



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

UPDATE: Truancy Data and Outcomes

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Authorizing Legislation: RCW 28A.225.151

Anna Marie DuFault

**Assistant Superintendent of Student Engagement
& Support**

Prepared by:

- **Krissy Johnson**, Assistant Director of Attendance & Engagement
krissy.johnson@k12.wa.us | 360-972-4354

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As required under statute [RCW 28A.225.151](#), this report provides a summary of truancy data reported to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) through the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS). The report highlights data and trends from the past three school years 2019–20, 2020–21, and 2021–22.

The COVID-19 pandemic had wide-reaching impacts on student learning, mental health, economic and physical well-being, as well as unprecedented levels of absences, a critical indicator of our system. Legislative and OSPI rule changes also impacted schools' attendance practices and filing of truancy petitions.

Over the past three school years, unexcused absences and the percent of students that met the thresholds for a truancy petition were at their highest during the 2021 school year at 22%. Both of those numbers decreased during the 2022 school year, with 9% of all students meeting the truancy thresholds.

This report also provides a summary of OSPI's programmatic efforts to support schools, districts, and communities to support youth and families and increase attendance, as well as highlights known gaps and opportunities for addressing them.

INTRODUCTION

This report provides a summary of data and trends reported to OSPI on students unexcused absences and subsequent truancy actions reported to CEDARS over the past three school years (SY 2020, SY 2021, SY 2022). This report also provides a summary of OSPI's programmatic efforts to support schools, districts, and communities to support youth and families and increase attendance—and, hence, access to education. Finally, this report highlights known gaps and opportunities for addressing them. This report will address the truancy portion of the Becca Bill, not the status offense petitions such as At Risk Youth (ARY) and Child in Need of Services (CHINS).

The COVID-19 pandemic had wide-reaching impacts on student learning, mental health, economic and physical well-being. The pandemic saw unprecedented levels of absences reported to OSPI, a critical indicator of our system. Legislative and OSPI rule changes also impacted schools' attendance practices and filing of truancy petitions.

A student meets the thresholds for having a truancy petition filed when they accumulate seven or more unexcused absences in a month or 15 or more in a year. Over the past three school years, unexcused absences and the percent of students that were truant (met the thresholds for a truancy petition) were at their highest during the 2021 school year at 22%. Both of those numbers decreased last school year (SY 2022), with 9% of all students meeting the truancy thresholds.

The student groups by race/ethnicity that have the highest rates of truancy (meeting the thresholds for a petition) are American Indian/Alaskan Native (24%), Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (23%), Black/African American students (15%), and Hispanic/Latino students (13%). Similarly, the student groups by program or characteristic with the highest rates of truancy were unaccompanied youth (38%), students experiencing homelessness (26%), and youth in foster care (18%).

American Indian/Alaskan Natives and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander have the highest disproportionality, where their proportion of students who have met the truancy thresholds is 2.68 and 2.56 times their proportion of the total student population, respectively.

SY 2021 saw an all-time low of only 1% of students that met truancy thresholds had a petition filed. In 2021–22, 4% of the students who meet the definition of truant have a truancy petition filed on them, which represents 4,054 students. Forty-five percent of all the students who qualified for a Community Engagement Board (CEB) were referred during 2021–22.

White students are shown to have the highest disproportionality of having a petition filed, with the proportion of white students that had a petition filed at 1.22 times higher than their proportion of all students that met the truancy thresholds. Black/African American and Asian students are under-represented in the population of students that had a truancy petition filed.

Drawing conclusions from this data is complex, as truancy involves many factors from both inside and outside of school. These data provide an opportunity for OSPI to learn more about 1) why certain students are over or under-represented and 2) the community contexts underlying these absences. OSPI continues to work with districts, courts, and service providers to understand how to increase access to prevention and intervention supports to improve outcomes for all students.

BACKGROUND

More than 20 years ago, the Washington State Legislature enacted the Becca Bill in response to the tragic death of Becca Hedman. Becca's chronic truancy and running away from home contributed to her murder at the age of 12. One intent of the law is to unite schools, courts, communities, and families to overcome the barriers that prevent school attendance. Since the last Truancy Legislative Report was published in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic and policy changes have dramatically shifted the landscape of student absences, as well as the response of the education system to those absences.

It is good to remember that the impetus for our truancy laws was the safety of youth in our state. Absences are a research-based early warning indicator, or screener, for students that may need more support or intervention.

OSPI has developed the following principles which guide its work on attendance:

- Attendance and engagement are foundational to student learning.
- Absences tells us when a student has not accessed or had the opportunity to engage in instruction, not just a measure of a student in their seat.
- Absences are a signal that can reflect inequities that are caused by or perpetuated by our systems; and, therefore, is a critical indicator for school improvement.
- Absences are a signal that may tell us when a student or family might need more support; sometimes, in rare cases, absences can signal a safety concern.
- As such a signal, absences are a critical early warning indicator & screening tool, along with course performance and behavior.
- Absences are an opportunity to get curious about why students aren't attending, and respond proactively and supportively.
- Students and families are our best partners to understand the barriers to attendance and how to increase attendance and engagement.

Washington State Legislative Policy Changes

Elimination of Use of Juvenile Detention for Truancy

On July 1, 2021, Washington state eliminated the use of the valid court order (VCO) for status offenses as required by [Senate Bill 5290 \(2019–20\)](#). Status offenses include truancy, running away, and out of control behavior, and are only considered illegal due to the student's age status. The VCO authorized juvenile court judges to order a student to juvenile detention for failing to comply with a court order. In effect, the law prohibits local juvenile courts from placing students that are truant in juvenile detention.

Extension of Truancy Timeline & Rename Truancy Board

Another legislative policy change that impacted truancy policy and practice in school districts was [House Bill 1113 \(2021–22\)](#). This bill required the following changes:

- Unexcused absence thresholds that require the filing of a truancy petition changed to seven unexcused absences in a month and 15 unexcused absences in a school year, and;
- Community Truancy Boards were renamed to Community Engagement Board.

OSPI provided [guidance](#) to school districts summarizing these changes. This bill passed in April of 2021 and became effective immediately. All OSPI Attendance Guidance can be found on the [Attendance Policies, Guidance and Data Reporting](#) webpage.

Interventions Required Before and After Truancy Petition

Policy changes starting in 2016 began to shift practice from a primarily punitive model to a support-driven model, with the mandate for districts to create a Community Truancy Board (now Community Engagement Board).

Schools and districts are required to provide the following communication and support at specific thresholds of unexcused absences:

- Schools are to send a letter to parents¹ at the beginning of the school year that highlights the importance of attendance, the impacts of not attending (including excused and unexcused), the supports available to parents to assist with attendance concerns, and the role and responsibility of the school².
- Elementary schools are to hold a parent conference for students who have accumulated five or more excused absences³.
- Schools are to hold a parent conference for students after their third unexcused absence.
- Schools are to take data-informed steps between their second and seventh unexcused absence; this includes administering a screener such as the Washington Assessment of Risks and Needs (WARNS)⁴ and provide best practice interventions to support better attendance. If the student has an IEP or 504 Plan, the reconvening of the IEP or 504 team is required⁵.
- A truancy petition shall be filed after seven unexcused absences in a month or after 15 unexcused absences in a school year.
- After a school district files a petition with the juvenile court, the petition must be **stayed** (placed on hold while the district and court continue interventions), and the student shall be referred to a Community Engagement Board (CEB). The intent of the CEB is to understand the root causes of the absences and bring community resources and relationships to bear to provide wrap around support to the student and family, to support them to address barriers and increase their engagement and attendance.

