

TIPS/TOOLS FOR FAMILIES -- School Attendance, Absences and Truancy

A state law in Washington, called the “Becca Bill,” requires all children **between ages 8 and 18** to attend school regularly. The law requires parents or legal guardians to make sure their children are in school regularly.

Students can be in public school, private school or homeschool.

The law requires that students are **in school, full-time, every day**, unless there is a **valid excuse**.

If a student **misses school without a valid excuse**, the student might be considered “**truant**.” When a student is truant, schools are required to:

- ✓ Notify the family;
- ✓ Meet and work with the family and student to figure out why, and
- ✓ Try different strategies to help improve the student’s attendance.

If that doesn’t work, a student and family can be referred to a Community Truancy Board or to court.

What does the law require of Students?

- ✓ in school,
 - ✓ on time,
 - ✓ every day,
- unless there is a valid excuse.

If a student **misses school a lot**, even with a valid excuse, the law now requires schools to meet and work with the family to figure out why, and make a plan to help the student get to school regularly. That is because missing school a lot or “**chronic absenteeism**” can make it hard for a student to keep up. It can also be a sign that a student might not be getting the supports they need. When we are talking about missing school, “a lot” can seem like “a little” – missing **even just 2 days a month** can add up to a big impact!

What does the law require of Schools?

- ✓ notify parents of the attendance rules and get a signature to show they received the notice
- ✓ notify parents every time a student is absent,
- ✓ meet with parents and students to find out why,
- ✓ try different strategies to improve attendance, and in some cases,
- ✓ refer a student and/or parent to a Community Truancy Board or to court.

If getting your child to school every day has been a challenge, your school can help break down barriers and help your child **build a new habit of attendance every day, all day, on time**. Check out OEO’s FAQs to find out what may happen if a student continues to be absent, and ideas for getting back on track with regular attendance. If you need more help solving problems with attendance, please call! Visit our [website](http://www.oeo.wa.gov) at www.oeo.wa.gov, or call 1-866-297-2597 for a copy of the **School Attendance and Truancy FAQs** listed on the back of this sheet.

FAQs on School Attendance and Truancy

What about children younger than 8? Do they have to be in school?

What about teenagers? Can they leave school before they turn 18?

What is an "excused" or "unexcused" absence?

Who decides whether an absence is excused?

What if my child is late to school? Or skips a class?

What if my child is sick a lot, and can't make it to school?

What does missing "a lot" of school mean?

What will happen if my child misses a lot of school?

Can I (the parent) get in trouble if my child misses a lot of school?

Can my child be suspended for missing school or being late to class?

The school asked me to meet to talk about my child's absences – how can I prepare for the meeting?

Should my child attend too?

What kind of things could the school do to help?

What if my child keeps missing school?

When can my child be sent to truancy court?

What happens when a district files a truancy petition?

What is a Community Truancy Board?

What if my child keeps missing school after going to the Community Truancy Board?

What can happen if my child has to go to court for truancy?

What happens if my child misses more school when there is already a truancy case?

Can a child with an IEP be sent to court for truancy?

What if I, the parent, have a disability and need accommodations?

What if I don't speak or read English well?

What if my child just doesn't want to go to school, but is keeping up with work at home?

What if my child is anxious about school and gets angry, breaks down, or just won't get out of bed?

What if my foster child has already missed school from moving around a lot, and will have to miss more for court and other appointments?

What if we are homeless and my child misses school while we are trying to find housing? Can I get help from the school?

What if I feel school has not been a positive place for my child? Do I have to keep sending my child even they are being bullied, facing discrimination, or constantly getting in trouble?

How can OEO help?

Where else can I find help or more information?

Available at www.oeo.wa.gov

FAQs on Attendance, Truancy and Getting to the Root of the Problem
Available at www.oeo.wa.gov

What about children younger than 8? Do they have to be in school?

Washington's "compulsory attendance law" starts at age 8. Parents can choose whether to send their younger children to school.

If a parent decides to enroll a child who is 6 or 7, then the student must attend school regularly, on time, unless there is a valid excuse (or the parent decides to remove them from school).

*And remember, children have a **right to access free public school starting at age 5!***

What about teenagers? Can they leave school before they turn 18?

