



Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Chris Reykdal, State Superintendent

*All students prepared
for post-secondary pathways,
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REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

UPDATE: Truancy Report

2018

Authorizing legislation: [RCW 28A.225.151](#)

Tennille Jeffries-Simmons
**Assistant Superintendent of System and School
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Executive Summary

At the end of each school year, each school district compiles, verifies, and submits summary data on truancy petitions to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). The number of truancy petition filings reported to OSPI increased in the 2017–18 school year, from 8,624 to 10,139. Recent changes in the law require school districts and courts to stay petitions and refer students and families to a community truancy board (CTB), a new pathway intended to increase access to community supports through a collective commitment to problem solving with community members. Initially, this increase in truancy filings suggests a positive change.

Of the students that met the definition of truant (5 unexcused absences in a month or 10 unexcused absences in a year), 12.5 percent had truancy petitions filed on them. This low percentage of petitions filed on truant students may reflect school system awareness of the negative outcomes of involvement with the juvenile justice system. However, this low percentage may also reflect that students and families who are in need of supports and services, such as those offered by CTBs, are not accessing these supports.

Data collected by OSPI also show that American Indian/Alaskan Native (20 percent), Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (17 percent), Black/African American (14 percent), and Migrant (13 percent) students have the highest rates of truancy or are more likely to be truant. To illustrate this question of which students are accessing the supports of community-based CTB interventions, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and Migrant truant students have lower rates of petitions being filed. In contrast, White and Asian truant students, as well as truant students with a 504 Plan, have higher rates of petitions filed.

Students experiencing poverty appear to have the most disproportionate involvement with the truancy process, as evidenced by the difference in rates of petitions filed on low-income truant students in comparison to their non-low income truant peers. Additionally, low-income students make up 81 percent of all petitions filed, a proportion that is high, although slightly lower than 2016–17, where low-income students made up 93 percent of all petitions filed.

The rise in the number of petitions filed indicates that the changes in the law, including the requirement for each district to create a CTB, are reflective of

changing practices on truancy. Ultimately, it remains to be seen if this increase in filings and referrals to a CTB result in better attendance and better outcomes for students.

Background

Over 20 years ago, the Washington State Legislature enacted the Becca Bill in response to the tragic death of Becca Hedman, a chronic truant and runaway, who was murdered at the age of 13. The intent of the law is to unite schools, courts, communities, and families in an effort to overcome the barriers that prevent school attendance.

Revised Absence Rules

In August of 2018, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's (OSPI) adopted absence rules became effective. The new [Chapter 392-401](#) of the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) defines an absence and reasons for excused absences, and contains substantial changes to the absence rules. In addition to defining an absence, the rules prohibit the use of the truancy process for tardies. This rule change affects what is considered a common practice in many districts, and could result in alternative approaches to addressing student tardies without relying on court intervention.

Student-Level Data Collection

In the 2012–13 school year, OSPI began collecting student-level absence data for both excused and unexcused absences. Prior to that, OSPI only collected that data on a combined basis.

Shift in Practice to Address Attendance

Broadly speaking, OSPI sees a shift across the state regarding attendance. Schools and school districts have directed more attention and resources to attendance. This new focus comes as a response to recent changes in the law, a new focus on chronic absenteeism under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, and a greater national focus fueled by awareness efforts and a strong research base. This attention extends to examining both excused and unexcused absences, reviewing school policies, providing interventions earlier, and engaging in awareness campaigns about the importance of student attendance from preschool to graduation. Evidence suggests that Washington schools and school districts are moving away from reliance on the court system and focusing more on prevention and earlier intervention to address barriers to attendance.

Update Status

This is the second year the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has collected truancy data at the student level, specifically whether a student has had a truancy petition filed on them. In the 2018–19 school year, OSPI began using the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS) to collect additional details on what occurs after a petition is filed. These data elements include referral to a community truancy board or other coordinated intervention; whether the stay was lifted and the student went to court; if there was an alternate less restrictive disposition; and if they were sent to detention. Beginning next year, OSPI will be able to report this data.

