

## **Attendance Action Plan Report**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Purpose of Report:** To inform the School Board of the Sioux Falls School District (SFSD) action plan to increase student attendance.

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Because student attendance has a proven correlation to academic success, an important part of the Sioux Falls School District's comprehensive strategic plan is to increase student attendance by five percent by 2020.

Since there are many root causes for attendance challenges, including poverty, physical or mental health challenges and difficult family situations, there is no singular solution. Sioux Falls School District administrators from many departments are working with individual schools, community groups, parents and students to increase attendance rates at all levels. The District has created posters, public service announcements, videos and other materials emphasizing the importance of attendance. A Tier of Interventions has been developed to help meet the needs of students with attendance challenges before absence ever becomes an issue. The District has partnered with physical and mental health providers to develop means to assist families when absences are caused for these reasons. Additionally, the District is working with courts, police and prosecutors to develop clear guidelines for truancy offenses.

This work will continue as a District-level Attendance Council will keep the topic of attendance at the forefront of building, District and community wide discussions, and school teams will continue to develop a culture of supporting good attendance in the years to come.

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**Administrative Recommendation to School Board:** Acknowledge the multi-dimensional phases toward developing an action plan to increase student attendance.

## Attendance Action Plan Report

**Purpose of Report:** To inform the school board of the Sioux Falls School District (SFSD) action plan to increase student attendance.

**District Priority Area:** School Culture and Climate

**Priority State 3:** Sioux Falls School District will provide a nurturing and safe learning experience for all.

**Annual Objective:** SI2.3-1: Research and outline an action plan to address increasing student attendance.

### **Explanation:**

Overview: Consistent school attendance has a positive correlation to academic success and school completion as outlined in SFSD Policy JH, Student Attendance, and through research. Ten or more absences in a school year is excessive as defined in the policy. Emerging from the District strategic planning process of reviewing data, listening to stakeholders, and actionable dialogue to improve the District was a goal to improve attendance. A specific and quantifiable goal has been developed to serve as a metric to monitor District progress in this area:

By 2020, the number of K-8 students who did not attend school at least 94% of the time will decrease by 5%.

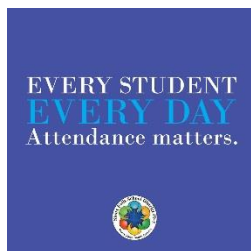
Baseline data from the 2015-2016 school year documents 3,607 students did not meet the goal to attend school at least 94% of the time. The overall attendance rate across the SFSD was 94.35% during 2015-2016 school year.

The South Dakota School Performance Index (SPI) is calculated for each SD school district and includes an attendance data point with the changes implemented during summer 2016. As a result of the revision to SFSD Policy JH in June 2016, District and building leaders reviewed the marking of attendance to ensure consistent practices in data entry systems and codes for the 2016-2017 school year. The Informational Technology Services department has developed systems to make attendance data readily accessible for building attendance teams to access and monitor.

The attendance committee began by reviewing data in an effort to better understand the root causes of students with excessive absenteeism and the barriers to regular attendance in the SFSD. Although there is no one pattern or root cause for all students with attendance challenges, the impact of poverty rates, physical and mental health challenges, and difficult family situations are factors that influence school attendance. Consistent with national trends, SFSD students who identify ethnically/racially as Native American or Black or students with disabilities have higher absenteeism rates than their peers. After review, the committee concluded that processes the SFSD develops to improve attendance need to be focused on learning about, and problem-solving around, the individual circumstances of the impacted student and the interventions personalized for that individual.

Raise awareness of the importance of school attendance: The District started a campaign in August 2016 titled, "Attendance Matters. Every Student. Every Day." Raising awareness of students, parents, staff and the community regarding the importance of school attendance was the goal of the campaign. The Office of Community Relations launched the multifaceted awareness campaign, producing "Attendance Matters" posters for school buildings, creating

public service announcements for use by local media, developing videos to showcase school-specific attendance projects, and supporting other needs brought forth by principals.