If a child is 16 or older AND is regularly employed, or the parent agrees the child should not be required to attend school, or the child is emancipated, has already met graduation requirements or has received a GED, then the child is not required to continue to attend school. You can find the details about this exception, and other parts of the Washington State truancy law at [RCW 28a.225](http://www.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28a.225), available online at: <http://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28a.225&full=true>.

*Remember, youth have a **right to access free public school until they are 21 years old, or until they graduate**. There are an increasing number of options for young people who are looking for alternatives to a traditional high school but still want to earn their high school diploma. You can find information about options for older youth at [OSPI's Graduation a Team Effort](http://www.k12.wa.us/GATE/Re-engagement/default.aspx) page: <http://www.k12.wa.us/GATE/Re-engagement/default.aspx>.*

What is an "excused" or "unexcused" absence?

Excused absences include:

- (1) Illness, health condition or medical appointment (including, but not limited to, medical, counseling, dental, optometry, pregnancy, and in-patient or out-patient treatment for chemical dependency or mental health) for the student or person for whom the student is legally responsible;
- (2) Family emergency including, but not limited to, a death or illness in the family;
- (3) Religious or cultural purpose including observance of a religious or cultural holiday or participation in religious or cultural instruction;
- (4) Court, judicial proceeding, court-ordered activity, or jury service;

- (5) Post-secondary, technical school or apprenticeship program visitation, or scholarship interview;
- (6) State-recognized search and rescue activities consistent with RCW 28A.225.055;
- (7) Absence directly related to the student's homeless or foster care/dependency status;
- (8) Absences related to deployment activities of a parent or legal guardian who is an active duty member consistent with RCW 28A.705.010;
- (9) Absences due to suspensions, expulsions or emergency expulsions imposed pursuant to chapter 392-400 WAC if the student is not receiving educational services and is not enrolled in qualifying "course of study" activities as defined in WAC 392-121-107;
- (10) Absences due to student safety concerns, including absences related to threats, assaults, or bullying;
- (11) Absences due to a student's migrant status; and
- (12) An approved activity that is consistent with district policy and is mutually agreed upon by the principal or designee and a parent, guardian, or emancipated youth.

A school principal or designee has the authority to determine if an absence meets the above criteria for an excused absence. Districts may define additional categories or criteria for excused absences. These categories of excused absences come from the state rule on excused and unexcused absences in [WAC 392-401](http://www.wa.gov/WAC/392-401). Find the rules online, here: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=392-401&full=true>.

If the reason for your child's absence is not in this list, or on a list of excused absences from your district, then it would be "unexcused."

Who decides whether an absence is excused?

Generally, the **school principal** will decide if an absence meets the criteria for being excused or not. For example, sometimes a parent may call to say a child is sick and should be excused. A principal might ask the parent to provide a doctor's note or ask for more detail before agreeing that the absence is excused.

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

What if my child is late to school? Or skips a class?

If a student is tardy a lot, it can make it hard to keep up with class. It can also make things difficult with the teacher. So, if your child is having trouble getting to class on time, ask for a meeting with the teacher, counselor or principal to help figure out why, and come up with solutions to the problem.

What if my child is sick a lot, and can't make it to school?

Being sick is a valid excuse for being absent. A child should have the chance to make up what they missed, and not get in any trouble for being absent.

At the same time, if a child misses a lot of school for any reason, it makes it hard to keep up with the work and take advantage of opportunities available at school. If your child is sick a lot, you can ask the school to work with you to find ways that your child can keep learning, and making progress with school work, even if it has to happen somewhere other than the classroom. If a child has a chronic medical condition, like asthma, severe allergies, or another condition that can cause frequent absences, they might qualify as a child with a disability under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act ("Section 504"). If a student might have a disability and need accommodations, you can ask for an evaluation to see if they might be eligible for a Section 504 Plan, or an "IEP" (Individualized Education Program). Find more information on Evaluations, IEPs and 504s in [OEO's Parent Guides: Protecting the Educational Rights of Students with Disabilities in Public Schools](#). If a student is temporarily unable to attend school for four weeks or more because of a physical and/or mental disability or illness, they might qualify for [Home/Hospital Instruction](#). More information is available here: <https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/learning-alternatives/homehospital-instruction>.

