

# 1 Policy Analysis: Attendance-Based Grading in Ontario Schools

## 1.1 Relevant Documents

- **Bill 101:** *Putting Student Achievement First Act* (2026)
  - **Growing Success:** *Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* (2010)
  - **OHRC Policy:** *Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities* (2018)
  - **PPM 119:** *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools* (2013)
  - **PPM 145:** *Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour* (2018)
  - **Ontario Human Rights Code** (R.S.O. 1990, c. H.19)
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This document analyzes the impacts, concerns, and policy contradictions related to the Ministry’s announcement (via Bill 101 [1]) that student attendance and participation will now account for 15% (Grades 9-10) and 10% (Grades 11-12) of final grades.

## 1.2 1. Policy Intersections and Contradictions

### 1.2.1 Growing Success (The Primary Conflict)

- **Fundamental Principle:** *Growing Success* [2] (p. 10) explicitly states: “*The evaluation of student learning is the responsibility of the teacher and must be based on the student’s achievement of the curriculum expectations.*”
- **Separation of Learning Skills:** Currently, attendance and “Learning Skills and Work Habits” (Responsibility, Independent Work, etc.) are reported **separately** from the percentage grade.
- **Direct Contradiction:** By making attendance a part of the numerical grade, the Ministry is reversing a decade of policy designed to ensure grades represent *competency* rather than *compliance*.

### 1.2.2 The Education Act (Bill 101)

- **Ministerial Power:** Bill 101 [1] amends Section 8(1) to give the Minister direct authority over assessment policies. This allows the Ministry to override the principles in *Growing Success* [2] without a full pedagogical review.

### 1.2.3 Human Rights and Equity (OHRC & PPM 119)

- **Duty to Accommodate:** Under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* [6], school boards have a legal duty to accommodate students with disabilities to the point of undue hardship. The *OHRC Policy on Accessible Education (2018)* [3] notes that “attendance requirements” can be a significant barrier for students with disabilities (mental health, chronic illness, etc.).
- **Discriminatory Impact:** Penalizing attendance may be found discriminatory if it negatively impacts students based on protected grounds (disability, family status, race, or socio-economic status).
- **Equity and Inclusion (PPM 119):** This memorandum [4] requires boards to identify and remove systemic barriers. Attendance-based grading may be viewed as creating a new systemic barrier that contravenes the goals of PPM 119.

### 1.2.4 Progressive Discipline (PPM 145)

- **Shift in Approach:** *PPM 145* [5] emphasizes “Progressive Discipline” as a non-punitive, educational approach to behavior issues (including absenteeism). Tying attendance to grades shifts absenteeism from a behavioral issue to an academic penalty, which bypasses the restorative goals of PPM 145.

## 1.3 2. Concerns for Educators and Associations

### 1.3.1 Pedagogical Integrity

- **“Diluted” Grades:** If a student masters 100% of the curriculum but loses 15% for being absent due to family issues, their grade no longer reflects their actual knowledge. Conversely, a student with perfect attendance but weak skills might be “passed” through attendance padding.
- **Credit Integrity:** Universities and colleges rely on Ontario grades as a measure of academic readiness. Attendance-based grading may lead to “grade inflation” or “grade distortion,” devaluing the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

### 1.3.2 Administrative and Legal Burden

- **Appeals:** Teachers and principals may face a surge in appeals from parents demanding “excused” status for absences to protect their child’s grade.
- **Record-Keeping:** Precise tracking of attendance now becomes a high-stakes legal requirement, as it directly impacts a student’s final percentage and potential for scholarships.

### 1.3.3 Systemic Issues vs. Classroom Symptoms

- This policy addresses the *symptom* (absenteeism) without addressing the *cause* (lack of engagement, mental health, systemic barriers).

## 1.4 3. Government Rationale (The Case for the Policy)

The Ministry of Education has framed the introduction of attendance-based grading as a key component of its “Back to Basics” and “Student Achievement First” agenda. The government’s position centers on several key pillars:

### 1.4.1 Combatting the Post-Pandemic Attendance Crisis

- **Restoring Norms:** Since the return to in-person learning, school boards have reported a significant increase in chronic absenteeism. The Ministry views this policy as a necessary lever to restore the pre-pandemic norm of daily physical attendance.
- **Direct Incentive:** By giving attendance “teeth” in the gradebook, the government aims to provide a clear, tangible incentive for students to prioritize being in the classroom.

### 1.4.2 Valuing In-Person Learning as a Social Process

- **Classroom Synergy:** The Ministry maintains that learning is not just about completing worksheets or submitting digital files; it is a collaborative, social process that requires physical presence and peer interaction.
- **Skills for the Future:** Regular attendance is framed as an essential “life skill” that prepares students for the workplace, where being present and reliable is a fundamental requirement of employment.

### 1.4.3 Enhancing Parental Accountability and Transparency

- **Clear Expectations:** Tying attendance to grades is intended to send a clear message to parents about the Ministry’s expectations. It provides parents with a visible indicator of how their child’s presence (or absence) is impacting their overall academic performance.
- **Consistency:** The policy creates a province-wide standard for how attendance is valued, preventing inconsistencies between different school boards or individual schools.

## 1.5 4. Stakeholder Perspectives (Teacher Unions)

The major teacher federations (OSSTF, ETFO, OECTA, AEFO) have raised significant concerns regarding Bill 101: ### Punishing the Vulnerable OSSTF [8] has argued that tying marks to attendance punishes vulnerable students rather than addressing the root causes of absenteeism (mental health, poverty, school violence).

### 1.5.1 “Smoke and Mirrors”

OECTA [9] and AEFO have characterized these mandates as “smoke and mirrors” designed to distract from systemic underfunding and the teacher recruitment crisis.

### 1.5.2 Lack of Consultation

Unions have criticized the government for a lack of meaningful consultation with educators before introducing these high-stakes changes.

### 1.5.3 Centralization of Power

There is widespread concern that Bill 101 removes local accountability and further erodes teacher professional judgment by mandating rigid grading formulas.

## 1.6 5. Summary Table

Issue Area	Policy Contradiction	Concern	Potential Benefit
<b>Curriculum</b>	<i>Growing Success</i> [2]	Grades reflect attendance, not achievement.	Recognizes “being present” as part of learning.
<b>Equity</b>	Human Rights Code [6]	Penalizes marginalized and vulnerable students.	May identify students needing early intervention.
<b>Integrity</b>	OSSD Standards	Devalues the meaning of an Ontario grade.	Increases student accountability.
<b>Workload</b>	Board Policies	Massive increase in grade appeals/legalism.	Consistent rule for all schools.

## 1.7 6. Sources and Citations

1. **Bill 101: Legislative Assembly of Ontario** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)
2. **Growing Success: Ontario Ministry of Education** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)
3. **OHRC Policy on Accessible Education: Official Policy** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)
4. **PPM 119 (Equity): Ontario.ca** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)
5. **PPM 145 (Discipline): Ontario.ca** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)
6. **Ontario Human Rights Code: Official Text** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)
7. **PPM 128 (Code of Conduct): Ontario.ca** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)
8. **OSSTF Statement: Fix the Funding. Get to the Table.** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)
9. **OECTA Statement: Ford Government’s Ineffective Cellphone Policy is More Smoke and Mirrors** (Date Added: 2026-05-07)

## 1.8 7. Provide Feedback

Your insights are valuable. This analysis is an ongoing effort to document and understand Ontario’s changing education landscape. If you have feedback, documents to share, or suggest a new policy area—including additional resource materials to contribute or specific citations to be included in our research—please use our [Feedback Form](#).

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