

OSPI Attendance & Truancy Starter Kit

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Purpose of Starter Kit

This kit is intended to support Attendance and Truancy professionals (District Truancy Liaisons, attendance clerks and specialists) to set themselves up for success at the start of the school year. It includes an overview of Washington Laws and Policies, key resources, and ideas for where you can start and how to get organized.

Note: this is the first version of this publication. If you are looking for other information, we want to know about it so we can add it to future editions. Please contact Vicki Wood at vicki.wood@k12.wa.us with your feedback.

As we start a new school year, it's important for students to come to school every day. By working together, we can support all students to receive their free and appropriate public education (FAPE), help families understand attendance policies and procedures, and create plans to improve attendance. Let's focus on attendance and help every student succeed this year.

Review State Attendance Laws, Rules and Guidance

It is important to start by familiarizing yourself with attendance and truancy regulations that impact public schools and students. These can be found in the Washington state statute ([Chapter 28A.225 RCW](#)) and the Washington Administrative Code ([Chapter 392-401 WAC](#)).

You will need this information not only to support students and families with good attendance habits, but also to create a culture of attendance and ensure that your peers are delivering the same messages regarding the importance of attendance in your community.

State Attendance Laws (Statute)

Familiarizing yourself with these key sections of the attendance law will be a good foundation in your role. These statutes are established solely by the Washington State Legislature.

- [RCW 28A.225.005](#) Information for students and parents (see beginning of the year letter below)
- [RCW 28A.225.010](#) Attendance Mandatory-Age-Exceptions
- [RCW 28A.225.015](#) Attendance mandatory- Six- or seven-year-olds- Unexcused Absences-Petition
- [RCW 28A.225.018](#) Conferences to identify barriers to child's school attendance
- [RCW 28A.225.020](#) School's duties upon child's failure to attend school
- [RCW 28A.225.030](#) Petition to juvenile court for violations by a parent or child- School district responsibilities.

When you have more time, consider reading all sections 28A.225.005 through 28A.225.035.

Washington Administrative Code (OSPI Rules)

OSPI as a state agency has certain authority granted by the Legislature to create administrative rules. [Chapter 392-401 WAC](#) is the primary chapter that applies to attendance and absences.

- [WAC 392-401-015](#) Definition of absence from in-person instruction
- [WAC 392-401-018](#) Daily attendance taking
- [WAC 392-401-020](#) Excused absences
- [WAC 392-401-030](#) Unexcused absences
- [WAC 392-401-040](#) Student absences – General requirements
- [WAC 392-401-045](#) Multitiered system of support for attendance

When you have more time, consider reading the entire Chapter.

Review OSPI Guidance on Laws and Rules

Summaries of Attendance & Truancy Required Steps

The following two resources are a succinct summary of the steps required of districts by law when students are absent.

- [Elementary Attendance & Truancy Required Steps](#)

- [Secondary Attendance & Truancy Required Steps](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

The following guidance is frequently updated and includes answers to commonly asked questions about a wide range of topics related to attendance and truancy.

- [Attendance & Truancy FAQ](#)

To do:

- Review State Attendance Law (Chapter 28A.225 RCW)*
- Review Absence Rules (Chapter 392-401 WAC)*
- Review Elementary & Secondary Attendance & Truancy Required Steps*
- Review OSPI Frequently Asked Questions*

District Attendance Policies and Procedures

Familiarize yourself with your district’s attendance policies and procedures. You can find these in your board policy and school’s Student Handbook. Typically, a district’s absence board policy is #3122.

What do I do if our district policy or procedure do not align to the state laws and rules?

- Document and cite the differences
- Share with your supervisor

To do:

- Review your district attendance policy and procedures*

Attendance Communication Materials

The beginning of the year is an excellent time to review the communication your district sends out to families about absences. When you review, ask yourself:

- Do your school letters align with state policy and rules?
- Do they align with board policy and school/district procedure?
- Do your letters reflect a tone of positive support?
- Are they written at a 6th grade reading level to ensure readability by all families?
- Are they translated into the primary languages spoken at home?