Data elements required in this truancy report include:

- the total number of unexcused absences,
- the number of students with five or more unexcused absences in a month or ten or more unexcused absences in the school year, and
- the number of truancy petitions filed with the courts.

The expanded tables for grades 1–8, grades 9–12, and all grades include information on enrollment, unexcused absences, truancy petitions, and more.

Table 1: Grades 1–8 Statewide Truancy Report Totals

| | 2017–18 School Year | % | 2016–17 School Year | % |
|--|------------------------|-------|------------------------|-------|
| Enrolled at Any Point During the School Year | 696,340 | -- | 689,466 | -- |
| # of Students with 1+ Unexcused Absences | 208,024 | 29.9% | 196,136 | 28.4% |
| # of Students with 5+ Unexcused Absences Within 30 Days | 18,403 | 2.6% | 15,931 | 2.3% |
| # of Students with 10+ Unexcused Absences in a School Year | 21,209 | 3% | 18,619 | 2.7% |
| Total Number of Unique Truant Students | 25,799 | 3.7% | 22,888 | 3.3% |
| Percent of Truant Students with a Filed Truancy Petition | -- | 14.3% | -- | 13.9% |
| Total Truancy Petitions Reported | 3,686 | 0.5% | 3,178 | 0.5% |

Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018.

Table 2: Grades 9–12 Statewide Truancy Report Totals

| | 2017–18 School Year | % | 2016–17 School Year | % |
|--|------------------------|-------|------------------------|-------|
| Enrolled at Any Point During the Year | 357,248 | -- | 355,393 | -- |
| # of Students with 1+ Unexcused Absences | 173,948 | 48.7% | 173,058 | 48.7% |
| # of Students with 5+ Unexcused Absences Within 30 Days | 43,575 | 12.2% | 42,081 | 11.8% |
| # of Students with 10+ Unexcused Absences in a School Year | 51,424 | 14.4% | 49,922 | 14.0% |
| Total Number of Unique Truant Students | 55,038 | 15.4% | 53,444 | 15.0% |
| Percent of Truant Students with a Filed Truancy Petition | -- | 11.7% | -- | 10.2% |
| Total Truancy Petitions Reported | 6,453 | 1.8% | 5,446 | 1.5% |

Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018

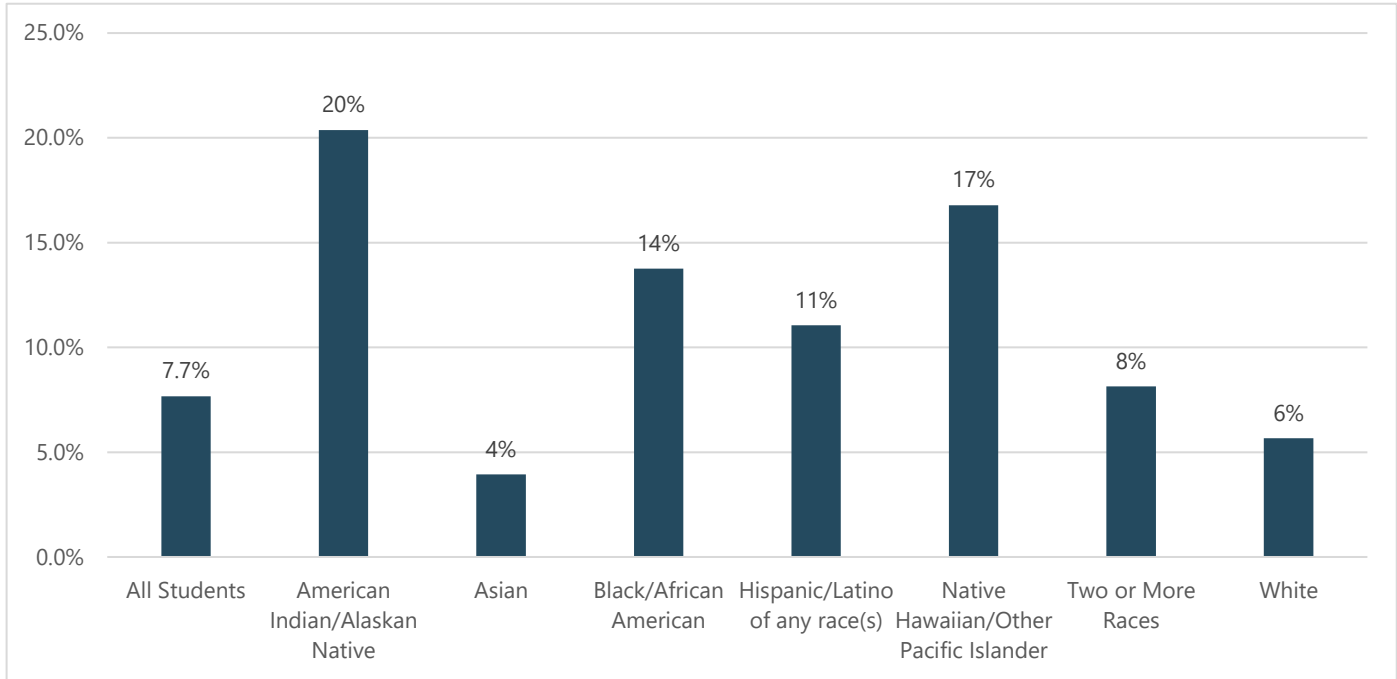
Table 3: Grades 1–12 Statewide Truancy Report Totals

