

SOSS Inquiry Plan 2026-27

The Beginning: Draft 09-29-26

School Context

- 490 students (Grades 8–12)
- 18% Indigenous ancestry (30% on reserve)
- 18% with Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

Scanning

We scanned satellite data and anecdotal data with staff. The data scanned included:

- Assessment, Report Card and Attendance Data
- MDI-Middle Years Development Instrument (Grade 8)
- Student Learning Survey
- Staff observations, and feedback

Some trends that emerged from our scanning and discussions with staff included:

- Staff concerns around attendance and missing assessments
- Absenteeism is on the rise
- Students lacking personal responsibility around their attendance
- Looking at our spheres of influence and control
- Trends have shown improvement in literacy
- Are lates underreported and more of a concern than the data shows
- Curiosity around school success and attendance

Through our anecdotal observations we are wondering...

- Does a small group of students account for a significant proportion of chronic absenteeism, and we want to better understand who these students are and what factors influence their attendance.
- Is attendance connected to other factors such as student engagement, sense of belonging, personal responsibility, academic success, and external life circumstances.
- Do some students face responsibilities or barriers outside of school that may affect their ability to attend regularly.
- If attendance rates alone do not tell us why students are or are not attending, how do we develop a deeper understanding of the underlying causes.

- Do students who attend regularly have different experiences, motivations, and supports than students who are chronically absent.
- Do the current school structures and schedules meet the needs of all learners, particularly those with significant commitments outside of school.
- Is attendance both an indicator and a contributor to student success, making it important to understand the relationship between attendance, achievement, and well-being.
- Does increasing attendance require addressing broader issues related to engagement, relevance, relationships, accountability, and flexibility.

Developing a Hunch

As a staff, we are still working on our hunch, we have pulled these possible hunches based on our staff discussions.

Student Engagement & Relevance

- Students are more likely to attend when they find learning meaningful, engaging, and connected to their goals.
- Chronic non-attendance may be a symptom of disengagement rather than the root problem itself.
- Improving attendance may require improving students' sense of purpose, and connection to school.

Personal Responsibility & Accountability

- Regular attendance helps students develop personal responsibility, accountability, and positive habits.
- Attendance may be both an outcome and a contributor to student success. Students who feel successful are more likely to attend, and attending provides opportunities to experience success.

Barriers Beyond School

- Some students with chronic absenteeism may face significant external responsibilities, such as employment, caregiving, transportation challenges, mental health concerns, or family obligations.
- Traditional schedules may unintentionally create barriers for students whose circumstances do not fit a conventional school day.

Understanding the 15%

- The reasons for chronic non-attendance are likely varied and cannot be addressed through a single intervention.
- Different groups of non-attenders may require different supports.
- Focusing on who is absent and why may provide more actionable information than focusing only on attendance rates.

School Structures & Flexibility

- Greater flexibility in scheduling, programming, or pathways might improve access and engagement for some students.
- Current structures may work well for most students but not for those experiencing the highest attendance challenges.

Reframing the Problem

- Attendance may be an indicator of deeper issues related to engagement, rigor, mental health, relationships, or life circumstances.
- Efforts focused solely on increasing attendance may have limited impact unless the underlying causes are identified and addressed.

Possible Team Hunch Statement

"Chronic non-attendance may be less about students choosing not to come to school and more about a complex interaction of engagement, personal responsibility, school flexibility, and external life circumstances. Understanding these underlying factors may be more effective than focusing solely on increasing attendance rates."

Focus prior to checking

"What are the underlying reasons that drive attendance and chronic non-attendance, and how can addressing those causes better support student responsibility, engagement, and success?"

Possible Student Empathy Interview Questions

- What helps you want to come to school each day?
- What makes it difficult to come to school?
- How do you feel when you are at school?
- Is there a time during the school day when you feel most connected? Least connected?
- What would make school a place you want to attend more regularly?
- Who at school do you feel comfortable talking to when you need support?
- What gets in the way of your learning or participation?

Possible Parent/Caregiver Questions

- What factors make it easier or harder for your child to attend school regularly?

- How does your child feel about coming to school?
- What supports have been helpful in improving attendance?
- Are there challenges outside of school that affect attendance that we should better understand?
- How connected do you and your child feel to the school community?
- What could the school do differently to support your child's attendance and engagement?
- What would help your family feel more supported?

Next Step Statement for Your Inquiry

Next Step: We will conduct empathy interviews with students and gather parent and caregiver feedback to better understand the experiences, motivations, and barriers influencing attendance. The insights collected will help us test our current hunches, identify root causes, and inform the development of responsive strategies to improve student engagement and attendance.