Ensure that you are delivering critical information to your students, families, and communities about absences.

For example:

- How do families notify the school about an absence?
- How many days does a family have to excuse an absence?
- What is the procedure for an extended planned absence?

- Expectations when a student is sick regarding doctor's notes¹ and returning to school

Beginning of the Year Attendance Letter

Each school in a district is required to send a letter with key pieces of information about attendance at the beginning of the year ([28A.225.005](#)). This letter template is something that you can use to communicate the key expectations and features listed above. OSPI has recently updated the Beginning of the Year Attendance Letter [Template](#).

Truancy Letters

Each district is required by law to notify parents at specific thresholds of unexcused absences. Many choose to notify parents through letters. Find samples here.

- [1 Day Unexcused Absence Letter Sample](#)
- [3 Day Unexcused Attendance Letter Sample](#)
- [5 in a month or 10 in a Year Excused Absence Letter for Elementary Schools Sample](#)
- [7-15 Unexcused Filed Truancy Letter Sample](#)

Excused Absence Letters

Each school is required to notify and hold a conference with parents when an elementary school student accumulates 5 or more excused absences ([RCW 28A.225.018](#)). Here is an example:

- [5 in a month or 10 in a year Excused Absence Letter for Elementary Schools Sample](#)

Some school districts might also have an excessive excused absence policy, where the school will take certain actions when a student reaches a certain threshold of excused absences. Here is an example:

- [Palisades Excessive Excused Absence.docx](#)

Nudge Letters

[Nudge letters](#) are an evidence-based strategy that use social comparison norms to “nudge” the behavior of students and families. Contact your student information system (SIS) administrator or service provider to learn more about attendance nudge letter options. Here are a few examples:

- [Chronic Absence Template.docx](#)
- [Improved Attendance Template.docx](#)
- [Nudge Letter- Chronic Absence Template -.docx](#)

Note: your district may not currently be sending nudge letters. If not, that's ok, consider pursuing this as a goal for the coming year.

¹ Consider the implications of requiring medical documentation before excusing an absence for medical reasons including mental health. See [OSPI's Mental Health Related Absences: Guidance to Support Implementation of House Bill 1834](#)

Student Success Plans

Historically known as Attendance Contracts, Student Success Plans are a document that schools can use to identify action steps and commitments by the school, district, parent/guardian, and the student when a plan has been put in place to address the underlying causes of absences. These documents can be a helpful artifact to keep everyone accountable to one another after a parent or student conference.

Here are a few examples:

- [Student, Family, School Attendance Success Plan](#)

To do:

- Adapt the beginning of the year attendance letter template to align with your district policies and procedures*
- Share the requirement and template with your schools before the beginning of the year.*
- Review your truancy letter, coordinate with your Student Information System's department for delivery.*
- Review your excused absence letter(s) and nudge letters, coordinate with your Student Information System's department for delivery.*

Offer Trainings

The beginning of the year is a critical time to provide training to staff who support attendance within your district (Administrators, Counselors, Staff with Attendance duties, etc.).

Here is a Start of the Year Attendance PowerPoint Template that is designed to assist school districts in developing comprehensive back-to-school training sessions for staff. School districts can create customized presentations that address specific attendance goals, highlight best practices, and foster a collaborative approach to improving student engagement and success. Please do not modify slides with the OSPI logo, as they contain essential statewide policy and practices.

[Start of the Year Attendance PowerPoint](#)

To do:

- Offer attendance training to staff who support attendance within your district.*

Stay Connected through Peer Learning Opportunities

OSPI is offering multiple opportunities to stay connected to your job alike and peers across the state in the 2024-25 school year.

Truancy & Attendance Learning and Knowledge Sharing (T.A.L.K.S)

The OSPI T.A.L.K.S series offers a dedicated venue for district attendance and truancy liaisons to connect, gain support, and exchange valuable insights regarding truancy. Participants will be equipped with essential information on the implementation of Tier III strategies, along with a suite of resources and tools.

