

## ATTENDANCE ADVISORY PANEL INFORMATION

### Trainer notes to accompany presentation

Slide	Title	Key points
1.	Attendance Advisory Panels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This presentation is designed to provide participants with comprehensive information regarding Attendance Advisory Panels.</li> </ul>
2.	Outcomes	<p>This presentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Will</b> provide information on where Attendance Advisory Panels ‘fit’ in the scope of the policy and legislation</li> <li><b>Will</b> provide information on what the non-negotiable aspects of the legislation are</li> <li><b>Will</b> provide some information on the flexible but generally-accepted way that panels can be run</li> <li><b>Won’t</b> provide a pro-forma, ‘one-size-fits-all’ process as networks will determine their own procedures for how to manage the use of panels; and panels can determine their own procedures for the actual meeting</li> </ul>
3.	The Requirements	<p>School responsibilities for managing student attendance are set out in legislation and policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>School Education Act 1999;</i></li> <li><i>School Education Regulations 2000;</i> and</li> <li><i>Student Attendance policy.</i></li> </ul> <p>Within these, schools are obliged to meet four key responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Recognise</i> – every student’s attendance is monitored daily and every absence is identified</li> <li><i>Resolve</i> – every absence is investigated and the reason recorded</li> <li><i>Restore</i> – where a student’s attendance is below 90% or is identified as a concern, school-devised and legislative strategies are implemented to restore attendance. Attendance Advisory Panels are one strategy that can be used to restore a student’s attendance.</li> <li><i>Record</i> – accurate records of daily attendance, explanations and strategies tried are maintained and would withstand external scrutiny. Record-keeping underpins all components.</li> </ul> <p>The policy and legislation is not about fast-tracking to a punitive end-point but rather about ensuring schools continue to progress strategies to improve attendance for every student.</p>
4.	Restoring Attendance <i>Unpacking system-level strategies and processes</i>	<p>The ‘Restore’ component of the policy and legislation is further broken down to three stages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Consultation Phase</i> – Meetings with the family to devise and implement school-based strategies to restore attendance. These strategies will be documented in a plan. Schools use a variety of strategies and resources appropriate for the context.</li> <li><i>Formal Meeting</i> – This is a meeting where the principal will offer the family one of the legislative strategies available – an Attendance Advisory Panel or a Responsible Parenting Agreement</li> </ul>

		<p>(if not already tried). It is often where the introduction of external support occurs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Attendance Advisory Panel</i> – a system-level, legislative strategy. Attendance Advisory Panels are initiated and overseen by the school but are legislated for, as opposed to school-devised.</li> </ul> <p>Prosecution is a judicial level intervention within the <i>School Education Act 1999</i> but does not form part of the requirements. It is not the Department's objective to prosecute.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A note on timing – It is a misconception that schools must <i>exhaust</i> all strategies prior to convening an Attendance Advisory Panel. The school will refer the parent(s) to an Attendance Advisory panel when it is determined that the family may benefit from the advice and assistance that a panel consisting of community members may provide. However, by the time a school has referred a family to a panel, they will have tried a number of strategies already.</li> </ul>
5.	AAP – definition	<p>The panel is a collaborative meeting between the parent(s), the student and the community members, with the main goal being to work together to devise measures and strategies to restore a student's attendance.</p> <p>An AAP is not a punitive measure.</p> <p>Advantages of running an AAP as a restorative measure outside of the school's domain include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They can provide support for families who feel shame, embarrassment or shyness attending meetings at the school – an independent group may be more likely to determine the underlying causes of the absences.</li> <li>• An AAP provides peer-pressure or support rather than bureaucratic pressure or support.</li> <li>• Community members can offer a perspective that school-staff may not have considered and can ask questions that school staff may not be comfortable asking.</li> <li>• The school staff can work with the family to implement the panel's recommendations as a way of overcoming parent perceptions of school imposed strategies that must be complied with.</li> </ul>
6.	Convening an AAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In accordance with the Act, the principal, Director General, badged attendance officer or Regional Executive Director (as delegated by the Director General) can refer a family to a panel. In most cases, the principal will offer the parents a panel.</li> <li>• The RED or IPS principal would convene the panel by appointing a Chairperson and EO (not mandatory) to coordinate the process.</li> <li>• Chairperson and EO would work to engage panel members</li> </ul> <p><i>How this logistically works is flexible within networks – the RED or IPS principal must give the final approval but the school/network may coordinate in their behalf.</i></p>

