

TIPS/TOOLS FOR FAMILIES -- Attendance

Children in Washington age eight to eighteen are required to attend a public or private school, or be receiving home-based instruction.¹ Oftentimes there are reasons why a student might not be able to attend school. It is important to communicate with your school if your student is currently dealing with, or you anticipate dealing with, attendance issues.

The school won't excuse my student's absence, what should I do?

Different Districts have different policies on what an excused absence is. First, see if you believe the absence meets any of the statewide criteria listed in [WAC 392-400-325](#). You can also ask to see what the District's specific policy on absences/attendance is. In most cases, the school principal has the discretion to decide if an absence meets the state/District criteria or not.

If you disagree with the Principal's decision you can ask to meet with them to discuss the issue, or ask to speak to someone at the District-level about your concerns.

What options are available if my student can't or won't attend school?

It is important to have some understanding about why your student is not attending school. If you have access to outside medical resources, you may seek an evaluation by a doctor and/or psychologist to understand what your student is dealing with.

If your student is temporarily unable to attend school for an estimated period of four weeks or more because of a physical and/or mental disability or illness they may qualify for Home/Hospital Instruction. Ask your school if they can help set up Home/Hospital. More information is available here:
<http://www.k12.wa.us/HealthServices/HomeHospital.aspx>

Relevant Rules Related to Attendance in Washington State

Washington's compulsory attendance law, which outlines when children should be in school and the relevant exceptions can be found in [RCW 28A.225.010](#).

If a student is truant or believed to be truant the District may file a petition for civil action (this is often referred to as the Becca Law). The steps leading up to that are outlined in [RCW 28A.225.020](#).

Other Attendance Resources:

- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)'s Truancy and Compulsory Attendance Page: <http://www.k12.wa.us/GATE/Truancy/>
- OSPI Guide to Preventing Truancy and Understanding the Becca Bill: <http://www.k12.wa.us/GATE/Truancy/pubdocs/Becca/BeccaBillinfoforparents.pdf> (Also available in [Chinese](#), [Russian](#), [Vietnamese](#), [Spanish](#))
- ACLU Parent's Guide to Truancy in Washington: https://aclu-wa.org/library_files/Truancy_guide_parents_5_07.pdf (Also available in [Spanish](#))

¹ If a 6- or 7-year-old is enrolled in school, the student must attend their full program. Youth who are 16 or older may be excused from attending public school if they meet certain requirements.

If your student is more likely to be out for an extended period of time, or their absences may be intermittent, ask about getting an evaluation for a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Check out OEO's Toolkits and Parent Manuals for more information of 504s and IEPs.

My student has been absent and the school wants to meet, what should I do?

Share with the school your best understanding of the attendance issues and any steps you have taken to address it. Clarify with the school if the meeting is part of the truancy process and, if so, see if they believe any of the steps listed below would help the situation.

What can the school do to help?

Beyond setting up a plan for the student (if they qualify), the school could adjust the child's school program or school or course assignment, provide more individualized or remedial instruction, provide appropriate vocational courses or work experience, refer the child to a community truancy board (if available), require the child to attend an alternative school or program, or assist the parent or child to obtain supplementary services that might eliminate or ameliorate the cause or causes for the absence from school (from [RCW 28A.225.020](http://leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=28A.225.020)).

If my student is found truant by the court, what might the consequences be?

The court may order attendance at the current school, alternative school, another public school, a skill center, drop-out prevention program, a private school or education center, referral to a Community Truancy Board, or completion of a drug assessment test. The court may order a student to report to county detention, impose alternatives to detention, or order parents to perform community service or pay a fine of up to \$25 per day for each unexcused absence, if the court rules that a student or parent violated the court order.

How can OEO help?

If you are experiencing attendance issues with your student, OEO can help explain your options, work with you and the school on addressing the issue, and/or help get an appropriate plan established. OEO is not able to help with court proceedings or offer legal advice.

What is the Truancy process in Washington?

After **one** (1) unexcused absence in a month, the school is required to inform the parent in writing or by phone.

After **two** (2) unexcused absences, the school is required to initiate a parent conference to improve the student's attendance.

After **five** (5) unexcused absences in a month, the parent and school must enter a contract to improve the student's attendance. Or, the case can be referred to a Community Truancy Board.

After **seven** (7) unexcused absences in a month, or ten unexcused absences in an academic year, the school district may file truancy petitions with the juvenile court.

If the student is not in compliance with a court order resulting from a truancy petition, the school is required to file a contempt motion.

- **Suggestions for Parent/s Guardian when Dealing with Truancy Problems:**
<http://www.k12.wa.us/GATE/Truancy/Suggestions.aspx>.