



The Children's Aid
Society of Ottawa | La Société de l'aide
à l'enfance d'Ottawa

Addressing Lack of Attendance in Schools in Ontario

Presentation for Information Session on Child Welfare and School
Attendance with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of
Children, Community and Social Services

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AGENDA

1. Legislation Related to Absenteeism

- Presented by Fiona Sillars - Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and Christine Riedel - Ministry of Education

a. Absenteeism & Duty to Report in the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*

b. Compulsory Attendance under the *Education Act*

2. Chronic Absenteeism from an Education Liaison's Perspective

- Presented by Jill Bennett – Education Liaison at Children's Aid Society of Ottawa

a. Background

b. Policies, Programs & Relevant Legislation

c. Issue Trends & Possible Solutions

ABSENTEEISM & DUTY TO REPORT UNDER THE CYFSA

Educators are specifically named in subsection (b) of section 125(6) of the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA)* which identifies a non-exhaustive list of those professionals who are guilty of an offence if they fail to report a suspicion, and the information on which the suspicion was based was obtained in the course of the person's professional or official duties.

“a teacher, early childhood educator, person appointed to a position designated by a board of education as requiring an early childhood educator, school principal, social worker, family counsellor, youth and recreation worker, and operator or employee of a child care centre or home child care agency or provider of licensed child care within the meaning of the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*”.

Chronic school absenteeism alone is not a grounds for protection under the CYFSA , and therefore would only be subject to the duty to report if connected to an enumerated ground of protection under s. 125(1) of the CYFSA.

EDUCATION ACT: COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE

Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2, Section 21:
Compulsory attendance

21 (1) Unless excused under this section,

(a) every person who attains the age of six years on or before the first school day in September in any year shall attend an elementary or secondary school on every school day from the first school day in September in that year until the person attains the age of 18 years; and

(b) every person who attains the age of six years after the first school day in September in any year shall attend an elementary or secondary school on every school day from the first school day in September in the next succeeding year until the last school day in June in the year in which the person attains the age of 18 years. 2006, c. 28, s. 5 (1).

EDUCATION ACT: DUTY OF A PARENT

Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2, Section 21:

Duty of parent, etc.

(5) The parent or guardian of a person who is required to attend school under this section shall cause the person to attend school as required by this section unless the person is at least 16 years old and has withdrawn from parental control. 2006, c. 28, s. 5 (1); 2021, c. 4, Sched. 11, s. 7 (1).

