

## PART A: POLICY

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### Importance of regular school attendance

1. Enrolment and regular attendance by learners at school are prerequisites of an educated nation. It is desirable that every learner, whatever their age, should attend punctually and regularly once they are enrolled in a school. A school has at least five reasons to insist on punctual and regular attendance:

- (a) Each school has a duty to protect every learner's fundamental right to education;
- (b) Enrolment in a school places a learner under an obligation to attend punctually and regularly during the school day unless there is a valid reason for absence;
- (c) In most if not all schools, the SGB's code of conduct for learners includes the obligation to attend school punctually and regularly;
- (d) Each school has a duty of care during the school day towards every learner who attends; and
- (e) A school that successfully curbs absence by learners without valid reason will most likely improve learner retention and performance.

2. Many public schools have a culture of punctual and regular learner attendance. Our goal must be to enhance such a culture in all public schools. This will be achieved if:

- (1) Principals, teachers and district officials show zero tolerance for absences from school without valid reason;

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- (2) Schools adopt an attendance policy and SMTs, teachers and SGBs explain attendance rules to parents and win their support for enforcing them;
- (3) Schools reduce the alienation of learners and encourage regular attendance by creating a supportive and safe school environment, inclusive and relevant curricula, good teaching and a disciplined and purposeful school ethos;
- (4) Schools curb absence without valid reason by giving guidance to learners who frequently abscond or are absent without valid reason, and by making prompt follow up with parents and (where necessary) local government, provincial or non-governmental agencies responsible for children and youth welfare;
- (5) Provincial and national education departments raise public awareness of the importance of regular and punctual school attendance, which will help schools in their efforts to achieve it.

### **Purpose of policy**

3. The purpose of this policy is to –
  - (a) promote punctual and regular attendance at public schools; and
  - (b) provide public schools and PEDs with the necessary procedures to manage and monitor learner attendance.
4. The policy provides a common terminology and national norms and standards for recording and monitoring learner attendance and absence. It will therefore ensure that all public school learners are treated equitably in this respect and enable comparable attendance and absence data to be accurately recorded and

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analysed by school, district and province. Data on learner absences are an important indicator of efficiency in the school system.

5. Accurate daily learner absence records will enable principals and teachers to safeguard the best educational interests of learners by monitoring absences and taking appropriate action. Regular summaries of learner absences will enable district offices, PED head offices and the DoE to track attendance trends and respond appropriately.

### **Scope and application of policy**

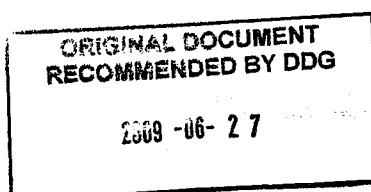
6. This policy is made by the Minister of Education in terms of section 3 of NEPA and sections 3, 4, 8, 11, 16, 16A and 20 of SASA.
7. The policy includes the procedures, attached schedules and related instructions.
8. The policy applies to all public schools in the Republic of South Africa.

### **Interpretation of terms**

9. Terms used in this policy have the meaning ascribed to them in the Definitions and Acronyms. In case of a conflict of interpretation the meaning of a term in NEPA or SASA prevails.

### **Delegation of powers**

10. A MEC or Head of Department may delegate any function envisaged in this policy in terms of the powers of delegation vested in them by section 62 of SASA.



11. Subject to sections 16A and 62 of SASA a principal may delegate a function envisaged in this policy to a member of the SMT, a grade head or a senior teacher.