| | 2017–18 School Year | % | 2016–17 School Year | % |
|--|------------------------|-------|------------------------|-------|
| Enrolled at Any Point During the Year | 1,053,588 | -- | 1,044,859 | -- |
| # of Students with 1+ Unexcused Absences | 381,972 | 36.3% | 369,194 | 35.3% |
| # of Students with 5+ Unexcused Absences Within 30 Days | 61,978 | 5.9% | 58,012 | 5.6% |
| # of Students with 10+ Unexcused Absences in a School Year | 72,633 | 6.9% | 68,541 | 6.6% |
| Total Number of Unique Truant Students | 80,837 | 7.7% | 76,332 | 7.3% |
| Percent of Truant Students with a Filed Truancy Petition | -- | 12.5% | -- | 11.3% |
| Total Truancy Petitions Reported | 10,139 | 1.0% | 8,624 | 0.8% |

Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018.

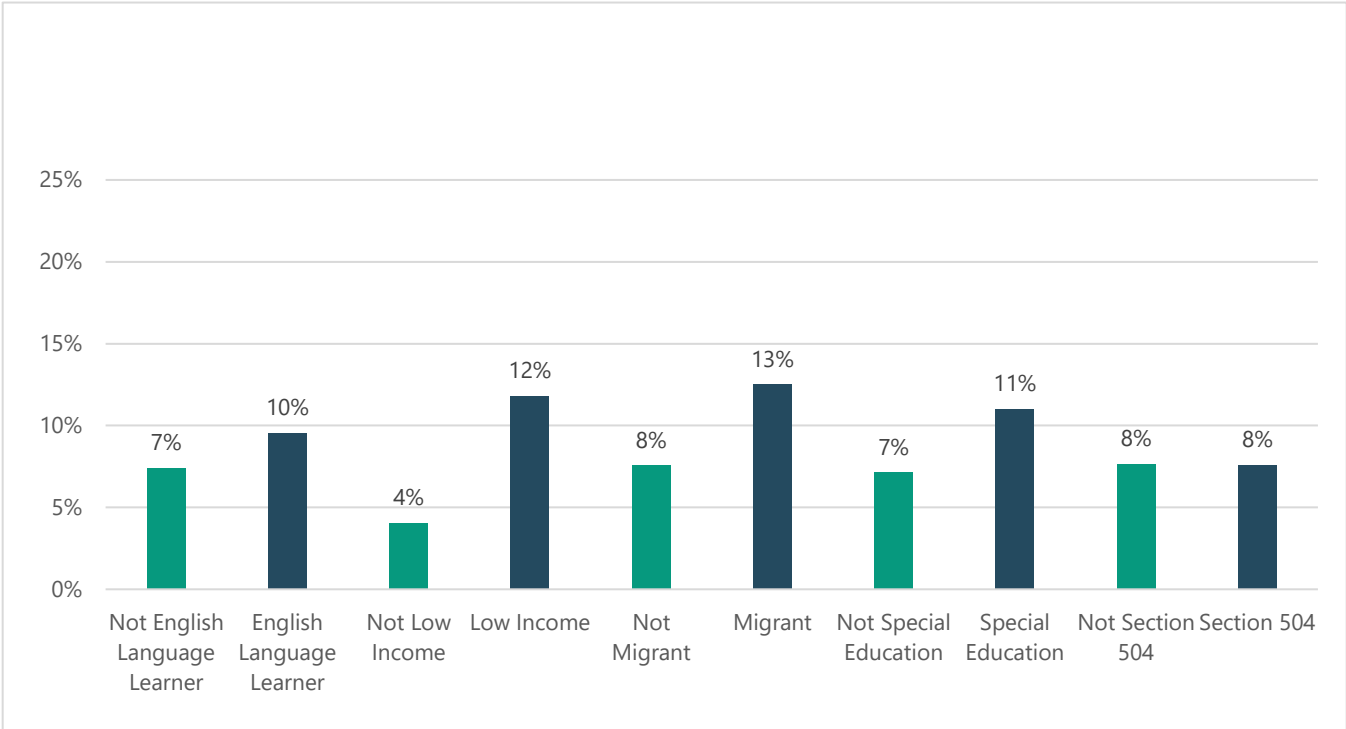
Which Students have Higher Rates of Truancy?

Figure 1: 2017–18 Truancy Rates by Race and Ethnicity: Percentage of Student Group that Met the Definition of 'Truant'



Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018.

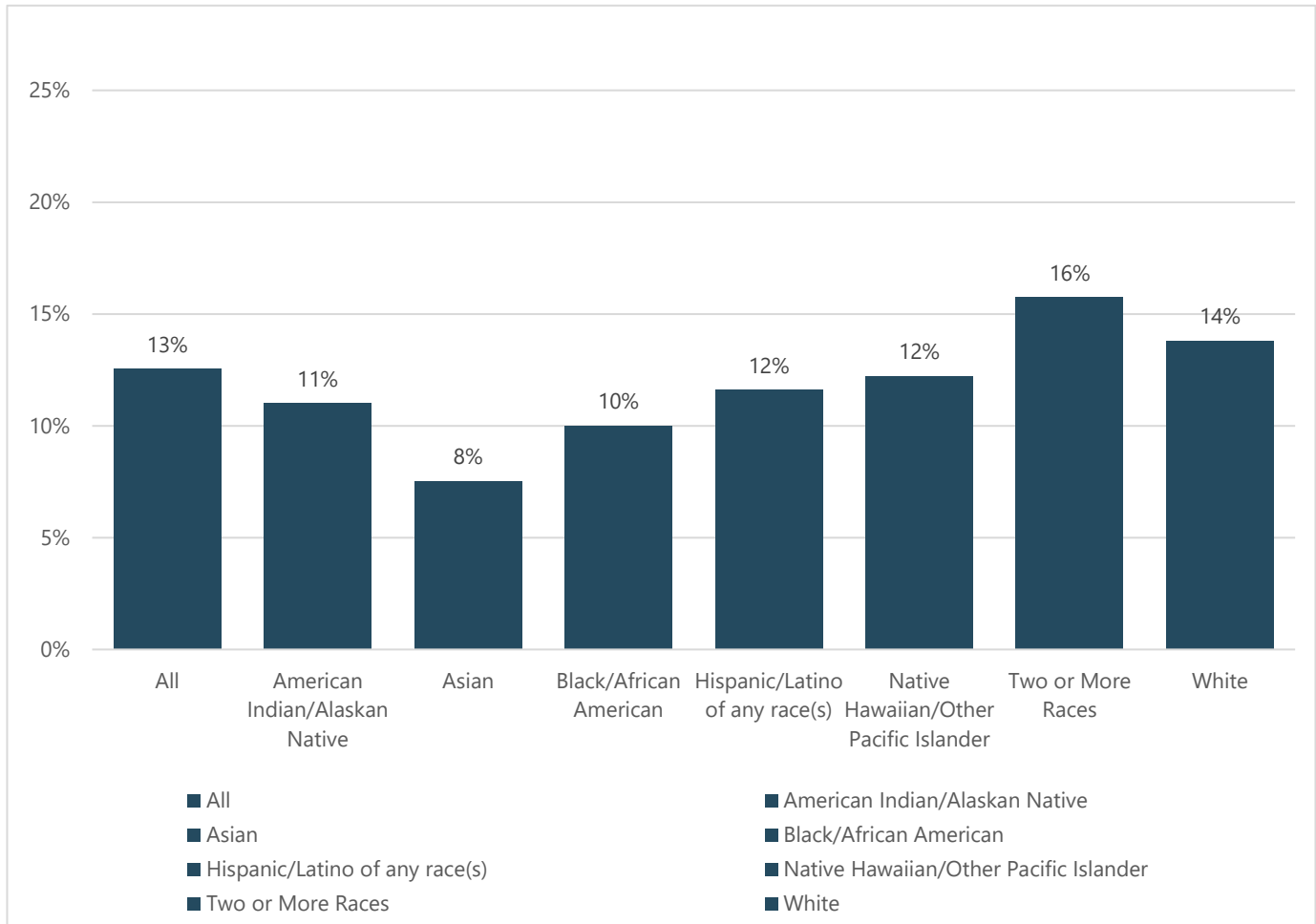
Figure 2: 2017–18 Truancy Rates by Student Group: Percentage of Student Group that Met the Definition of 'Truant'



Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018.

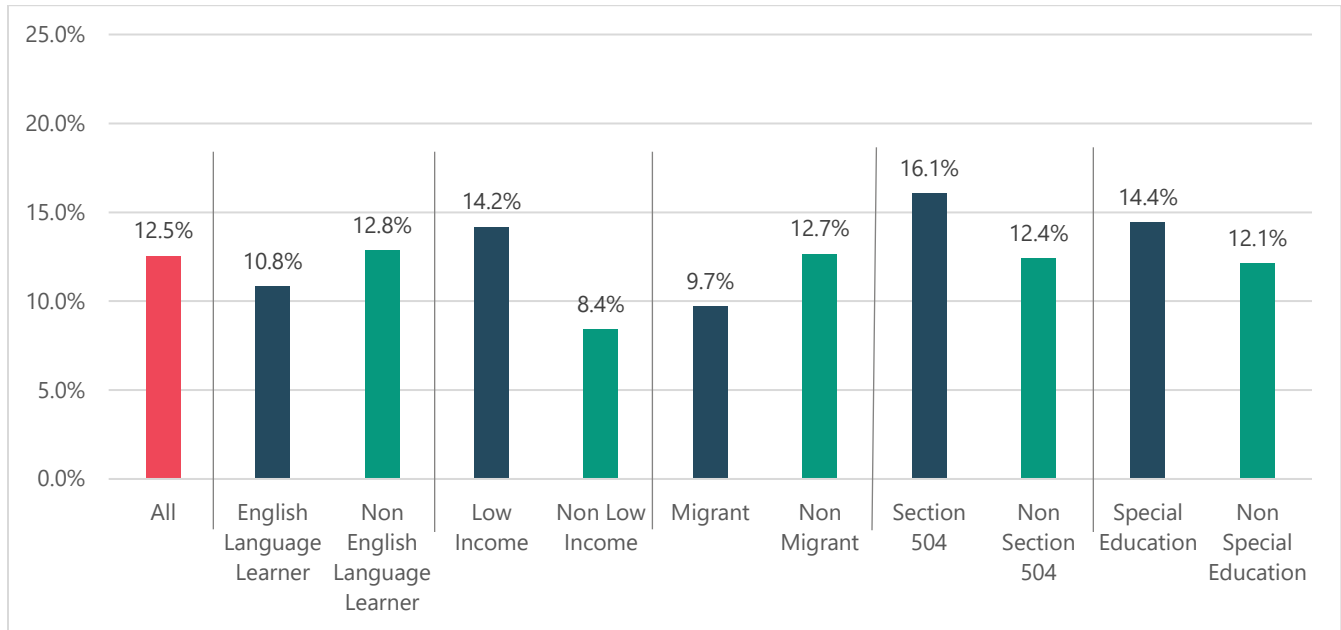
Which Students Experience Higher Rates of Petitions Filed?