OSPI has compiled these steps in reference documents for [Elementary](#) and [Secondary Schools](#).

¹ [RCW 28A.225.010 \(2\)](#) defines "parent" as: a parent, guardian, or person having legal custody of a child

² [RCW 28A.225.005](#)

³ [RCW 28A.225.018](#)

⁴ [RCW 28A.225.020 \(1\)\(c\)\(ii\)](#)

⁵ [RCW 28A.225.020 \(1\)\(c\)\(ii\)](#)

STUDENT-LEVEL DATA COLLECTION

OSPI began collecting student-level absence data through the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS), for both excused and unexcused absences, in the 2012–13 school year. Prior to that, districts reported a total number at the end of the year. Districts now report when a student is absent for a full-day or partial day (anything less than 50% or more of their scheduled day), and whether it was excused or unexcused. In 2018–19, OSPI began collecting additional student-level data on truancy actions, as outlined in [RCW 28A.225.151](#).

Definitions Impacting Data Collection

The Washington state statute (RCW 28A.225), OSPI administrative rule (Chapter 392–401 WAC) and OSPI CEDARS Reporting Guidance all contribute to shaping the absence data that is reported to OSPI.

Definition of Absence

The definition of an absence can be found in [Chapter 392–401 WAC](#).

Definition of absence from in-person instruction

A student is absent from in-person instruction when the student is:

1. Not physically present on school grounds; and
2. Not participating in the following activities at an approved location:
 - a. Instruction; or
 - b. Any instruction-related activity; or
 - c. Any other district or school approved activity that is regulated by an instructional/academic accountability system, such as participation in district-sponsored sports.

Definition of absence from synchronous and asynchronous instruction

1. A student is absent from synchronous online instruction when the student does not log in to the synchronous meeting/class.
2. A student is absent from asynchronous instruction when there is no evidence that the student accessed the planned asynchronous activity.

Excused Absences

[WAC 392–401–020](#), revised in 2021, outlines the types of absences that must be excused. In addition, school districts may define additional reasons that absences may be excused in their local board policy.

Unexcused Absences

Unexcused absences are defined in Washington state statute as well as in district board policy.

[RCW 28A.225.020\(2\)](#) defines an unexcused absence as when a child:

- 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

- Has failed to meet the school district’s policy for excused absences; or
- Has failed to comply with alternative learning experience program attendance requirements as described by the superintendent of public instruction.

School district policies will include greater detail and potentially additional categories of what is considered excused, as well as policies and procedures that address excessive excused absences.

Truancy

Truancy, as used in this report, refers to a student who has accumulated seven or more unexcused absences in a month or 15 or more unexcused absences in a year, which is the threshold which requires school districts to file a truancy petition. The table below lists the legal thresholds by school year for being considered truant and having a petition filed.

Table 2. Unexcused Absence Thresholds for Filing a Truancy Petition by Year

School Year	Thresholds for Filing a Truancy Petition
2018–19	5+ or 7+ or more unexcused in a month; 10 or more in a school year
2019–20	5+ or 7+ or more unexcused in a month; 10 or more in a school year
2020–21	Beginning of school year through April 26, 2021: 5 or 7 or more unexcused in a month; 10 or more in a school year April 26, 2021, through end of SY 2021: 7 or more unexcused in a month; 15 or more in a school year
2021–22	7 or more unexcused in a month; 15 or more in a school year

Full-Day Absence

A full day absence, defined in [the OSPI CEDARS Manual](#), is when a student misses the majority of hours or periods in their average school day (50% or greater of the day absent). The absence data in this report only includes full-day absences, as reported to CEDARS.

Truancy Actions as Reported to CEDARS

With the legislative changes to truancy passed in 2016, OSPI was required to begin collecting from school districts in CEDARS when students were assigned or experienced key points in the truancy process. These are collectively referred to in this report as Truancy Actions. These are in addition to the previously collected filing of a truancy petition. Reporting guidance can be found in the [CEDARS Appendix F – Students Attributes & Programs 2022–23](#). Truancy Actions are detailed below.

Truancy petition

When a student has reached the unexcused absence thresholds in [RCW 28A.225.030](#) (7 unexcused absences in a month or 15 unexcused absences in a school year), the school district has attempted the [legally required interventions](#) and the absences have not improved, the district must file a truancy petition with the local juvenile court and the petition must be stayed.

Referral to a community engagement board

The statute specifically states “referral,” and this element collects the number of students that were **referred** to a CEB, regardless of whether they attended or not.

Other coordinated means of intervention

As detailed in [RCW 28A.225.026](#), districts with fewer than 300 students must provide access to a CTB or through other coordinated means of intervention aimed at identifying barriers to school attendance, connecting students and their families with community services, etc.; and may do this cooperatively with other school districts and their educational service districts.

A hearing in juvenile court

This element identifies if a student received a hearing in juvenile court.

Other less restrictive disposition

This is reported when assigned as an alternative to the student being placed in juvenile detention when the student is found to be in contempt of a court order (e.g., change of placement, home school, alternative learning experience, residential treatment, etc.).

Detention for failure to comply with a court order

Each instance of the imposition of detention for failure to comply with a court order under RCW 28A.225.090 is to be reported.

Data Caveats

The pandemic impacted the data quality and consistency of absence data reported to OSPI through CEDARS. We know that the combination of shifting to remote learning, alongside grasping a new definition of what constitutes present and absent during remote learning, required schools to develop entirely new processes that were time-consuming and stress-inducing, for an already overwhelmed staff. The data reported to OSPI was undoubtedly impacted during SY 2020 and 2021.

What Data Are We Missing?

Truancy is a critical indicator. But it is an incomplete answer to the question: Who is missing from our education system, and therefore missing out on their right to an education? The following data are critical to paint a complete picture of who is missing their educational opportunities, and why.

Students Withdrawn for Non-Attendance

It is common for school districts to withdraw students for non-attendance in order to be compliant with apportionment rules. Apportionment rules dictate that school districts may not claim students for funding if they have been absent for 20 consecutive days prior to count day. Many districts have understood, incorrectly, that this automatically means the student must be withdrawn from enrollment. This means that students are no longer appearing on absence reports (a critical early warning indicator that should prompt responses and outreach from the school) and are no longer receiving communications from the school or district. The data below will show which students

experience truancy; however, it does not show how many and which students are no longer enrolled in the K-12 education system.

Chronic Absence & Severe Chronic Absence

Over the last decade, a growing research base⁶ demonstrates that all absences, including excused and unexcused absences (i.e., truancy), significantly impact students' educational outcomes. The research shows that missing 10% of the school year, or just two days a month, can greatly impact students' chances of reading at grade level by 3rd grade⁷ and significantly reduce the chances of students graduating from high school⁸. OSPI includes chronic absence—reported as its inverse, Regular Attendance—on the [OSPI Report Card](#) and in our [state's accountability framework](#). Regular Attendance is typically released on an annual basis in January of the following school year with the other School Quality and Student Success (SQSS) measures, 9th Grade on Track and Dual Credit Completion.

Therefore, we should look at regular attendance, which includes excused absences, in addition to students that are withdrawn or no longer enrolled and truancy. Additionally, in the context of the spread of COVID, influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), we know that illnesses are a significant contributor to absences. The 10% threshold for chronic absence is a threshold that was established in research prior to the pandemic. Districts have shared anecdotally that this threshold does not effectively help them to triage because there are so many students meeting that threshold. One district reported that 50% of their students are chronically absent so far this school year (2022–23). To better understand student absences, we would benefit from looking at multiple thresholds, including students missing 20% and 30%, until we find a new normal.

