**Calculating Attendance for the School Discipline Attendance (SDA) Collection in Online Schools**

The State collects several measures of student attendance in the School Discipline Attendance (SDA) collection, but in the past some online schools report default metrics of 100% attendance and 0% truancy for these measures. It is unclear why this inconsistency originally occurred, but moving forward all online schools and their authorizers are required to report metrics that are truly representative of actual student attendance and truancy rates.

Individual school policies and procedures depend upon the limitations of the Student Information System (SIS) or the Learning Management System (LMS), the student-teacher ratio, grade-level of the students, and learning model used by the school. Despite the variance in virtual schools, every online school should have consistent, authorizer-approved participation/attendance and truancy policies and procedures that are communicated to parents, students, and teachers.

After exploring different options for recording and calculating attendance rates, it was determined that there is not a one-size-fits-all method that can be applied to all online schools. With this in mind, there are three different methods that may be used for recording attendance depending on the model of the virtual school: **1) Minimum login time requirements, 2) Specific task completion for a given time period**, **3) Minimum lesson/unit completion requirements**. None of these methods are meant to be mutually exclusive and a combination of these methods may be utilized to record and calculate attendance rates.

* **1. Minimum Login Time Requirements**. Establishing a minimum amount of time that must be spent logged-in to coursework per day or week is the simplest option to implement because attendance can be easily recorded in most SISs designed for use in brick-and-mortar schools. Most of the same SISs used in brick-and-mortar schools are commonly used in online schools and there are few SISs designed specifically for use in virtual schools. This method of taking attendance is fairly black and white as it is easy for an instructor to verify and report whether or not a student logged into course work for a sufficient amount of time.

This method does not take into account the amount of actual work completed by the student during the time logged in to course work, but does provide a comparable measure to the “seat time” measure that is used to calculate attendance in a brick-and-mortar school. This can easily be entered into an SIS on a daily basis, again much the same as is done in a brick-and-mortar school. Additionally, schools may mandate that students must log into course work at certain times during the day as well as specific days throughout the week. While simple, this method of calculating attendance does not allow a high level of flexibility for students who are unable to fulfill a minimum number of hours or log in to course work during designated days and times.

* **2.** **Specific Task Completion for a Given Time Period.** Another method for recording and calculating attendance is mandating that students complete a series of regularly scheduled tasks on a daily or weekly basis. If the student completes all of the required tasks during the specified amount of time, he or she is considered in attendance. If the student does not complete all of the tasks, then he or she is not in attendance or is only partially in attendance. This method of recording and calculating attendance is widespread in post-secondary online courses.

Tasks may include, but are not limited to, contacting the teacher by phone or email, participating in a discussion thread, attending a virtual tutoring session or webinar, and/or submitting a specific assignment. Any task or interaction that can be electronically documented and contributes to student engagement could be used for recording attendance. Another strategy would be to weight tasks in order to reflect the importance or difficulty of each task.

This method for recording and calculating attendance is fairly compatible with most SISs, especially if student task completion is recorded on a daily basis. Measuring students by completing tasks over a timeline also allows for more flexibility as the students can be allowed to complete tasks at any time during the given timeline, or if more structure is required, the students can be asked to complete their tasks by a specific time of day or by the end of the week.

* **3.** **Minimum Lesson/Unit Completion Requirements.** The third method for recording and calculating attendance affords the most flexibility and, if implemented correctly, holds students to the highest level of accountability. In this method, student attendance is directly tied to what the student accomplishes and/or produces over a given period of time. The assignments completed essentially become the evidence that a student has been in attendance, and if no work is produced, then a student is not considered to be in attendance.

In this scenario, the timeline established for completion of work is critical as some students may require more/less time to complete assignments. It is important when implementing this method that extra time is not the only accommodation used with students for whom extra time in the classroom may be a valid accommodation.

Although there is flexibility for implementing these recommended methods for recording attendance, a weekly timeline is recommended. In Colorado pursuant to §22-33-107(3)(a) C.R.S., a child who is “habitually truant” is between the ages of six and seventeen and has “four unexcused absences from public school in any one month or ten unexcused absences from public school during any school year.” Based on the statutory definition of habitual truancy, it is possible that a student can become “habitually truant” within the period of one week. This should compel an online school to record and calculate participation for its students on a weekly basis, at a minimum.

