:

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- Ensure the employee knows that the Attendance Support process is intended to support employees and assist them in attending work regularly.
- Recognize that they have shown improvement in their attendance and acknowledge their efforts.
- Employees should feel that their contributions to the workplace and efforts to attend work are most valued in this process.
- Encourage the employee to continue to take advantage of the supports and benefits that are available. See if there is anything else the district can do to support continued and sustained attendance. Deliver the message that “the door is always open”.
- Explain next steps in the process - that absence data is analyzed regularly and employees will be approached according to the results and what is known about the reasons for absences.
- Invite the employee to provide comments or ask questions now or at any time (again, “the door is always open”).

In addition to having a one on one meeting, supervisors can informally promote awareness about attendance with all employees in a variety of ways including recognizing their contributions to the workplace, showing concern for their well-being and welcoming them back after being away. In other words, “we appreciate you when you’re here and we miss you when you’re not”.

Roles and Responsibilities

Human Resources oversees this process and intervenes as appropriate to ensure there is optimal participation and support.

EMPLOYEES

The improvement of attendance is heavily dependent on the participation and commitment of the employee. They are expected to:

- ✓ Attend work regularly and consistently.
- ✓ Take reasonable measures to maintain good health.
- ✓ Seek assessment, intervention, treatment or support in order to resolve barriers that may prevent regular attendance at work.
- ✓ Record and report all absences promptly and accurately.
- ✓ Attend to personal issues and routine or non-emergency appointments outside of working hours whenever possible.
- ✓ Clearly communicate a need for workplace accommodation and assist in the process by providing supporting medical and functional information to the district to support the request for accommodation.

MANAGERS/PRINCIPALS

As “front line” personnel, managers and principals play a critical role in the success of the Attendance Support process. Managers and principals have rapport with their staff and a vested interest in the improvement or attendance. Their role includes:

- ✓ Understand and lead the Attendance Support process in their location.
- ✓ Communicate with employees regarding the district expectations for regular attendance.
- ✓ Review attendance data with Human Resources.
- ✓ Ensure absences are being recorded accurately and promptly.
- ✓ Ensure employees are aware of available resources for wellness, accommodation support and other leaves.
- ✓ Ensure that personal information and confidentiality are respected in accordance with applicable law, policy and collective agreements.
- ✓ Partner with Human Resources to ensure consistent and fair application of the Attendance Support Program and Disability Management / Accommodation process.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Human Resources plays a critical role in supporting, guiding and advising managers, principals and employees about the Attendance Support process.

- ✓ Guide and act as a resource for employees and managers/principals regarding all aspects of the Attendance Support process.
- ✓ Coordinate and execute effective communication to all employees about the Attendance Support process.
- ✓ Train and support managers and principals in their responsibilities for the Attendance Support process and ensure the process is applied in a consistent, fair and respectful way.
- ✓ Ensure attendance data is accurately recorded and regularly analyzed.
- ✓ Create and update informational tools and guidelines as needed.