Contributing Factors or Reasons for Absences

OSPI does not collect any information about why students are absent. Absences are a critical early warning indicator, but without further exploration, they tell us little about what is causing them. The following data must be interpreted through that lens.

⁶ Compilation of Research, Attendance Works <https://www.attendanceworks.org/research/>

⁷ [Attendance in the Early Grades: Why it Matters for Reading](#)

⁸ [Research Brief: Chronic Absenteeism](#)

UPDATE STATUS

OSPI last reported on the measures below in 2019, the last full school year prior to the pandemic. Table 3 includes data from 2019 as well as the last three full school years since then. Unexcused absences and the percent of students that were truant (met the thresholds for truancy) were at their highest during the 2021 school year. Both of those numbers decreased last school year (2022), to 4,736,405 unexcused absences and 9% of all students meeting the truancy thresholds. However, they remain higher than pre-pandemic 2019 unexcused absences and truancy rates.

The unexcused absence thresholds were higher last year due to legislative changes. A student has met the threshold for a truancy petition when they have 15 or more unexcused absences in a year, compared to 10 or more in previous years. If all other variables remained the same, we would expect the change to the threshold to result in fewer numbers of students meeting that threshold, and yet the numbers are higher than in 2019.

Table 3. K–12 Statewide Truancy Totals

	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22
Enrolled at Any Point during the School Year	1,058,200	1,185,688	1,140,713	1,144,079
Number of Unexcused Absences	3,174,111	2,297,651	7,368,283	4,736,405
Number of Students with 5+ or 7+ Unexcused Absences Within 30 Days	65,107	70,929	191,213	85,564
Percentage of Students with 5+ or 7+ Unexcused Absences Within 30 Days	6.2%	6.0%	16.8%	7.5%
Number of Students with 10+ or 15+ Unexcused Absences in a School Year	77,104	59,813	182,363	87,419
Percentage of Students with 10+ or 15+ Unexcused Absences in a School Year	7.3%	5.0%	16.0%	7.6%
Total Number of Students who met Truancy thresholds (5+ or 7+ in a month or 10+ or 15+ in the year)	85,769	77,450	250,990	101,469
Percentage of Students who met Truancy thresholds (5+ or 7+ in a month or 10+ or 15+ in the year)	8.1%	6.5%	22.0%	8.9%

Source: CEDARS extracted on 10/22/2019 & 11/15/2022

Table 4 below shows the number of students with a truancy petition and the percentage of students that met the truancy thresholds who have a petition filed on them over the past four years. Prior to the pandemic, this percentage ranged between 11–12% (See [2019 OSPI Truancy Legislative Report](#)). With the guidance from OSPI to avoid truancy filings and school facility closures in the spring of 2020, it is not surprising to see a lower percentage of 7%, particularly as

we know many districts ramp up the filing of truancy petitions in the spring, after attempting to reduce absences over the course of the school year. SY 2021 saw an all-time low of 1% of students that met truancy thresholds had a petition filed. Last year’s data (SY 2022) show just 4% of the students who meet the definition of truant have a truancy petition filed on them. This rate is lower than in years prior to the pandemic. Truancy petition filings are down to 4,054 students from 9,562 prior to the pandemic (2018–19).

Table 4: Trends in Truancy Petitions

	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22
Number of Students with a Truancy Petition	9,562	5,509	2,558	4,054
Percentage of Students that Met Truancy Thresholds that had a Petition Filed	11.1%	7.1%	1.0%	4.0%

Source: CEDARS extracted on 10/22/2019 & 11/15/2022

What could explain these low rates of filing petitions?

The persistently low percentages of truancy petitions filed could suggest a lack of awareness of the law and/or a lack of resources and capacity to file truancy petitions and other required interventions—particularly during the pandemic, which saw unprecedented staffing shortages and an overwhelming number of students and families demonstrating need. This data also likely reflects a belief that court intervention is punitive and/or harmful, and a commitment to addressing student absences without involving the court.

Schools may also withdraw students with too many consecutive absences before filing a petition, and then believe they do not have standing, capacity, or directive to file a petition because the student is no longer enrolled. Local court jurisdictions all approach this differently as well, adding to the complexity when drawing conclusions. OSPI addressed this in several pieces of guidance over the course of the pandemic, including in the most recent [guidance on withdrawing students](#).

The low percentage of petitions may also mean that many students and families who need supports and services, such as those offered by Community Engagement Boards, are not getting access to them. Students who qualify yet do not have a petition filed on them may be accessing supports from schools and others; however, OSPI does not collect that data.

Table 5: Truancy Actions Once Truancy Petition is Filed by Count

	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22
Number of Students with a Truancy Petition	9,562	5,509	2,558	4,054
Number of Students who were Referred to a Community Engagement Board	5,077	2,510	2,126	1,842
Number of Students who Received a Coordinated Means of Intervention	1,395	709	547	810

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Number of Students with a Hearing in Juvenile Court	1,342	836	434	447
Number of Students Ordered a Less Restrictive Disposition	472	283	130	86
Number of Students who were Detained for Failure to Comply with Court Order	69	37	10	1
Number of Students Referred to Juvenile Court (No Petition)	N/A	N/A	No Data	142

Source: CEDARS extracted on 10/22/2019 & 11/15/2022

The data in the tables above and below show that, of the students who qualified for a Community Engagement Board (or, said another way, the percentage of students for whom districts are required to provide access to a Community Engagement Board), only 45% were referred last year. This rate has hovered around 50% in the years prior to SY 2021, when it jumped to 83% (of the smallest population in recent years that had a petition filed: 2,558 students).

This data begs the question: With just 4% of students qualifying for a petition who actually had a petition filed, what do we know about the other 96% of students that met the thresholds for truancy and had no truancy petition filed on them? This report will later address data on the population of students who had a petition filed.

This analysis does not parse whether the students referred to a Community Engagement Board necessarily had a truancy petition filed. However, based on the law and statewide conversations with districts and courts, we know anecdotally that districts largely provide CEBs only after a petition is filed.

What do we know about implementation of Community Engagement Boards?

OSPI stopped collecting information on whether districts were implementing Community Engagement Boards during the pandemic. This is a data collection that will be reinstated for the 2023 school year. Anecdotally, we hear that many districts that had CEBs stopped doing them during the pandemic, with the loss of community volunteers contributing significantly (a trend seen in other volunteer roles in the education system as well, such as mentoring). Some might not have had them in place prior to the pandemic. We do know, supported by the percentages in the table below, that those that do have them do not have the capacity to serve all the students that have a petition.

CEBs are a resource-intensive intervention, requiring significant district staffing. School districts commonly report to OSPI that truancy work is not resourced appropriately⁹.

