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**SENATE BILL 5563**

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**State of Washington 65th Legislature 2017 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Fortunato, Hawkins, and Brown

AN ACT Relating to providing flexibility to school districts to reduce costs related to compliance with truancy laws; and amending RCW 28A.225.015, 28A.225.018, 28A.225.020, 28A.225.025, 28A.225.030, 28A.225.090, and 28A.225.151.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.225.015 and 1999 c 319 s 6 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) If a parent enrolls a child who is six or seven years of age in a public school, the child is required to attend and that parent has the responsibility to ensure the child attends for the full time that school is in session. An exception shall be made to this requirement for children whose parents formally remove them from enrollment if the child is less than eight years old and a petition has not been filed against the parent under subsection (3) of this section. The requirement to attend school under this subsection does not apply to a child enrolled in a public school part-time for the purpose of receiving ancillary services. A child required to attend school under this subsection may be temporarily excused upon the request of his or her parent for purposes agreed upon by the school district and parent.

(2) If a six or seven year old child is required to attend public school under subsection (1) of this section and that child has unexcused absences, the public school in which the child is enrolled shall:

(a) Inform the child's custodial parent, parents, or guardian by a notice in writing or by telephone whenever the child has failed to attend school after one unexcused absence within any ((~~month~~)) thirty-day period during the current school year;

(b) Request a conference or conferences with the custodial parent, parents, or guardian and child at a time reasonably convenient for all persons included for the purpose of analyzing the causes of the child's absences after two unexcused absences within any ((~~month~~)) thirty-day period during the current school year. If a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference day is to take place within thirty days of the second unexcused absence, then the school district may schedule this conference on that day; and

(c) Take steps to eliminate or reduce the child's absences. These steps shall include, where appropriate, adjusting the child's school program or school or course assignment, providing more individualized or remedial instruction, offering assistance in enrolling the child in available alternative schools or programs, or assisting the parent or child to obtain supplementary services that may help eliminate or ameliorate the cause or causes for the absence from school.

(3) If a child required to attend public school under subsection (1) of this section has seven unexcused absences in a ((~~month~~)) thirty-day period or ten unexcused absences in a school year, the school district shall file a petition for civil action as provided in RCW 28A.225.035 against the parent of the child.

(4) This section does not require a six or seven year old child to enroll in a public or private school or to receive home-based instruction. This section only applies to six or seven year old children whose parents enroll them full time in public school and do not formally remove them from enrollment as provided in subsection (1) of this section.

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.225.018 and 2016 c 205 s 3 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Except as provided in subsection (2) of this section, in the event that a child in elementary school is required to attend school under RCW 28A.225.010 or 28A.225.015(1) and has five or more excused absences in a single ((~~month~~)) thirty-day period during the current school year, or ten or more excused absences in the current school year, the school district shall schedule a conference or conferences with the parent and child at a time reasonably convenient for all persons included for the purpose of identifying the barriers to the child's regular attendance, and the supports and resources that may be made available to the family so that the child is able to regularly attend school. If a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference day is to take place within thirty days of the absences, the school district may schedule this conference on that day. To satisfy the requirements of this section, the conference must include at least one school district employee such as a nurse, counselor, social worker, teacher, or community human services provider, except in those instances regarding the attendance of a child who has an individualized education program or a plan developed under section 504 of the rehabilitation act of 1973, in which case the reconvening of the team that created the program or plan is required.

(2) A conference pursuant to subsection (1) of this section is not required in the event of excused absences for which prior notice has been given to the school or a doctor's note has been provided and an academic plan is put in place so that the child does not fall behind.

