LAERSKOOL VRYBURG



Learners attendance

➢ INTRODUCTION

• Purpose of policy

1. The purpose of this policy is to —

(a) promote punctual and regular attendance at public schools: and

(b) provide public schools and provincial education departments (NWED) with standard procedures for recording, managing and monitoring learner attendance.

• Scope and application of policy

2 The Minister of Basic Education has determined this policy with the approval of the Council of Education Ministers (CEM) in terms of section 3 of the National Education
Policy Act. 1996 (NEPA).

3. The policy includes the attached schedules and related instructions.

4. The policy applies to all public schools in the Republic of South Africa,

5. Where necessary. NWED should bring their policies on learner attendance and procedures in line with this national policy, as provided in Section 2(2) of SASA, to ensure that all learners are treated equitably.

• Interpretation of terms

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

➢ CONTEXT

7. Learners stay away from school for many reasons, but in many community's poverty is the root cause of irregular school attendance. Irregular attendance may be the result of parents' inability to pay school fees or buy uniforms: lack of transport to school; parents' or children's chronic illness, including HIV AIDS and tuberculosis; poor nutrition or hunger; child labor: unstable or dysfunctional family life; and gang violence.

8. Several official programmes relevant to school attendance are aimed at alleviating the worst effects of chronic poverty. These include the extension of the child support grant to impoverished children aged 16 to 1 8; the implementation of HIV and AIDS programmes; the expansion of the Early Childhood Development programme; the National School Nutrition Programme; and the No-Fee School policy.

➢ RATIONALE FOR THE POLICY

• Importance of regular school attendance

9. Enrolment of learners and their regular and punctual attendance at school are prerequisites for an educated nation. Moreover. enrolment and punctual, regular attendance at school are (is) important because

(a) Each school has a duty to protect every learner's fundamental right to education;

(b) Enrolment at a school places a learner under an obligation to attend school punctually and regularly unless there is a valid reason for absence;

(c) A school that successfully curbs absence without valid reason will most likely improve learner retention and performance; and

(d) Regular attendance at school is a powerful brake on teenage pregnancies and HIV infection.

• Importance of attendance records

9. A daily record of learner attendance enables a school to monitor learners' absence and take appropriate follow up action with both parents and learners. Quarterly returns of learner absence enable district offices to track attendance trends at schools and to respond

10. Records of learner attendance may be required for legal purposes. It is therefore essential that a school maintains such records accurately. The principal and staff of a school act in loco parentis (in place of a parent) for a learner at a school. They therefore have a duty of care towards each learner who is recorded as present. If legal action were instituted against the school as a result of a mishap to a learner the accuracy of the learner attendance record could be an Important issue before the court,

➢ LEARNER ABSENCE

• Definition of 'absent'

11. A learner is deemed to be absent from school when the learner is not present in class or not participating in a school activity when the register is marked.

• Valid reason for absence

12. While punctual and regular attendance is necessary, from time to time it may not be possible or desirable for a learner to attend school- Any of the following is a valid reason for absence of a learner from school:

(a) study leave taken by a Grade 12 learner in terms of paragraph 16 of this

(b) physical or psychological illness, for which a principal may require communication from the parent that the learner is unable to attend school, or written confirmation by a registered medical practitioner or traditional healer if the illness lasts longer than three days;

(c) giving birth, subject to written confirmation by a registered medical practitioner or registered midwife;

(d) religious or cultural observances approved by the School Governing Body (SGB) in terms of the National School Calendar Policy; (e) death of a family member;

(e) appointment at court, social services or other official agency, for which a principal may require documentary proof; (g)suspension by the SGB;

(h) acts of nature (that is, events that are outside of human control);

(I) exceptional circumstances for which, in the view of the principal, a temporary absence from school

(i) is in the best interest of the learner; or

(ii) was unavoidable.

➢ RESPONSIBILITIES

• Promoting a culture of attendance

13. Many public schools have a culture of punctual and regular learner attendance. The government's goal is that all South African public schools will establish and maintain such a culture, which is a mark of pride in our schools and a prerequisite for quality teaching and learning. This will be achieved if—

(a) principals. teachers and district officials show zero tolerance for absence from school without valid reason;

(b) schools tackle the alienation of learners by creating a supportive and safe school environment; providing interesting and challenging curricula, including stimulating extracurricular activities; and teaching learners well

(c) schools and social agencies give appropriate support to learners whose families struggle under the burden of poverty. serious illness and bereavement, especially learners who are compelled by circumstances to be caregivers or to head their own households:

(d) district offices support schools by promoting and monitoring learner attendance and following up where there is evidence that a school has a problem of learner absence; and (e)provincial and national education departments raise public awareness of the importance of regular and punctual school attendance.