Table 6: Truancy Actions while under a Truancy Petition by Percentage

	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22
Percent of Students with a Truancy Petition that were Referred to a Community Engagement Board	53%	46%	83%	45.4%
Percent of Students with a Petition who Received Coordinated Means of Intervention	15%	13%	21%	20%
Percent of Students with a Truancy Petition who Had a Hearing in Juvenile Court	14%	15%	17%	11%
Percent of Students Referred to a CEB who Had a Hearing in Juvenile Court	26%	33%	20%	24%
Percent of Students with a Truancy Petition who were Ordered a Less Restrictive Disposition	5%	5%	5%	2%
Percent of Students who had a Hearing in Juvenile Court who were Ordered a Less Restrictive Disposition	35%	34%	6%	19%
Percent of Students with a Truancy Petition who were Detained for Failure to Comply with Court Order	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Percent of Students who had a Hearing in Juvenile Court who were Detained for Failure to Comply with Court Order	5%	4%	2%	<1%

Source: CEDARS extracted on 10/22/2019 & 11/15/2022

⁹ OSPI receives \$1.4 million annually to distribute to school districts to support truancy prevention and supports. The actual district distributions can be found [here](#).

EQUITY ANALYSIS: DISAGGREGATION & DISPROPORTIONALITY

OSPI is committed to supporting the work that schools and districts do to make more equitable systems that serve all students. By identifying and examining disproportionality between student groups that experience truancy and the truancy process, this report can support that work.

Drawing conclusions from gaps between students around attendance-related issues is complex, particularly at the state level. Gaps may be present in one jurisdiction that are washed out in another. While certain gaps are apparent, interpreting the underlying causes (and therefore solutions) is challenging.

The following analyses explore the equity implications and disproportionality among student groups in key areas of truancy. We focus on these key areas:

- Which student groups had higher truancy rates?
- Which student groups are over-represented among youth who are truant?
- Which student groups have more petitions filed with the Juvenile Court?

Which Student Groups Had Higher Truancy Rates?

Chart 1. Truancy Rates by Federally Reported Race/Ethnicity (2021–22)

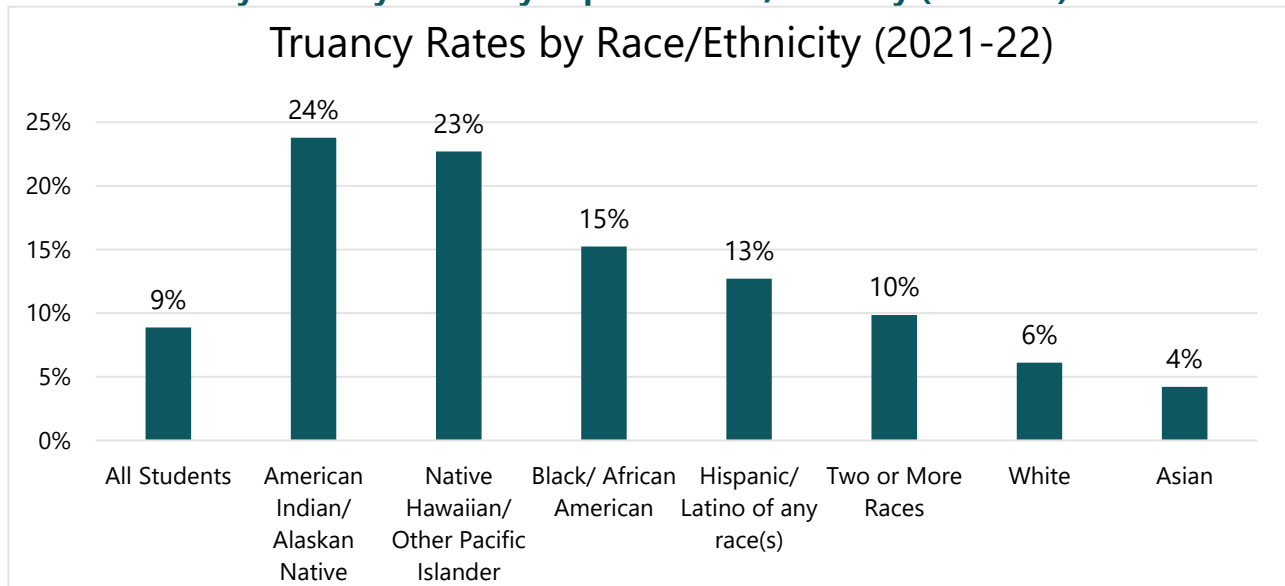


Chart 1 shows which students, by their federally reported race/ethnicity category, have higher rates of truancy compared to others. As the chart shows, 9% of all students met the definition of truancy (7 or more unexcused absences in a month or 15 or more unexcused absences in a year) during the 2021–22 school year. The student groups that have the highest rates of truancy are American Indian/Alaskan Native (24%), Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (23%), Black/African American students (15%), and Hispanic/Latino students (13%).

Table 7 displays the percentage of each race/ethnicity student group that met the truancy thresholds across the previous four school years from 2018–19 through 2021–22. Again, we look specifically at how last year’s rates compare to the full school year prior to the pandemic (2018–19).

Table 7: Truancy Rate Trends by Federally Reported Race/Ethnicity

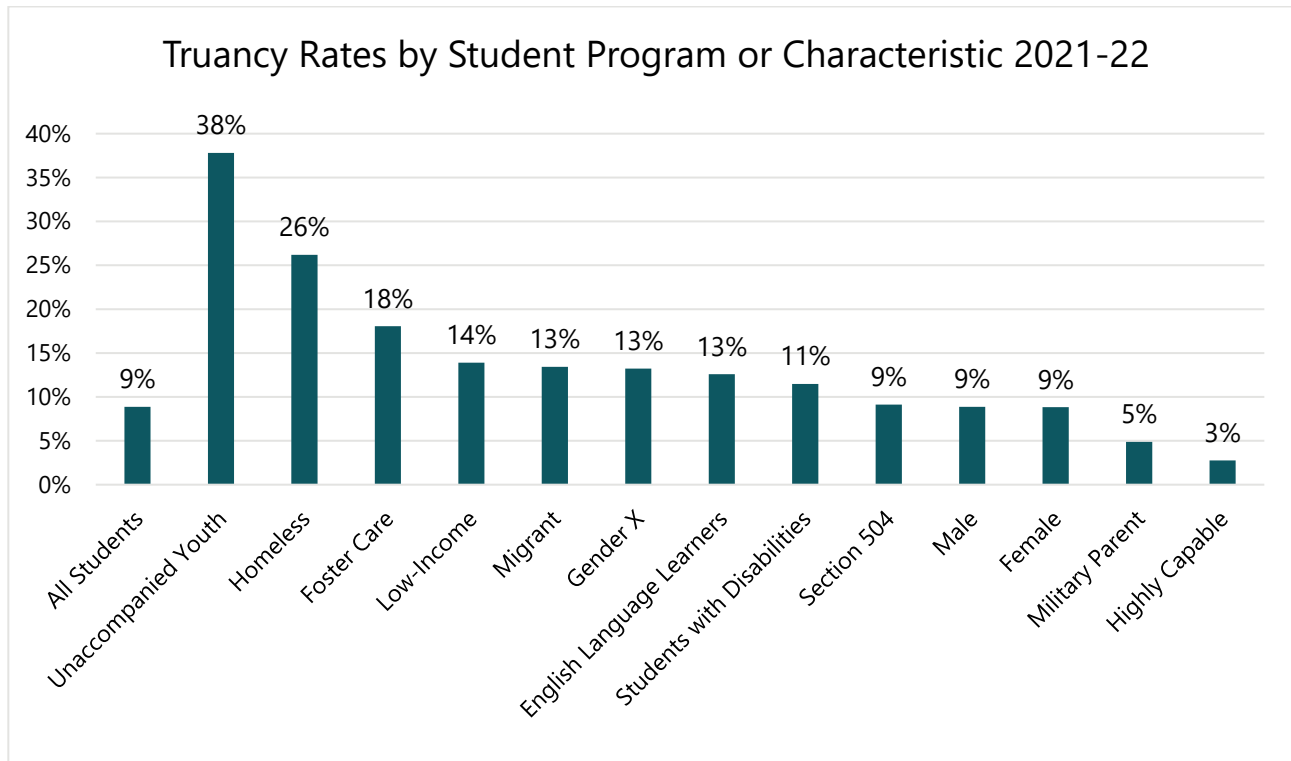
	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22
All Students	8%	7%	22%	9%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	20%	16%	48%	24%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	19%	17%	56%	23%
Black/African American	15%	12%	33%	15%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	12%	9%	32%	13%
Two or More Races	9%	8%	23%	10%
White	6%	5%	16%	6%
Asian	4%	4%	11%	4%