Figure 3: 2017–18 Petitions Filed on Students that Met the Definition of 'Truant,' by Race and Ethnicity



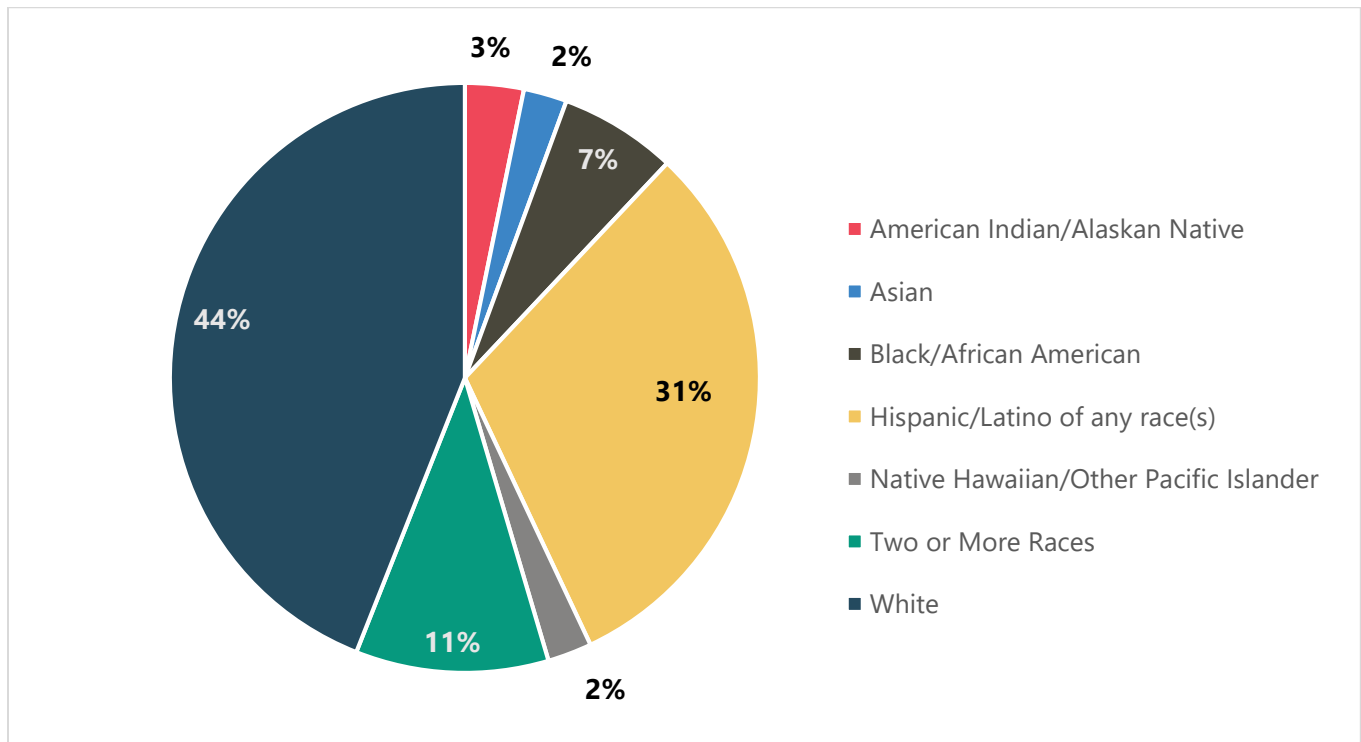
Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018.

