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# Truancy 101

An overview of Washington's truancy process, laws and guidance  
Student Engagement & Support, OSPI



# Objectives of Session



Understand the intent of Washington's compulsory attendance & truancy laws



Have a basic understanding of state law and OSPI rules



Understand the truancy process (what actually happens)



Know where to turn next for more information and resources



# Tips for Participating in Zoom Webinar

- **Questions** as we go? Ask them in the **Q&A**



- Chat engagement is encouraged
- **Recording** will be available next week

# Need clock hours?

Register in  
pdenroller:

[Truancy 101](#)  
[\(pdenroller.org\)](#)



## Vision

*All students prepared for post-secondary pathways, careers, and civic engagement.*

## Mission

Transform K–12 education to a system that is centered on closing opportunity gaps and is characterized by high expectations for all students and educators. We achieve this by developing equity-based policies and supports that empower educators, families, and communities.

## Values

- Ensuring Equity
- Collaboration and Service
- Achieving Excellence through Continuous Improvement
- Focus on the Whole Child



Washington Office of Superintendent of  
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# Equity Statement

Each student, family, and community possesses strengths and cultural knowledge that benefits their peers, educators, and schools.

Ensuring educational equity:

- Goes beyond equality; it requires education leaders to examine the ways current policies and practices result in disparate outcomes for our students of color, students living in poverty, students receiving special education and English Learner services, students who identify as LGBTQ+, and highly mobile student populations.
- Requires education leaders to develop an understanding of historical contexts; engage students, families, and community representatives as partners in decision-making; and actively dismantle systemic barriers, replacing them with policies and practices that ensure all students have access to the instruction and support they need to succeed in our schools.



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# Presenters

- **Jenna Millett**, Attendance & Reengagement Program Specialist, OSPI
- **Krissy Johnson**, Assistant Director of Attendance & Reengagement, OSPI
- **Claire Pearson-Walker**, Attendance & Reengagement Manager, ESD 112
- **Teresa McMahon**, Probation Counselor, Clark County Juvenile Court





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# Questions & Polling 1



## Who's here?

- Building Administrator
- Attendance Clerk/Front Office Staff
- District Truancy Liaison
- Counselor/School Psych/Social Worker/Community Liaison/Grad Specialist
- Community Member/Community Based Organization
- District Office
- Court staff
- ESD Staff
- Other

## What grade band do you work with the most?

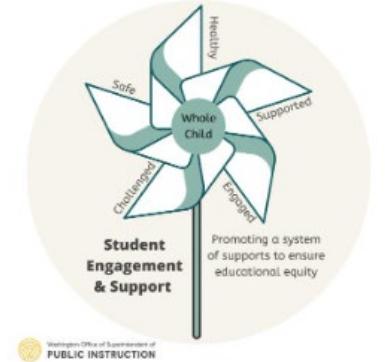
- Elementary
- Secondary
- Both
- None/NA
- Other

## How familiar are you with our topic?

- Very
- Somewhat
- It's new!