When:

- September 17, 2024 – 12pm
- November 19, 2024 – 12pm
- January 21, 2024 – 12pm
- March 18, 2024 – 12pm
- May 20, 2024 – 12pm

Register [here](#).

OSPI Attendance Office Hours

The OSPI Attendance Office Hours series is an opportunity for any school district staff seeking guidance on attendance-related questions.

When:

- October 15, 2024 – 12pm
- December 16, 2024 – 12pm
- February 18, 2025 – 12pm
- April 15, 2025 – 12pm
- June 16, 2025 – 12pm

Register [here](#).

To do:

- Register for OSPI Peer Learning Opportunities (T.A.L.K.S and Office Hours)*

Pursue Additional Professional Development

The following OSPI webinars and guidance contain key attendance information for your role.

OSPI Webinars

- [Truancy 101](#)- an overview of Washington's truancy process, laws and guidance.
- [Overview of Truancy Policy and Data Presentation](#)
- [Updated Guidance on Withdrawing Students](#)- June 5, 2024

OSPI Guidance

Keeping Students Enrolled (e.g. Withdrawing Guidance)

OSPI has provided clarification through guidance on what is required and what is not required when it comes to withdrawal practices. Familiarize yourself with the following resources.

- [State Requirements that Impact Student Enrollment & Withdrawal](#)
- Find more resources on the [OSPI Policies, Guidance and Data Reporting webpage](#), under Withdrawing Students.

Mental Health Absences Guidance

In 2022, OSPI updated the absence rules to clearly specify that absences due to mental health are excused absences. Read the following guidance for more information.

- [Mental Health Related Absences: Guidance to Support Implementation of House Bill 1834 – Comprehensive Guidance \(August 22, 2022\)](#)

Data Analysis

To support attendance and truancy, you will need to manage a significant amount of data. Start by building a relationship with your Student Information Systems (SIS) Administrator or team. Collaborate with them to create the necessary reports and ensure timely delivery. Start with these reports at the beginning of the year:

Student Withdrawal Report (aka U & D report)

What it is

This report identifies the students that have been withdrawn and coded with an “Unknown” or “Dropout” withdrawal code. These are the students withdrawn from school, and the district has not received confirmation of enrollment in another approved educational program. Read the following guidance on [How to use the P210 Withdrawal Report in CEDARS](#).

What to do with it

- Identify students who have not enrolled in an approved educational program (including homeschool).
- Conduct outreach activities to locate students to support engagement efforts.
- If the student is not enrolled and not engaged in an approved educational program, begin to follow the steps in the truancy process.

Prior Year Chronic Absence Report

What it is

This report identifies the list of students that were chronically absent (missed 10% or more of their enrolled school days for any reason, excused or unexcused) in the last school year.

What to do with it

Provide this report to each of your schools with some guidance on what actions to take at the beginning of the year. (See OSPI suggestions below).

Connecting with Students who Were Chronically Absent Last Year

The strongest predictor of absences is previous absences. You can get ahead of supporting your students' engagement this year by identifying the students that were chronically absent last year and setting up a communication and support plan for them right at the beginning of the year.

Here's what that could look like:

- Ask your schools to do some personal outreach to these students. (Tip: provide them a script to make it easier!).
- Send a postcard home specific to them, sharing how excited you are for them to start school this year.
- Recruit some older students to commit to reaching out and connecting with these students on a weekly basis.
- Celebrate the small wins! When students attend and keep attending, let them know you've noticed with positive reinforcement.

To do:

- Work with Student Information System Administrator for running attendance letters.*
- Run U & D Withdrawal Report.*
- Run Chronic Absenteeism report from previous school year.*

Support Schools to take a Team-Based Approach to Attendance (Excused and Unexcused)

These are tools for schools to support increased attendance. You can work with school teams to provide information from the chronic absence report regarding students that need additional support at the beginning of the school year.