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.225.020 and 2016 c 205 s 4 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) If a child required to attend school under RCW 28A.225.010 fails to attend school without valid justification, the public school in which the child is enrolled shall:

(a) Inform the child's parent by a notice in writing or by telephone whenever the child has failed to attend school after one unexcused absence within any ((~~month~~)) thirty-day period during the current school year. School officials shall inform the parent of the potential consequences of additional unexcused absences. If the parent is not fluent in English, the school must make reasonable efforts to provide this information in a language in which the parent is fluent;

(b) Schedule a conference or conferences with the parent and child at a time reasonably convenient for all persons included for the purpose of analyzing the causes of the child's absences after ((~~two~~)) three unexcused absences within any ((~~month~~)) thirty-day period during the current school year. If a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference day is to take place within thirty days of the ((~~second~~)) third unexcused absence, then the school district may schedule this conference on that day; and

(c) Take data-informed steps to eliminate or reduce the child's absences. These steps ((~~shall~~)) may include application of the Washington assessment of the risks and needs of students (WARNS) or other screening or assessment tool by a school district's designee under RCW 28A.225.026, and where appropriate, providing an available approved best practice or research-based intervention, or both, consistent with the ((~~WARNS profile,~~)) results of the screening or assessment tool. The school may take flexible actions appropriate to the individual circumstances of the child, including adjusting the child's school program or school or course assignment, providing more individualized or remedial instruction, providing appropriate vocational courses or work experience, referring the child to a community truancy board, requiring the child to attend an alternative school or program, or assisting the parent or child to obtain supplementary services that might eliminate or ameliorate the cause or causes for the absence from school. If the child's parent does not attend the scheduled conference, the conference may be conducted with the student and school official. However, the parent shall be notified of the steps to be taken to eliminate or reduce the child's absence.

(2) For purposes of this chapter, an "unexcused absence" means that a child:

(a) Has failed to attend the majority of hours or periods in an average school day or has failed to comply with a more restrictive school district policy; and

(b) Has failed to meet the school district's policy for excused absences.

(3) If a child transfers from one school district to another during the school year, the receiving school or school district shall include the unexcused absences accumulated at the previous school or from the previous school district for purposes of this section, RCW 28A.225.030, and 28A.225.015. The sending school district shall provide this information to the receiving school, together with a copy of any previous assessment as required under subsection (1)(c) of this section, history of any best practices or researched-based intervention previously provided to the child by the child's sending school district, and a copy of the most recent truancy information including any online or written acknowledgment by the parent and child, as provided for in RCW 28A.225.005.

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.225.025 and 2016 c 205 s 5 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) For purposes of this chapter, "community truancy board" means a board established pursuant to a memorandum of understanding between a juvenile court and a school district and composed of members of the local community in which the child attends school. ((~~All~~)) Members of a community truancy board ((~~must~~)) may receive training regarding the identification of barriers to school attendance, the use of the Washington assessment of the risks and needs of students (WARNS) or other assessment tools to identify the specific needs of individual children, trauma-informed approaches to discipline, evidence-based treatments that have been found effective in supporting at-risk youth and their families, and the specific services and treatment available in the particular school, court, community, and elsewhere. Duties of a community truancy board ((~~shall~~)) may include, but not be limited to: Identifying barriers to school attendance, recommending methods for improving attendance such as connecting students and their families with community services, culturally appropriate promising practices, and evidence-based services such as functional family therapy, multisystemic therapy, and aggression replacement training, suggesting to the school district that the child enroll in another school, an alternative education program, an education center, a skill center, a dropout prevention program, or another public or private educational program, or recommending to the juvenile court that a juvenile be referred to a HOPE center or crisis residential center.

(2) The legislature finds that utilization of community truancy boards is the preferred means of intervention when preliminary methods to eliminate or reduce unexcused absences as required by RCW 28A.225.020 have not been effective in securing the child's attendance at school. The legislature intends to encourage and support the development and expansion of community truancy boards. Operation of a school truancy board does not excuse a district from the obligation of filing a petition within the requirements of RCW 28A.225.015(3).

