

**Senate Education and Employment References Committee: school refusal
inquiry - questions on notice**

- 1 Please provide attendance data by year level**
- **Do you collect data on reasons for absenteeism?**
 - **If so, please provide the categories you collect data against**
 - **Please provide the absenteeism data by year level and by category you collect this data under.**

ANSWER

Semester 1, 2022 attendance data by year level for public school students is provided in **Table 1**. The table includes:

- attendance rate
- percentage of students in each of the attendance risk categories
- percentage of authorised absences
- percentage of unauthorised absences
- percentage of absences by reason (code).

Under section 28 of the *School Education Act 1999*, principals are required to maintain accurate daily attendance records for all students enrolled in their school. Additionally, public school principals are required to use the following attendance codes to record the reason for student absences.

Authorised absences:

Code	Cause
R	reasonable cause
C	cultural absence
N	notified as sick
V	authorised vacation
Z	suspended

Unauthorised absences:

Code	Cause
U	unexplained absence/not yet established
K	unauthorised vacation
X	unacceptable reason
T	truant - off school site

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Table 1 WA Public Schools Attendance Data by Year Level – Semester 1 2022

Semester 1, 2022		Attendance risk categories ²				Authorised absences						Unauthorised absences					
Year Level	Attendance Rate ¹ (%)	Regular (%)	Indicated (%)	Moderate (%)	Severe (%)	Total Authorised absences (%)	R code (%)	N code (%)	C code (%)	V code (%)	Z code (%)	Total Unauthorised absences (%)	U code (%)	X code (%)	T code (%)	K code (%)	Total students ³
PPR	85.9	48	32.6	14.2	5.2	72.1	24.3	44.2	0.6	2.9	0.1	27.9	17.6	4.5	0.0	5.7	26,272
Y01	86.8	50.8	32.1	12.6	4.5	70.7	23.6	43.3	0.7	2.8	0.2	29.3	18.7	4.7	0.0	5.9	27,042
Y02	87.0	51.6	31.9	12.0	4.5	70.6	24.6	42.1	0.9	2.9	0.2	29.4	18.9	5.0	0.0	5.4	26,234
Y03	87.2	53.1	30.7	11.7	4.5	69.0	23.1	42.1	0.8	2.6	0.4	31.0	20.0	5.7	0.1	5.2	26,240
Y04	86.9	51.4	31.8	12.1	4.7	69.2	22.7	43.3	0.8	2.1	0.4	30.8	20.2	5.8	0.1	4.7	26,038
Y05	86.7	50.9	31.8	12.6	4.7	68.8	22.8	43.0	0.8	1.9	0.4	31.2	21.4	5.5	0.1	4.2	25,053
Y06	86.1	49.4	32.5	12.7	5.4	69.1	22.2	43.9	0.8	1.5	0.7	30.9	21.5	5.6	0.2	3.6	24,948
Y07	84.9	48.7	28.6	15.0	7.7	67.5	20.3	41.4	0.6	0.4	2.6	32.5	20.4	9.3	0.2	2.2	20,814
Y08	81.0	40.4	29.1	18.4	12.1	62.0	19.8	36.5	0.6	0.3	2.7	38.0	24.4	11.1	0.3	1.7	21,147
Y09	79.3	36.7	29.3	19.6	14.3	59.9	20.1	34.5	0.6	0.3	2.5	40.1	25.9	11.6	0.5	1.7	21,675
Y10	78.5	35.3	29.0	20.3	15.5	59.1	21.6	32.4	0.6	0.2	1.9	40.9	26.8	11.6	0.5	1.5	20,754
Y11	80.6	41.1	28.0	18.0	12.9	58.0	23.1	31.0	0.7	0.2	0.9	42.0	27.0	12.8	0.4	1.2	18,401
Y12	80.6	37.9	29.5	20.8	11.7	60.9	25.3	31.3	0.5	0.2	0.5	39.1	25.2	12.3	0.3	0.7	15,047

¹ the percentage of available days that enrolled students attended

² Regular >=90%

Indicated 80-<90%

Moderate 60-<80%

Severe <60%

³ students enrolled in a public school at any time during Semester 1, 2022.

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- 2 What is your attendance target level for students? Is this consistent across all year groups?**
- If this varies by year level, please provide the target for each year level.**

ANSWER

The expectation is that students will attend compulsory schooling every day the school is open unless an authorised reason for the absence has been determined.

Principals develop approaches relevant to their school's particular context to support student attendance, and this may involve setting attendance targets.

While the Department has no overall 'target' the Student Attendance in Public Schools Procedures provides guidance that where student attendance is below 90%, it is the principal's responsibility to determine whether a documented attendance improvement plan is required for an individual student or group of students.