Source: CEDARS extracted on 10/22/2019 & 11/15/2022

In addition to the state average being higher (9% compared to 8%), this data show that American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, and students identified as Two or More Races experienced higher rates of truancy in the last school year (2021–22) compared to the school year prior to the pandemic (2018–19). All other race/ethnicity categories have the same rates of truancy—however, the thresholds for being considered truant last were higher, therefore the years are not exactly comparable. If the thresholds were the same, we would find that all race/ethnic categories had higher rates of truancy in 2021–22 compared to 2018–19. White and Asian students have truancy rates that are below the “all students” rate. We can also see that American Indian/Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander had significantly higher rates during the 2020–21 school year, at 48% and 56% respectively.

Chart 2 shows truancy rates within the students served by a specific program or having certain characteristics.

Chart 2. Truancy Rates by Student Program or Characteristic 2021–22



Source: CEDARS extracted on 10/22/2019 & 11/15/2022

By far, the student groups with the highest rates of truancy are unaccompanied youth (38%), students experiencing homelessness (26%), and youth in foster care (18%). Other student groups that have truancy rates higher than the state average include students from low-income households, migrant students, students reported as Gender X, English language learners, and students with disabilities.

Table 8 displays the percentage of students by program and characteristics that met the truancy thresholds across the previous four school years from 2018–19 through 2021–22. Again, we look specifically at how last year’s rates compare to the full school year prior to the pandemic (2018–19). The table below shows that truancy rates for most programs or characteristics are still higher than our baseline year of 2018–19 prior to the pandemic.

Table 8: Truancy Rate Trends by Program and Characteristics

	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22
All Students	8%	7%	22%	9%
Unaccompanied Youth	N/A	33%	58%	38%
Homeless	N/A	22%	52%	26%
Foster Care	N/A	15%	38%	18%
Low-Income	13%	10%	34%	14%

	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22
Migrant	13%	9%	30%	13%
Gender X	N/A	27%	21%	13%
English Language Learners	11%	9%	33%	13%
Students with Disabilities	12%	9%	27%	11%
Section 504	8%	8%	22%	9%
Male	N/A	7%	23%	9%
Female	N/A	6%	21%	9%
Military Parent	N/A	3%	13%	5%
Highly Capable	N/A	2%	8%	3%

Source: CEDARS extracted on 10/22/2019 & 11/15/2022

The following student groups experienced higher rates of truancy in 2021–22 compared to 2018–19: students from low-income households, English language learners, and students with a 504 Plan (Section 504). Several categories were not included in the 2018–19 Truancy Legislative Report, therefore comparison is not possible here. The other student groups for which we show data (migrant students and students with disabilities) have the same rates of truancy, but again, the thresholds for being considered truant last year were higher, therefore the years are not exactly comparable. If the thresholds were the same, we would find that all race/ethnic categories had higher rates of truancy in 2021–22 compared to 2018–19.

We can also see that unaccompanied youth, youth experiencing homelessness, youth in foster care, students from low-income households and English language learners, all had significantly higher truancy rates during the 2020–21 school year, with the state average being significantly higher at 22% compared to 8% in 2018–19.

Which Student Groups Are Over-Represented Among Youth Who Are Truant?

The next set of analyses describes which student groups meet the truancy thresholds of unexcused absences more than other student groups, which is one measure of disproportionality.

The tables below compare the proportion of all students that meet the truancy thresholds to their proportion of the total student population. For example, in Table 9 which looks at race/ethnicity, Black/African American students comprise 4.9% of the student population, but they comprise 8.4% of all students reported as truant. When the proportion of students that are truant is higher than their proportion of the student population, we can say that this student group is disproportionately meeting the unexcused absence thresholds.

Furthermore, we can understand the magnitude or size of the disproportionality to better understand which student groups are experiencing disproportionality more compared to other

student groups. The magnitude of the disproportionality column below is calculated by dividing the second column (proportion of students that are truant) by the first column (proportion of total student population). The data show that American Indian/Alaskan Natives and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islanders have the highest magnitude of disproportionality, where their proportion of students who have met the truancy thresholds is 2.68 and 2.56 times their proportion of the total student population, respectively. Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students are also over-represented in the population of students that meet the truancy thresholds. The two student groups that are under-represented in the population of students that met the truancy thresholds are white and Asian students, with magnitudes of disproportionality below one.

Table 9. Magnitude of Disproportionality: Students that are Truant compared to Proportion of Student Population by Federally Reported Race/Ethnicity (2021–22)

	Proportion of Total Student Population	Proportion of Students that are Truant	Magnitude of Disproportionality
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1.3%	3.4%	2.68
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	1.4%	3.5%	2.56
Black/African American	4.9%	8.4%	1.72
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	25.3%	36.2%	1.43
Two or More Races	9.1%	10.1%	1.11
White	49.6%	34.2%	0.69
Asian	8.5%	4%	0.48

Source: CEDARS extracted on 10/22/2019 & 11/15/2022

Table 10 shows disproportionality in meeting the truancy thresholds by program or student characteristic. The highest magnitudes of disproportionality are for unaccompanied youth (4.26), youth experiencing homelessness (2.95), and youth in foster care (2.04). The students that have no disproportionality or are under-represented in the population of students that met the truancy thresholds are students with a parent in the military, students in highly capable program, students with a 504 plan, and students identifying as male and female. Another key finding is that students from low-income households comprise 49% of the total student population, yet they comprise 76% of the students that meet the truancy thresholds, which impacts approximately 78,000 students. This highlights a trend that has continued for several years (see [OSPI Truancy Legislative Report 2019](#)).

Table 10. Magnitude of Disproportionality: Students that are Truant compared to Proportion of Student Population by Student Program/Characteristic (2021–22)