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.225.030 and 2016 c 205 s 7 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) If a child under the age of seventeen is required to attend school under RCW 28A.225.010 and if the actions taken by a school district under RCW 28A.225.020 are not successful in substantially reducing an enrolled student's absences from public school, ((~~not later than~~)) upon the seventh unexcused absence by a child within any ((~~month~~)) thirty-day period during the current school year or ((~~not later than~~)) the tenth unexcused absence during the current school year the school district ((~~shall~~)) may file a petition and supporting affidavit for a civil action with the juvenile court alleging a violation of RCW 28A.225.010: (a) By the parent; (b) by the child; or (c) by the parent and the child. The petition must include a list of all interventions that have been attempted as set forth in RCW 28A.225.020, include a copy of any previous truancy assessment completed by the child's current school district, the history of approved best practices intervention or research-based intervention previously provided to the child by the child's current school district, and a copy of the most recent truancy information document signed by the parent and child, pursuant to RCW 28A.225.005. Except as provided in this subsection, no additional documents need be filed with the petition. Nothing in this subsection requires court jurisdiction to terminate when a child turns seventeen or precludes a school district from filing a petition for a child that is seventeen years of age.

(2) The district shall not later than the fifth unexcused absence in a ((~~month~~)) thirty-day period:

(a) Enter into an agreement with a student and parent that establishes school attendance requirements;

(b) Refer a student to a community truancy board as defined in RCW 28A.225.025. The community truancy board shall enter into an agreement with the student and parent that establishes school attendance requirements and take other appropriate actions to reduce the child's absences; or

(c) File a petition under subsection (1) of this section.

(3) The petition may be filed by a school district employee who is not an attorney.

(4) If the school district fails to file a petition under this section, the parent of a child with five or more unexcused absences in any ((~~month~~)) thirty-day period during the current school year or upon the tenth unexcused absence during the current school year may file a petition with the juvenile court alleging a violation of RCW 28A.225.010.

(5) Petitions filed under this section may be served by certified mail, return receipt requested. If such service is unsuccessful, or the return receipt is not signed by the addressee, personal service is required.

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.225.090 and 2016 c 205 s 9 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) A court may order a child subject to a petition under RCW 28A.225.035 to do one or more of the following:

(a) Attend the child's current school, and set forth minimum attendance requirements, which shall not consider a suspension day as an unexcused absence;

(b) If there is space available and the program can provide educational services appropriate for the child, order the child to attend another public school, an alternative education program, center, a skill center, dropout prevention program, or another public educational program;

(c) Attend a private nonsectarian school or program including an education center. Before ordering a child to attend an approved or certified private nonsectarian school or program, the court shall: (i) Consider the public and private programs available; (ii) find that placement is in the best interest of the child; and (iii) find that the private school or program is willing to accept the child and will not charge any fees in addition to those established by contract with the student's school district. If the court orders the child to enroll in a private school or program, the child's school district shall contract with the school or program to provide educational services for the child. The school district shall not be required to contract for a weekly rate that exceeds the state general apportionment dollars calculated on a weekly basis generated by the child and received by the district. A school district shall not be required to enter into a contract that is longer than the remainder of the school year. A school district shall not be required to enter into or continue a contract if the child is no longer enrolled in the district;

(d) Submit to a substance abuse assessment if the court finds on the record that such assessment is appropriate to the circumstances and behavior of the child and will facilitate the child's compliance with the mandatory attendance law and, if any assessment, including a urinalysis test ordered under this subsection indicates the use of controlled substances or alcohol, order the minor to abstain from the unlawful consumption of controlled substances or alcohol and adhere to the recommendations of the substance abuse assessment at no expense to the school;

(e) Submit to a mental health evaluation or other diagnostic evaluation and adhere to the recommendations of the drug assessment, at no expense to the school, if the court finds on the court records that such evaluation is appropriate to the circumstances and behavior of the child, and will facilitate the child's compliance with the mandatory attendance law; or

(f) Submit to a temporary placement in a crisis residential center or a HOPE center if the court determines there is an immediate health and safety concern, or a family conflict with the need for mediation.