## **2. PROMOTION, RECORDING AND MONITORING OF LEARNER ATTENDANCE**

### **Learners' responsibilities**

12. A learner has a responsibility to attend school punctually and regularly. The government depends on parents; school SGBs, SMTs and teachers; and PEDs to play their parts in ensuring that learners understand and accept this responsibility and derive benefit from their school experience.
13. Except for grade 12 learners, a learner may not take leave from school to study for examinations or take leave from school when examinations have ended. Grade 12 learners may take study leave to prepare for the National Senior Certificate examinations in accordance with a PED attendance policy. They need not attend school on completing the examinations.
14. In schools with grade 8 and above the RCL must –
- (a) contribute to the development and application of school policy on learner attendance;
  - (b) inform learners about their rights and responsibilities pertaining to school attendance;
  - (c) encourage learners to practise punctual and regular attendance; and
  - (d) assist in monitoring learner attendance,

### **Parents' responsibilities**

15. Parliament has placed a legal duty on parents of children in the compulsory school-going age bracket to ensure that their children attend school unless they have been exempted by the Head of Department (SASA, sections 3 and 4).
16. All parents of learners who have been admitted to a school are expected to encourage in their children, whatever their ages, habits of punctual and regular attendance at school and to ensure that they attend school on time for the whole school day unless there is a valid reason for absence.
17. Parents are strongly discouraged from taking their children out of school on family holidays during term time.
18. Parents are expected to inform the principal or class teacher in accordance with school attendance policy if their child is absent or expected to be absent with valid reason.
19. If a learner is absent from school without valid reason the parent is expected to co-operate with the school in resolving the problem.

### **Schools' responsibilities**

20. The entire school community, led by the SGB and SMT, is responsible for promoting and monitoring school attendance, in order to give learners the best chance of benefiting from their school experience.
21. A school must monitor learner attendance in a manner that is consistent with this policy, any PED policy on learner attendance and the school's learner attendance policy.

22. Marking the register may have legal implications for the school and must therefore be done legibly and accurately. If a register shows that a learner is present, the school has a duty of care towards the learner for the duration of the school day. The Courts have held that a duty of care requires a school to minimise the risk of harm to a learner and take active steps to ensure, so far as is reasonably possible, that harm to a learner is prevented.

### **SGB responsibilities**

23. SASA requires each SGB to adopt a *code of conduct for learners*. The code “must be aimed at establishing a disciplined and purposeful school environment, dedicated to the improvement and maintenance of the quality of the learning process” (SASA, section 8). Rules of punctuality and regular attendance must be part of the code, supported by parents, and enforced by the SMT, grade heads, class teachers and all other educators.
24. SGBs are expected to take an active interest in the rate of attendance of learners in their school and may request the principal to provide detailed information on attendance trends and problems.
25. SGBs are expected to encourage parents to monitor their children’s attendance at school and to advise the principal or class teacher promptly if there are difficulties the school should be aware of.

### **Principal and SMT responsibilities**

26. A school’s SMT led by the principal is responsible for developing the culture of punctual and regular attendance at school. The adoption of a *school attendance policy* is a management responsibility of the SMT led by the principal, and must involve consultation with the teaching and support staff, the learners (through the RCL where applicable) and parents through the SGB. The

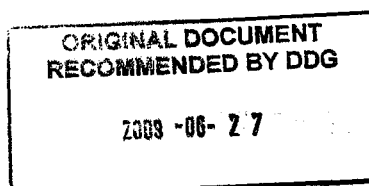
school attendance policy must be consistent with this policy and any similar policy of the PED. It will –

- (a) reflect and reinforce the school's ethos and values and support the school's mission and curriculum;
- (b) promote awareness in the school community that absence without valid reason is unacceptable and will be followed up promptly;
- (c) encourage co-operation with parents and learners in curbing if not eradicating absence without valid reason;
- (d) take account of the social circumstances of the school community, especially factors like travelling distance to school, health and safety concerns, cultural and religious obligations;
- (e) specify how the parent, the learner and the school should communicate with each other if a learner is absent; and
- (f) specify that learners (but not grade 12 learners for whom provision is made at paragraph 13 of this policy) must attend on all school days including examination days, except on days when a school is officially closed.

27. A principal is responsible for ensuring that class registers and period registers are properly compiled, marked, monitored and stored. In schools with electronic administrative systems like SA-SAMS the principal is responsible for ensuring that electronic registers are properly maintained and backed up, and hard copies made in accordance with this policy.