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3 Have you done any analysis work on the linkage between student attendance and student academic performance?

ANSWER

Individual student performance in NAPLAN is reported against their attendance (previous two semesters) in the Department's internal Student Achievement Information System (SAIS). This enables teachers and school leaders to investigate any potential impacts of attendance on a student's performance in NAPLAN.

The Department provided comprehensive student attendance and achievement data to the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research (now Telethon Kids Institute) to inform its 2013 report *Student Attendance and Educational Outcomes: Every Day Counts*, prepared for the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Additionally, the Department is currently represented on the AERO (Australian Education Research Organisation) working group to shape its *Student Attendance Project* which has been requested by Education Ministers. Detailed student attendance data will be provided to AERO to inform its research.

The Department also provides de-identified public school student attendance and NAPLAN data for major data linkage projects in Western Australia including the WA Data Linkage System, Social Investment Data Resource (SIDR) and PeopleWA.

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- 4 How many children are enrolled in a form of education, other than mainstream school, including:**
- **Home School**
 - **Distance Education**
 - **Other (please define categories).**
 - **Please provide student data against each category.**

ANSWER

- Home School

As of the March 2023 census, there were 6,466 students registered for home education in Western Australia.

Parents choose to home-educate for a variety of reasons, one of which may be school refusal. The Department has no legislative authority to request the reason for student registration and, therefore, does not capture this data.

- Distance Education

Students typically enrol at the Department of Education's School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) for reasons which fall into one or more of the following categories:

- full-time students unable to attend a conventional school due to geographical isolation
- students travelling with their parents in Australia or overseas for 6 months or more
- students whose local school does not offer the subjects they wish to study, including rural and remote primary schools with secondary students
- elite athletes or art students
- students referred to SIDE due to severe medical/chronic health problems; psychological, emotional or social disorders; or pregnancy or parenting responsibilities..

As at the 2023 Semester 1 student census 402 students were enrolled at SIDE across all of the above categories. This figure excludes students enrolled at another Western Australian school and receiving teaching support for one or more subjects through SIDE.

- Other

Western Australian legislation allows for students aged 16 or older to opt for an alternative to mainstream education through a Notice of Arrangements (NOA). These permit students to undertake employment, training, tertiary study and/or an apprenticeship in place of, or in conjunction with, mainstream schooling.

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The reason for a Notice of Arrangements (NOA) application is recorded centrally against four categories. As of July 2023 the number of individuals by category is:

Reason	Total¹
Training (TAFE/RTO)	2600
Apprenticeship	1699
Employment	1109
Combination of activities	401
Total	5809

¹ the total for each activity includes approved, cancelled, pending and rejected NOA applications.

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- 5 Is data collected on the reason a student is not attending mainstream school and why an exemption has been provided?**
- Please provide data by category of exemption for how many students are enrolled in alternative methods of schooling.**

ANSWER

The reason a student has an exemption is captured by individual schools.

An exemption is not required to enrol in the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE). The reason for a student enrolling at SIDE is not reported centrally.

The reason for a Notice of Arrangements (NOA) application is recorded centrally against four categories – Training, Apprenticeship, Employment of Combination of activities (as provided at Q4).

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6 Is data collected on student academic performance for students enrolled in alternative forms of schooling (as above).

ANSWER

Student academic performance data is routinely collected for all students other than those engaged in home schooling.

The Department has no legislative authority to request student academic performance data for home-educated students and therefore, does not capture this data.

In Western Australia, parents and legal guardians who choose to home-educate their children during the compulsory years of schooling must meet legislated criteria, provide an appropriate educational program and ensure that satisfactory student progress is achieved.

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- 7 Do schools with higher rates of school refusal also have poorer academic performance among the rest of the student body?**

ANSWER

The impacts on the academic performance of the other students in schools with high rates of school refusal have not been investigated by the Department.

There is a strong positive correlation between a school's ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage) and their attendance rates and academic outcomes.

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- 8 What is the academic performance like of schools that are specifically geared towards reaching students who engage in school refusal? (eg Virtual Schools Victoria is one such school the committee is aware of)**

ANSWER

The Department does not have schools specifically geared towards reaching students who engage in school refusal. Principals may manage a student's attendance in conjunction with an alternative school or provider, however the student remains enrolled at their school. See the response to Question 11 for examples of an alternative school or provider.

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9 What work has been done to understand the complex factors that influence student absenteeism?

ANSWER

The Department's Student Attendance in Public Schools policy and procedures reinforces the importance of early intervention and building shared responsibility for attendance between schools, students, parents and the broader community. Evidence supports that regular attendance is critical to good educational outcomes.

