



Treehouse Tips: Attendance and Truancy

All children in Washington State have a constitutional right to an education. According to a Washington State law called the Becca Bill, all children between ages 8 and 18 must attend school full-time, every day, unless there is a valid excuse. It also mandates that schools monitor student attendance and report unexcused absences. *Chronic absenteeism*, or frequent absences, can signal that a youth is not getting the support they need. Therefore, if a youth experiencing foster care has unexpected or excessive absences, the school must communicate with the youth's care team, which may include their social worker, case manager, parent, caregiver, and/or attorney, to investigate the cause of their absences and collaborate on solutions.

Attendance Policies:

Schools document and monitor attendance electronically. It is recommended that parents/caregivers obtain access to the online platform that the district utilizes to track student attendance and grades. This access allows parents/caregivers to check on their student's attendance as frequently as needed. If a parent/caregiver notices an error in the attendance record, they should contact the teacher or attendance secretary to make a correction. It is recommended that parents/caregivers obtain a copy of the district's attendance policies and procedures.

Under [RCW 28A.225.023](#), schools are required to monitor and report excessive and unexpected absences for youth involved in dependency proceedings. Schools must work with the adults who support the youth, including their caseworkers, attorneys, educational liaisons, parents/caregivers, and more to determine the cause of absences and collaborate to support the student. Further, [RCW 28A.225.360](#) mandates that school districts collaborate with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families as required in [RCW 74.13.570](#).

In order for youth experiencing foster care to participate in *full-time* alternative learning experiences, such as remote or online school, their parents/caregivers and social worker must obtain a court order per [WAC 110-148-1525](#). Specific rules regarding alternative learning experiences, including the requirement to make direct contact with a certified teacher at least once per school week can be found here: [WAC 392-550-025](#).

Being Tardy:

When a student arrives late to school or to a specific class period, they are documented as being "tardy". Depending on the cause, frequent tardies can signal the need for a behavior intervention, health plan, or other accommodation. If a student needs extra time transitioning between classes due to a disability, their parents/caregivers should contact the school's Individualized Education Program (IEP) Case Manager or 504 Plan Coordinator to create and document accommodations. Please note: Schools may not combine tardies to equal a full day and/or days of unexcused absences. However, schools may count a partial-day absence as a full day in truancy petitions as explained further below.

Excused and Unexcused Absences:

Each school district has the authority to create their own definitions of excused and unexcused absences, so please consult district-specific policies for more details. Attendance policies can usually be found on the school or district website and/or by calling the school directly.

In general, an *excused* absence is when the parent/caregiver notifies the school of the absence, thus acknowledging their awareness and approval of the youth missing school. Parents and caregivers cannot excuse every absence from school. [WAC 392-401-020](#) outlines what types of absences can be excused.

An *unexcused* absence can occur when there is no parent/caregiver communication with the school about the absence. If a student has numerous unexcused absences, the school district may refer them to Truancy Court.

Truancy:

When students have repeated unexcused absences, it is called “truancy.” Per [RCW 28A.25.020](#), schools are required to complete the following tasks *before* filing a truancy petition to juvenile court:

1. Provide notice to parents/caregivers of the student’s absences.
2. Schedule a meeting with the student and parent/caregiver to discuss the reasons for the absences.
3. Take data-driven steps to resolve problems leading to the student’s absences. Steps can include but are not limited to: counseling, transportation arrangement, family services, school supports through a 504 plan, Special Education supports, and more.
4. Refer the student to a Community Engagement Board who works collaboratively with the team to help reduce educational barriers.

If the above actions are not successful, [RCW 28A.225.030](#) requires that school officials file a petition to juvenile court for any student who has seven (7) unexcused absences in one month and no more than fifteen (15) unexcused absences in a school year.

Discipline and Enrollment:

Washington state law does not permit schools to suspend or expel a student for absences or tardiness. Similarly, schools are not allowed to unenroll students due to a lack of attendance.

Make a referral for Educational Advocacy!



If you have any questions or concerns about a youth's attendance, please make a referral to Treehouse’s advocacy program! To qualify for Educational Advocacy, youth must have an open dependency or have shelter care status. Scan the QR code or click the link below to complete the referral process: <https://referrals.treehouseforkids.org/>