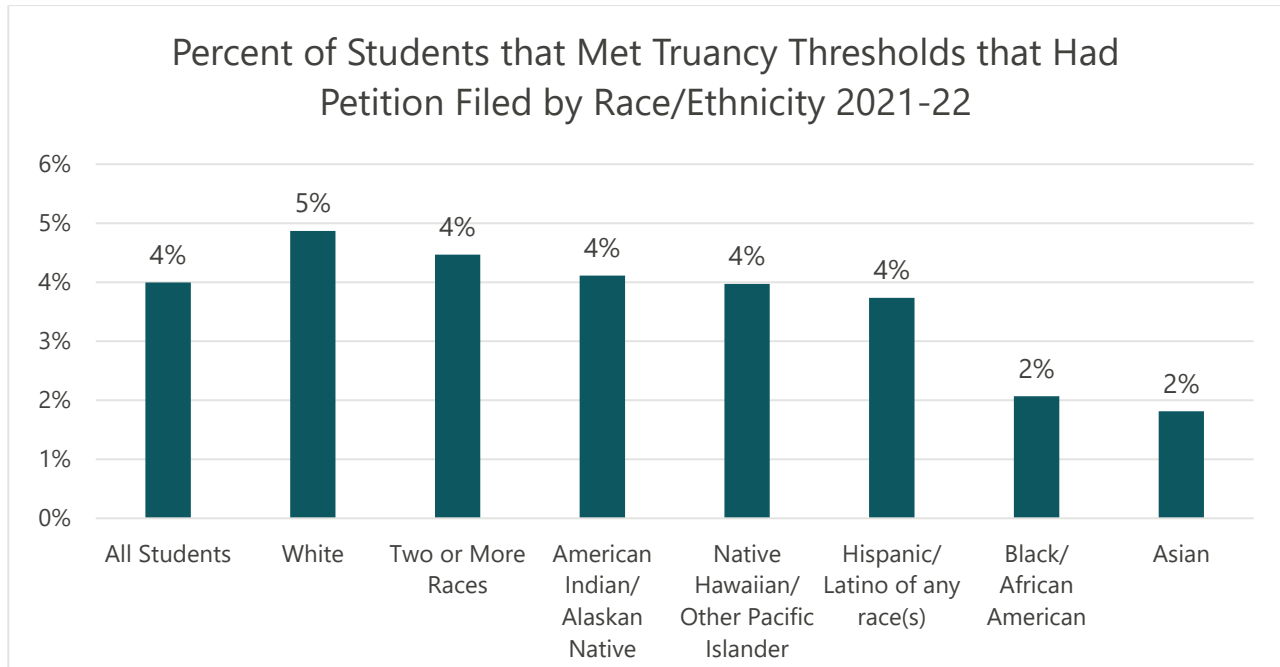
	Proportion of Total Student Population	Proportion of Students that are Truant	Magnitude of Disproportionality
Unaccompanied Youth	0.6%	2.5%	4.26
Homeless	3.3%	9.6%	2.95
Foster Care	0.4%	0.9%	2.04
Low-Income	49%	76%	1.57
Migrant	2.1%	3.2%	1.51
Gender X	0.4%	0.6%	1.49
English Language Learners	12.5%	17.8%	1.42
Students with Disabilities	15.4%	19.9%	1.3
Section 504	4.6%	4.7%	1.03
Male	51.7%	51.7%	1
Female	47.9%	47.7%	1
Military Parent	2.9%	1.6%	0.55
Highly Capable	6.6%	2.1%	0.31

Source: CEDARS extracted on 10/22/2019 & 11/15/2022

Which Student Groups Have More Petitions Filed with the Juvenile Court?

When reviewing the data below, keep in mind that we are looking at the population of students who had a petition filed (4% of all students that met the truancy thresholds, or 4,054 students).

Chart 3. Percent of Students that Met Truancy Thresholds that Had Petition Filed by Federally Reported Race/Ethnicity 2021–22



Source: CEDARS extracted on 10/22/2019 & 11/15/2022

As highlighted in Chart 3, 4% of all students who met the definition of truant had a petition filed. This chart compares the proportion of truant students in each race/ethnicity category who had a petition filed on them. For instance, of the white students who met the definition of truant, 5% had a petition filed, compared to 2% of Black/African American students that were truant. White students had the highest rate of petitions filed compared to Asian students at 2%.

Table 11. Trends in Percentage of Students that Met Truancy Thresholds that had a Petition Filed by Federally Reported Race/Ethnicity

	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22
All Students	11%	7%	1%	4%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	10%	8%	1.6%	5%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	12%	7%	1.2%	5%
Black/ African American	7%	4%	0.6%	4%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	10%	7%	1%	4%
Two or More Races	14%	8%	1.1%	4%
White	13%	8%	1.1%	2%

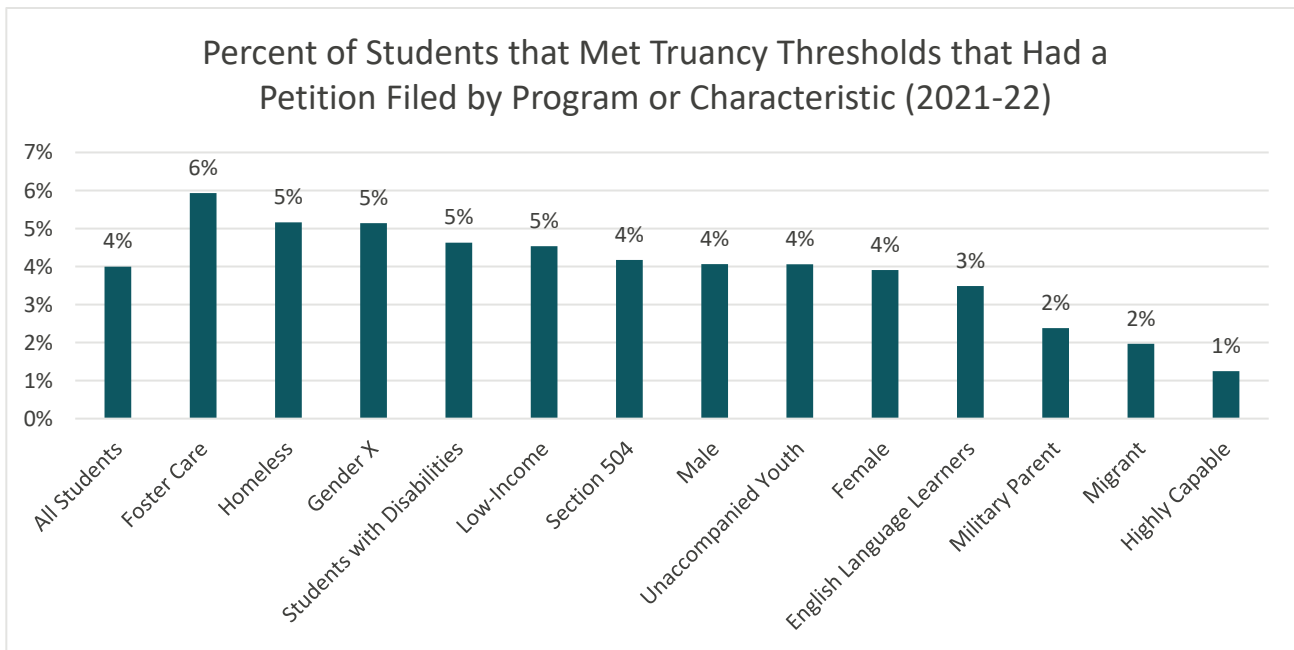
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Asian	5%	3%	0.6%	2%

Source: CEDARS extracted on 10/22/2019 & 11/15/2022

Table 11 above shows the trends in the rates of petitions filed among students that qualified by meeting the truancy thresholds by race/ethnicity. The overall rate for all students has declined since 2018-19, from 11% to 4%. The student groups, as categorized by federally reported race/ethnicity, who had the greatest decline are White students, students reported as Two or More Races, and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students (11, 10, and seven percentage points lower in 2021-22 compared to 2018-19, respectively).

The 2020-21 school year saw the lowest rates across the race/ethnicity categories since OSPI has been publishing this report.

Chart 6. Percent of Students that Met Truancy Thresholds that Had Petition Filed by Program or characteristic 2021-22



Source: CEDARS extracted on 10/22/2019 & 11/15/2022

Chart 6 shows data for students served by special programs or by characteristic. The data show that youth in foster care have higher rates of petitions filed (6%) compared to other programs or characteristics, such as students with a military parent, students that are migratory, or students in the Highly Capable Program.

