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Datum 18 November 2008

**TO: SENIOR GENERAL MANAGERS
GENERAL MANAGERS
MANAGERS
DISTRICT MANAGERS
PRINCIPALS
CHAIRPERSONS OF SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES**

KZN CIRCULAR NO. 143 OF 2008


POLICY ON LEARNER ATTENDANCE AT PUBLIC ORDINARY SCHOOLS

Management of learner attendance at public ordinary schools is critical for the achievement of learning and educational outcomes.

Attached is the policy on learner attendance at public ordinary schools as well as a guideline which schools may utilise to develop their own learner attendance policy.

It is imperative that all public ordinary schools adhere strictly to the policy on learner attendance which comes into effect on 1 January 2009.

The contents of this circular must be brought to the attention of all educators.



R. Cassius Lubisi, PhD.
Superintendent-General

3/12/2008

***Model policy on attendance to be adapted by a school as
required***

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POLICY

NAME OF SCHOOL:

VISION OF SCHOOL:

MISSION OF SCHOOL:

PREAMBLE

[Name of school] is committed to providing a full, well rounded and efficient education to all pupils and embraces the concept of equal access and opportunities for all.

We will endeavour to provide an environment where all pupils feel valued and welcome.

We recognize that for learners to reach their full academic potential and achieve high educational outcomes regular school attendance is essential. We will consistently work towards a goal of one hundred percent attendance for all children. Every opportunity will be used to convey to pupils and their parents or care-givers the importance of regular and punctual attendance.

School attendance is subject to various Education laws and this school attendance policy is written to reflect these laws and the guidance produced by the KwaZulu-Natal Department for Education.

Each year the school will examine its attendance figures and set attendance/absence targets. These will reflect both national and provincial attendance targets.

The school will review its systems for improving attendance at regular intervals to ensure that it is achieving the goals it sets for itself.

This policy will contain within it the procedures that the school will use to meet its attendance targets.

Objectives of the policy

- To provide a framework for the management and control of learner attendance and absence.
- To improve the overall rate of attendance in all schools in the province.
- To gather and analyse attendance data.

School Procedures

Registration at school will be conducted twice daily and recorded in a register either manually or electronically in a format approved by the Department.

Any child who is absent from school at the morning or afternoon registration period must have his/her absence recorded as being authorized or unauthorized. Only the principal or a member of staff acting on his/her behalf can authorise absence. If there is no known reason for the absence at registration, then the absence must be recorded in the first instance as unauthorised.

Late Arrivals

Morning registration will take place at the start of school at.....am.

The registers will remain open for..... minutes.

Any learner arriving after this time will be marked as having an unauthorised absence unless there is a reasonable and acceptable explanation for the late-coming. In cases for example, where the absence at registration was for attending an early morning medical appointment, the appropriate authorized absence code will be entered.

The afternoon registration will be at PM.

The registers will close at PM.

Learners arriving after the start of the school day but before the end of the registration period will be treated for statistical purposes, as present, but will be coded as late before registers close.

First Day Absence

All learners who have registered for school are expected to be at school from the first day until the last. Condonation of absence will be with the explicit consent of parent/care-giver after providing valid reasons. However, such a learner will be marked as being absent in the class register on the first day and ensuing days until he/she returns.

Names of learners who come under compulsory education and who do not return to school at the beginning of the new year will be reflected in a register and will be referred to the District Office.

Learners who are over the age of 15 years and who do not return to school will be omitted from the register from the first day and will be considered as having dropped out. If a learner returns on a date after the first day his/her name will be reflected in a register on the date of return. Only in exceptional cases and at the discretion of the principal will the registration of a learner be considered after twenty days of the start of the school year.

Continuing Absence

The school will endeavour to contact parents/caregivers to elicit the reason for absence and to provide the necessary support. Any absence for reasons of ill-health for more for five days or more must be accompanied by a medical certificate. All other absence irrespective of the number of days must be accompanied with an explanation from a parent or care-giver upon the learner's return.

Any learner who is absent for ten consecutive days without a valid explanation will be referred to the District Office and to the local Social Welfare Offices. The school will include details of the action that they have taken.

Frequent Absence

It is the responsibility of the class educator to be aware of and bring attention to, any emerging attendance concerns.