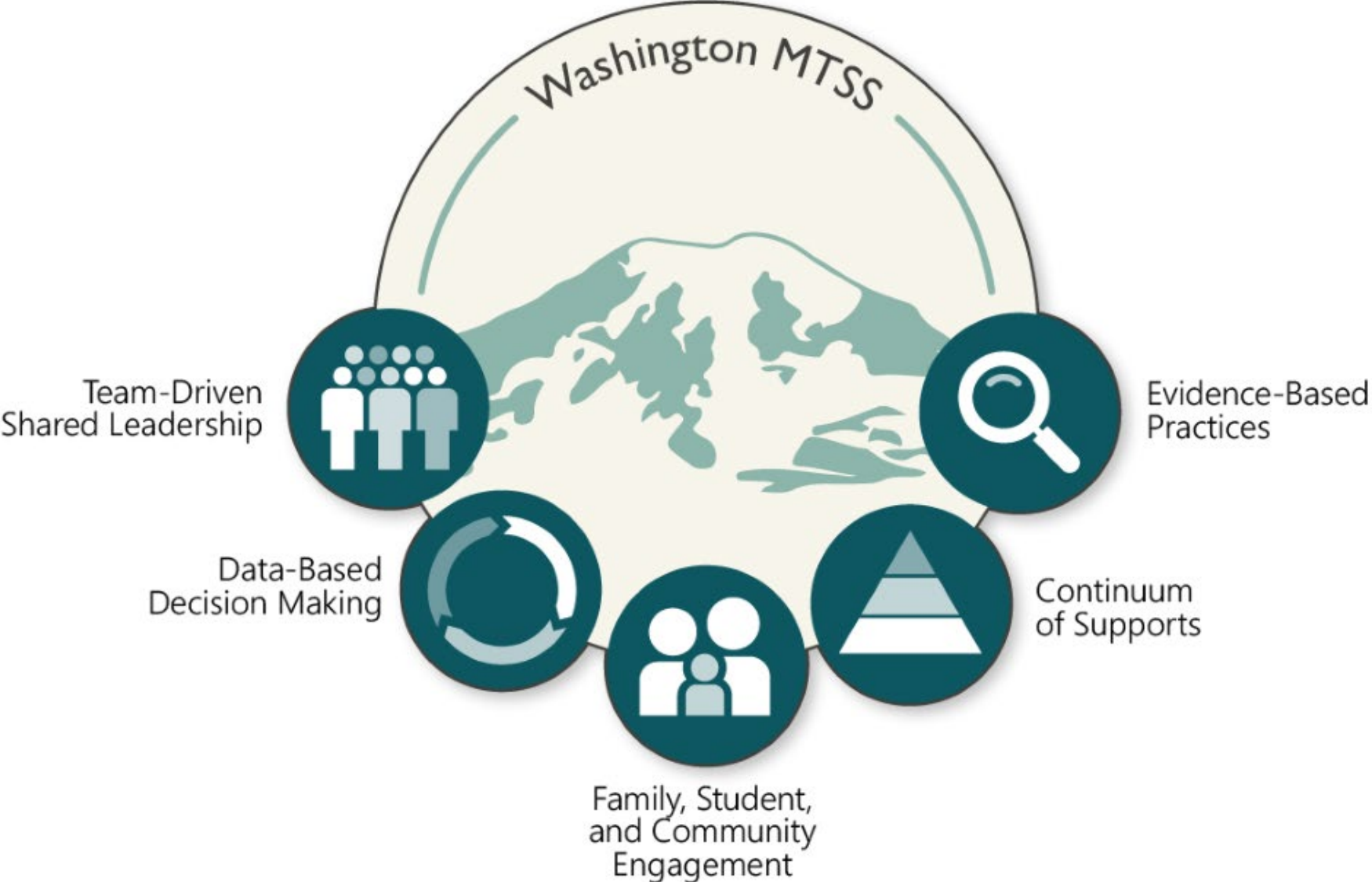


# OSPI Attendance Guiding Principles



- Attendance and engagement are foundational to **student learning**
- Absences tells us when a student has **not accessed instruction**
- Absences are a critical **early warning indicator** that:
  - can reflect **inequities** that are caused by or perpetuated by our **systems** or
  - when a student and family might need more **support**
- We have an opportunity to get **curious** about why students aren't attending
- **Students** and **families** are our best partners to understand the barriers to attendance
- Schools and districts have lots of opportunity for **prevention** and **intervention** before involving the Court

# Attendance critical part of MTSS



Absenteeism is  
an indicator  
with many  
underlying  
causes

An iceberg diagram where the visible tip represents the indicator of absenteeism, and the submerged part represents various underlying causes. The causes are listed in text around the submerged portion of the iceberg.

Physical  
illness

Anxiety or  
depression

Caring for  
siblings

Transportation

Do not feel welcome  
or belong at school

Have fallen  
behind in classes

Unsafe or challenging  
home environment

# Differentiating Terms

## Chronic Absence

A student missing 10% or more of their school days, excused and unexcused

## Truancy

Unexcused absences  
7 unexcused absences in a month or 15 unexcused absences in a year





# Background and Intent of Becca Bill

# Purpose of the Becca Law

The purpose of the Becca Law is to provide a safety net for youth and to prevent students from disengaging from school. It is not intended to punish students for past absences.

The Compulsory Attendance laws are a tool for early detection and intervention for youth at risk of disengaging. The goal is to provide intentional supports for youth to reengage them with their education, address barriers to attendance, and increase access to opportunities.





# The Becca Bill – Chapter 28A.225 RCW



- Named after Becca Hedman, whom the system failed in 1995
- Rebecca started skipping school, began abusing substances, and became a victim of commercial sexual exploitation
- At the age of 13, Rebecca was brutally murdered
- Schools were found to be a critical intervention opportunity and were mandated to communicate with parents about student absences and take steps to reengage youth in their education.



