

**From:** Valerie Shirley

**Sent:** Wednesday, April 8, 2020 4:56 AM

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**Subject:** Distance Learning Attendance Procedure

Greetings all! I pray that you and all of your loved ones are safe and healthy during this very scary time.

I've been listening to staff around the district and my parents and I'm worried that our attendance procedure is causing some anxiety for everyone. Additionally, the policy is not equitable. Can we make some changes to how we report attendance? I'm aware that we need to establish procedures to report to MDE, however, I am unaware of the requirements that MDE has put in place for reporting. Is the development of our reporting policy up to the discretion of our district leadership? If so, that gives us as a district a lot of wiggle room to develop a policy that will not be an increased burden on families during this already emotionally devastating time. I also know that we need a standardized method of knowing which students are not engaging during distance learning so that we can support them. We want to ensure that the supports we put in place are actually support and not increased pressure.

This email is written to inform the board of what I'm hearing around the district from staff and families. We are sending messages to the community that we will be holding kids (and families) harmless in this time of crisis, however, the current attendance process gets in the way of that. Staff and families are feeling like we're holding them accountable rather than harmless. When families question me, I tell them that we are working out the kinks and this is all new to us and we will have something solid in place soon. Is there a different process being worked out? It's absolutely impossible to get accurate attendance during this time of working out all the kinks to this distance learning deal. In addition to working out the kinks, there are a number of kids who still will not have equitable access to the system after the kinks are worked out. Honestly, often times we are not able to get many students to do tasks when they are physically in the building, but we are expecting them to log in and do a task when they are at home during a world crisis. Is our school funding being based on student attendance during distance learning? I would pray not, because that would be the state not holding districts harmless. Additionally, I'm sure you are all aware that kids with disabilities (on an IEP or not!), kids with parents who have disabilities (diagnosed or not!), kids without wifi, kids without iPads, kids with broken iPads, ELL kiddos, kiddos with ELL parents, kids with parents who speak no English, kids of parents who have no phones (or no minutes on their phones) and a whole host of other kiddos who I have not listed here should not be marked absent. They simply don't have access to this new system for a variety of reasons. I found out that my own daughter has not checked in or submitted any work since distance learning has started and I've been sitting right next to her watching her screen on Schoology while doing my own work! How is that even possible?

Even though I have my students on SeeSaw and am in touch with the families daily, most of them still have not checked in online. Those that have not checked in online have not done so due to some barrier. I am in touch with them and their parents on an ongoing basis and they are working their hardest to get acclimated to this new system despite all the barriers. Talking to families and students almost daily feels like they are present to me. Are there alternatives in place to simply marking students absent if they have not done the attendance task online? There are several districts around Minnesota that are offering one time check in online and one time contact with their student's teacher as a full week of attendance. Can we establish something like this instead of a daily assignment to be counted present?

Forgive me for this very long email and thank you for any information and guidance you can offer to make this time easier on families and students. I know you are already aware that It's been pretty tough for staff as well, so an easy standardized attendance policy will make things easier for all involved.



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