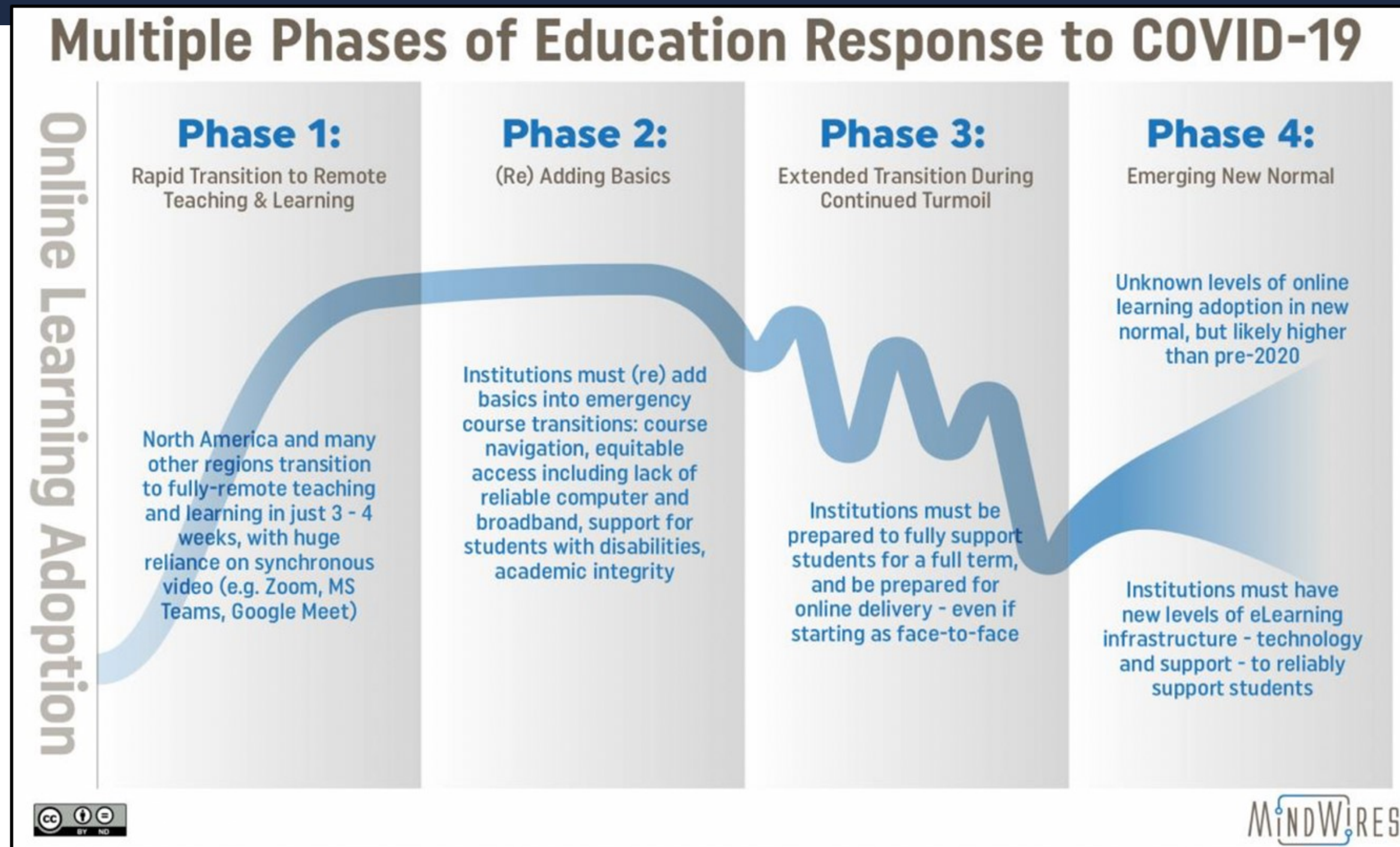
ROLE OF AN EDUCATION LIAISON

- The Education Liaison program serves children and youth in care as well as children and youth who are not in care but are receiving Child Welfare Services.
- Education Liaisons are employed by Children's Aid Societies (societies).
- Their role is to coordinate educational services and connect students to educational supports, while building capacity within societies to support improved educational outcomes for children in care.
- Education Liaisons also help to resolve issues that impact the educational success of eligible children and youth, and strengthen relationships among societies, public school boards, First Nations school authorities, schools, and community partners.

Relevant Legislation, Policies and Programs

Ministry of Education	Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services	Ministry of Colleges and Universities
• Education Act • Enrolment Register Instructions for Elementary and Secondary Schools 2024-2025 • Safe Schools • Special Education: Individual Education Plans • PPM 169: Student Mental Health • School Mental Health Ontario	• Child, Youth, and Family Services Act • Duty to Report • Children and Youth in Care • Voluntary Youth Services Agreement • Ready Set Go • Stay Home for School Program • Education Liaison Program	• Ontario Education Championship Teams
• Joint Protocol for Student Achievement		

BACKGROUND



BACKGROUND



SCHOOL CLOSURES AND COVID-19: Impacts on children

In an effort to curb the spread of COVID-19, policy makers across Canada have employed remote learning approaches and closed schools. There can be unintended consequences associated with these measures, which may particularly affect the **5.7 million** children and youth who attend primary or secondary school in Canada (2018/19).



Vulnerable groups

- Families without adequate internet access or devices
- Families where no one can support home learning
- Children with learning disabilities

8% of children and youth aged 5-17 have a diagnosed learning disability (2019)

58% of households with children do not have enough devices to support all members working or studying from home at the same time (2018)

- The pandemic has disrupted two school years
- School supports for children may be less accessible
- Internet access and devices become critical

ACADEMIC IMPACTS

64% of youth aged 15 to 24 reported a decrease in their mental health during the pandemic (2020)

- Children feel isolated without peers
- With reduced day-to-day interactions, in-school support for mental health may be less available

MENTAL IMPACTS

Vulnerable groups

- Children experiencing mental health challenges before the pandemic
- Families who were experiencing mental or financial stress pre-pandemic

5% of children and youth aged 5-17 reported having a diagnosed anxiety disorder (2019)

Vulnerable groups

- Children living in low income
- Children experiencing food insecurity

11% of children and youth aged 0-17 live in low income (2018)

44% percent increase in the number of employed mothers who were working less than half their usual hours in January 2021 compared with January 2020 (with a child under 13)

