

In May 1995, the Governor signed new provisions to the Compulsory School Attendance law with clear expectations for students, parents, and School Districts for returning truant students to school. Through a coordinated effort, regular school attendance can be achieved and issues contributing to truant behavior can be addressed.

A clear District-wide attendance policy is in place. Students, parents, and schools must work together to correct any truancy problems a student is experiencing.

- ❖ Students do not learn when they are absent from school. They miss critical instruction for understanding key concepts, and they can fall behind quickly in completing assignments. High school student who do not attend school may not graduate.
- ❖ Schools and parents/guardians share a responsibility to assure that students attend classes unless there is a good reason not to do so and a plan is in place to engage the student in his/her education.
- ❖ Schools must intervene quickly whenever a student has an unexcused absence.
- ❖ The court system is a final, but necessary, step to return some students who have become truant to regular class attendance. Court action may be against the parents or guardians if the court determines that they are the cause of the student's unexcused absences.

You may notify your child's school about your child's excused absence by telephone or in a written note, whichever is required by your child's school. Please remember to include the reason why your child is absent in your telephone call or note.

The Compulsory Attendance law applies to students between the ages of 8 and under 18, as well as 6 and 7 year olds who are enrolled in a public school program, unless the student is:

- ❖ Incapable of attendance due to medical or mental reasons.

- ❖ 16 and above, and regularly employed, and with the permission of a parent/guardian to work in lieu of attending school.
- ❖ Has met the educational requirements (GED, or other means found acceptable to the Superintendent)

Students who are ages 6 or 7 are subject to the Becca Law if they are enrolled in school.

Students found to be in violation of the Compulsory Attendance law may be subject to a truancy petition filed with the Juvenile Division of King County Superior Court. The Court may order a student to attend school, and if the student willfully violates the Court's order, the Court may take whatever actions necessary to insure compliance and regular school attendance. These may include community service or detention in the Juvenile Detention Facility.

Schools are required to:

- ❖ **Take daily attendance and notify parents/guardians after the first and second unexcused absence.**
- ❖ **Schedule a conference to meet with the student and parent to address truant behavior after 2 or more unexcused absences.**
- ❖ **Take steps to correct the problem in an effort to determine why your child is not attending school and to help develop a plan to insure your child's regular attendance.**
- ❖ **File a truancy petition with the Superior Court if the child has 7 truant days in a calendar month, or 10 truant days during the school year.**

Schools who fail to comply with the Compulsory Attendance law may lose state or federal monies or support.

Parents are required to have their school-age children enrolled in an educational program and to take steps to insure regular daily school attendance.

Parents or guardians who fail to comply with the Compulsory Attendance law may also be subject to a truancy petition filed with Superior Court. Parents may be fined up to \$25.00 per day for each day of their child's unexcused absences if the court determines that the parent is the cause of the student's truancy.

Additional sanctions imposed by the Court might include community service for the parent or guardian of the child.

The following District definitions of excused and unexcused absences are for students at all ages:

Excused Absences:

- ❖ Unplanned absences are excused when your child's personal illness or injury, or the illness, injury or death of a family member, prevents your child from attending school, and you notify the school within 48 hours of the absence. The school may require a note from your child's doctor if your child is absent due to illness or injury for an excessive number of days before excusing those absences.
- ❖ Planned absences are excused when you submit a request to the principal or assistant principal at least three school days before the start of the planned absence, usually for a doctor or dentist appointment, or religious holiday, or educational trip, or other special one-time event. The school may require your child to complete missed assignments and/or make other academic assignments for extended excused planned absences.
- ❖ Absences due to short-term discipline of your child are excused on District attendance records.

Unexcused Absences:

- ❖ All other absences are considered unexcused, including absences caused by the student or parent oversleeping, student missing the bus, transportation problems, student needed for babysitting, student job requirements, religious instruction, student on wait list for another school, etc.

- ❖ Absences by long-term suspended and expelled students for whom space is available in a reentry program, but who do not enroll and attend, are unexcused.
- ❖ A parent's request to "excuse my child's absence" without a stated reason or with a reason that does not meet the above criteria for excused absences will cause the child's absence to be recorded as unexcused.
- ❖ Family vacations are not excused.

The Compulsory Attendance law requires that school districts file petitions with the Juvenile Court for all students who have seven (7) or more unexcused absences in a month or ten (10) or more unexcused absences in a school year. Truancy petitions usually are filed on secondary students, but may be filed on parents of elementary students or if the school believes the parent is causing their child's absences or condoning them. The petition asks that the court compel the student to attend school or compel the parent to ensure that the student attends school.

When a petition has been filed, you and your child are invited to attend a Truancy Workshop, usually held at the John Stanford Center, as a diversion from setting a date for a preliminary hearing. Elementary parents have a separate workshop and elementary students do not need to attend the workshop.

If after attending the Truancy Workshop the student continues to have unexcused absences, the District may ask the court to set a date and time for a hearing. If the court sets a preliminary hearing you and your child are required to attend. Once a court hearing occurs and a court order is issued to a child and/or parent/guardian, the school district is required to report additional unexcused absences to the court.

If your child continues to have unexcused absences after the court order to attend is made at the preliminary hearing, a show cause hearing for contempt of court will be scheduled to determine if you or your child has willfully violated the court's order to attend school. If this occurs, your child will be appointed a public defense attorney to represent

him/her at any hearing dealing with a violation of the court's order. You may be expected to pay up to \$1,000 for this attorney.

As previously noted, the court may take whatever steps it feels are necessary to insure regular school attendance by the student. A student found to be in contempt of court by not attending school may be given expectations to fulfill to purge the contempt charge.

The key to any/all court action hinges on your child's attendance. Please reply to any school notification in a prompt manner. Students in secondary education programs may lose credit in their classes after as few as 10 absences, whether excused or unexcused. By prompt intervention, truancy can be corrected and educational success facilitated.

If you have questions about your child's attendance record, or are in need of a report on your child's educational progress, please call your child's school.

If you are in need of any additional information in regard to truancy issues, or if you have received a copy of a truancy petition filed by the Truancy Office and have questions about either the petition or the court process, please contact Truancy Office staff at 252-0825.

Your child's school administrator or the Truancy Office staff may also be able to provide you with additional information about resources available to assist you if you are having problems that go beyond typical school attendance issues with your child or other issues that are barriers to your child attending school regularly.



**“Becca Law”
Implementation of Washington State’s
Compulsory Attendance Law
(28A.225 RCW)**

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