- [School Attendance Self-Assessment](#)
- [Boosting Your Teaming for Better Attendance](#)
- [How to Organize an Effective School Team to Improve Attendance \(PDF\)](#)
- [Attendance Teaming Routines Checklist \(PDF\)](#)
- [Tier 1 Attendance & Engagement Data Teams Can Explore](#)

To do:

- Partner with Attendance Teams to locate students who did not return at the beginning of the year.*

Reporting Data to OSPI

School districts must report absences and truancy data to OSPI through the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System ([CEDARS](#)).

Key Relationships

Here is a list of recommended relationships to build to support your role in truancy. This list is not comprehensive nor in order:

- **Administrators**- attendance teaming and messaging.
- **Boundaries and/or Home-Based Instruction**- support students entering or leaving the district and those who have completed an intent for home-based instruction.
- **Counselors**- provide prevention and intervention to students and families struggling with attendance.
- **Educational Service District (ESD)**- connect with your local ESD to learn about available attendance support.
- **McKinney-Vento Liaison**- partnering to ensure that barriers to attendance that are related to homelessness are addressed.
- **Special Services Team**- collaborate to address attendance barriers through the IEP team.
- **Student Information Systems Administrator or Team**- support reporting to CEDARS, support district reporting, and ensure attendance letters are operating in system.
- **Truancy Court Professionals**- Connect with your local court to learn about your county's truancy process and available support and training.

To do:

- Connect with individuals within your district that will support your role in truancy.*
- Connect with your local Educational Services District (ESD).*
- Connect with your local truancy court professionals.*

Community Engagement Boards

This is the time of year to start scheduling your CEB's for the school year, as well as your volunteer training. Below is a brief introduction on how to plan. It is recommended to check and see if you already have a list of volunteers and a space that is dedicated to holding the CEB's and volunteer training. You will need to work with the person who schedules your spaces to confirm you have space available. OSPI's Attendance Program will be continuing to provide guidance regarding CEB's.

- Build calendar for CEB's (when possible, pre-schedule):
 - CEB dates and times
 - Volunteer training dates and times
- Electronic calendar Invitation

- Email
- Provide a paper document of dates and times to all board members

To do:

- Schedule Community Engagement Board.*
- Schedule volunteer training dates and times.*

Contact Us

Please contact OSPI’s Attendance Program at attendance@k12.wa.us with your questions.

For regular updates on OSPI Attendance policy and best practices, sign up for the [OSPI Attendance Newsletter](#).

All school districts are required to designate and identify a person or persons to coordinate school district efforts to address excessive absenteeism and truancy to OSPI ([RCW 28A.225.026](#)). Please update your contact information at the [OSPI District Truancy Liaison Webpage](#).

To do:

- Sign up for [OSPI’s Attendance Newsletter](#)*
- Update [OSPI’s District Truancy Liaison Contact Information \(RCW 28A.225.026\)](#)*
- Review [OSPI’s Attendance Webpages](#)*

Check List:

- Review State Attendance Laws
- Review Absence Rules (Chapter 392-401 WAC)
- Review Elementary & Secondary Attendance & Truancy Required Steps
- Review OSPI Frequently Asked Questions
- Review your district attendance policy and procedures
- Adapt the beginning of the year attendance letter template to align with your district policies and procedures
- Share the requirement and template with your schools before the beginning of the year.
- Review your truancy letter, coordinate with your Student Information System’s department for delivery.
- Review your excused absence letter(s) and nudge letters, coordinate with your Student Information System’s department for delivery.
- Offer attendance training to staff who support attendance within your district.

- Register for OSPI Peer Learning
- Work with Student Information System Administrator for running attendance letters.
- Run U & D Withdrawal Report.
- Run Chronic Absenteeism report from previous school year.
- Partner with Attendance Teams to locate students who did not return at the beginning of the year.
- Connect with individuals within your district that will support your role in truancy.
- Connect with your local Educational Services District (ESD).
- Connect with your local truancy court professionals.
- Schedule Community Engagement Board
- Schedule volunteer training dates and times
- Sign up for [OSPI's Attendance Newsletter](#)
- Update [OSPI's District Truancy Liaison Contact Information \(RCW 28A.225.026\)](#)
- Review [OSPI's Attendance Webpages](#)