28. A principal has a particular duty, on the advice of a class teacher, to contact and counsel the parent of a learner who is repeatedly absent from school without valid reason.

29. A principal must monitor and analyse learners' attendance rates by grade and make a quarterly report to the SGB, with proposals for attending to any problems that have emerged.



**Class teachers' responsibilities**

30. Class teachers are responsible for compiling and marking *class registers* at the appointed time or times on each school day, maintaining them accurately and submitting them to the school office on time in the manner prescribed by this policy.
31. A class teacher who has reason to believe that a learner is absent without valid reason must make every reasonable effort to contact and counsel the parent of the learner and request the learner's return to school in accordance with this policy.

**Teachers' responsibilities**

32. Teachers have the responsibility to mark *period registers*, maintain them accurately and submit them to the principal's office in the manner prescribed by this policy.
33. A teacher who has reason to believe that a learner is absent without valid reason must report such absence to the learner's class teacher.

**PED responsibilities**

34. A PED, acting mainly through its district offices, has the responsibility to promote punctual and regular learner attendance by –
- (a) raising public awareness of the educational and social importance of regular school attendance;
  - (b) providing schools with the means to maintain accurate learner attendance records, and monitoring compliance;
  - (c) requiring schools to enforce their learner codes of conduct in respect of punctual and regular attendance (SASA, section 8);
  - (d) assisting SMTs to adopt and enforce school attendance policies;

- (e) ensuring that parents of compulsory school age children meet their legal responsibilities (SASA, sections 3 and 4);
- (f) ensuring that authorised district office staff check schools' attendance registers whenever they visit a school;
- (g) supporting schools where there is chronic learner absenteeism without valid reasons;
- (h) ensuring that summaries of learner attendance are prepared and reported in terms of this policy; and
- (i) analysing quarterly attendance returns to identify patterns of absence in schools and districts respectively and make take appropriate follow up action with schools and districts that have high rates of absence.

35. A PED must supply each school on time with sufficient official class registers, period registers and quarterly returns.

36. An Head of Department may, after considering the safety and welfare of learners and with sufficient reason, direct that a school be closed for a specified period on grounds of –

- (a) inclement weather;
- (b) natural disaster;
- (c) transport problems;
- (d) industrial action by educators;
- (e) religious holiday; or
- (f) other compelling circumstances.

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## PART B: PROCEDURES

### 3. PROCEDURES FOR RECORDING, MONITORING AND REPORTING LEARNER ATTENDANCE

#### Registers

37. Registers are official documents of the Provincial Education Department. The following registers will be used in accordance with this policy –

- (a) *class register* (which includes a temporary class register), maintained by a class teacher; and
- (b) *period register*, maintained by a teacher.

#### Safe-keeping and archiving

38. A principal is responsible for the safe-keeping of class registers in a school. Registers must be kept securely in the principal's office when not in use.

39. At the end of the school day, all class registers must be taken to the principal for safe-keeping.

40. A principal must keep each class register securely for at least three years from the date of last entry before disposal.

41. A principal must keep each temporary class register securely for one year before they may be destroyed.

42. A class teacher must keep sick notes and other documents in support of learner absences, including records of telephone conversations, in the learner's profile.

### **Class registration period**

43. A principal must designate on the school timetable a daily registration period of no more than ten minutes to enable a class teacher to mark the class register. A class registration period may be in the morning session or in both morning and afternoon sessions.

### **Class register**

44. A principal must ensure that a class register –
- (a) is maintained by a class teacher in every class on each school day of the school year;
  - (b) records the following information about every learner admitted to the class –
    - (i) admission number;
    - (ii) surname;
    - (iii) name;
    - (iv) gender; and
    - (v) any other information that the Head of Department or the principal may require.
45. The class register must be compiled and marked in accordance with the instructions in Schedule 1. The exception method is to be used. Only learner absences must be recorded using the codes provided.
46. The class register must be marked on all days that the school is open for instruction, including sports days, excursion days and examination days.
47. To mark a day when a school is closed by direction of the Head of Department a class teacher must rule a vertical line through the column for that day, writing the reason for closure in the column in capital letters, for example "FLOOD".

