

**District Accountability Questions
Board of Education Charge Questions
2022-2023**

Excused Absences

1. Manitou Springs School District 14 is unique and inspiring in so many different ways for students, staff, and families. Ensuring that the practices, policies, and procedures employed by Manitou Springs School District 14 are honoring of our rich traditions (e.g., Arts Integration, Experiential Learning, Environmental Stewardship, Community Engagement, etc.), responsive, and rooted in current research-based, best practices, requires a critical analysis of current district and building policies and practices.

What do excused absences mean for Manitou Springs School District 14? What are the current realities regarding the excused absence practices for MSSD? What are our best hopes for thinking through excused absences and a practice regarding them at each level? What are we doing well? What are some areas of growth? What would it mean for our practices regarding excused absences to be systemic?

Research shows that students – regardless of gender, socioeconomic status or ethnicity – fall behind academically when they are chronically absent. Children chronically absent in kindergarten show lower levels of achievement in math, reading and common knowledge during first grade. That same research shows that youngsters who continue on the path of chronic absence through first grade are less likely to read proficiently in third grade.

Studies have linked poor attendance at an early age with serious repercussions in later years. High school dropouts were found to have a history of negative behaviors, including higher levels of absenteeism throughout their childhood than those of high school graduates.

Behavioral benchmarks like attendance also indicate students' chances of completing college and being ready for careers.

2. Communication

Over the last three years, Manitou Springs School District has shifted communication in various ways. This includes a new website, the return of Facebook pages (MSSD, UPES, MSES, MSMS, MSHS), all schools producing weekly newsletters, the implementation of BoardDocs for all board-related matters, listening sessions, culture and climate surveys, the District Accountability Committee (DAC) involving more staff, students, and parents, and other changes.

With these changes, we still see opportunities for improvement and growth, especially considering that individuals and families access and consume district-related content and information in different and preferred ways.

What is working?

What are some opportunities for improvement?

How might the DAC play a role in strengthening communication internally and externally?

3. Staff Retention Post-Pandemic

Manitou Springs School District is an amazing school district that provides exceptional opportunities for students, and we also have areas of growth when it comes to meeting the needs of students. However, after three years of pandemic teaching, salaries that are below other professions, overwhelming workloads, housing crisis, rising healthcare and childcare costs, education staff (in all positions) in Manitou Springs School District, across the region, nation and state have reported burnout and are leaving the profession at a higher rate than any other time in history.

(<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2021/09/08/how-the-pandemic-has-changed-teachers-commitment-to-remaining-in-the-classroom/>) From surveys, emails, and honest conversations, we know that staff have left MSSD for a variety of reasons (e.g., retirement, job promotion/change, leaving the profession, moving out of the area, a family member's health status, job dissatisfaction).

In MSSD, we know the education of children with a whole child approach that is inclusive, experiential, creative, academically challenging, and exciting can only be achieved with the contribution and dedication of highly effective and committed staff—in partnership with parents and families. As a school district, we also have a strategic outcome that says, “We will recruit, retain, and develop the BEST staff (in all positions).”

After coming out of the pandemic and considering the strong impact of inflation, it will be important for the DAC to consider the following questions:

- With all of the changes that have taken place in public education and the exciting changes in Manitou School District, what might we do to continue to recruit, retain, and develop the BEST staff (in all positions)?
- With fixed budget sources, what are other strategies to provide additional compensation and benefits for staff?
- Are there other forms of compensation or benefits that are not monetary?
- Are there additional opportunities for stipends or programs outside of the school day? How can these additional benefits and compensation be funded?
- How might community partners contribute to retention of effective and highly effective staff?