

BRIAN A. LUTES

Wright County Attorney's Office



July 10, 2026

Dear Parents:

As we approach a new school year, I am once again asking everyone (parents, guardians, schools, teachers, social workers) for their support and assistance in reducing truancy. COVID-19, distance learning and transitions back to in-person education have presented many challenges for our school districts, families, and students causing escalated truancy rates in recent years. Prior to the problems associated with COVID-19, we have all made a concerted effort, over the last years, to reduce truancy and were making progress. Your support and assistance in reducing the truancy rate is greatly appreciated. It was truly a team effort. When I met regularly with administrators and teachers from all school districts in Wright County, I consistently heard that schools have happily returned to a normal learning mode. Similarly, we have returned to aggressively addressing truancy. Let's continue working together to get our students in school and reduce truancy.

I believe all children deserve a solid education to prepare them for the challenges of today's world. Likewise, I firmly believe parents/guardians want their students to receive the best possible education. Unfortunately, truancy deprives many students of their chance to obtain an education. If this letter does not pertain to you, I apologize. However, from my perspective the issue of truancy is important enough that I wanted to share with you some of my thoughts and concerns.

As the Wright County Attorney, I have supported open communication with our schools and have given many talks to various schools regarding the criminal justice system, the opportunities our great country offers, what it takes to be a good citizen, and the need for an education. As a father, I have five children who have received public education in Wright County schools with my youngest starting high school this year. I also believe that to the best of our collective ability, our students need to get an education without fearing drugs or violence. That is why I choose to sit on a number of Safe School Committees throughout the County. One of the issues raised in those committees is truancy. I have made the truancy issue a priority within my office. Almost twenty years ago, my office participated in creating a truancy program by collaborating with schools, Social Services, Court Services, and the Courts to assist families facing truancy issues. The goal of the truancy program is to help families facilitate successful completion of the student's education. The program has been a success. Over $\frac{3}{4}$ of all families referred to the program in the last several years, excluding the difficult COVID-19 years, have been able to correct the truancy problem before Court involvement.

In the State of Minnesota, all children should attend school until the age of 18 and **must** attend school until the age of 17. *Minn. Stat. §124A.22, Subd. 8.* **Continuing Truant** means a child who is under 17 years who is absent from attendance at school without lawful excuse for three days if the child is in elementary school or for three or more class periods on three days if the child is in middle school, junior high or high school. *Minn. Stat. §260A.02, Subd. 3.* **Habitual Truant** means a child under the age of 17 years who is absent from attendance at school without lawful excuse for seven school days if the child is in elementary school or for one or more class periods on seven school days if the child is in middle school, junior high or high school and who has not lawfully withdrawn from school. *Minn. Stat. §260C.007, Subd. 19.* Children who are truant can end up before a Judge on a CHIPS (Children in Need of Protection or Services) Petition. It is the hope that through the truancy program, families who have a concern over truancy can be provided help to address the problem before a petition is filed.

There are many reasons why a student does not attend school: illness, family emergency, mental health issues, funeral, religious holiday, bullying at school, parent/guardian forgot to wake their student, parent/guardian did not know school schedule, student missed the bus and there was no back-up plan for transportation, student overslept, lack of awareness of the importance of an education, student didn't feel like going to school, student was sleepy, student thinks school is boring, and the parents/guardians did not understand their student's school attendance

3700 Braddock Avenue NE, Suite 2100, Buffalo, MN 55313

(763) 682-7340 FAX (763) 682-7700

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policy. Some of the above reasons are considered lawful excuses but many of the above are considered unlawful excuses.

The following are some tips for improving school attendance:

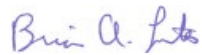
- Make your student's education a family priority.
- Tell your student how important his or her education is to them and you.
- Insist that your student attend school and do homework.
- Understand your student's school attendance policy.
- Make sure your student obeys curfew laws and gets plenty of sleep at night.
- Buy your student an alarm clock.
- Praise your student's effort.
- If possible, help with his or her homework.
- Do not enable your student by calling the school to cover illegal absences.
- If your student does not want to attend school, find out why. Talk to your student and listen for an answer. If there is a problem, try to solve it together.
- If your student refuses to go to school, do not be afraid to ask for help. Talk to school staff to find out if your student has a problem and what resources are available to you.
- Advocate for your student in the school system.

Regular school attendance is one of the most reliable predictors of academic achievement. Research shows that children who do not attend school do not learn at the same rate as children who do attend school. Also, in law enforcement circles, truancy is widely regarded as a gateway to crime. Research confirms that missing school is a key factor in predicting future delinquency and criminal behavior. Keeping children in school does not only promote educational success but is also a key crime prevention strategy.

Let us work together to reduce the truancy rate in Wright County. We owe it to our students. I ask for your help. I ask for your support. I thank you for your time and effort.

It is my sincere wish that our children's 2026-2027 school year is safe, productive and enjoyable.

Have a great year!



Brian A. Lutes
Wright County Attorney