# Legal Tools to Intervene with Youth

## Truancy Petition

- Students with unexcused absences
- Brought by school district or parent
- Attempts to reengage students in school through the coordination of schools, courts, parents and community

## Child in Need of Services (CHINS) Petition

- Youth in need of an out of home placement
- Brought by youth or parent
- Request for temporary out of home placement and facilitates a family assessment and mediation

## At-Risk Youth (ARY) Petition

- Youth in need of out of home placement and services
- Brought by parent
- Help parent(s) access community resources



# Recent Legislative Changes to Truancy laws

- Schools and districts are now required to take preventative and early intervention steps to support youth to remain engaged, long before filing a petition
- Petition is stayed, to increase time and effort for intervention without a judge
- Juvenile courts are no longer allowed to place students in juvenile detention for status offenses (truancy or running away).



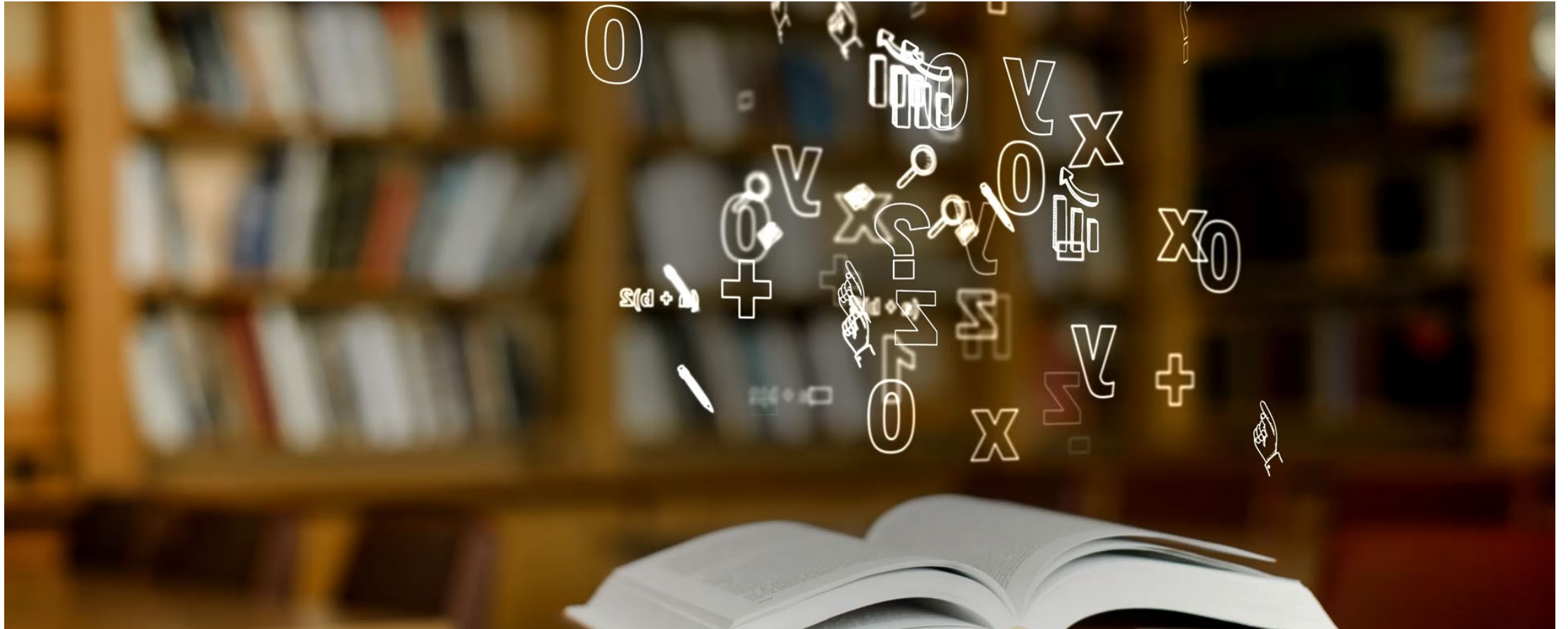
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# Summary of Washington Attendance Laws

# Education is a basic, constitutional right for all children in Washington



# Parents/guardians and children have a legal responsibility to enroll in education and attend

Public, private or  
home-based  
instruction  
(homeschool)

Ages 8 – 18

With some  
exceptions

[RCW 28A.225.010](#)



# Districts are required to take steps when students are absent

# of Absences	
After 1 unexcused absence	Notify parents when students are absent
After 3 unexcused absences in a month	Schedule a conference with student and parent to identify barriers and make a plan
Between 2 and 7 unexcused absences in a year	Take data informed steps Administer an assessment to identify barriers Convene the IEP or 504 team
Not later than 7 unexcused absences in a month	Enter into an agreement with student and parent or Refer student to a Community Engagement Board (CEB) or File a truancy petition
After 7 unexcused absences in a month and not later than 15 unexcused absences in a year	File a truancy petition; petition is stayed Refer parent and student to community engagement board

