

What You Need to Know About the Becca Bill

Some Background Information: The Juvenile Justice Act of 1977 decriminalized running away from home and established residential centers to care for young runaways. There hasn't been room in all the facilities to care for the children, leaving many out-of-control youths living on the streets, at risk of victimization and criminal involvement.

To address this problem, the Becca Bill was created by Governor Mike Lowry and Attorney General Christine Gregoire. The Becca Bill is named for a young Tacoma girl who was murdered while living on the streets.

According to Governor Lowry's office, the purpose of the bill is to "empower parents to help their children when they have run away or when their child's substance abuse or mental health problems place them in serious danger of harming themselves or others." One aspect of the bill requires that all school districts track the number of student absences and notify parents when their children have violated attendance procedures.

Basic Guidelines for Paterson School District 50 _____:

- After **one** unexcused absence, the parent or guardian must be notified. An unexcused absence means that a student has failed to attend the majority of classes in an average school day and that the parent has not excused the absence by providing a note or informing the school by phone within 48 hours.
- After **two** unexcused absences, the school must make personal contact with the parent or guardian.
- By the **fifth** unexcused absence in a month, the school shall enter into an agreement with the student and parent/guardian that establishes school attendance requirements; or file a petition with the juvenile court alleging a violation.
- By the **seventh** unexcused absence in a month or **tenth** unexcused absence in a school year, if actions taken by the school are not successful, the school district is required to file a petition with the juvenile court alleging a violation.
- Parents who fail to get their children to school may be fined \$25 a day or sentenced to volunteer in the child's school.
- Fines shall be used exclusively to enforce this law.
- Children who refuse to return to school can be found in contempt of court and sentenced to community service or a week in juvenile hall.
- Documentation of attendance violations shall be reported annually to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

What can parents/guardians do? If you are concerned about your child's attitude toward school and about his/her attendance record, contact your child's teacher, counselor and/or school principal. With the combined insights in your child's needs and interests, we can work together to design an individualized plan to help your child stay in school.