(2) If the child fails to comply with the court order, the court may ((~~order the child to be subject to detention, as provided in RCW 7.21.030(2)(e), or may impose alternatives to~~)) impose sanctions that do not include detention, such as community restitution. ((~~Failure by a child to comply with an order issued under this subsection shall not be subject to detention for a period greater than that permitted pursuant to a civil contempt proceeding against a child under chapter 13.32A RCW. Detention ordered under this subsection may be for no longer than seven days. Detention ordered under this subsection shall preferably be served at a secure crisis residential center close to the child's home rather than in a juvenile detention facility. A warrant of arrest for a child under this subsection may not be served on a child inside of school during school hours in a location where other students are present.~~))

(3) Any parent violating any of the provisions of either RCW 28A.225.010, 28A.225.015, or 28A.225.080 shall be fined not more than twenty-five dollars for each day of unexcused absence from school. The court shall remit fifty percent of the fine collected under this section to the child's school district. It shall be a defense for a parent charged with violating RCW 28A.225.010 to show that he or she exercised reasonable diligence in attempting to cause a child in his or her custody to attend school or that the child's school did not perform its duties as required in RCW 28A.225.020. The court may order the parent to provide community restitution instead of imposing a fine. Any fine imposed pursuant to this section may be suspended upon the condition that a parent charged with violating RCW 28A.225.010 shall participate with the school and the child in a supervised plan for the child's attendance at school or upon condition that the parent attend a conference or conferences scheduled by a school for the purpose of analyzing the causes of a child's absence.

(4) If a child continues to be truant after entering into a court-approved order with the truancy board under RCW 28A.225.035, the juvenile court shall find the child in contempt, and the court may ((~~order the child to be subject to detention, as provided in RCW 7.21.030(2)(e), or may impose alternatives to~~)) impose sanctions that do not include detention, such as meaningful community restitution. ((~~Failure by a child to comply with an order issued under this subsection may not subject a child to detention for a period greater than that permitted under a civil contempt proceeding against a child under chapter 13.32A RCW.~~))

(5) Subsections (1), (2), and (4) of this section shall not apply to a six or seven year old child required to attend public school under RCW 28A.225.015.

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.225.151 and 1996 c 134 s 5 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) As required under subsection (2) of this section, each school shall document the actions taken under RCW 28A.225.030 and report this information to the school district superintendent who shall compile the data for all the schools in the district and prepare an annual school district report for each school year and submit the report to the superintendent of public instruction. The reports shall be made upon forms furnished by the superintendent of public instruction and shall be transmitted as determined by the superintendent of public instruction.

(2) The reports under subsection (1) of this section shall include:

(a) The number of enrolled students and the number of unexcused absences;

(b) Documentation of the steps taken by the school district under each subsection of RCW 28A.225.020 at the request of the superintendent of public instruction. Each year, by May 1st, the superintendent of public instruction shall select ten school districts to submit the report at the end of the following school year. The ten districts shall represent different areas of the state and be of varied sizes. In addition, the superintendent of public instruction shall require any district that fails to keep appropriate records to submit a full report to the superintendent of public instruction under this subsection. All school districts shall document steps taken under RCW 28A.225.020 in each student's record, and make those records available upon request consistent with the laws governing student records;

(c) The number of enrolled students with ten or more unexcused absences in a school year or five or more unexcused absences in a ((~~month~~)) thirty-day period during a school year;

(d) A description of any programs or schools developed to serve students who have had five or more unexcused absences in a ((~~month~~)) thirty-day period or ten in a year including information about the number of students in the program or school and the number of unexcused absences of students during and after participation in the program. The school district shall also describe any placements in an approved private nonsectarian school or program or certified program under a court order under RCW 28A.225.090; and

(e) The number of petitions filed by a school district with the juvenile court.

(3) A report required under this section shall not disclose the name or other identification of a child or parent.

(4) The superintendent of public instruction shall collect these reports from all school districts and prepare an annual report for each school year to be submitted to the legislature no later than December 15th of each year.

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