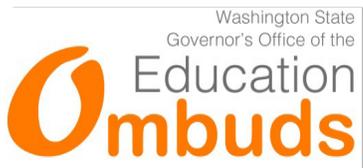
What does missing "a lot" of school mean?

"Chronic absenteeism" is when a student misses **18 or more full days** of school (excused or unexcused). That could be as few as **2 days a month**. But it adds up. Educators and parents have looked at data and see that missing more than 9 days of school each year can make it hard to catch up and keep up. Missing 18 days a year can make it even harder, and students risk falling behind in reading and math, and face a hard climb to graduation.

What will happen if my child misses a lot of school?

A child who misses a lot of school can miss out on a lot of opportunities.

Sometimes there are completely valid reasons why a child can't get to school (for example, if they are sick, or dealing with a health condition, or trying to sort things out if their family loses their housing). If a child has to miss school a lot, you can ask the school to work with you to put together a plan so that your child can still keep learning.



Toll-free: 1-866-297-2597
Phone Interpretation Available.

Web: www.oeo.wa.gov
Email: oeoinfo@gov.wa.gov

Sometimes students get in a habit of missing a few days now and then, and before you know it, it has added up to a lot of days. It might seem like they are doing fine, catching up when they get back, but the missed time can really make an impact in learning to read, write and do math. If a student misses several days, they might miss learning things that they will need to know as they move on to more complex topics. Missing days in high school can mean a student risks losing credit for a class. Missing days in elementary school can mean a student misses out on learning key things that they'll need to be successful as the work gets harder.

Conferences to Identify Barriers to Attendance: Updates to Washington's attendance law now **require districts to schedule a conference with parents** if a child in **elementary school** has **5 or more excused absences in a month** or **10 or more excused absences in a year**. These conferences will be an important time to consider whether a child needs extra supports. The conferences are meant to help schools and families work together to identify barriers to attendance. The conference should include someone like a nurse, counselor, social worker or teacher who can help come up with ideas to address any barriers to attendance.

If your child has an IEP or Section 504 Plan, and misses 5 days in a month or 10 in a year, then the school should call the team together to problem-solve around the absences.

If you have already given the school a doctor's note and worked out a plan so your child can keep on track with academic work, the conference may not be necessary.

You can read about this requirement in the state law at [RCW 28A.225.018](http://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28a.225&full=true#28A.225.018), online here:
<http://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28a.225&full=true#28A.225.018>.

Can I (the parent) get in trouble if my child misses a lot of school?

Possibly, yes. If a child is truant, a parent might face a court hearing, and possible fines or community services.

If a child has 5 or 7 unexcused absences in a month, or 10 in a school year, a school district can file a petition with the juvenile court against the parent, the child or both.

If a court finds that a parent failed to ensure their child attends school as required, the court can order the parent to:

- Pay a fine of not more than \$25 for each day of unexcused absence; or
- Do community service.

A parent can avoid the fines by showing that the school didn't follow its duties to notify, meet or work with the parent and student to reduce absences, or by attending a conference to address the reasons for the absences and participating with the school and student in a supervised plan for attendance.

Can my child be suspended for missing school or being late to class?

No. Schools may not suspend or expel a student for absences or tardiness.

Washington state rules on school discipline have been changing in recent years. The rules used to allow schools to suspend students for skipping school. That is no longer permitted.

A student's **grades or credits**, though, may be impacted by absences if attendance or participation is related to the goals of the class, the teacher has said that attendance will count, and the reasons for the student's absences have been taken into account (including whether the absence or tardiness is directly related to a disability).

You can find the rules on discipline at WAC 392-400, online here:
<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=392-400&full=true>.¹

The school asked me to meet to talk about my child's absences – how can I prepare for the meeting?

Be ready to share what you have noticed and what you are worried about, and to listen to the concerns and ideas of the school.

¹ Note – sometimes there are changes made to state rules. If you can't find what you are looking for, please call and we can try to help.