In cases where a learner begins to develop a pattern of absences, the school will try to resolve the problem with the parents/care-givers. If this is unsuccessful the school will with the consent of the parent/care-giver refer the learner to the local clinic if the problem appears to be a medical one. In other cases, the school will seek advice from the District Office.

Return after absence

It is important that on return from an absence that all learners are made to feel welcome. This should include ensuring that the learner is helped to catch up on missed work and brought up to date on any information that has been passed to the other learners.

Absence notes

Notes received from parents/caregivers explaining absence should be kept for the remainder of the academic year. The notes may need to be retained for a longer period if there are concerns about the attendance of the learner which may require further investigation.

Promoting attendance

The school will use opportunities as they arise to remind parents/care-givers, that it is their responsibility to ensure that their children receive their education.

Parents/care-givers wishing to home-school their child/ward must be referred to the appropriate section in the Department.

Holidays in term time

Holidays during term time are to be discouraged. Parents/care-givers will be reminded of the effect absence can have on a learner's potential achievement.

Religious Holidays

While it is expected that every child attends school every day of the academic year, the school respects the cultural diversity of the South African population. Learners wishing to absent themselves during school term to celebrate cultural and religious occasions must apply for such leave of absence. Absence from school during this period will be regarded as authorized absence.

After conducting an investigation, the school will apply to the Department for complete closure of school for a specific religious or cultural holiday/s provided that the majority of the learner population belong to the said religion or culture.

Early closure at end of term

A school may close early at the end of a term provided that at least three hours of notional time is spent meaningfully on the academic programme.

Attendance Awards

The school will use the following system to reward learners who have good or improving attendance. [*List school's attendance award system*]

(Any reward system must be meaningful to the learners. The timing of rewards needs to be taken into account to ensure that the children can make the link between their attendance and any rewards)

Attendance Targets and Standards

The school will set attendance targets each year. Consecutive targets become the standard for the school. A system for analysing performance towards the targets will be established and a member of the school management will be responsible for overseeing this work. Attendance figures and targets will be discussed with the school governing body and at parent meetings.

Attendance figures for the week will be announced at assembly.

Study leave

No learner must absent himself/herself for the purpose of studying during tests or examinations unless such leave is authorized by the Head of Department.

Learners must attend school everyday of the year without exception even during days when examinations are not written except in the case of matriculants writing end of year examinations.

The registration system

The School will use *manual paper registers/a computerised system* for keeping the school attendance records.

The following provincial codes will be used to record attendance information.

CODE	DESCRIPTION	MEANING
/	Present	Present
a a	Absent	Absent without authorisation
a /	Unauthorised absence in the morning	Unauthorised absence in the morning but present in the afternoon
/ a	Unauthorised absence in the afternoon	Present in the morning but unauthorised absence in the afternoon
A /	Authorised absence in the morning	Authorised absence in the morning but present in the afternoon
/ A	Authorised absence in the afternoon	Present in the morning but authorized absence in the afternoon
A A	Absent	Authorised absence
N	New on register	Inclusion of new learner per the date indicated
C	School closed to pupils	Authorised closure
E	Excluded (no alternative provision made)	Remove from register

Categorisation of Absence

Any pupil who is on roll but not present in the school must be recorded within one of these categories.

1. Authorised Absence
2. Unauthorised Absence
3. Approved Educational Activity

1. Authorised absence

This is for those pupils who are away from school for a reason that is deemed to be valid and with the consent of the parent or care-giver.

2. Unauthorised absence

This is for those pupils where no reason has been provided, or whose absence is deemed to be without valid reason.

3. Approved Educational Activity

This covers types of supervised educational activity undertaken off site but with the approval of the school/ Department of Education.

Note: Pupils recorded in this category are deemed to be present for attendance returns purposes.

This would include:

- Work experience placements
 - Field trips and educational visits/excursions
 - Sporting activities
-

Management of registers

- Registers must be kept for at least 3 years. Registers are legal documents and may be used in a court of law.
- Computer generated registers must be printed out at least once a month and bound into annual volumes. Alternatively electronic back-ups must be made. These also need preserving for at least three years.
- Registers will be examined by a District Office official at least once a quarter.
- Entries in paper registers must be in ink.
- All corrections must be visible (no correcting fluid).
- All names must be recorded in alphabetical order beginning with the surname, followed by all other names.
- The gender of the learner must be reflected preferably in another colour ink if registers are maintained manually.
- The register will be balanced daily and the statistics will be maintained in the class register as well as in the school's daily summary register.
- A class and school summary register must be maintained for each month.
- All class registers' balances must tally with that kept by management.
- On a quarterly basis statistics on learner attendance and drop-out must be submitted to the District office.