# Acknowledgement



This can be overwhelming



Not everyone has tiered systems perfectly in place



Can create a lot of learning or leadership tension



Your reality or process may be different than what we present



We are all still building systems



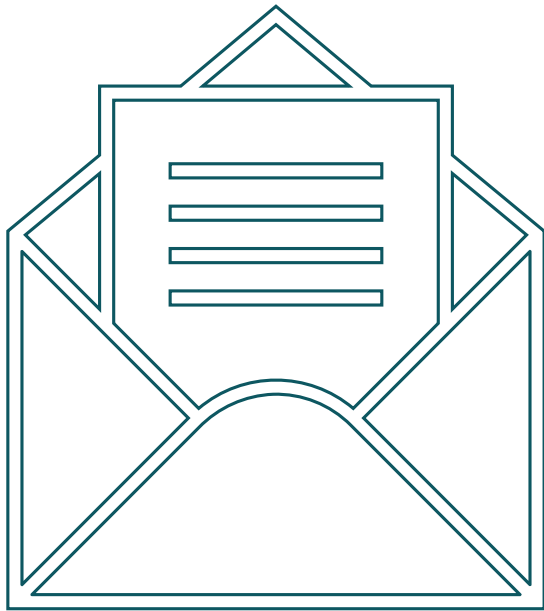


Taking the right action on the right day is NOT the most important thing.

Taking supportive, early, consistent action is.



# Beginning of the Year Letter



[OSPI Template Letter](#)

Information letter to all students and parents that includes:

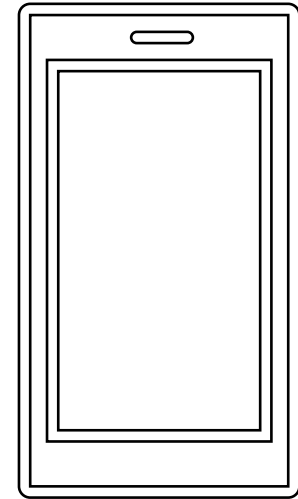
- the **benefits** of regular school attendance;
  - the **school's expectations** regarding attendance;
  - the **resources** available to assist the child and the parents;
  - the **responsibilities** of the school; and
  - the **truancy** process and other topics.
- 
- Message must be communicated in a language in which the parents are fluent



# Notify parent when student is absent

## After 1 unexcused absence

- **Inform** the student's parent/guardian by a notice **in writing or by telephone**, in a language the parent is fluent, whenever the student has failed to attend school



## Resources

- [Phone Call Script](#)
- [OSPI Attendance Letter Samples](#)

# Chat Engagement Question

1

What is the difference between an excused and unexcused absence?

2

Why might a student's absence not get excused?



# Parent conference to identify barriers

## After 3 unexcused absences

- Purpose of conference is to understand the causes of the child's absences
- Identify supports and next steps
- Held at a time reasonably convenient for all persons included



## Resources

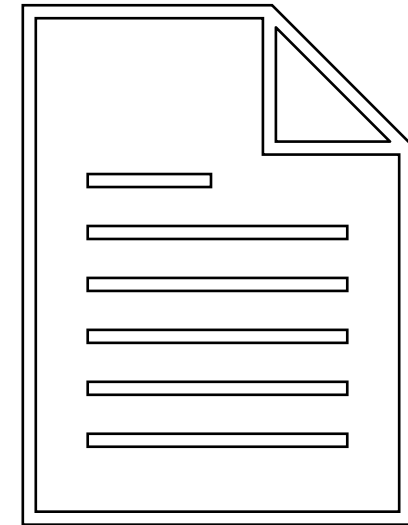
- [Sample script for phone conference](#)
  - [Guide for Attendance & Re-engagement Conference](#)
- [Motivational Interviewing Cheat Sheet](#)



# Take data-informed steps

## Between 2 & 7 unexcused absences

- For middle and high school students, must include using an assessment (WARNS or other)
- These steps must include providing a best practice or research-based intervention consistent with the WARNS profile or other assessment



## Resources

- [OSPI Guidance on Attendance & Truancy Assessments](#)
- [List of interventions in RCW 28A.225.020](#)
- [Attendance Works Tiered Interventions](#)



# Convene the 504 or IEP Team

## Between 2 & 7 unexcused absences

- Convene the IEP or 504 team to consider the reasons for the absences and adjust the IEP or 504 Plan as necessary
- For students reasonably believed to have a disability who do not have an IEP or 504, the following steps must occur:
- Student should be referred to the district's existing Child Find process ([WAC 392-172A-02040](#))
- Parents/guardians informed of their right to request an evaluation at no cost to them;
- if the parents/guardians consent to evaluation, time must be allowed for the evaluation to be completed ([WAC 392-172A-03005](#))\*
- If the student is found to be eligible for services/accommodations, a plan must be developed to address the identified needs