Sometimes it can take a while to figure out what is getting in the way of a student attending school. It might seem simple. A student might be saying, "I just don't want to go." But there is often more to it. It can take time to figure out whether something specific is not going well, or if there is something that would motivate a student to want to be at school.

Here are some specific things you can do before you go to the meeting:

- ✓ Let the school know if you will need an interpreter;
- ✓ Let the school know if other people will join you (for example: your child's counselor, a grandparent);
- ✓ Ask your child to share with you what has been going on at school, and outside school: with friends, with other students, with teachers. Ask how your child feels about school work and school activities, and what your child would like to have happen at school.
- ✓ Talk with your child about your goals and hopes for your child with school.

Should my child attend too?

It is a good idea to have your child participate in the meeting if possible. Your child can share what is going on from their point of view. Your child can also hear you and the staff at the school working together to try to figure out how to support them. That can be powerful for a young person – to know you and the adults at school care about them and care about them being in school.

If you think there might be some difficult conversations in the meeting, think about having your child attend for part of the time.

At the meeting, you and your child can share your thoughts on why your child has been absent and ideas for how to reduce the absences. You will have the chance to hear from the staff at school what ideas they have to help, and also what might come next if your child continues to miss school.

What kind of things could the school do to help?

Educators can be very creative when they are working to support a student, especially when they work in partnership with families and students to understand what is going on, and what could help.

As you are trying to think about what might be getting in the way of your child going to school every day, think about what is expected of them when they get there: being in class, keeping up with homework and classwork, earning credits (for high school students), following school rules, and getting along with other students. Could your child be having a hard time with some of these things? Are there things that could help them do better, and feel better about being in school?

Some of the things that schools and families might consider include:

- **Change classes?** Review how the student is doing in each class, and make changes to a class schedule, drop a class, add a class, or make time for extra support in some classes;
- **New school?** Consider whether a different school with a different kind of program or setting would work better;
- **Extra help? Test retakes?** Provide tutoring, extra credit opportunities or test make-ups so the student can catch up;
- **More English language support?** Review an English language learner's progress and consider whether additional support is needed;
- **A person to connect with?** Think about whether there is someone (or several people) at the school that have, or could build, a close connection with the student to help them feel like they are an important part of the school community;
- **Positive behavior interventions?** Build a plan to identify possible triggers, reduce inappropriate behavior, and teach appropriate behaviors;
- **Sports? Music? Robotics?** Explore extra-curricular activities or elective classes that would motivate the student to show up to the classes that are harder or less exciting;
- **Reward system?** Brainstorm possible "rewards" that the student could work toward with improved attendance;
- **Evaluation for Special Education?** Request an evaluation to see if the student has a disability that is getting in the way of learning and may need an IEP or 504 Plan;
- **Work Experience?** Find opportunities for the student to try vocational courses or get work experience;
- **Address peer conflicts/bullying/harassment?** Agree on a plan to try to resolve a conflict with a friend, or address bullying or harassment;
- **School Climate?** Talk about the overall school climate and think of ways to make sure it is welcoming to yours, and all students;
- **Support for the Family?** Connect the family with community-based services to help with needs outside the school setting; and, if absences continue:

➤ **Community Truancy Board?** Refer the student to a community truancy board or to court.

What if my child keeps missing school?

The school should be contacting you and working with you and your child to try to reduce or eliminate the absences.

Notice: the school is required to tell you every time your child is absent without an excuse. It might be by phone call, or in writing.

Conference: If your child has **3** unexcused absences in a month, the school should schedule a conference with you and your child to try to understand what is causing the absences.

Assessment: For students in middle school or high school, the school might ask them to take the “WARNS” (the Washington Assessment of Risks and Needs), or another assessment, to try to understand what might be causing the absences. You can read more about the WARNS at the [Washington State University WARNS website](https://warns.wsu.edu/), here: <https://warns.wsu.edu/>.

Steps to Reduce Absences: the school should be working with you and your child on steps to try to reduce absences.

If your child has an IEP or a 504 plan, the school should invite you to a team meeting. If there are concerns about behavior, or mental health, the school may need to invite a specialist to join you for the team meeting to try to figure out what might be leading to the absences, and how to address them. If you and the rest of the team are not sure what is triggering your child’s absences, or other behaviors that are getting in the way of them getting to school, the team, with your consent, can do a “functional behavior assessment”. That assessment can then be used to help develop a positive behavior intervention plan.