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h\\_uB7dmlcCw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_uB7dmlcCw)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OP0iuD8oK3M>

**Attendance  
Matters to  
Hawthorne!**  
  
**Great Job!**

Midcontinent and KTTW cable channels provided free air time. In December 2016, the District was chosen as a Tradition of Caring Award Winner by KELOLand TV, resulting in \$17,000 of free airtime and website presence to further inform the community about the importance of school attendance. The SFSD-produced television spots will air during critical times when school attendance has historically taken a dip.

Tiers of Intervention for schools: The study committee reviewed researched, effective strategies and surveyed SFSD building principals to begin the development of a multi-tiered system of supports that combine prevention with early and consistent interventions as determined by analyzing individual students' needs. At the base of the tiers are general SFSD procedures that will be implemented Districtwide to communicate and document attendance challenges. Appendix A contains the beginning SFSD tiers of attendance intervention model.

In this "tiered" model, every student has access to the first tier of supports, with additional interventions becoming available if what has been provided is not sufficient to improve their attendance. The second tier includes interventions that are individualized to the student to either alleviate or eliminate the barriers to regular school attendance. In this level, building attendance teams are implementing a problem-solving approach to understand the individual student and parent circumstances which are interfering in school attendance. Interventions intensify as you move to the third tier. At this level in the tiers, the building attendance team may be coordinating resources from both school and community entities.

Never static, the matrix will continue to be expanded to add interventions as further strategies are reviewed and SFSD systems are developed for building attendance teams to implement. As a support to building teams, Student Support Services will develop a resource list of reviewed materials and web links regarding the effective implementation of the interventions.

Community partnerships and dialogue: The SFSD recognizes and embraces that helping schools, families and students overcome the barriers for getting students to school is not a matter for schools in isolation. It requires a community including schools, public officials, public agencies, businesses, families and youth to work together toward the goal to increase student attendance. Since September of 2016, the SFSD has initiated dialogue with the following community partners toward that goal.

*--Dialogue with community health partners:* In December 2016, select SFSD administrators met with Avera McGreevy and Sanford Health clinic administrators to discuss medical documentation and attendance regarding student absences that are health related. The SFSD recognizes the importance of accommodating students with special health needs as well as the importance of students staying home when they are ill and/or contagious. Health care providers

play an important role in determining a student's health status and when they can return to school. Medical documentation is often the means of communication between the health care provider and the school. During our conversation both healthcare systems voiced a desire to learn more about the health services we are able to provide to students. They also requested a return to school letter template outlining the information needed to document student health related absences. In January 2017, a health services brochure and a return to school letter template were developed and provided to the healthcare systems. Both entities have pledged to provide the information and letter template to their health care providers. We are hopeful that these interventions and ongoing communication will positively impact student attendance.

*--Dialogue with community mental health supports:* Southeastern Behavioral Health (SEBH) provides home and school-based services and has assigned counselors in schools across the city. This partnership allows SEBH to work with families on identifying problem areas that cause a disruption in a child's ability to regularly attend school. In addition, the counselors work with staff members of the SFSD to develop programming and communication with the student and family that is consistent and solution focused. SEBH along with Lutheran Social Services (LSS) are authorized by the state to provide services in the areas of Family Functional Therapy (FFT) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). Both of these services are researched based and have been proven to assist individuals with overcoming mental health issues that impede their ability to perform at home and school. Several local mental health providers have partnered with the SFSD to assist students and families that have mental health challenges that impede their ability to attend school regularly.

Washington High School has implemented a pilot program with SEBH, Graduate on Time Program (GOT), that utilizes Southeastern counselors to assist students and families with eliminating barriers and addressing issues that prevent students from graduating on time. The students selected for the GOT program are juniors in high school that are behind their cohort in either credits or completing coursework in time to graduate. They have different challenges that the SEBH counselors work to identify and address in an effort to increase attendance, credit attainment and overall wellbeing. Currently there are 20 students being served in the program with a goal of 40 students by graduation of the 2018 school year.