Figure 4: 2017–18 Percentage of Truant Students that had a Truancy Petition Filed on them, by Student Group



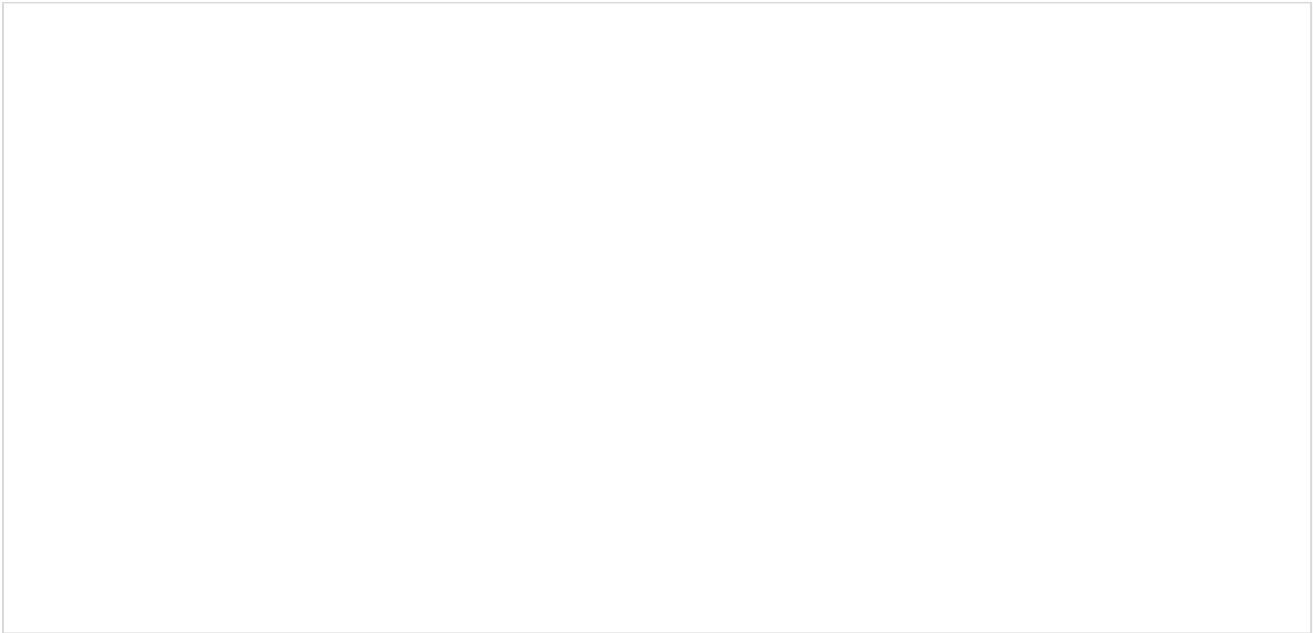
Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018.

Figure 5: 2017–18 Percentage of All Filed Petitions, by Student Group



Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018.

Figure 6: 2017–18 Percentage of All Filed Petitions, by Socioeconomic Status



Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018.

Figure 6 highlights that of all students that had a truancy petition filed in 2017–18, 81 percent were eligible for free or reduced-price meals. This proportion is lower in comparison to 2016–17, when 93 percent of all petitions filed were filed on students eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The original intent of the Truancy Report was to provide information on the relationship between the “habitual truant” and truancy petitions as an intervention. The rise in the number of petitions filed indicates that the changes in the law, including the requirement for each school district to create a Community Truancy Board (CTB), are affecting practice in education. Ultimately, it remains to be seen if this is a positive trend and if the increased filling and referral to a CTB is resulting in better attendance and better outcomes for students.

If filing a petition is seen as an opportunity to re-engage the student and seek community supports, this data could indicate that certain groups of students have more access to that support. However, there are many factors at play, including regional and local variations in implementation and availability of supports and resources. Without more research, these observations are just a starting point for further exploration.