Once a method and criteria have been chosen to assess whether a student is in attendance or not, an online school and its authorizer must determine how to quantify the attendance so that it may be reported to the State in the School Discipline Attendance collection. Regardless of the internal methods used to track attendance, metrics for all of the following measures must be calculated and reported:

* **Total Days Attended by Students**: The aggregate number of whole and partial days the students have attended school for the current school year. It is calculated by adding the number of days each student attended (full and partial days) in the current school year.
* **Total Days Excused by Students**: The aggregate number of whole and partial days students had excused absences (out of school), for the current school year. Absence due to a suspension is excused. (A student who is tardy is not considered to be absent.)
* **Total Days Unexcused by Students:** The aggregate number of whole and partial days students were absent (out of school), without being excused from a parent/guardian for the current school year. (A student who is tardy is not considered to be absent.)
* **Total Possible Attendance Days**: The aggregate number of whole and partial days students would have attended school if there had been no absences for the current school year. It is calculated by adding the number of days that each student was enrolled in the current school year. Expelled students are included until date of expulsion. This number should be the sum of Total Days Attended, Total Days Excused Absent and Total Days Unexcused Absent. Example: A school that has a 185-day calendar and a student population of 600 students would have 111,000 Student Total Days Possible.
* **Number of Students Truant Four or More Days in a Month**: The unduplicated count of habitually truant students who are at least the age of six on or before August 1 of the year in question and under the age of seventeen years having four total days of Unexcused Absences from public school in any one calendar Month; calculated by the sum of unexcused absences converted to days and fractions of days.
* **Number of Students Truant Ten or More Days in a School Year**: The unduplicated count of habitually truant students who are at least the age of six on or before August 1 of the year in question and under the age of seventeen years having ten or more total days of Unexcused Absences, but never accumulated four or more total days of unexcused absences from that public school in any one calendar month; calculated by the sum of unexcused absences converted to days and fractions of days.
* **Number of Students Truant for Both Conditions:** The unduplicated count of Habitually Truant students who are at least the age of six on or before August 1 of the year in question and under the age of seventeen years four or more total days of Unexcused Absences from the reporting public school in any one calendar month and also accumulated ten or more total days unexcused absences from the same public school during the reported school year; calculated by the sum of unexcused absences converted to days and fractions of days.

The following are hypothetical examples using different methods of recording attendance to obtain metrics for the measures above:

**Example 1:**

Online School A has calendar schedule of 180 days in the school year with a student population of 300 students, resulting in 54,000 **Total Possible Attendance Days.** The online school determines that students must login to their classes for at least 20 hours per week, which is 4 hours per day in a 5 day week (Students may login any day of the week, including weekends). Each week, the school records how many hours students have logged into their coursework and uses the following method to calculate the number of individual student absences:

(20 expected hours per week – Actual # of hours logged in) = # of days absent per week
 4 hours per day

Student A logged in to her courses for 18 hours during the week and her parents called the online school and excused the absence. Based on the above equation, Student A attended 4.5 days of school for that week and accrued 0.5 excused absences, which must be added to the **Total Days Excused by Students**.

**Example 2:**

Online School B determines that a student must participate in a discussion thread (20%), respond to teacher emails/phone calls (25%), attend a synchronous class session (25%) and submit homework assignments (30%) by the end of the school week in order to be in attendance. The tasks are weighted as indicated. Each week, the number of student absences is determined by which tasks students completed.

Student B participated in a discussion thread, responded to emails and submitted homework assignments, but did not attend the synchronous class session and was not excused by a parent/guardian. The school used the following method to calculate Student A’s weekly attendance:

 5 days/week x (0.2 + 0.25 + 0.3) = 3.75 days attended/week

Because the student was not excused, 1.25 days must be added to the **Total Days Unexcused by Students.**

**Example 3:**

Online School C determines that a student must complete 20 lessons per week (4 lessons per day) to be in 100% attendance. Student C completes 4 lessons during the week. The school uses the following method to calculate the number of absences:

(20 lessons per week – Actual # of lessons completed) = # of absences per week
 4 lessons per day

Based on this calculation, Student C has accrued 4 absences for the week. A parent or guardian did not excuse these absences, so they must be added to the **Total Days Unexcused by Students**. Additionally, this student would be added to the Number of Students **Truant Four or More Days in a Month**.