Table 12. Trends in Percentage of Students that Met Truancy Thresholds that had a Petition Filed by Program or Characteristic

	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22
All Students	11%	7%	1%	4%
Foster Care	--	9%	2%	6%
Homeless	--	8%	2%	5%
Low-Income	13%	8%	1%	5%
Gender X	--	27%	3%	5%
Students with Disabilities	13%	8%	1%	5%
Unaccompanied Youth	--	9%	2%	4%
Section 504	13%	9%	1%	4%
Male	--	7%	1%	4%
Female	--	7%	1%	4%
English Language Learners	10%	7%	1%	3%
Migrant	8%	7%	1%	2%
Military Parent	--	7%	<1%	2%
Highly Capable	--	3%	<1%	1%

Source: CEDARS extracted on 10/22/2019 & 11/15/2022

Table 12 above shows the trends in the rates of petitions filed among students that qualified by meeting the truancy thresholds by program or characteristic. All student groups for which we reported data in 2018–19 saw a decline between 6–9 percentage points.

Which Student Groups Are Disproportionately Filed On?

The next analyses answer the question: Which student groups disproportionately have a truancy petition filed with the juvenile court? We do this by comparing the proportion of students that met the truancy thresholds compared to the proportion of petitions filed.

Table 13. Magnitude of Disproportionality: Proportion of All Students that Met Truancy Thresholds Compared to Proportion of Petitions Filed by Federally Reported Race/Ethnicity

	Proportion of All Students that Met Truancy Thresholds	Proportion of Students that had a Petition Filed	Magnitude of Disproportionality
White	34.2%	41.6%	1.22
Two or More Races	10.1%	11.2%	1.12
American Indian/Alaskan Native	3.4%	3.5%	1.03
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	3.5%	3.5%	0.99
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	36.2%	33.9%	0.93
Black/ African American	8.4%	4.3%	0.52
Asian	4.0%	1.8%	0.45

Source: CEDARS extracted on 10/22/2019 & 11/15/2022

Table 13 above shows, for example, that 36% of all students that met the truancy thresholds are Hispanic/Latino students and they comprise 34% of all students who had a petition filed. We can say that Hispanic/Latino students have a truancy petition filed less than expected for their share of students that met the truancy thresholds. White students are shown to have the highest disproportionality of 1.22, which means the proportion of white students that had a petition filed was 1.22 times higher than their proportion of all students that met the truancy thresholds. Black/African American and Asian students are under-represented in the population of students that had a truancy petition filed.

Table 14. Magnitude of Disproportionality: Proportion of All Students that Met Truancy Thresholds Compared to Proportion of Petitions Filed by Program or Characteristic

	Proportion of All Students that Met Truancy Thresholds	Proportion of Students that had a Petition Filed	Magnitude of Disproportionality
Foster Care	0.9%	1.4%	1.49
Homeless	9.6%	12.4%	1.29
Gender X	0.6%	0.8%	1.29
Students with Disabilities	19.9%	23.1%	1.16
Low-Income	76.3%	86.6%	1.14
Section 504	4.7%	4.9%	1.04

	Proportion of All Students that Met Truancy Thresholds	Proportion of Students that had a Petition Filed	Magnitude of Disproportionality
Male	51.7%	52.5%	1.02
Unaccompanied Youth	2.5%	2.5%	1.02
Female	47.7%	46.7%	0.98
English Language Learners	17.8%	15.5%	0.87
Military Parent	1.6%	1.0%	0.60
Migrant	3.2%	1.6%	0.49
Highly Capable	2.1%	0.6%	0.31

Source: CEDARS extracted on 10/22/2019 & 11/15/2022

Table 14 above shows that the student groups with the highest disproportionality are youth in foster care (1.49), youth experiencing homelessness (1.29), and students reported as Gender X (1.29), followed by students with disabilities, students from low-income households, and students with a 504 plan (Section 504). English language learners, students with a military parent, students are migrant, and students in the Highly Capable Program are under-represented in the population of students that had a truancy petition filed.

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

As our state continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, we have an opportunity to re-establish practices that we know will increase prevention of truancy and all absences.

Increasing School-based Interventions

Schools Did Increase Interventions

During the pandemic, we saw evidence that schools got more creative and innovative in their efforts to connect and support students that were absent. We saw more school staff doing home visits and delivering WiFi hot spots, laptops, and meals, attempting to meet family and student basic needs.

The challenge for students to show up for remote learning was significant. The magnitude of support needed was at a volume that overwhelmed some schools, and therefore school and district staff had to pivot the strategies they were using to support all students (tier 1 – universal). We saw historical approaches to absences shift because of this.

Capacity to Fully Shift to Earlier Interventions is Limited

Since school buildings have reopened, we have continued to hear from schools that they barely have the capacity to serve the students that are showing up. Many schools are unable to put the necessary systems into place that will reduce the number of students who reach truancy thresholds and require resource-intensive interventions like CEBs. Our goal is to reach students and families early and reduce the potential for a CEB, and as well as reduce the likelihood of court intervention.

We continue to see attendance roles and responsibilities fall on the shoulders of front office attendance clerks and sometimes assistant principals. We know that attendance needs to be supported by a team of people, including sponsorship by the building leader. Ideally, attendance is embedded in any teaming structure (MTSS, PBIS, RTI, IEP, 504, etc.).

To respond more proactively to student absences, schools would most benefit from having:

- Attendance awareness campaigns
- Proactive, supportive, translated communication about absences (including research-based nudge letters)
- Team approach to data and interventions
- Access to data (early warning indicators)
- Community partners
- Tiered interventions/best practices

Learning from Current Projects to Inform System Opportunities & Gaps

OSPI's Attendance program is currently managing two large-scale projects that will inform OSPI and state leaders about the system opportunities and gaps around attendance and truancy. The [ESSER Attendance & Reengagement project](#) and the [Re-envisioning Truancy Policy & Practice](#)

[\(Appendix\)](#) are unique opportunities to learn from grantees, our partners, communities, and youth and families with lived experience.

Next Steps: ESSER Attendance & Reengagement

- Continued implementation of and learning through this project, with one of its goals being to support schools to establish the systems and strategies above.
- OSPI will have preliminary data from the project in November 2023 on the students served, their progress towards re-enrollment, and the reasons students disengaged, and will have an end-of-year report in fall 2024.

Next Steps: Re-envisioning Truancy Policy & Practice

- Learn from system implementation partners what is needed to do this well at the school building. Are there interventions and supports that were put in place and practices that were only necessary because of the pandemic? Or are there strategies that our system learned that should be carried forward?
- The project will produce a report capturing learnings, opportunities, and gaps in spring 2024.

Data Access Through Early Warning Systems

One of the key findings of the ESSER Attendance and Reengagement Project, which is supporting a wide range of districts, is there is a lack of access to readily useable visual displays of attendance data, and other early warning indicators (such as course performance and behavior). These data displays are critical to support making meaning of trends, grades, race/ethnicity, and other student groups, and having actionable data to be proactive and early intervention.

The [Building Bridges Workgroup provided recommendations](#) to the Legislature in 2011 to address the gaps in our state related to dropout prevention. One of their primary areas of focus was on early warning systems.

Next Steps

- OSPI staff and education partners will continue to assess and identify gaps and opportunities regarding high-leverage strategies for supporting early warning systems.
- OSPI will continue to partner with student information system vendors to articulate the core components, based on research, that need to be included in visual displays to support early warning efforts.