48. Learners who do not attend school on examination days or after an examination period, must be marked absent, including grade 12 learners who are given leave to be absent while preparing for or after writing their end of year National Senior Certificate examinations.
49. A Head of Department must ensure that every school is provided with sufficient official class registers.

### **Schools with electronic administration systems**

50. A principal of a school that enters learner attendance on an electronic school administration system such as SA-SAMS must maintain the attendance registers and monitor attendance and absence in accordance with this policy.
51. A principal –
- (a) may choose to use the official class register to record daily learner attendance, or print out a similar blank class register from the school's management information system on a monthly basis for use by the class teachers;
  - (b) must ensure that attendance data on the class registers are submitted at least weekly to the school office for capturing on the electronic system;
  - (c) must ensure that a hard copy of the electronic record of the class register is generated monthly for the previous month, signed and filed for audit purposes;
  - (d) must ensure that quarterly attendance summaries are generated.

### **Temporary class register**

52. A principal may direct class teachers to compile and mark temporary class registers for a period not longer than ten consecutive school days from the beginning of the first term while class lists are being finalized.

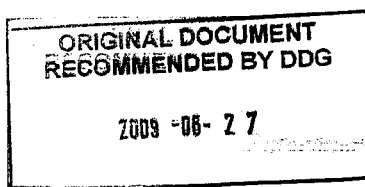
53. A temporary class register is an official document and must be maintained in the same manner as a class register in terms of this policy.
54. When the ten day lifespan of a temporary register has elapsed the class teacher must copy the learners' attendance records into the permanent class register, but the records of learners who were de-registered because they failed to attend may be omitted.

### **Period register**

55. A teacher maintains a period register in order to monitor learner attendance and in particular to check on learners who abscond.
56. A teacher maintains a period register for every class taught by the teacher during the school day.
57. A PED may direct that a period register is marked in every period of every school day. In provinces where such direction is not given a principal must ensure that a period register is marked at least once a month in each period during a school day designated by the principal. If a school experiences a recurrent problem of learner abscondment the principal must direct that the period register is marked more frequently.
58. A principal must—
- (a) check and countersign each period register when it has been properly completed by a teacher; and
  - (b) make period registers available to a district official when requested.
59. A Head of Department must ensure that every school is provided with sufficient official period registers.

## Monitoring and following up learner attendance

60. If a learner is absent without explanation the class teacher concerned must as soon as possible make a reasonable effort to contact the parent by whatever means is suitable to the circumstances of the school and the family concerned. First day contact, if circumstances permit, will demonstrate the school's concern for the welfare of the learner.
61. If a learner is absent without explanation on three consecutive school days the class teacher concerned must inform the principal, and the principal must contact the parent by whatever means are appropriate and investigate the reasons for absence.
62. A principal must check the class and period registers from time to time to identify learners who have a frequent pattern of absence from school or a class and make an appropriate follow-up with the learners' parents.
63. If the reason for a learner's absence is not valid the principal must –
- (a) inform the parent or the learner of the importance of regular attendance for the learner's well-being;
  - (b) emphasise the learner's duty to attend punctually and regularly in terms of the school's code of conduct for learners;
  - (c) if the learner is of compulsory school going age, inform the parent of the legal consequences in terms of section 3 of SASA if the learner's absence is allowed to persist; and
  - (d) request the learner's return to school.
64. Despite the intervention of the principal if a learner persists in being absent without valid reason the learner must be charged with breach of the school's code of conduct for learners.



