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## Education Appropriations Committee

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### HB 2449

**Brief Description:** Concerning truancy payments to school districts.

**Sponsors:** Representative Appleton.

#### Brief Summary of Bill

- Amends the 2009-11 operating budget in fiscal year 2011 by eliminating a \$1.5 million general fund-state appropriation provided for school districts' petitions to juvenile court for truant students, and makes an appropriation in the same amount in FY11 for diversion and other activities to eliminate or reduce truancy.

**Hearing Date:** 1/19/10

**Staff:** Ben Rarick (786-7349).

#### **Background:**

The 2009-11 operating budget includes \$3 million in general fund-state appropriations to support school district petitions for truant students. School districts are required to petition courts for civil actions against truant students not later than the seventh unexcused absence for that student within any month, or the tenth unexcused absence during the current school year.

Requirements regarding follow up actions for truant students by school districts have evolved over time. In 1995, Washington passed the "Becca Bill," which established stricter procedures for follow up and tracking of students who are truant. Prior to the adoption of the "Becca Bill," statutes required districts to follow procedures for parent notification, parent and student conferences, and following steps to eliminate or reduce the absences. However, there were no clear standards in statute for what constituted excessive absenteeism, or specific requirements to petition courts for truant students. "Becca" added a requirement for a truancy petition to be filed by the school district after seven unexcused absences in a month or 10 in a single school year. As a result, annual petitions for truant students grew from less than 100 per year prior to 1995 to approximately 15,000 petitions annually today.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

In February of 2009, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) issued a report entitled Washington Truancy Laws: School District Implementation and Costs. According to WSIPP, the statewide average cost to school districts per truancy case filed is \$183. This does not include indirect or overhead costs such as staff time dedicated to telephone calls and conferences. In 2007-08, WSIPP estimates that districts spent an estimated \$2.7 million to file petitions and contempt motions and to attend hearings, while the operating budget appropriated \$1.8 million to reimburse school districts.

In the field of truancy prevention, "diversion" programs typically mean programs that treat court involvement as a last resort, and emphasize counseling and mentorship opportunities to reengage youth in school. The U.S. Department of Education lists several truancy diversion programs among its list of evidence-based programs for drop-out prevention and reengagement.

**Summary of Bill:**

The bill amends the 2009-11 operating budget in fiscal year 2011. The bill eliminates a \$1.5 million appropriation provided solely for school districts' petitions to juvenile court for truant students, and creates an appropriation in the same amount in FY11 provided solely for diversion and other activities to eliminate or reduce truancy.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.