If your child does not have an IEP (Individualized Education Program) or 504 plan, but you think they might have a disability and need special education or accommodations, the school should tell you about the right to request an evaluation.

Other steps the school might consider for any student, if appropriate, include:

- Adjusting your child’s classes, or school program;
- Providing more individualized instruction, or help to catch up academically;
- Helping your child get involved in vocational courses or work experience;
- Requiring your child to attend an alternative school or program;
- Helping you and your child get help from services outside of school; or

- Referring your child to a Community Truancy Board.

When can my child be sent to truancy court?

Districts have the option to file a truancy petition if a student gets to **5 unexcused absences in a month**.

The law also says that a district must file a truancy petition if a student gets to **7 unexcused absences in a month, or 10 in a year**, and the steps it is taking to try to reduce absences are not working and it needs the court's help.

If a school district does not file a truancy petition, a parent can file one if a student gets to 5 unexcused absences in a month, or 10 in a year.

You can find the section of the attendance law that describes the obligation to file a truancy petition at [RCW 28A.225.030](http://leg.wa.gov/RCW/28A.225.030), online here: <http://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28A.225.030>.

What happens when a district files a truancy petition?

Notice of the Truancy Petition: first, the district should make sure you get a copy of the petition that it files with the truancy court. They can first try to get it to you by certified mail. If that doesn't work, the district should take additional steps to make sure you get a copy. If you hear that a petition has been filed with the court, but you haven't seen a copy of it, you should be able to get a copy by calling the school, or the district office.

Stay of Petition for Community Truancy Board Intervention:

When the court gets the petition, it generally won't move forward immediately with a court hearing. First, it will "stay," or hold onto the petition while the student and parent are referred to a Community Truancy Board.

If there is no Community Truancy Board in your area, then the court will schedule a hearing date or order other steps aimed at reducing your child's absences.

If you are referred to a Community Truancy Board, but do not attend, or are not able to reach an agreement, or you or your child does not comply with the agreement within the timeline set by the Community Truancy Board, then the case would go back to the court.

Notice of Truancy Court Hearings: you and your child should receive notice of any court hearings, in a language you can understand. If a hearing is set, the court can require you, your child, or both of you to attend.

If the court decides your child has been truant, it can issue an order assuming “jurisdiction,” or authority over the case. The court can stay involved for as long as it determines is appropriate to make sure your child is attending school regularly.

Updates to the Court: if a court issues a truancy order, the school district is required to update the court on your child’s attendance. The district has to give the first update within 3 months, and then continue to update the court for as long as the case is open.

What is a Community Truancy Board?

A community truancy board is a group of people from the community brought together by a joint agreement between a school district and the county juvenile court.

Boards must include members who receive training on:

- how to identify barriers to school attendance,
- the use of a Washington state tool for assessing risks and needs of students, called the “WARNS”, or other similar assessment tools;
- culturally responsive interactions;
- trauma-informed approaches to discipline;
- evidence-based treatments for supporting at-risk youth and their families; and
- specific services and treatment available in the local school, court and community.

Community truancy boards meet with youth and families that are referred by their district. They listen and talk with them to try to figure out what is getting in the way of the student attending school; they make recommendations to the family and the school for steps to take to improve attendance.

Community Truancy Boards can:

- Connect students and families with services including functional family therapy, or “wraparound” mental health, behavioral health or other family services);
- Recommend that the district transfer the student to another school, an alternative program, skill center, dropout prevention program, or other school option; or
- Recommend to the juvenile court that the youth be referred to a [HOPE center](#) or [crisis residential center](#). (more information on those is available here: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/adolescents/riskrunaway-youth>).

Some districts have been working with community truancy boards for many years. In 2016, the law changed and now requires every district (except ones with fewer than 200 students) to develop a community truancy board by the 2017-2018 school year.

What if my child keeps missing school after going to the Community Truancy Board?

The student, or parent or both may be referred back to the juvenile court.

What can happen if my child has to go to court for truancy?