• Learner's responsibilities

A learner has a responsibility to attend school punctually and regularly The government depends on parents, SGBs, school management teams (SMTs), teachers and NWED to play them part in ensuring that learners accept and act on this responsibility. The example set by parents, SMTs and teachers is of decisive importance in building the culture of punctual and regular attendance.

14. Except for Grade 12 learners, a learner may not take leave from school to study for examinations or when examinations have ended. Grade 12 learners may take study leave to prepare for the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations five school days before the first day of the NSC examination. Such learners need not attend school on days when they do not write examinations and after completing the examinations.

15. In schools with Grade 8 and above, the representative council of learners (RCL) should
    (a) contribute to the development and application of school policy on learner attendance; and
    (b) inform the SMT of barriers to learner attendance.

• Parent's responsibilities

16. A parent is expected to—
    (a) ensure that the learner attends school daily, on time and for the whole school day unless there is a valid reason for absence;
    (b) ensure that the learner is not taken out of school without valid reason (family holidays are not a valid reason):
    (c) inform the principal or class teacher if the learner is absent or expected to be absent or to be late for school with valid reason;
    (d) cooperate with the school in resolving the problem if the learner is absent from school without valid reason; and
    (e) encourage and if possible assist the learner to make up for time lost for absence from school.

• School's responsibilities

17. The school community, led by the principal and SGB, is responsible for promoting and monitoring school attendance in order to give learners the best chance of benefiting from their school experience.

• SGB's responsibilities

18. Rules dealing with punctuality and regular attendance should be part of an SGB's code of conduct for learners.
19. An SGB is expected to take an active interest in the rate of attendance of learners at its school. In particular, an SGB should request from the principal a quarterly report on learner attendance trends (in terms of section 16A (2) (c) of SASA) and consider the report at a meeting.

• Principal's responsibilities

20. A principal, working with the SMT and the SGB is responsible for developing a culture of punctual and regular attendance at a school.

21. A principal is responsible for fostering a caring school environment in which the SNIT and educators take an interest in each learner's well-being and are alert to problems that might affect a learner's attendance.

22. Subject to section 16A of SASA and section 4 of the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM), a principal may allocate a duty or responsibility envisaged in this policy to a member of staff.

23. The principal must develop a school policy on learner attendance after consultation with the school staff, RCL (where applicable) and SGB. A school attendance policy must_

    a. make clear that absence without valid reason is unacceptable and will be followed up promptly;

    b. specify how the parent should communicate with the school if a learner is absent;

    c. specify whether the class register will be marked once or twice per day;

    d. state what follow-up action the school will take if a learner is absent:

    estate what support the school will give a learner who has been absent. in order to make up for time lost or assessments missed

    (f) specify when the class register must be brought to the school office for safekeeping;

    (g) specify how often the period register must be marked and when it must be brought to the school office for safekeeping; and

    (h) state how staff duties and responsibilities for (d)-(g) are allocated.

24. A principal must ensure that staff members who are allocated responsibility for school attendance matters understand the importance of accurate records and careful monitoring, and carry out their responsibilities competently.

25. A principal is responsible for ensuring that class registers and period registers are compiled, marked and monitored properly and are stored safely in terms of this policy. At schools with electronic administration systems, the principal is responsible for ensuring that electronically generated registers are properly maintained and backed up and that hard copies are made in accordance with this policy.

26. A principal must follow up learner absence as contemplated in paragraphs 50-53.

27. A principal must cancel a learner's record in the class register in terms of paragraphs 54-59.

28. A principal must monitor and analyses learners' attendance rates by grade and must include such information in the reports the principal makes to the HOD or SGB in terms of section 16A of SASA.

29. A principal must consult the district office in order to find an acceptable solution if, during the NSC examination period, learner attendance is likely to be disrupted by accommodation difficulties or the absence of teachers on examination marking duty.

• Class teacher's responsibilities

30. A class teacher is responsible for compiling and marking the class register in the class registration period on each school day, maintaining it accurately and taking it to the school office for safekeeping.

31. A class teacher must inform the principal when a learner is absent without explanation for three consecutive school days and must draw the principal's attention to cases of repeated absence so that the matter may be followed up with the parent in an appropriate manner.

• Teacher's responsibilities

32. A teacher is responsible for marking the period register maintaining it accurately and taking it to the school office for safekeeping.

33. A teacher who has reason to believe that a learner is absent from a period without valid reason must report such absence to the school office.

• PED's responsibilities

34. An HOD, acting mainly through district and circuit managers, 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) giving appropriate administrative direction and management support to district offices and schools in accordance with this policy and NWED policy;

    (c) ensuring that authorised district office staff monitor class registers when they visit a school;

    (d) analyzing school quarterly attendance returns to identify patterns of absence in schools; and (e taking appropriate follow-up action in the case of schools that have high rates of learner absence.