- Parents may have to reduce work hours to support at-home learning
- Possible lack of access to school meal programs

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS

PHYSICAL IMPACTS

- School as a safe space is no longer available
- No access to structured physical activities offered in school
- Increased screen time

61% of children and youth aged 5-17 did not meet the physical activity guidelines (2016/17)

Vulnerable groups

- Children who mostly relied on school for physical activity
- Children at risk of family violence

22,299 children and youth aged 17 and younger were victimized by a family member; a parent (60%) was the most common perpetrator (2019)

Equity and diversity:

Some populations or groups may be overrepresented among the most vulnerable

What Research is Finding



Before we dive into strategies to address absenteeism, it is key to understand risk factors and potential challenges that students who are chronically absent may be facing. The research divides these factors into three categories: personal, school, and parental.

Risk Factors



PERSONAL

- Socioeconomic Status
- Special Education Needs
- Mental Health
- Sleeping Challenges
- Social Isolation



SCHOOL

- Connection with teachers
- School climate
- COVID-19 virtual schooling



PARENTAL

- Parent/caregiver mental health
- Engagement in school
- Mistrust of school officials
- Child welfare involvement

Issue Trends and Possible Solutions

- **Socioeconomic Status** has affected some students' ability to engage in their learning. 'e.g. uniforms, technology, school supplies.
- **Child Welfare Involvement** and the circumstances surrounding their life journey can impede the student's ability to engage in school when other life circumstances are clouding their education pathway.
- **Staff Turnover in schools and child welfare agencies** has affected the understanding and/or consistent implementation of current policies, procedures or protocols.
- **Connection with Teachers** who do not have a trauma informed lens from which to view and understand the needs of our children and youth, can be challenging.
- **Special Education Needs** prohibit some students from attending due to the school's concern about lack of resources or safety of self and/or others.

Issue Trends and Possible Solutions

- **Social Isolation** is a reality for some children and youth who have experienced multiple moves or are new to Canada and are experiencing language barriers.
- **Parent/Caregiver Mental Health** sometimes inhibits the ability of the child or youth to get to school. If the child or youth are parentified this can be a barrier to attending their classes.
- **Engagement in School is inhibited** when the youth does not see themselves in the curriculum content or the expectations of the teacher do not align with their needs.
- **Mental Health** of the youth. There are more youth being diagnosed with mental health disorders such as anxiety and/or depression which prevents them from being able to attend school.
- **Mistrust of School Officials** by the youth or the caregiver if previous school experiences have not been positive for them.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS



Ongoing Monitoring

Educator and Community Awareness

Community Support

Parent/Caregiver Engagement

Increased Mental Health Literacy/Supports

ONGOING ATTENDANCE MONITORING



Potential Solution:

- Develop a virtual attendance monitoring system inclusive of student information, user friendly, and individualized.



Challenge: developing a simple way to access attendance data that is:

- Disaggregated by student
- Easily accessible and user friendly
- Inclusive of relevant student information

EDUCATOR AND COMMUNITY AWARENESS?

Challenge:

Ensuring teachers, schools and community agencies are aware of best practices on how to support and engage chronically absent students.

Potential Solution:

Ongoing campaigns to increase awareness on risk factors of absenteeism and best practices. Develop a website and schedule on-going presentations to schools and community stakeholders. This could include the work of the Education Liaisons, School Social Workers, Education Championship Teams



EDUCATOR AND COMMUNITY AWARENESS



Develop streamlined processes for tracking and responding to absences.

Meet basic needs first (Safety, sense of belonging, housing, transportation, food, after school care).

Focus on caring relationship development.

Increase training for educators/staff on risk factors.

Make referrals to community resources.

Engage with families in an informal way.

Increase community partnerships.