APPENDIX

OSPI Re-Envisioning Truancy in Washington Project

Purpose & Goals

OSPI is engaged in exploring equitable truancy policies and practices in order to engage and support youth to access their education. OSPI will do this by talking with students and families with lived experience of the truancy process, education partners, and communities. OSPI seeks to understand what resources, supports, and policy changes will help ensure that our state's truancy system centers the needs and experiences of youth and families, emphasizes school reengagement, moves away from punitive approaches, provides early intervention and supports, and addresses system gaps when student and family needs are outside the scope of the education system.

Guiding Questions

The following questions will guide this project:

1. How do youth and families with lived experience of the truancy process in the last several years, and partners in the education system who implement truancy-related policies, **perceive** and **experience** current truancy policies and their implementation?
2. What **changes** would youth, families, and partners in the education system like to see made to current truancy policies and their implementation? What changes would they like to see when student and family need is outside the scope of the education system?
3. What **systems** and **supports** need to be in place to facilitate these changes? What are the barriers to making these changes happen? What might support these changes to occur?

Who Will Be Engaged in This Process, and How?

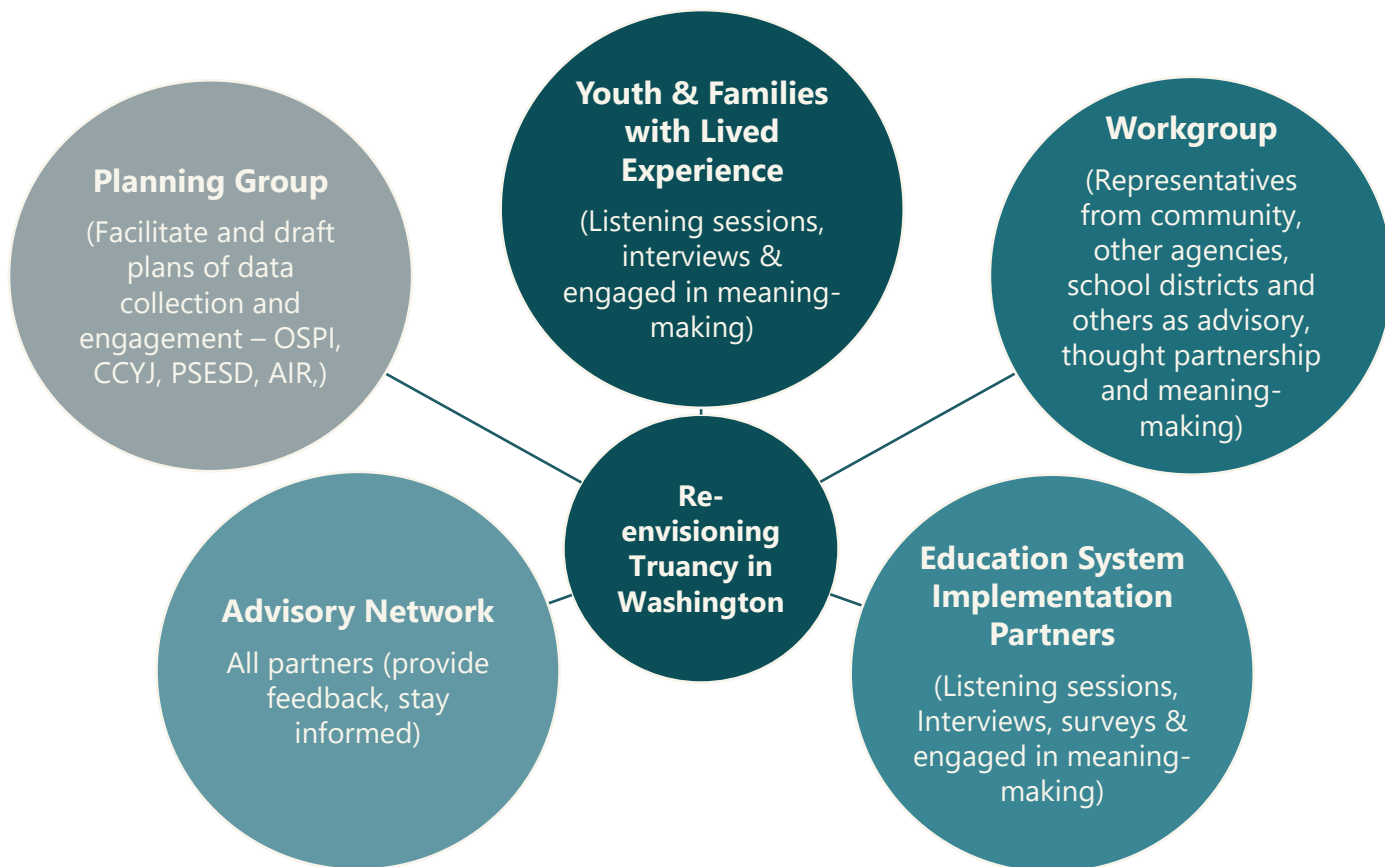
Planning Group

The Planning Group has membership from OSPI, the Center for Children & Youth Justice (CCYJ), American Institute for Research (AIR), and the Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD) Evaluation Team.

Youth & Families with Lived Experience

This project will identify youth and families who have directly experienced the truancy practices in school buildings as well as broader truancy practices and policies with local juvenile courts. This could mean the student has unexcused absences; they have received punishment, consequences, supports, or interventions from their school because of their unexcused absences; they have had a truancy petition filed with the local juvenile court; they have been invited to or participated in a truancy workshop or a community engagement board; or they have been withdrawn due to nonattendance), within the last five years.

Students and families will be engaged through listening sessions, focus groups, and interviews. The youth and families we engage with will also engage in making meaning of the information that we gather through the listening sessions, as well as guiding the development of the recommendations. These sessions will be led by the PSESD and AIR teams, with the questions and methodology informed by the Working Group. Youth and families will be provided compensation for their participation.



Education System Implementation Partners

We will engage our partners who are deeply involved in implementing truancy policies and procedures such as principals, attendance clerks, district truancy liaisons, district social workers, school counselors, community-based organizations, educational service districts, and courts.

Re-envisioning Truancy in Washington Workgroup

OSPI will partner with CCYJ, AIR, and PSESD Evaluation Team to facilitate a Re-Envisioning Truancy in Washington Workgroup. The members of the workgroup will bring knowledge and experience of the different sectors and agencies that implement truancy; will be able to provide diverse perspectives and will represent communities that are highly impacted by truancy including, but not limited to, students of color, students with an IEP or 504 Plan, and students from economically disadvantaged households; and will represent the geographic diversity of our state.

The workgroup will advise the Planning Group on the data collection process, provide outreach support of youth, families, and system implementation partners, and collaborate on making meaning of the findings.

Advisory Network

The Advisory Network will be a diverse representation of the many education and partnering organizations, agencies, and interests. The Network will have the opportunity to stay informed of the status of the project, participate in recruitment of youth and families with lived experience, and provide feedback on data collection results.

Informing State-level Gaps

Learnings from this project will inform OSPI and other partners of the gaps and future opportunities that might be related to policies, funding, resource allocation, staffing, professional development, and data needs.

Contact

To learn more, contact Krissy Johnson, Assistant Director of Attendance & Engagement at the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) at krissy.johnson@k12.wa.us.

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Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Chris Reykdal | State Superintendent
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Old Capitol Building | P.O. Box 47200
Olympia, WA 98504-7200