If a court finds a student has been truant, the court can order the **student** to:

- Attend school regularly
- Switch schools (if there is space, and an appropriate program available);
- Get testing to determine if the student has used alcohol or drugs, and if so, then follow recommendations of the assessment;
- Get a mental health evaluation

If a court finds that a parent failed to ensure their child attend school as required, the court can order the **parent** to:

- Pay a fine of not more than \$25 for each day of unexcused absence; or
- Do community service.

A parent can avoid the fines by showing that the school didn't follow its duties to notify, meet or work with the parent and student to reduce absences, or by attending a conference to address the reasons for the absences and participating with the school and student in a supervised plan for attendance.

What happens if my child misses more school when there is already a truancy case?

Updates to the Court: if a court issues a truancy order, the school district is required to update the court on your child's attendance. The district has to give the first update within 3 months, and then continue to update the court for as long as the case is open.

If a court decides that a student violated its order, it can require the student to:

- Do community service;
- Participate in intensive wraparound services;
- Meet with a mentor; or
- Engage with other services or interventions the court decides are appropriate.

Juvenile Detention: If a student continues to miss school, and the court finds that other steps have not been successful, the court can send the child to juvenile detention for up to 7 days.

Can a child with an IEP be sent to court for truancy?

Yes, students with disabilities, including students with an IEP, are sometimes referred to court for truancy.

But, before a child with an IEP (or a 504 plan) is referred to court for truancy, the school should have scheduled a team meeting to try to understand and address the absences.

If a truancy court hearing is scheduled for a child with an IEP, the court must ask the district what efforts it has made to help the student get to school.

If you end up in court, or at a Community Truancy Board, you can share your questions, concerns and ideas about why your child has missed school and what might help to improve attendance. For more information and ideas on working with IEP teams to address problems, including absences, call OEO at 1-866-297-2597, or check out our [Parent's Guide on Protecting the Educational Rights of Students with Disabilities](#).

What if I, the parent, have a disability and need accommodations?

Parents with disabilities can request reasonable accommodations from their child's school and district. School districts must follow the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Section 504, both of which prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities. Schools are places of public accommodation and they may need to make reasonable accommodations so that parents with disabilities can equally access their buildings, services and programs. Ask your child's school or contact the district office and ask for their ADA or Section 504 coordinator.

What if I don't speak or read English well?

Notices and communication from the school about your child's attendance should be in your primary language.

The school should make sure an interpreter is available for meetings to talk about your child's attendance. If you are having a hard time getting an interpreter, you can try calling the school or the district main office. You can also call OEO for help at 1-866-297-2597.

What if my child just doesn't want to go to school, but is keeping up with work at home?

Regular attendance is required by law, even if a student is otherwise keeping up with homework and passing tests. Often, even when students think they are doing okay without going to class, they are missing more than they realize.

Students saying that they don't want to go, don't like school, or are bored, might also be a sign that something is bothering them at school. They might really be bored and need more challenging work. Or, they might be facing bullying or harassment, or feeling like they just can't keep up with school.

If you are having a hard time getting your child motivated to go to school regularly, try connecting with someone at the school or district for ideas, call OEO at 1-866-297-2597, and/or check out some of the links at the end of this sheet for other places to find help.

What if my child is anxious about school and gets angry, breaks down, or just won't get out of bed?

You can ask for help from the school and the district.

A child who is struggling with anxiety, depression or other mental health condition may need an evaluation and specialized supports and accommodations to be able to participate regularly in school. If a child is showing signs of anxiety that is getting in the way of going to school, it is important to try to get help as early as you can.

One of the types of disabilities that is covered under special education law is "emotional or behavioral disability", and that can include anxiety, depression or other mental health conditions.

Families can ask the school to consider doing an evaluation to see if the child needs extra supports through an IEP or 504 plan (see [OEO's Parent Guide on Protecting the Rights of Students with Disabilities](#)).

Families may also be able to find help from a private mental health counselor who can partner with the school and family to support the child in getting to school. Each county has community mental health services, and for youth who need intensive mental health services, there may be “wraparound” services and supports that can help. (learn more about [WISe – Wraparound with Intensive Services for Medicaid-eligible youth](#) at <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/SESA/publications/documents/22-1594.pdf>).

