Overview

The State collects several measures of student attendance in the Attendance snapshot, in which all online schools and their authorizers are required to report metrics that are truly representative of actual student attendance and truancy rates. This data is reported as part of the Student School Association file which is then captured in the Attendance snapshot.

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 must have consistent, authorizer-approved attendance and truancy policies and procedures that are communicated to parents, students, and teachers (*per Colorado State Board Rules 1 CCR 301-78*).

It was determined that there is not a one-size-fits-all method that can be applied to all online schools. While there may be other methods to utilize, this document provides three potential methods for tracking attendance depending on the model of the virtual school: **1) Minimum login time requirements; 2) Specific task completion for a given time, or 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 track and calculate attendance rates.

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 Student Information Systems (SIS) designed for use in brick-and-mortar schools. Most of the same Student Information Systems used in brick-and-mortar schools are commonly used in online schools and there are few Student Information Systems designed specifically for use in virtual schools. This method of tracking attendance is black and white as it is easy for an instructor to verify and report whether a student logged into course work for enough time.

This method does not consider 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 daily, again much the same as is done in a brick-and-mortar school. Additionally, schools may require that students 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.

Specific Task Completion for a Given Time Period

Another method for tracking and calculating attendance is requiring that students complete a series of regularly scheduled tasks on a daily or weekly basis. If the student completes all the required tasks during the specified amount of time, he or she is considered in attendance. This method of tracking 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 tracking attendance. Another strategy would be to weigh tasks to reflect the importance or difficulty of each task.

This method for tracking and calculating attendance is compatible with most SISs, especially if student task completion is recorded daily. 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.

Minimum Lesson/Unit Completion Requirements
The third method for tracking 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. 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 valid accommodation.

Summary
Although there is flexibility in implementing these recommended methods for tracking 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 Attendance Snapshot collection. Regardless of the internal methods used to track attendance, metrics for all the following measures must be calculated and reported in the Student School Association file.

- **Total Days Attended** – The aggregate number of whole and partial days the student attended school. If the student attended for at least half of a day, it should be counted as a full day of attendance.
- **Total Days Excused by Students** – The aggregate number of whole and partial days the student had excused absences (out of school). Absence due to a suspension is excused. (A student who is tardy is not considered to be absent). If the student missed more than half of a day, it would be counted as a full day absent.
- **Total Days Unexcused by Students** – The aggregate number of whole and partial days the student was absent (out of school), without being excused from a parent/guardian. (A student who is tardy is not considered to be absent). If the student missed more than half of a day, it would be counted as a full day absent.
- **Total Possible Attendance Days** – The aggregate number of whole and partial days the student would have attended school if there had been no absences. Expelled students are included until date of expulsion.
- **Habitually Truant Status** – Indicate if the student met any of the habitually truant criteria for the record with the corresponding code:
  - 0 - Student was not habitually truant

- o 1 - Truant Four or More Days in a Month – The student had four total days of Unexcused Absences from a public school in any one calendar month: calculated by the sum of unexcused absences converted to days and fractions of days.
- o 2 - Truant Ten or More Days in a School Year – The student had 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.
- o 3 - Truant for Both Conditions – The student had both four (or more) total days of Unexcused Absences from the reporting public school in any one calendar month and 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.

Examples

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

Example 1:

Online School A has a calendar schedule of 180 days in the school year. 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 days absent per week which would then be summed for the student:

$$(20 \text{ expected hours per week} - \text{ Actual \# of hours logged in}) \div 4 \text{ hours per day } = \text{ \# of days absent per week}$$

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 which would be rounded up and reported as 5 days attended and 0 days absent.

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:

$$5\frac{\text{days}}{\text{week}} \times (0.2 + 0.25 + 0.3) = 3.75 \ days \ which \ is \ rounded \ up \ to \ 4 \ days \ in \ attendance$$

Because the student was not excused, 1 day must be added to the **Total Days Unexcused by Students** for that student's record.

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:

$$(20 \; lessons \; per \; week - Actual \; \# \; of \; lessons \; completed) \div 4 \; lessons \; per \; day \; = \# \; of \; absences \; per \; week$$

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 reported as Habitually Truant 4 or More Days in a Month.