65. A record of all communication with a parent must be made and kept in the learner's profile.

### **De-registration**

66. A principal may de-register a learner for one of the following reasons –
- (a) Failure to take up a school place;
  - (b) Exemption from attendance by the Head of Department;
  - (c) Expulsion from school by the Head of Department;
  - (d) Transfer to another school;
  - (e) Continuous absence for a period of ten school days without valid reason;
  - (f) Notification by the parent that the learner will not return to school; or
  - (g) Death.
67. If a learner is absent without valid reason for ten consecutive school days after admission to the school, a principal must make reasonable attempts to ascertain from the learner's parent or from the learner, whether the learner is attending another school. If so, or if the principal is unable to make contact with the parent or the learner the principal must de-register the learner on grounds of 'failure to take up a school place' and the District office must be notified.
68. If a learner is absent from school for ten consecutive school days a principal must make reasonable attempts to ascertain from the learner's parent whether the learner has been withdrawn from the school. If the learner has been withdrawn or if no valid reason for absence is given, or if the principal is unable to make contact with the parent or the learner the principal must de-register the learner on grounds of 'continuous absence' and the district manager must be notified.
69. When a principal de-registers a learner the principal must –

- (a) inform the parent and class teacher in writing of the date and reason for the learner's de-registration; and
- (b) inform the District office in writing if the learner is of compulsory school going age and the reason for de-registration is (a), (e), (f) or (g) under paragraph 66.

70. A class teacher who has been informed by the principal that a learner has been de-registered must record this according to the instructions in Schedule 1. If a learner who has been de-registered is later re-admitted to the school, the class teacher must make a new entry for the learner at the end of the class list in the class register.

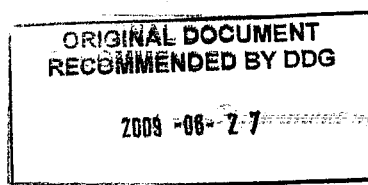
## Returns

71. Returns are official documents of the Provincial Education Department. The following returns will be used in accordance with this policy –

- (a) *school quarterly school attendance return* (for which a principal is responsible);
- (b) *school quarterly return of other school-wide educational activity and school closure* (for which a principal is responsible);
- (c) *district quarterly attendance return* (for which a district manager is responsible);
- (d) *provincial annual learner attendance return* (for which a Head of Department is responsible).

## School quarterly learner attendance return

72. Not later than a week after the beginning of a new term a principal must compile, verify and sign a quarterly school attendance return for the previous quarter according to the template provided in Schedule 4 and submit the return to the district office.



**School quarterly return of other school-wide educational activity and school closure**

73. Not later than a week after the beginning of a new term a principal must compile, verify and sign a quarterly return of other school-wide educational activity and school closure for the previous quarter according to the template provided in Schedule 5 and submit the return to the district office.
74. The return is in two parts. The first part records the number of school days on which school-wide educational activity (other than regular teaching) took place. The second part records the number of 'school closure days', that is days on which a school was closed by direction of the Head of Department. The number of official school days in the quarter (according to the school calendar) less the number of school closure days gives the total number of actual school days in the quarter.

**District quarterly learner attendance return**

75. Not later than four weeks after the end of every school term a district manager must compile, verify and sign a quarterly district attendance return according to the template provided in Schedule 5 and submit the return to the PED head office.

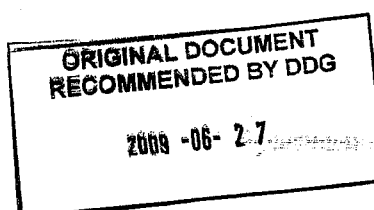
**Provincial annual learner attendance return**

76. Not later than eight weeks after the end of every school year a Head of Department must compile, verify and sign an annual provincial attendance return according to the template provided in Schedule 6 and submit the return to the DoE.

#### 4. SCHEDULES

77. The following schedules are part of this policy. They are provided for the guidance of PEDs and may be adapted to suit the needs of a province so long as the required information is recorded in the registers and submitted in the returns

1. Class register
2. Period register
3. Summary register by grade
4. School quarterly learner attendance return
5. School quarterly return of other school-wide educational activity and school closure
6. District quarterly learner attendance return
7. Provincial annual learner attendance return



“Schedule” to the draft