The causes of non-attendance are complex and varied, with the consequences extending beyond school and over many years to impact social, economic, health and wellbeing outcomes. Best-practice research and consultation with schools and communities informs that one-size-fits-all and top-down approaches are generally ineffective at improving student attendance. Improving attendance is a shared responsibility between government, the community services sector, families and communities.

In Western Australian public schools, principals, in consultation with their local community, have the autonomy to implement strategies and resources to meet the needs of their students and support improved school attendance. A whole school attendance approach supports schools and their communities to address the complex and varied factors that influence student absenteeism at their school through. A whole school approach includes:

- promotion approaches that focus on building student, family, school and community resilience, and the promotion of protective factors
- prevention approaches include a range of evidence-based procedures that enable early identification of students who are most at risk
- response approaches that provide support or interventions for those students who are not attending.

In Western Australia, public schools have access to the online Attendance Toolkit. The Toolkit includes a suite of resources and online professional learning modules for school staff to support them to develop promotion, absence prevention and response approaches that meet the needs of individual students and the local community.

In addition, the *Every day matters: 10 point plan to improve attendance* represents a cross-agency commitment to a new way of doing things that is both strength-based and community-led. The plan outlines joint commitments to strengthen student attendance including:

- working with communities to develop and implement approaches that meet their own unique needs and aspirations, based on a shared understanding of what works and what does not. This includes earlier support for communities when addressing factors impacting attendance
- culturally responsive approaches that respond to the diverse needs, backgrounds, experiences and knowledge of communities.

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The action plan supports the implementation of the Student Attendance in Public Schools Policy, Procedures and Requirements through:

- community-led action
- support for schools, families and communities
- system action and accountability.

The Department also provides support and conducts activities at a regional level that contribute to addressing and focusing on attendance, including:

- support for individual young people in Years 10, 11 and 12 to reengage with education through participation in education or training options other than full-time enrolment in a school
- attendance forums and network meetings for principals and staff to discuss the factors impacting attendance, share strategies that are having a positive outcome and explore ideas for implementation in their school settings
- implementation of multi-faceted strategies such as case conferences, strengthening school-family communications, and exploring pathways and student engagement strategies

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10 What policies do you have that support students and their families re-engage in school when experiencing school refusal?

ANSWER

Principals manage student attendance in accordance with the Student Attendance in Public Schools policy and procedures. The policy requires school staff to:

- build positive relationships with students, parents and communities
- engage in community-initiated approaches to strengthen student attendance
- provide school environments that engage and support students to thrive.

The Students at Educational Risk in Public Schools policy and procedures identify irregular school attendance as a risk factor in educational achievement. The procedures require principals to allocate available resources and engage appropriate agencies to support individuals and groups at risk.

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- 11 Has any work been done to identify students who may be at risk of school refusal?**
- **What intervention strategies are in place to support these students and families?**

ANSWER

Meeting the needs of students at risk of school refusal is a shared responsibility and partnerships formed between home and school help to support students in both contexts. Students attending school less than 60% of available days (severe non-attenders) are identified in the Department's Student Attendance Reporting (SAR). School administrators are encouraged to target students at severe attendance risk and implement strategies to improve school attendance.

School staff employ a range of approaches to support early identification, increase protective factors, and reduce risk factors influencing the educational, social and/or emotional development of students at risk. Early intervention approaches to student engagement are multi-dimensional and combine observable indicators such as achievement, behaviour and attendance, with internal emotional and cognitive states (feelings and thoughts).

Student engagement is best viewed and responded to in a holistic way. This may include teachers knowing their students and being aware of potential risk factors.

All Western Australian public schools have access to a school psychologist.

In addition, school staff may also access support from the four Schools of Special Educational Needs (SEN): Disability, Sensory, Medical and Mental Health, Behaviour and Engagement. The SEN promote inclusive learning environments through research and evidence-based practice.

SEN: Behaviour and Engagement provides services to all public schools, K-12 through:

- 14 Engagement Centres across the state, providing a continuum of services supporting schools and students, including intensive support for individual students exhibiting the most extreme, challenging and complex needs, either onsite or via outreach in schools
- The Midland Learning Academy, providing support for the re-engagement of students with internalising behaviours
- Youth Transition Coordinators (YTCs), assisting school-age young people to transition out of custodial sentences and into meaningful education and training pathways.

SEN: Medical and Mental Health provides educational support for public and non-government school students across more than 40 Department of Health settings whose medical or mental health prevents them from successfully participating in their enrolled school programs.

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SSEN: Disability and SSEN: Sensory build the capacity of school staff to ensure students with disability, hearing loss and/or vision impairment can access the curriculum on the same basis as their peers.

Additionally, the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) provides short-term support for students, with a referral, who have special circumstances that impact school attendance. The program is coordinated by SIDE's school psychologists, and students need to be working towards reintegration into their current school or an alternative program.