What if my foster child has already missed school from moving around a lot, and will have to miss more for court and other appointments?

Children and youth who are in foster care (youth who are dependent under the child welfare laws), often end up missing school for reasons beyond their control. They also often face unique challenges and need support from their schools and other adults who care for them.

For those reasons, [state law](#) requires schools to work together with foster parents, parents, caseworkers, educational liaisons, an attorney if the youth has one, and other adults involved in the student’s life, to take a close look if a youth in foster care is absent unexpectedly or often. They must work together to figure out why the student has been absent and school staff are required to work proactively with the student to support them with their school work so the student won’t fall behind or get in trouble for missing school. You can find more information and resources on [OSPI’s Foster Care Education Program](#) page (at <https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/access-opportunity-education/foster-care>) and from your local [Foster Care liaison](#).

What if we are homeless and my child misses school while we are trying to find housing? Can I get help from the school?

Yes. Every school district has someone on staff whose job is to help homeless youth and families. That person is called the McKinney-Vento Liaison. You can find their contact information by calling your district, or looking on OSPI’s page for [Education of Homeless Children and Youth](#) at <https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/access-opportunity-education/homeless-education>.

Absences related to a student’s homeless status should be excused.

Students who are experiencing homelessness can also receive supports from the school to help them keep up, to avoid having to change schools, and to help with transitions if they do have to move. These protections come from the federal [McKinney-Vento Act](#).

What if I feel school has not been a positive place for my child? Do I have to keep sending my child even they are being bullied, facing discrimination, or constantly getting in trouble?

If you find out that your child is being bullied or harassed, you can start by reporting it to the school principal and your child's teacher. If your child is afraid to go to school because of the bullying or harassment, ask them to work with you on a Safety Plan, to help make sure your child can be safe, and feel safe, at school. They can work with you on a Safety Plan even while they do a thorough investigation to find out what has been happening. You can talk with the principal about excusing absences if your child misses school because of bullying or harassment.

If your child is feeling like they just aren't welcome at school, or you are wanting to find another alternative for them, we hope you will call us to see if we can help come up with options.

There are also options for different kinds of school programs. Not all are available in every district, but some options are available statewide (for example, part-time or full-time online public school programs). Or parents can choose to homeschool their children.

We can't promise we'll be able to solve the problem, but we would like to help you try. You can call us at 1-866-297-2597 or find us online at www.oeo.wa.gov.

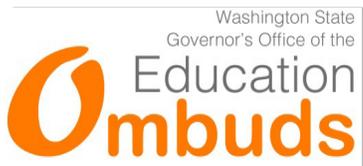
How can OEO help?

OEO is here to listen to your questions and concerns, share information, and work with you to figure out what steps you can try to make things better for your child. In some cases, with a parent or guardian's permission, we can work directly with you and the school or district to try to clarify what's going on, and find out what's possible to address the situation. Read more about [how we work](#), or call us at 1-866-297-2597.

Where else can I find help or more information?

The best help often comes from the people closest to the situation. Your child's teacher, principal, school counselor or a family liaison may be able to help. You can also ask to connect with the district's attendance person. You can find information online from the Washington state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI): <https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/support-programs/attendance-chronic-absenteeism-and-truancy/attendance-resources-parents-guardians>.

If your child receives special education services or accommodations – or you think they should – try connecting with your principal, special education teacher, or your district's special education office. Read more about accessing services for students with disabilities in [OEO's Parent Guide](#) for Protecting



Toll-free: 1-866-297-2597
Phone Interpretation Available.

Web: www.oeo.wa.gov
Email: oeoinfo@gov.wa.gov

the Educational Rights of Students with Disabilities. There are also organizations that connect [Parents to Parents](#) to support families with kids with disabilities. You can find contact information for parent to parent programs here: [http://arcwa.org/getsupport/parent to parent p2p programs](http://arcwa.org/getsupport/parent_to_parent_p2p_programs).

There is help for students who are [homeless](#), and students in [foster care](#). You can start looking for information by calling your school or checking out OSPI's website, here: <https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/access-opportunity-education/homeless-education> and here: <https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/access-opportunity-education/foster-care>.