*--Dialogue with SFSD, 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit Court, SFSD Police Department, and Minnehaha County Juvenile States Attorney:* In 2015, Senate Bill 73 was passed into law. Senate Bill 73 was the Juvenile Justice Reinvestment Initiative. This law overhauled the juvenile justice system and significantly changed the truancy process. The law also expanded local community based programs aimed at assisting youth and reducing recidivism. Truancy became a citable offense that required a court appearance by the offending juvenile. The citation process is an attempt to deter absenteeism at a lower level in the juvenile courts to avoid the formal probation process for our youth. The creation of the Truancy Based Interventions process was a collaborative effort that included numerous individuals from the SFSD, the States Attorney, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit, School Resource Officers, social workers, JDAI administrators, state employees and several others. The result of this collaborative work was the Truancy Based Interventions (Appendix B). The Truancy Based Interventions process will provide school personnel and truancy officers with distinct guidelines to follow when determining if an act of truancy should be cited as an offense. The process does not work in isolation, but as one part of the overall pyramid of interventions for improved attendance.

Ongoing process: The study committee has outlined an ongoing District process to continue to keep the SFSD and community partners focused on improving student attendance. A District level “Attendance Council” of stakeholders will meet quarterly. This council will keep attendance at the forefront of building, district and community wide discussions to:

- Ensure current partnership dialogues continue
- Network to expand to other partnerships in the community to support student attendance
- Explore further researched interventions to add to the intervention tiers
- Pursue further information from other school districts that have improved regular school attendance
- Analyze data to monitor attendance trends and changes across the SFSD
- Provide research based resources to building attendance teams through a bi-annual newsletter

Each school building attendance team will:

- Lead the school in developing school attendance initiatives, processes and goals
- Review building attendance data
- Identify students needing supports and provide individualized interventions
- Monitor ongoing attendance at the school level.