Register Security

The registers must be safely stored. *[Give details of the schools system for moving registers around school and where they are kept after registration times]*

Appendices

This policy must be read in conjunction with;

the South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996 (Amended), section 3 (1) that pertains to learners who are of compulsory school age and are registered at a school and the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education's Policy on learner attendance.

For educational purposes the term parent/care-giver is used to include those that have parental responsibility and/or those that have the day to day care of the child.

Approval

This policy was approved at a sitting of the school governing body on _____ 20____ .

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION POLICY ON LEARNER ATTENDANCE AND LEARNER ABSENTEEISM

1. INTRODUCTION

This policy framework is aimed at providing guidance to schools on managing and developing sound systems and procedures to promote and ensure attendance and punctuality.

Having learners attend school regularly must be a priority for all schools. The development of an effective school attendance policy can have a positive impact on improving rates of attendance and learner achievement.

The perception of learners and their experience of school are important in promoting good attendance. Poor attendance seriously affects learner achievement of educational outcomes and results in a waste of valuable resources.

Good attendance is also contingent on good administrative systems which accurately record attendance and absence, gathers and analyses data, thus enabling the school management team and governing body to take appropriate action.

The Department collects data to assess the performance of the education system in respect of access, adequacy, outputs, efficiency, effectiveness and economical use of all resources, outcomes and quality. Data on learner absenteeism is an important efficiency indicator.

For everyday that a learner is absent valuable resources such as time, money and information are wasted.

2. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

2.1. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Act 108 of 1996

Section 29 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa states that everyone has the right to:

- (a) basic education, including adult basic education; and
- (b) further education, which the state, through reasonable measures must make progressively available and accessible.

2.2. The National Education Policy Act 76 of 1996

Section(4) states that the Minister shall determine national policy for the planning, provision, financing, staffing, co-ordination, management, governance, programmes, monitoring, evaluation and well-being of the education system, and without derogating from the generality of this section, may determine national policy for compulsory school education.

Section 8(1) states that the Minister shall direct that the standards of education provision, delivery, and performance throughout the Republic be monitored and evaluated annually or at specified intervals, with the object of assessing progress in compliance with the constitution and with national education policy.

Section 8(3) (4) further states that the Department of Education must undertake monitoring and evaluation through analysis of data gathered by means of education management information systems or any other suitable means, in co-operation with provincial departments of education.

2.3. South African Schools Act 84 of 1996

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 places an obligation on a parent or care-giver to send a learner regularly to school.

Section 3 (1) states:

"Subject to this Act and any applicable provincial law every parent must cause every learner for whom he or she is responsible to attend school from the first day of the year

until the last day of the year in which such learner reaches the age of fifteen or the ninth grade whichever occurs first".

Section (5) states if a learner who is subject to compulsory attendance in terms of subsection(1) is not enrolled at or fails to attend a school, the Head of Department may:

- (a) investigate the circumstances of the learners absence from school;
- (b) take appropriate measures to remedy the situation; and
- (c) subject to this Act and any other applicable law:
 - (i) any parent who, without just cause and after a written notice from the Head of Department, fails to comply with subsection (1) is guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months; or
 - (ii) any person who, without just cause, prevents a learner who is subject to compulsory attendance from attending a school is guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY

- 3.1. To provide a framework for the management and control of learner attendance and absence.
- 3.2. To improve the overall rate of attendance in all schools in the province.
- 3.3. To gather and analyse attendance data.

4. COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE

- Children who turn six years before 30 June during a school year must attend school at the beginning of the following year.
- Children who turn five years before 30 June during a school year may attend school at the beginning of the following year. Attendance for this category of learners is not compulsory.
- A learner must remain in school until the end of the year in which he/she turns fifteen years of age.

5. SCHOOL POLICIES AND PROCEDURE

Every school under the jurisdiction of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education including independent schools have to develop a policy on attendance and attendant procedures for the implementation and monitoring of such a policy. Attached is a model of a policy that a school may use with some adaptation.

