

Guide to Preventing Truancy and Understanding the “Becca Bill”

Truancy

In our state, the law requires that children ages 6 to 17 who are enrolled in public schools, attend school Monday through Friday, unless there is a good reason for being absent. In this case the parent or legal guardian must excuse the absence by notifying the school.

When students miss school and their parents have not excused the absence, they can be considered truant. Truancy is defined as being absent from school or from the majority of a student’s classes without a valid excuse.

School districts around the state have different rules and regulations about student attendance and how parents should excuse absences. Be sure to read the attendance policies in your school district and discuss them with your student.

The Becca Bill

The “Becca Bill” (SB 5439) is our state’s truancy law. It is intended to stop truancy before it becomes a problem. Schools and families should work together as a team to ensure school attendance and student safety. However, if a student has unexcused absences, this law requires that schools and school districts take the following actions:

1. **One (1) unexcused absence.** The school must inform the parent when there is one unexcused absence. This is often done by a phone call home.
2. **Two (2) unexcused absences.** After the second unexcused absence, the school is required to schedule a meeting with the parent/legal guardian and student to discuss the causes of the unexcused absences and find solutions to prevent further absences. This is a team effort.
3. **Five (5) unexcused absences within 30 days.** The school must enter into a written truancy agreement with the family, where the parent, student and school agree on the necessary steps to resolve the student’s attendance problem.
4. **Seven (7) unexcused absences during a month or at the tenth (10th) unexcused absence within a school year.** The school district will file a petition in juvenile court to order the student to attend school. If this court order is violated, the court will call for a Contempt Hearing and the student could be ordered to do community service or spend time in juvenile detention. The parent may be fined up to \$25.00 for each day of unexcused absence.

The school district may also refer the family to a “Community Truancy Board” if there is one in the community. A Truancy Board is a group of citizens who help resolve truancy cases away from the court.

Schools must send the student a notice of the truancy court petition by certified mail with return receipt or by in-person delivery. The petition includes many important dates and deadlines that must not be missed by the student and the family. A student and/or parents can be represented by a lawyer in truancy court.

Preventing Truancy

Student safety and academic progress are important to both parents and educators. Here are some tips to prevent absences:

Communicate with your student frequently

- Talk about family expectations regarding school attendance.
- Discuss family expectations for earning a high school diploma.
- Praise positive behaviors and achievements in school.
- Look for attitudes from your youth that indicate unhappiness with school or fear of attending school. Listen to what they say and ask questions.

Communicate with your school frequently

- Ask the school about their policy and procedures on excusing absences from school.
- Respond quickly when the school notifies you of an unexcused absence.
- Learn how you can check your student's attendance.
- Immediately address issues of concern about your student with the school. Start with the teacher or counselor.
- If you feel your district's truancy or discipline procedures were not addressed properly, inquire about your district's appeal process.
- If you feel your school district policies are inadequate, speak with the Superintendent and school board members.

Get more help when you need it

- Go to the Education Ombudsman website at www.waparentslearn.org to read the Basic Education Rights manual, Section VI.
- If you have difficulties with the school in resolving truancy issues contact:
The Office of the Education Ombudsman toll-free at 1-866-297-2597
or the Washington School Safety Center at 360-725-6044 or jeff.soder@k12.wa.us.



WASHINGTON STATE

Office of the Education Ombudsman

www.waparentslearn.org