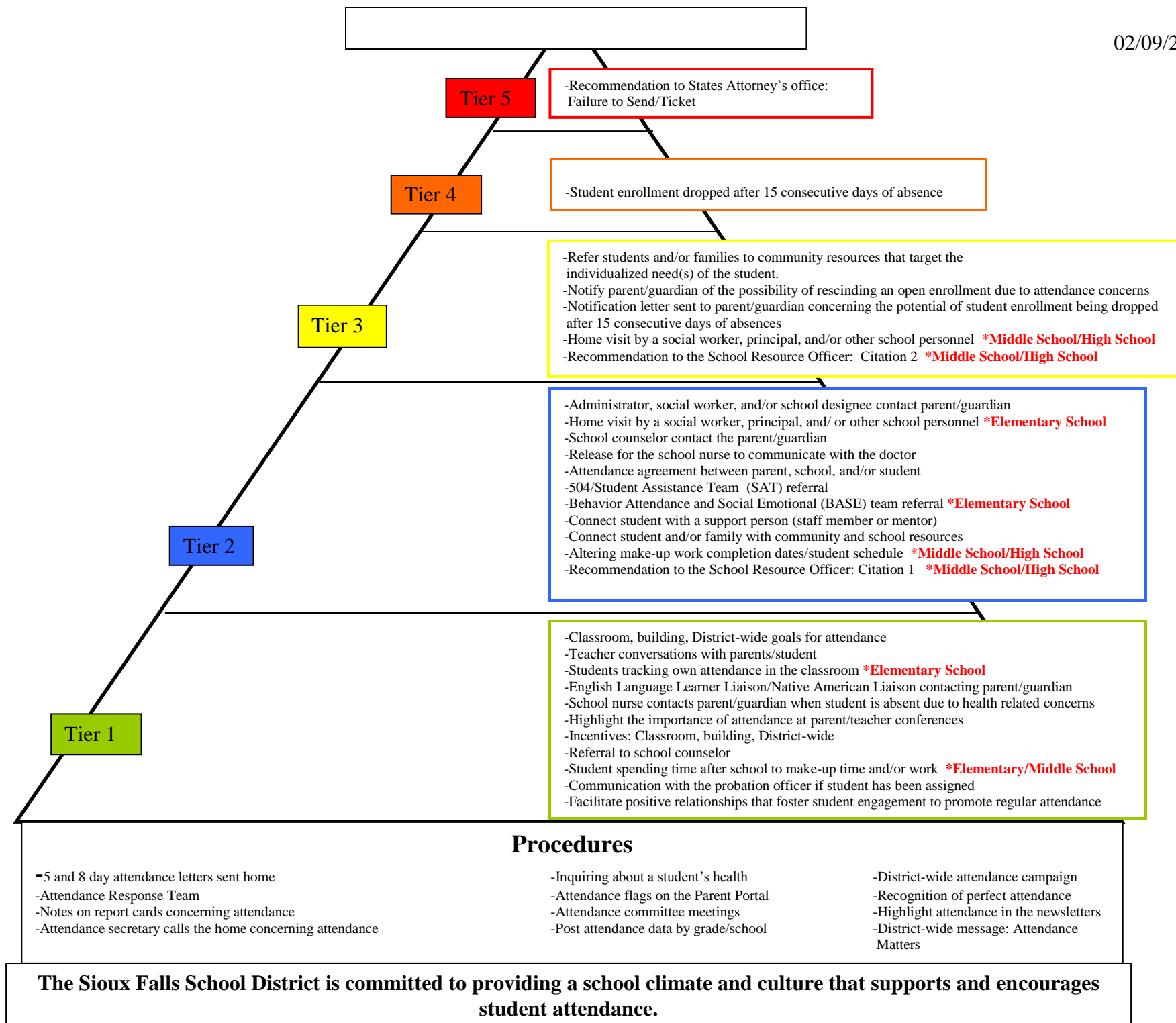
**Costs:** Not applicable

**Committee Participation:** The District study committee includes 6 elementary, middle and high school principals, 3 social workers, 3 nurses, specialized programs supervisor, Joe Foss Alternative School Program Supervisor, 2 school counselors, Health Services Supervisor, Community Education Supervisor, Student Services Coordinator, and Special Services Director.

In addition, subgroups of District staff and community partners continue dialogue to support the improving the attendance initiative.

**Summary:** The SFSD believes that increasing student attendance will positively correlate to increased student learning and graduation. Progress toward improving student attendance in schools will only be made if districts, schools and partners fully recognize that the collective action of a whole community will have the most impact. The public campaign will continue to raise awareness of the importance of attendance. An ongoing process has been developed as part of the action plan which includes each school building having an attendance team that meets to monitor building attendance data, implement interventions based on individual student needs and lead building initiatives to enhance attendance. At the District level, an attendance council will be put in place to lead ongoing districtwide conversations and research additional interventions to expand the tiered system with resources for building attendance teams. Ongoing community dialogue and partnerships will occur to support students and families to improve attendance at school.

**Administrative Recommendation to the School Board:** Acknowledge the multi-dimensional phases toward developing an action plan to address increasing student attendance.



## **TRUANCY BASED INTERVENTIONS**

**(Implemented January 23, 2017)**

Procedures jointly developed by the Sioux Falls School District 49-5 / 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit / Sioux Falls Police Department and Minnehaha County Juvenile States Attorney

The Sioux Falls School District will continue to implement and carry out additional programming and services to increase the attendance of all students. The following steps are those related to the citation process, and programming specific to truant students and their parents/guardians.

**Step 1: Five to Eight Days of Absence:** All absences included

1. The school district will send a letter to the parent/guardian of the student and document in the Infinite Campus ("IC") Contact Log.
  - a. Include consequences for lack of attendance.
  - b. Include number of days absent.
2. The school district will make a telephone or in-person contact with student and parent/guardian from at least one school official and document in the IC Contact Log. A school official will include the following: a social worker, truancy officer, success coordinator, counselor, administrator or the designee of an administrator. If multiple attempts to contact parents/guardians are unsuccessful, the attempts will be documented in the IC Contact Log.
3. The School District will start the Pyramid of Interventions specific to attendance, and when appropriate, will offer additional programming to assist the student/family, and offer options to avoid truancy citations such as community based counseling.