6. REGISTRATION OF LEARNERS

Learners must register for school annually. Learners seeking admission for the first time at a school must be accompanied by a parent or care-giver. The policies of the school must be made available to the parent/care-giver and in some instances explained to the parent/care-giver. Current learners need only complete a re-registration form and update all information required by the school.

7. ADMISSION REGISTER

An admission register is a composite register of all the learners of a school, past and present. Admission and class registers may be maintained either manually or electronically. An admission register provides a record of all learners who either attend or attended the school in the past.

The admission register must contain the following information:

- 7.1. Admission number
- 7.2. Date of Admission
- 7.3. Surname and name of learners
- 7.4. Date of Birth and Identity number
- 7.5. Gender
- 7.6. Address and telephone numbers
- 7.7. Names of parents
- 7.8. Current or last grade
- 7.9. Date of exclusion when learners leave

7.10. Remarks

8. TEMPORARY REGISTER

Classification of learners must be completed prior to the closure of schools each year and a temporary register compiled for each class for the following year. The temporary registers must be finalized and closed on the tenth day of the new school year. Within a week of the submission of the tenth day statistics, the permanent registers must be finalized and made available for inspection by the District Office. Only, the names of those learners who have registered and have returned to school or those whose parent/care-giver has indicated their intention to return, should appear in the temporary and subsequently in the permanent registers. It is a criminal offence to misrepresent the number of learners in a register.

9. DAILY REGISTER

The school must maintain a register for each class and registration must take place twice daily - once in the morning and again in the afternoon. The school may determine the times for registration. The attendance register is a legal document that provides a daily record of attendance per class in the school. The register must be marked by the educator responsible for a class. No learner must mark a register. The security and storage of the registers must receive high priority. A class register must be maintained for as long as at least one learner is mentioned therein and is still learning at the school and thereafter for a period of at least three years before being disposed.

9.1. Format of register

The register must on the first page contain the following information on a learner:

- 9.1.1. Admission number
- 9.1.2. Surname
- 9.1.3. First name/s
- 9.1.4. Date of Birth/ Identity number
- 9.1.5. Gender

9.2. Marking of register

The following provincial codes will be used to record attendance information.

CODE	DESCRIPTION	MEANING
/	Present	Present
a a	Absent	Absent without authorisation
a /	Unauthorised absence in the morning	Unauthorised absence in the morning but present in the afternoon
/ a	Unauthorised absence in the afternoon	Present in the morning but unauthorised absence in the afternoon
A /	Authorised absence in the morning	Authorised absence in the morning but present in the afternoon
/ A	Authorised absence in the afternoon	Present in the morning but authorized absence in the afternoon
A A	Absent	Authorised absence
N	New on register	Inclusion of new learner per the date indicated
C	School closed to pupils	Authorised closure
E	Excluded (no alternative provision made)	Remove from register

The register is a legal document and therefore utmost care must be taken in marking and maintaining it. The register must be neat and should not be altered once closed at the end of the day. All manual registers must be marked with a black ink pen.

9.3. Categories of absence

The Department recognizes three categories of absence, namely:

9.3.1. Authorised Absence

This is for those pupils who are away from school for a reason that is deemed to be valid and with the consent of the parent or care-giver.

9.3.2. Unauthorised Absence

This is for those pupils where no reason has been provided, or whose absence is deemed to be without valid reason.

9.3.3. Approved Educational Activity

This covers types of supervised educational activity undertaken off site but with the approval of the school/ Department of Education. This category of absence is considered as authorized absence.

9.4. Inclusions and exclusions

A learner who is admitted to school during the course of the year must be included after the last name that appears on the register and must be denoted with an (N) on the date of first attendance and subsequently with the provincial codes.

A learner who is absent for twenty consecutive days without notification and is not subject to compulsory attendance may be excluded from the class register. The exclusion must be denoted with an (E) after the twentieth day and followed by dashes subsequently.

Learners who are absent for long periods of time either consecutively or intermittently must be investigated and appropriate disciplinary action must be taken. Parents of children particularly of compulsory school-going age must be reminded that it is a criminal offence to deny their children access to education.

