An Act relating to schools; amending 70 O.S. 2021, Section 10-105, which relates to student attendance; including exceptions for mental health counseling and occupational therapy appointments; providing for certification of absence by certain professional; updating language; and providing an effective date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

SECTION 1. AMENDATORY 70 O.S. 2021, Section 10-105, is amended to read as follows:

Section 10-105. A. It shall be unlawful for a parent, guardian, or other person having custody of a child who is over the age of five (5) years, and under the age of eighteen (18) years, to neglect or refuse to cause or compel such child to attend and comply with the rules of some public, private or other school, unless other means of education are provided for the full term the schools of the
district are in session or the child is excused as provided in this section. One-half (1/2) day of kindergarten shall be required of all children five (5) years of age or older unless the child is excused from kindergarten attendance as provided in this section. A child who is five (5) years of age shall be excused from kindergarten attendance until the next school year after the child is six (6) years of age if a parent, guardian, or other person having custody of the child notifies the superintendent of the district where the child is a resident by certified mail prior to enrollment in kindergarten, or at any time during the first school year that the child is required to attend kindergarten pursuant to this section, of election to withhold the child from kindergarten until the next school year after the child is six (6) years of age. A kindergarten program shall be directed toward developmentally appropriate objectives for such children. The program shall require that any teacher employed on and after January 1, 1993, to teach a kindergarten program within the public school system shall be certified in early childhood education. All teachers hired to teach a kindergarten program within the public school system prior to January 1, 1993, shall be required to obtain certification in early childhood education on or before the 1996-97 school year in order to continue to teach a kindergarten program.

B. It shall be unlawful for any child who is over the age of twelve (12) years and under the age of eighteen (18) years, and who
has not finished four (4) years of high school work, to neglect or
refuse to attend and comply with the rules of some public, private
or other school, or receive an education by other means for the full
term the schools of the district are in session.

Provided, that this section shall not apply:

1. If any child is prevented from attending school by reason of
mental or physical disability, including mental health counseling
and occupational therapy appointments, to be determined by the board
of education of the district upon a certificate of the school
physician or, public health physician, counselor or occupational
therapist, or, if no such physician, counselor or occupational
therapist is available, a duly licensed and practicing physician,
counselor or occupational therapist;

2. If any child is excused from attendance at school, due to an
emergency, by the principal teacher of the school in which such
child is enrolled, at the request of the parent, guardian, custodian
or other person having control custody of such child;

3. If any child who has attained his or her sixteenth birthday
is excused from attending school by written, joint agreement
between:

   a. the school administrator of the school district where
      the child attends school, and

   b. the parent, guardian or custodian of the child.

Provided, further, that no child shall be excused from
attending school by such joint agreement between a school administrator and the parent, guardian or custodian of the child unless and until it has been determined that such action is for the best interest of the child and/or the community, and that said child shall thereafter be under the supervision of the parent, guardian or custodian until the child has reached the age of eighteen (18) years;

4. If any child is excused from attending school for the purpose of observing religious holy days if before the absence, the parent, guardian, or other person having custody or control of the student child submits a written request for the excused absence. The school district shall excuse a student child pursuant to this subsection for the days on which the religious holy days are observed and for the days on which the student child must travel to and from the site where the student child will observe the holy days; or

5. If any child is excused from attending school for the purpose of participating in a military funeral honors ceremony upon approval of the school principal.

C. It shall be the duty of the attendance officer to enforce the provisions of this section. In the prosecution of a parent, guardian, or other person having custody or control of a child for violation of any provision of this section, it shall be an
affirmative defense that the parent, guardian, or other person having custody of the child has made substantial and reasonable efforts to comply with the compulsory attendance requirements of this section but is unable to cause the child to attend school. If the court determines the affirmative defense is valid, it shall dismiss the complaint against the parent, guardian, or other person having custody of the child and shall notify the school attendance officer who shall refer the child to the district attorney for the county in which the child resides for the filing of a Child in Need of Supervision petition against the child pursuant to the Oklahoma Juvenile Code.

D. Any parent, guardian, custodian, child or other person violating any of the provisions of this section, upon conviction, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and shall be punished as follows:

   1. For the first offense, a fine of not less than Twenty-five Dollars ($25.00) nor more than Fifty Dollars ($50.00), or imprisonment for not more than five (5) days, or both such fine and imprisonment;

   2. For the second offense, a fine of not less than Fifty Dollars ($50.00) nor more than One Hundred Dollars ($100.00), or imprisonment for not more than ten (10) days, or both such fine and imprisonment; and

   3. For the third or subsequent offense, a fine of not less than One Hundred Dollars ($100.00) nor more than Two Hundred Fifty Dollars ($250.00), or imprisonment for not more than thirty (30) days, or both such fine and imprisonment.
Dollars ($250.00), or imprisonment for not more than fifteen (15) days, or both such fine and imprisonment.

Each day the child remains out of school after the oral and documented or written warning has been given to the parent, guardian, custodian, child or other person or the child has been ordered to school by the juvenile court shall constitute a separate offense.

E. At the trial of any person charged with violating the provisions of this section, the attendance records of the child or ward may be presented in court by any authorized employee of the school district.

F. The court may order the parent, guardian, or other person having custody of the child to perform community service in lieu of the fine set forth in this section. The court may require that all or part of the community service be performed for a public school district.

G. The court may order as a condition of a deferred sentence or as a condition of sentence upon conviction of the parent, guardian, or other person having custody of the child any conditions as the court considers necessary to obtain compliance with school attendance requirements. The conditions may include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Verifying attendance of the child with the school;

2. Attending meetings with school officials;
3. Taking the child to school;

4. Taking the child to the bus stop;

5. Attending school with the child;

6. Undergoing an evaluation for drug, alcohol, or other substance abuse and following the recommendations of the evaluator; and

7. Taking the child for drug, alcohol, or other substance abuse evaluation and following the recommendations of the evaluator, unless excused by the court.

SECTION 2. This act shall become effective November 1, 2023.

COMMITTEE REPORT BY: COMMITTEE ON COMMON EDUCATION, dated 02/21/2023 - DO PASS, As Coauthored.