## Resource

[OSPI Special Education webpage](#)

After the 7<sup>th</sup> unexcused absence, do one of the following:

Agreement

Enter into an attendance agreement or

CEB

Refer student to a Community Engagement Board (CEB) or

File

File a petition

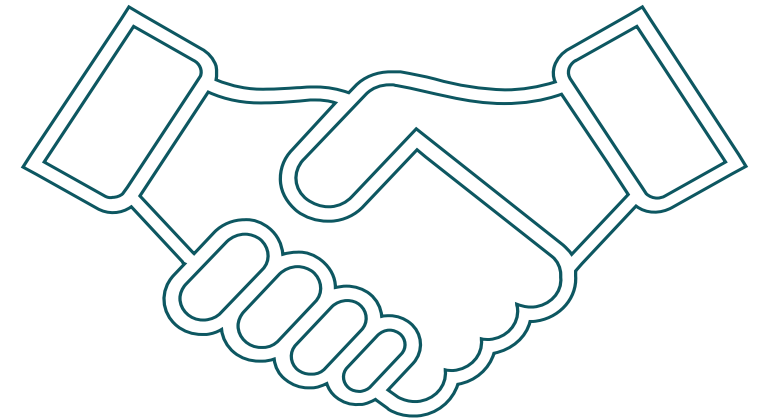




# Enter into an agreement

## After the 7th unexcused absence

- An agreement that serves as a student success plan
- Answers the questions:
  - What supports does this student need to address the underlying barriers to attendance?
  - What can the student, parent and school commit to?
  - What are next steps?



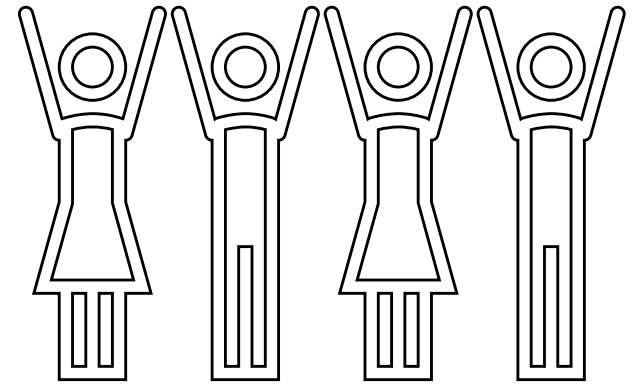
## Resources

- [Attendance Support Plan \(CVSD\)](#)
- [Attendance Success Plan \(Grandview\)](#)

# Refer student to Community Engagement Board

## After the 7th unexcused absence

- A community engagement board is a tier 3 intensive intervention
- A collaboration between school district, community members/organizations and local juvenile court to:
  - Identify barriers, identify and provide supports, connect to community services



## Resources

[Setting up your Community Engagement Board \(ESD 112/OSPI\)](#)



# File a truancy petition

After the 7th unexcused absence in a month, not later than the 15<sup>th</sup> in the year

- If the actions taken by a school district are not successful in substantially reducing an enrolled student's absences from public school, district shall file a petition with the local juvenile court
- Petition is a civil action



## Resource

Contact your local county court to for local process, forms, and supports

# Let's just take a pause...



Might feel overwhelming



You have systems in place already that can support this work



Opportunity to combine these steps (e.g. administer the assessment at the conference)





So, what does this look like in reality?

# Example 1 – Medium size district

Teacher reaches out - first point of contact

Letters are sent by front office

Parent conference by phone (admin)

School counselor administers assessment (WARNS or GAIN)

If absences continues, counselor & principal do a home visit

Meet in person to do an attendance contract

If absences continue, petition filed, stayed,

Then refer to Community Engagement board



# Example 2 - Large district

## District Liaison helps set up 2-3 person teams in each school

- Graduation coach, student advocate, counselor, attendance clerk, security officer
- Outreach, letters, conferences, assessments completed by each team

## Referrals sent to District liaison to file petitions

- District liaison does further outreach
- Provides information on alternative settings
- Makes sure barriers are addressed

## Community Engagement Boards

- Collaborates with local ESD to hold boards



# Takeaways

This is a team effort

These steps might not happen exactly at 3, 7 or 15 absences

Schools should make every effort to go through the process, and attempt all stages of the interventions in a timely fashion

Document all steps

**OSPI guidance: All of the required steps must have been attempted before filing a truancy petition**





# Chat Discussion

Who is on your team?