7.	Panel composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose is to be independent of the school</li> <li>• Focus on larger number of community members – no reason why cannot be all community members</li> <li>• EO role not legislated – will usually be DoE employee (often a staff member from another school). The EO cannot inform decision-making in anyway.</li> </ul>
8.	Preparing for the panel meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These functions are not tied to the EO role, but this is the generally accepted way panels might run</li> <li>• The venue will be somewhere neutral. Consider a venue that is appropriate and comfortable for the parent and student.</li> <li>• The school should provide the panel with a summary of past strategies and background on the case. Advice to schools is to keep this brief.</li> </ul>
9.	Communicating with parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents should understand what the panel’s purpose is – to help their child to attend school regularly. The EO should explain this to parents before the panel meeting.</li> <li>• The EO will also ensure the parent is provided with information on where and when the meeting will be held and how the meeting will run (how formal or informal).</li> <li>• The parent should be informed that they will have the opportunity to be heard and to discuss the reasons for why their child is not attending school regularly.</li> <li>• The parent should also be informed that the EO is not a panel member and won’t be providing advice or information. Their role is to take notes for the purpose of writing a brief report, which the parent will receive a copy of, and to ensure the meeting is procedurally fair.</li> </ul>
10.	Communicating with parents cont.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written communication may not be reliable evidence that parents have actually received and understood the offer and any accompanying information for the AAP.</li> <li>• Consideration should also be given as to whether there are any language barriers that are likely to impact communication.</li> <li>• Any written communication should be via registered post and followed up with a phone call or a home visit.</li> </ul>
11.	During the panel meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The panel may determine its own procedure with the aim being to facilitate discussion by parent and student. This may also include prompting the parent to contribute ideas of their own in developing strategies to restore attendance.</li> <li>• The EO cannot contribute to decision-making but may offer to make a phone call for the panel/Chairperson to the principal, Legal Services branch, or other relevant officer if required to ensure the panel member’s decision-making adheres to legislation, policy, and is practical for implementation at the school.</li> <li>• AAPs are not as rigid as School Discipline or Disability Advisory Panels and a broader range of topics are open for discussion. It is the panel’s role to consider and determine the factors contributing to the student’s persistent absence. This may include discussing the attendance of siblings and previous school experiences.</li> </ul>

12.	Procedural fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All panel decisions must be evidence-based – determined by the information provided to them by the school, the parent and the student. Any advice given by the panel must be aligned with what the panel have determined are the causes for the absences.</li> <li>The EO can remind the panel of their earlier discussions and determinations to ensure advice is aligned to these, but the EO cannot give their own ideas.</li> </ul>
13.	Record-keeping- the initial panel report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The EO will prepare a written report on behalf of the panel that summarises the meeting.</li> <li>All panel members should endorse the report. Signing/authorisation of the report does not need to be in person – confirmation of the accuracy of the report may be obtained from panel members by email.</li> <li>A copy of the report is provided to the principal, the parent and the Director General.</li> <li>Independent Public Schools should submit the Director General’s copy of the AAP report to K-12 Coordination (<a href="mailto:student.attendance@education.wa.edu.au">student.attendance@education.wa.edu.au</a>). For non-IPS, the Director General’s copy of the AAP report should be submitted via the Regional Executive Director (who will then provide to K-12 Coordination).</li> </ul>
14.	Record-keeping the initial panel report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While the way the meeting runs is quite flexible, all decisions must be <b>deliberated and documented</b>.</li> <li>Measurable objectives for improvement should be set and aligned to a reasonable review date.</li> <li>This review may or may not require the panel to sit again depending on the degree of restored attendance. The panel may review via teleconference.</li> </ul>
15.	Record-keeping – School requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All documentation should be maintained in the student’s file at school.</li> <li>Principals are required to report on the progress of Attendance Advisory Panels in the Student Attendance Reporting (SAR) application.</li> <li>SAR can be accessed through the Portal, under the applications heading.</li> <li>Details of students in the At-risk Severe attendance category automatically populate the Attendance Advisory Panels tab in SAR.</li> <li>Other students can be manually added using the cross icon next to the student’s name in the ‘Attendance’ tab.</li> <li>In the Attendance Advisory Panels tab, the principal can ‘tick’ once a formal meeting has taken place, once a panel has been offered to the parent(s) and once a panel meeting has occurred.</li> <li>This information populates the ‘History’ panel, which remains on the student’s SAR record when they transfer schools.</li> </ul>
16.	The legislative objective is not to prosecute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Department’s objective is not to prosecute families.</li> <li>The AAP does have the ability to recommend prosecution. However, a recommendation to prosecute cannot be the outcome of the first meeting as procedural fairness requires the parent/s and</li> </ul>

		student are given the opportunity to implement the strategies/follow the advice provided by the panel.
17.	Responsible Parenting Agreements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The <i>School Education Act 1999</i> has recently been amended to enable panels direct a parent to enter into a Responsible Parenting Agreement (if not already tried).</li> <li>• Responsible Parenting Agreements form part of the <i>Parental Support and Responsibility Act 2008</i>.</li> <li>• Responsible Parenting Agreements are only available for students under 15 years.</li> <li>• Responsible Parenting Agreements may also be initiated by another agency (usually Department for Child Protection and Family Support). In these cases, there is no need to replicate the process.</li> </ul>
18.	<p>WORKSHOP</p> <p>Required materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Worksheet – Attendance Advisory Panels Information</i></li> <li>• <i>Copies - Guidelines Attendance Advisory Panels</i></li> <li>• <i>Copies – Student Attendance policy</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The workshop component of the session is designed to prompt discussion between participants as to how they would negotiate various circumstances associated with attendance advisory panels.</li> <li>• Information that will assist in responding to these questions is contained within the <i>Guidelines for Attendance Advisory Panels</i> and <i>Student Attendance Policy</i>.</li> </ul> <p><i>Facilitator should allow time to complete questions in groups and facilitate discussion between participants regarding responses.</i></p>