
Education Committee

HB 2848

Brief Description: Modifying school and court processes to promote attendance and reduce truancy.

Sponsors: Representatives Orwall, Kilduff, Jenkins, Rodne, Goodman, Appleton, Haler, Kagi, Eslick and Slatter.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires members of certain school boards to participate in any trauma-informed training provided to community truancy board members and to attend at least one community truancy board meeting per school year.
- Requires the Department of Commerce to regionally site secure crisis residential centers that meet therapeutic standards so as to make these centers accessible and available for use by all counties, subject to the availability of funds.

Hearing Date: 1/25/18

Staff: Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

Background:

Community Truancy Boards.

Use of community truancy boards (CTBs) is the state's preferred means of intervention when preliminary methods to eliminate or reduce unexcused absences have not been effective in securing a child's attendance at school. Except for those with fewer than 300 students, school districts must enter into a memorandum of understanding with the county juvenile court regarding the operation of a CTB. The duties of the CTB are: 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; 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

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to the juvenile court that a juvenile be offered the opportunity for placement in a HOPE center or crisis residential center (CRC), if appropriate.

A CTB is composed of members of the local community in which a child attends school. The CTB must include members who receive training regarding the identification of barriers to school attendance; the use of the Washington Assessment of the Risks and Needs of Students or other assessment tools to identify the specific needs of individual children; cultural responsive interactions; 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.

Legislation enacted in 2016 directed the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC) to develop recommendations related to cultural competence training that CTB members and others involved in the truancy process should receive, and best practices for supporting and facilitating parent and community involvement, among other things. One of the EOGOAC's recommendations is that schools boards be a part of the CTB training process in order to promote CTBs as a district-wide priority and to ensure accountability.

Crisis Residential Centers.

Crisis residential centers are short-term, semi-secure or secure, facilities for runaway youth and adolescents in conflict with their families. Counselors at a CRC work with the families to resolve the immediate conflict and develop better ways of dealing with conflict in the future.

Legislation enacted in 2016 and 2017 made a number of changes with respect to the use of CRCs in the truancy context. First, the use of detention is made more prescriptive, but the cases where the court orders detention, it must preferably be served at a secure CRC close to the child's home rather than in a juvenile detention facility. Finally, in order to accommodate truant student found in contempt of a court order to attend school, it directed the capacity available in CRCs to be increased incrementally by no fewer than 10 beds in fiscal years 2017, 2018, and 2019, subject to funds appropriated for this purpose. This additional capacity must be distributed around the state based upon need, and to the extent feasible, geographically situated to expand the use of CRCs to make them available for use by all courts for housing truant youth.

The 2016 legislation also required the Administrative Office of the Courts to report annually the number of youth placed into juvenile detention facilities each calendar year, with a specific emphasis on youth detained for reasons relating to certain court petitions, such as truancy. According to the inaugural report, 780, or 5.9 percent of, juvenile detentions in 2016 were for contempt of court in a truancy matter. However, there was substantial variability across counties, and some counties were excluded because of data issues.

Summary of Bill:

If a school district is required to enter into a memorandum of understanding with a juvenile court with respect to the operation of a CTB, each member of the school district board of directors must:

1. participate in any trauma-informed training provided to CTB members; and
2. attend at least one CTB meeting per school year.

Subject to the availability of funds, the Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection, within the Department of Commerce, must regionally site secure CRCs that meet therapeutic standards so as to make these centers accessible and available for use by all counties. The initial focus must be on those counties that appear from the Center for Court Research's detention report to frequently use detention for nonoffender matters, such as truancy, and which do not have secure CRCs that meet therapeutic standards within geographic proximity. The siting must be done in collaboration with the Washington Association of Juvenile Court Administrator, and with data provided by the Center for Court Research.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 19, 2018.

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