EDUCATOR AND COMMUNITY AWARENESS



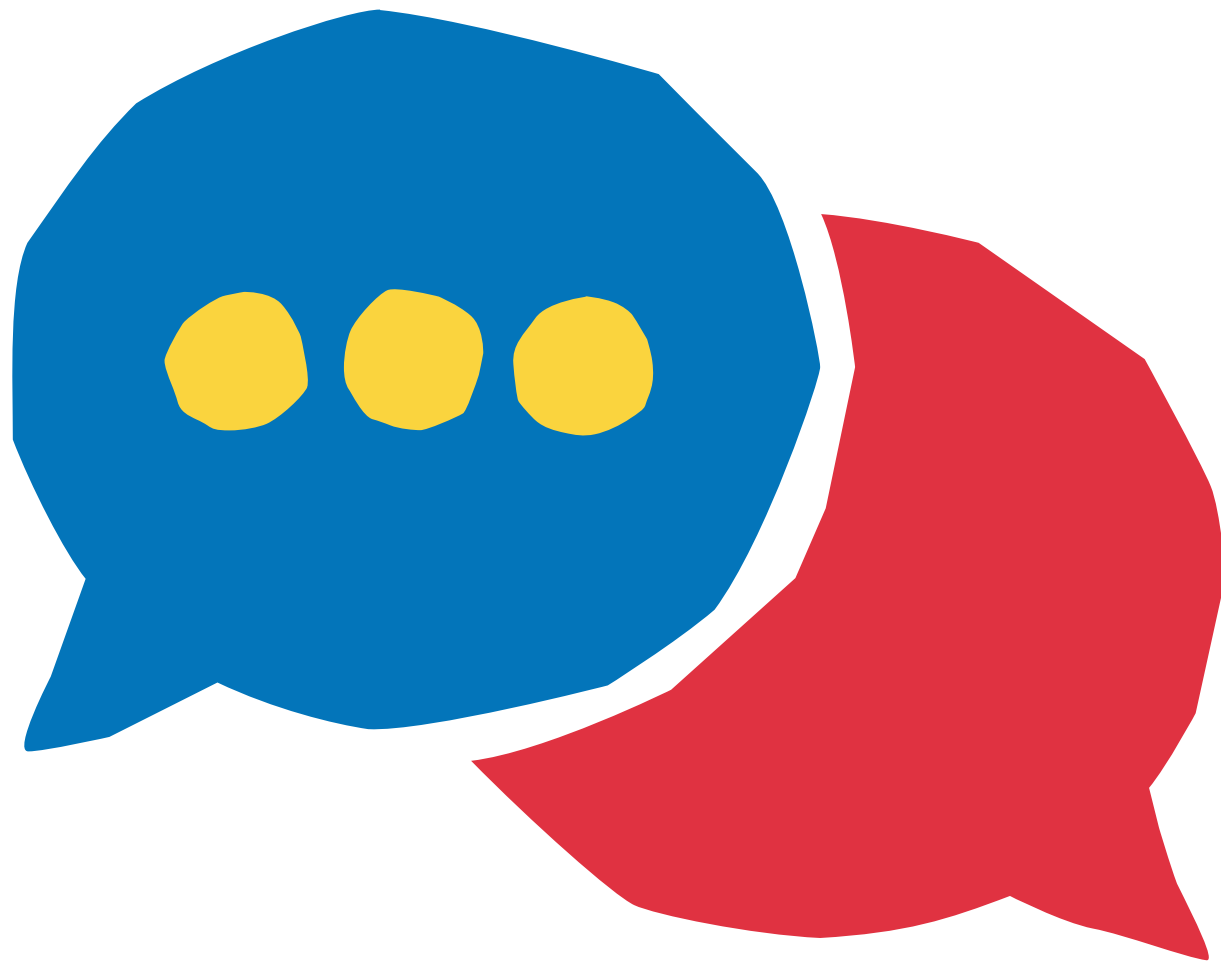
Interventions should be immediate, non-threatening and consistent.

Celebrate good and improved attendance.

Ensure that your school community is welcoming and engaging of parents, caregivers and students.

Help families understand the impact of attendance (both positive and negative).

COMMUNITY SUPPORT



Challenge:

Prioritize coordinated community support to assist in supporting students in returning to school.

Potential Solution:

- Community advisory tables
- Develop a community toolkit
- Individual student case planning in partnership with community. Make use of the JPSA protocol.

PARENT/CAREGIVER ENGAGEMENT



Challenge:

Ensuring parents/caregivers are engaged in conversations about student attendance and are supported in addressing their needs to increase attendance.

Potential Solution:

- Establish a culturally safe school climate
- “Nudge” Letters / conversations to parents as early as possible

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT AND LITERACY



School
Mental Health
Ontario

Santé mentale
en milieu scolaire
Ontario

Challenge:

Continue to increase educators' knowledge of mental health and provide meaningful programs and supports for students to address mental health challenges.

Potential Solution:

- Multi-tiered system of support
- Peer Mentoring Programs
- Partnerships with clinical services
- Trauma-informed practice training



**Next
Steps...**

Start

with

Why



Connect



Engage



Learn



Inspire



The Children's Aid
Society of Ottawa

La Société de l'aide
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CONCLUSION

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