**At ten (10) days of absences that qualify for Step 2 of the truancy citation process, the school will inform the guardians that continued absences will require medical documentation, if medically related, and the school will document this contact in the IC Contact Log. The medical documentation must be provided by a licensed medical provider. The school administration or the school nurse may also excuse the absence for medical reasons. The provisions of a school healthcare plan, created in conjunction with the school, family, and a medical professional's recommendations, may also be utilized to cover absences due to medical reasons. The notification of required medical documentation must be made by the school or district designee at least two (2) absences prior to a citation being issued. This process will also hold true for "Failure to Send" actions against parents/guardians.**

**Step 2: Twelve (12) Days of Absence\*:**

1. The student will need to have missed 12 qualifying days within the past 60 school days.
2. The school district will send a letter to the parent/guardian of the student and document in the IC Contact Log.
  - a. Include consequences of continued absenteeism.
  - b. Offer support and utilize the Pyramid of Interventions.
3. The school district will refer families to support services such as community based counseling.
4. The school district will make a telephone or in-person contact with student and parent/guardian from at least one school official and document in the IC Contact Log. If multiple attempts to contact parents/guardians are unsuccessful, the attempts will be documented and a letter will be sent to the mailing address. This letter can be included with the letter sent notifying the parent/guardian of the absences.
5. A district designated truancy officer will refer the absences to the School Resource Officer. The School Resource Officer will issue the first truancy citation, provided the previously established guidelines have been completed.

When a student has fifteen (15) consecutive absences for skipping, or when the school is not notified of the reason of the absence, the student will be dropped from enrollment.

- A school official will send the parent/guardian notifying them that the student has been dropped from enrollment due to consecutive absences, and to re-enroll in their home attendance center, they would need to contact the building principal.
- A referral will be made to the School Resource Officer for truancy citation.

**Step 3: Seventeen (17) Days of Absence\*:**

1. The student will need to have missed 5 qualifying days within the past 20 school days.
2. The school district will send a letter to the parent/guardian of the student and document in the IC Contact Log.
  - a. Include consequences of continued absenteeism.
  - b. Next steps in the process.
3. The school district will refer families to support services such as community based counseling.
4. The school district will make a telephone or in-person contact with student and parent/guardian from at least one school official and document in the IC Contact Log. If multiple attempts to contact parents/guardians are unsuccessful, the attempts will be documented and a letter will be sent to the mailing address. This letter can be included with the letter sent notifying the parent/guardian of the absences.
5. A district designated truancy officer will refer the absences to the School Resource Officer. The School Resource Officer will issue the second truancy citation, provided the previously established guidelines have been completed.



**Step 4: Twenty-Two (22) Days of Absences\*:**

1. The student will need to have missed 5 qualifying days within the past 20 school days.
2. The school district will send a letter to the parent/guardian of the student notifying the guardian of the request for a petition to the courts.
3. The school district will make a telephone or in-person contact with student and parent/guardian from at least one school official and document in the IC Contact Log. If multiple attempts to contact parents/guardians are unsuccessful, the attempts will be documented and a letter will be sent to the mailing address. This letter can be included with the letter sent notifying the guardian of the request for a petition to the courts.
4. The school district will request a Petition from the courts. The social worker or school resource officer will verify the student has received two previous truancy citations. Once confirmed, the school resource officer will inform the social worker or truancy officer to request a petition from the States Attorney.
  - a. States Attorney will notify the social worker or truancy officer if the petition has been accepted.
  - b. Student will have a mandatory court date for truancy violations.

\* The following absences with documentation will not be included in this count: Court Summons with Note, Death in Family/Funeral, Documented Medical Appointment, Illness of Student with Medical Note, Illness when Student Sent Home from School by the School, OSS Alternative Attendance, Principal Authorized Absence, Religious Holidays, and Hazardous Weather.