If you don't have a team, who can you enlist or ask?





# Truancy petitions and legal process

# Truancy Process

Schools provide prevention and intervention

File petition with the Juvenile Court

- Can name parent or the parent and student

Petition is a civil action (not criminal)

Court stays the petition

Referral to Community Engagement Board or other community supports

Lift stay and ask court for a "Findings of Truancy" or "Intervention Order"

Court intervention (tiered and varied across county)

Courts can no longer place students in juvenile detention for status offenses



# A truancy petition or engagement from court can provide:

---

Another adult with different authority when a school, district, and community partners have exhausted their efforts to engage student or parent

---

A case manager to support, engage, assess barriers and needs, and connect to services

---

Access to different resources such as counseling, referral to community partners, mediation, Functional Family Therapy

---

Workshops (for groups of families)

---

Home visits

---

# Why File a Petition

Filing the petition allows the court to come alongside the school district to provide additional supports

Court order mandating, substance abuse and/or mental health evaluations

Formalizes the truancy process

A decision point for some families that aren't responding to school's efforts

Petition is stayed





# Withdrawal Guidance

# Updated Guidance on Withdrawing Students

OSPI does not require that districts withdraw students for apportionment purposes or for CEDARS reporting after 4 days in September or after 20 days in other months of the school year.



- [OSPI updated guidance](#) (August 2023)
- [OSPI Withdrawing Students Webinar](#) (March 2023)



Wrapping up



# Purpose of the Becca Law

The purpose of the Becca Law is to provide a safety net to keep youth safe and prevent students from disengaging from school. It is not intended to punish students for past absences.

The Compulsory Attendance laws are a tool for early detection and intervention for youth at risk of disengaging. The goal is to provide intentional supports for youth to reengage them with their education, address barriers to attendance, and increase access to opportunities.



# Where to start...

Welcoming  
communication

Build your team



# Additional Resources

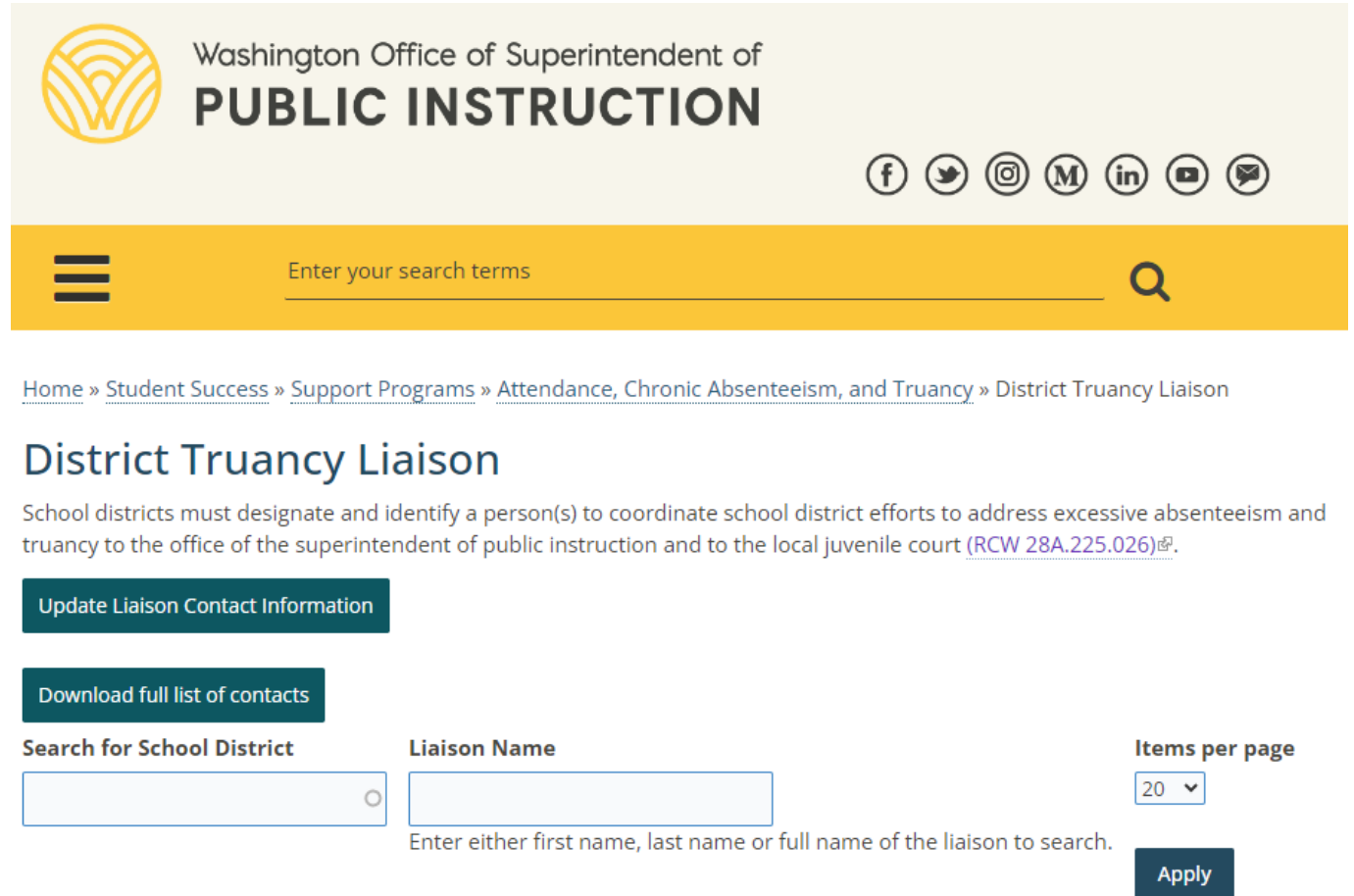
- [Attendance & Truancy FAQ](#)
- [ESD Attendance & Reengagement Coordinators Contact List](#)
- Webinar resources will be posted on the OSPI Attendance Policies and Guidance webpage in the coming days