35. An HOD must ensure that specific staff members are allocated responsibility for school attendance matters in the NWED head office and at each district and circuit office; that they understand the importance of accurate attendance records and careful monitoring; and that they carry out their responsibilities competently.

36. An HOD must ensure that every school that does not have an electronic administration system has sufficient class registers, period registers and quarterly returns.

➢PROCEDURES

• Registers

37. Registers are official documents of the NWED. 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.

38. If a class teacher or teacher is absent, another staff member must mark the class register or period register.

39. A register must be made available to an authorised official of the NWED or an authorised judicial officer upon request.

• Class register

40. A class register must be marked in the class registration period on each school day in accordance with the instructions in Schedule 1.

• Class registration period

41. The school timetable must include a daily registration period of no more than 10 minutes to enable a class teacher to mark the class register. A class registration period may be scheduled at the start of each morning session or, if the register is Inarched twice a day, at the start of each morning and each afternoon session.

• Temporary class register

42. A temporary class register may be used for no longer than 10 consecutive school days, starting on the first day of the first term. while class lists are being finalized
43. A temporary class register must be maintained in the same manner as a class register in terms of this policy.

44. When the 10-day lifespan of a temporary class register has elapsed, the data must be copied into the class register.

• Period register

45. A period register must be marked at least once a month in every period on a day designated by the principal. However, in order to improve monitoring of learner attendance, a principal may direct that the period register be marked more frequently.

• Schools with electronic administration system

46. A principal of a school that keeps learner attendance data in an electronic administration system_

a may use a class register to record daily learner attendance, or may print out a class list from the school's electronic administration system for use by a class teacher;

b must ensure that attendance data is captured on the electronic administration system at least once a week;

c must ensure that a hard copy of the attendance record of each class is generated monthly for the previous month, signed by the principal. and filed for audit purposes;

d must ensure that quarterly attendance returns are generated; and (e)must adapt and apply paragraphs 39-47.

47. Any attendance record or return generated by an electronic administration system is an official document of the NWED.

• Following up learner absence

48. If a learner is absent for three consecutive school days without explanation, the class teacher concerned must report the absence to the principal. The principal must, as soon as possible, make a reasonable effort to contact the parent by whatever means are suitable for the circumstances of the school and of the family concerned.

49. If the learner is absent without valid reason for three consecutive school days, the principal must —

a inform the parent of the importance of regular attendance;

b emphasize 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 implications of section 3 of SASA;

d inform the parent of the risk of the learner's record in the class register being cancelled for continuous absence;

e request the learner's return to school;

f where necessary, elicit the support of the district office; and

g where necessary, elicit intervention from government or non-government social development agencies.

50. If despite the intervention of the principal, a learner persists in being absent without valid reason —

(a) the learner must be charged with breach of the school's code of conduct for learners; or

(b) the learner's record in the class register must be cancelled if the learner is absent for 10 consecutive school days.

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

- **Cancellation of a learner's record in a class register**

51. Cancellation of a learner's record in a class register is an administrative action, not a disciplinary action. It is not the same as suspension or expulsion in terms of section 9 of SASA-

52. A learner's record in a class register may be cancelled for one of the following reasons:

a exemption from compulsory school attendance;

b expulsion;

c transfer to another school;

d registration for home education;

(e)(e)continuous absence;

(f) notification by the parent that the learner will not return to school; death of the learner.

53. If a learner is absent from school for 10 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 cancel the learner's record in the class register on grounds of 'continuous absence'

54. A female learner's record may not be cancelled on grounds that she is pregnant or has given birth.

55. When a learner's record is cancelled, the principal must, in writing—

(a) inform the parent and class teacher of the date of and reason for the cancellation; and

(b) if the learner is of compulsory school-going age, inform the district office of the date of and reason for the cancellation.

56. If a learner's record has been cancelled and the learner is later readmitted to the school, the class teacher must make a new entry for the learner in the class register.

- **Temporary closure of school**

57. A school may be closed temporarily by the HOD in case of emergency in terms of section of SASA.

58. An SGB may apply to the HOD in terms of paragraphs 3.1.7 and 3. I .8 of the National School Calendar Policy for permission to close a school temporarily for religious commemorations (if a majority of learners in the school are members of the faith in question), or for sporting or cultural events. In either case, the school may be temporarily closed for no more than two school days per year.

59. A learner may not be marked absent in the class register on a day when a school is temporarily closed. The instructions in Schedule I include appropriate notations for temporary school closure.

- School quarterly return on learner attendance

60. The school quarterly return on learner attendance must be compiled, verified and signed according to the template provided in Schedule 4 and must be submitted to the district office either electronically or in hard copy by not later than one week after the beginning of the following school term.

➢SCHEDULES

- **Forms**

61. The following schedules form part of this policy:

1 Class register;

2. Period register;

3. Summary register by grade, which is a document for guidance only, not an official template; and

4. School quarterly return on learner attendance.