Learners of compulsory school going age who absent themselves for ten consecutive days without notification must be reported to the local Social Welfare Services and the District Office after exhausting all avenues to get them back to school. The Department may institute legal action against the parents/care-givers of such learners.

9.5. Summary register

The school must maintain a summary register administered by a member of the school management team. The summary register must comprise of all the classes in the school and must contain the daily attendance and absence figures for each class. The daily percentage attendance figures for the school must be calculated from the summary register.

9.6. Calculations

The class teacher must tally and record in the register the attendance and absence figures and submit for capturing into the school's summary register daily.

At the end of each month the class teacher must, on the last page of a manually maintained register, summarise the attendance and absence figures for each learner and check whether the aggregated figures for the class correlates with that maintained by the school management. Schools using electronic registers may use alternative methods resulting in the same outcomes.

The school must calculate the average attendance for each month and submit these to the Superintendent of Education: Management (SEM) at the end of each quarter.

9.7. Absence notes

Schools must request parents/care-givers to provide an explanation for each time a learner is absent. Notes received from parents/care-givers explaining absence should be kept for the remainder of the academic year. If there are attendance concerns about the learner that may require further investigation, then the notes may need to be retained for a longer period.

9.8. Promoting attendance

The school must use every opportunity to remind parents/care-givers, that it is their responsibility to ensure that their children attend school regularly.

Parents/care-givers wishing to provide home-schooling for their child/ward must be referred to the appropriate section in the Department.

9.9. Holidays in term time

The school must discourage holidays during term time. Parents/care-givers must be reminded of the effect that absence can have on a learner's potential achievement if taken away unduly from school.

9.10. Religious Holidays

While it is expected that every child attends school every day of the academic year, the school must respect the cultural diversity among learners. Learners wishing to absent themselves during school term to celebrate cultural and religious occasions must apply, in the first term, for such leave of absence. Absence from school during this period will be regarded as authorized absence. Educators will have to apply for special leave during this period of absence.

After conducting an investigation, a school must apply to the District Office for provisional closure of school for a specific religious or cultural holiday/s provided that the majority of learners belong to the said religion or culture. The maximum number of days permitted for observance of religious or cultural holidays shall not exceed two days. Absence during this period will be reflected as authorized absence.

9.11. Early closure at end of term

A school may close early at the end of a term provided that at least three hours of notional time is spent meaningfully on the academic programme.

9.12. Attendance Awards

The school must devise strategies to reward learners who have good or improving attendance. Any reward system must improve overall attendance at school.

9.13. Attendance Targets and Standards

The school must set attendance targets at the beginning of each year. These targets must be communicated to the Superintendent of Education: Management (SEM). Consecutive targets must be used to establish the norm or standard of attendance for the school. A system for analysing performance towards the targets must be established and a member of the school management must be responsible for overseeing this work. Attendance figures and targets must be discussed with the school governing body and at parent meetings.

9.14. Study leave

Under no circumstances must learners be encouraged either overtly or covertly to take leave for the purpose of studying during tests or examinations unless such leave is authorized by the Head of Department. Parents who request leave for the children must be reminded of their obligation of sending their children to school for the full duration of the academic year.

Learners must attend school everyday of the year without exception even during days when examinations are not written except in the instance of Grade 12 learners in a school writing end of year examinations.

10. MONTHLY SUMMARY REGISTER

The summary register must be available for inspection at all times. The summary register must be balanced daily and at the end of each month it must be cross-referenced with the register of each class. The summary register will provide attendance trends for each class. The principal must investigate patterns of poor attendance and take the necessary corrective action. Quarterly statistical returns must be submitted to the SEM for transmission to the District and Provincial Education Management and Information Services (EMIS) respectively for analysis.

11. DROP-OUTS

The number of learners who drop out of school must also be reported to the SEM on a quarterly basis. This information is also required by the EMIS section of the Department.

12. QUARTERLY RETURNS

Quarterly returns on learner attendance and drop out must be submitted on the prescribed form to the SEM responsible for the school. A copy of the form is attached.

13. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The principal must monitor attendance and ensure that learners attend school regularly. The SEM is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the attendance policy of a school and taking corrective actions where necessary.

14. CONCLUSION

In order for the Department to achieve desired educational outcomes and to develop the human resources of the province, it is necessary to ensure that learners attend school everyday of the school year. Schools must put in place systems and processes to maximize learner attendance.