# Register your District Truancy Liaison

All school districts are required to designate and identify a person(s) to coordinate school district efforts to address excessive absenteeism and truancy to OSPI ([RCW 28A.225.026](#)).

You can verify and update your district's liaison information on [OSPI's District Truancy Liaison Website](#).



The screenshot shows the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction website. The header includes the OSPI logo and name, along with social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Microsoft, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Email. A yellow search bar contains the text "Enter your search terms" and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar is a breadcrumb trail: "Home » Student Success » Support Programs » Attendance, Chronic Absenteeism, and Truancy » District Truancy Liaison". The main heading is "District Truancy Liaison", followed by a paragraph explaining the requirement for school districts to designate a liaison. Below this are two buttons: "Update Liaison Contact Information" and "Download full list of contacts". A search section includes a "Search for School District" input field, a "Liaison Name" input field, and a note: "Enter either first name, last name or full name of the liaison to search." To the right is an "Items per page" dropdown menu set to "20" and an "Apply" button.

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Enter your search terms

Home » Student Success » Support Programs » Attendance, Chronic Absenteeism, and Truancy » District Truancy Liaison

## District Truancy Liaison

School districts must designate and identify a person(s) to coordinate school district efforts to address excessive absenteeism and truancy to the office of the superintendent of public instruction and to the local juvenile court ([RCW 28A.225.026](#)).

Update Liaison Contact Information

Download full list of contacts

Search for School District

Liaison Name

Enter either first name, last name or full name of the liaison to search.

Items per page  
20

Apply

# Next Events

## Attendance Works Fall E-Learning Series

- 3-part training series to promote attendance using a team approach
- Dates/Time: Thursdays, September 14, 21, and 28 | 3:30-5pm
- [Zoom registration link here](#)

## District Truancy Liaison Peer Learning Network

- Building Truancy Contact Person
- Date/Time: Tuesday, September 19, 2023, 2:00pm
- [Zoom registration link here](#)



# Contact Us!

- [Attendance@k12.wa.us](mailto:Attendance@k12.wa.us)
  - Krissy Johnson and Jenna Millett
- [ESD Attendance Coordinators](#)



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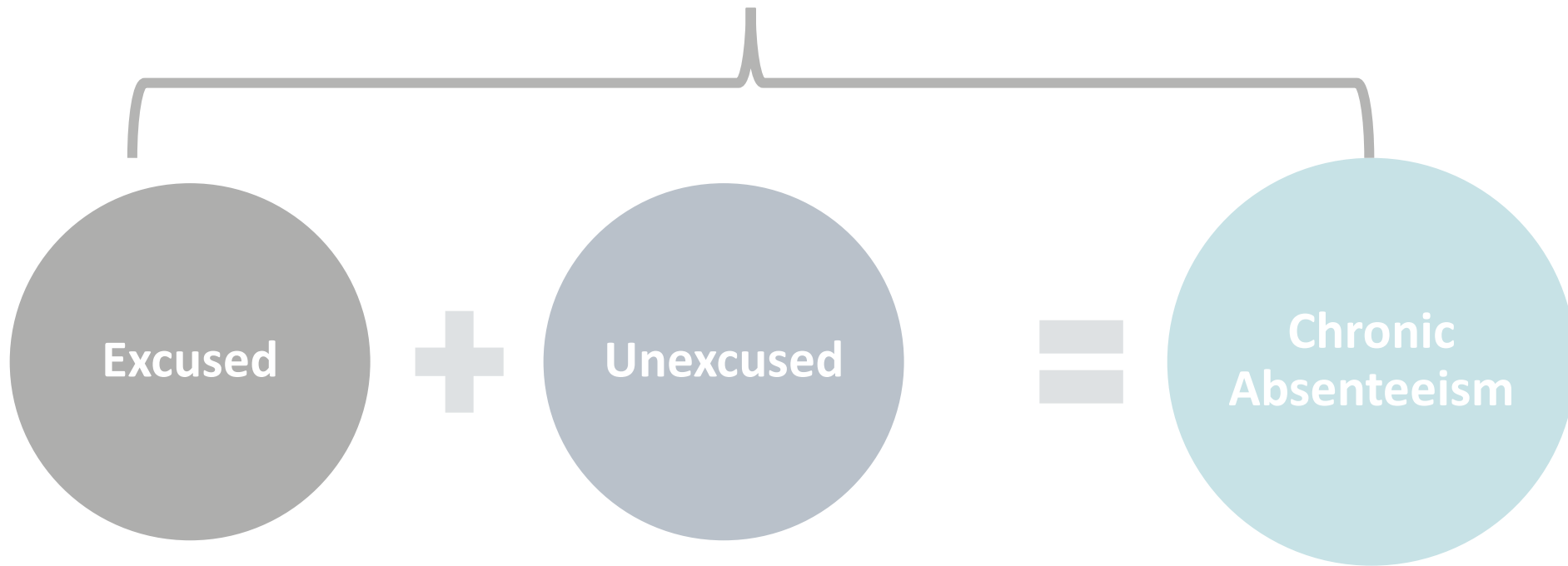


[medium.com/waospi](https://medium.com/waospi)



[linkedin.com/company/waospi](https://linkedin.com/company/waospi)

OSPI measures Chronic Absence and reports the inverse on Report Card as:  
"Regular Attendance"





# Chronic Absence: Research Highlights

[Attendance in the Early Grades:  
Why it Matters for Reading](#)

[Utah Data Alliance – Chronic  
Absenteeism Research Brief](#)



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Students that are chronically absent in preschool, kindergarten and 1st grade are **much less likely** to read at grade level by 3rd grade.

Students who can't read at grade level by the end of 3rd grade are **four times more likely** than proficient readers to not graduate.



A student that is chronically absent in any two years between 8th and 12th grade has **a 50% chance** of not finishing high school.

# Truancy Rates & Petitions Filed

	2020-21	2021-22
Total Number of Students who met Truancy thresholds	250,990	101,469
Percentage of Students who met Truancy thresholds	<b>22.0%</b>	<b>8.9%</b>
Number of Students with a Truancy Petition	2,558	4,054
Percentage of Students that Met Truancy Thresholds that had a Petition Filed	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>



# Definitions

- Petition
  - Formal written request made to the court, asking them to take specific action
- Motion
  - Formal request to the court for a judgement or ruling
- Stay
  - A ruling by the court to stop or suspend a proceeding temporarily. Places a "hold" on the petition
- Order
  - Directive of the court
- Commissioner vs. Judge
  - Judges are elected officials and Commissioners are appointed/hired to take on limited judicial functions
- Hearings
  - Formal proceeding in front of the Court
- Civil Contempt
  - Failing to follow an order from the court





What's the difference between the "statute" and the "rules"?

# Washington Attendance & Truancy Laws & Regulations

Body of Regulation	Where to Find	Who has authority?
State Law	Chapter 28A.225 RCW	State Legislature
State Administrative Rule	Chapter 392-401 WAC	OSPI
School District Policy & Procedure	3122-P	School Board of Directors



# OSPI Guidance

- Often OSPI will provide guidance to summarize, simplify or add to existing law or rule
- We will use the words recommends, or encourages to represent anything that is not an explicit requirement in law or rule
- Where to find OSPI Attendance & Truancy guidance:  
[OSPI Attendance Policies, Guidance and Data Reporting webpage](#)



# Outreach and Intervention Requirements



[WAC 392-401-045](#) states:



A district must have a process for outreach and reengagement for students who have been withdrawn due to nonattendance and there is no evidence that the student is enrolled elsewhere.