The student-level data that is currently being collected in the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS) will provide additional information about what is happening for individual students during the truancy process. From there, we will be able to explore whether the student was referred to a CTB or other coordinated intervention, whether the stay was lifted and the student went to court, if there was an alternate less restrictive disposition, and if they were sent to detention. This new data will allow us to see more information about which students are gaining access to interventions such as a CTB, as well as which students end up in the juvenile justice system.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is currently supporting school districts in implementing the changes in the law by developing guidance and providing professional development opportunities and resources that will help schools and school districts as they implement best practices. These efforts reflect an understanding of absences along a continuum of early warning information for schools and families, with truancy being at one end of the continuum. Schools are developing corresponding interventions and supports along this continuum. They are working to build a clearer understanding and definition of attendance, as well as developing positive messaging about the importance of attendance. Finally, schools are also creating clearer expectations and policies to share with families and community stakeholders about the benefits of attendance and the hazards of absenteeism (whether excused or not).

List of Tables

Table 4: Grades 1–8 Truancy Table Numbers

| Student Group | Enrollment | Total Unexcused Absences | Number of Students with 1 or more Unexcused Absence | 5+ Absences in a Month | 10+ Absences in the School Year | Truant | Filed Truancy Petition |
|--|------------|--------------------------|---|------------------------|---------------------------------|--------|------------------------|
| All | 696340 | 914582 | 208024 | 18403 | 21209 | 25799 | 3686 |
| Gender | | | | | | | |
| Female | 338754 | 439028 | 101311 | 8778 | 10130 | 12364 | 1744 |
| Male | 357586 | 475554 | 106713 | 9625 | 11079 | 13435 | 1942 |
| Race/Ethnicity* | | | | | | | |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 9282 | 40994 | 5006 | 907 | 1179 | 1263 | 126 |
| Asian | 53446 | 31154 | 9753 | 846 | 618 | 979 | 70 |
| Black/African American | 30553 | 71828 | 13621 | 1538 | 1958 | 2229 | 239 |
| Hispanic/Latino of any race(s) | 167252 | 308755 | 65138 | 5786 | 7456 | 8643 | 1068 |
| Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander | 7986 | 22377 | 4077 | 493 | 623 | 726 | 99 |
| Two or More Races | 58963 | 90704 | 18981 | 1996 | 2223 | 2709 | 481 |
| White | 368643 | 348446 | 91362 | 6829 | 7144 | 9239 | 1602 |
| Student Program | | | | | | | |
| English Language Learner | 96122 | 169125 | 37284 | 3238 | 4091 | 4782 | 475 |
| Low-Income | 340236 | 694840 | 137330 | 14041 | 17738 | 20334 | 3256 |
| Migrant | 14316 | 29867 | 5630 | 611 | 766 | 850 | 76 |
| Section 504 | 27008 | 33293 | 7068 | 710 | 767 | 937 | 192 |
| Special Education | 98807 | 189539 | 36036 | 4018 | 4857 | 5626 | 896 |

Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018

**Students without a provided Race/Ethnicity are included in the All Student Group*

Table 5: Grades 1–8 Truancy Table Percentages

| Student Group | Percent of Students with 1 or more unexcused absence | Percent of Students that are Truant | Percent of Students with a Filed Truancy Petition | Percent of Truant Students That have a Truancy Petition Filed on Them |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| All | 29.9% | 3.7% | 0.5% | 14.3% |
| Gender | | | | |
| Female | 29.9% | 3.6% | 0.5% | 14.1% |
| Male | 29.8% | 3.8% | 0.5% | 14.5% |
| Race/Ethnicity* | | | | |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 53.9% | 13.6% | 1.4% | 10.0% |
| Asian | 18.2% | 1.8% | 0.1% | 7.2% |
| Black/African American | 44.6% | 7.3% | 0.8% | 10.7% |
| Hispanic/Latino of any race(s) | 38.9% | 5.2% | 0.6% | 12.4% |
| Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander | 51.1% | 9.1% | 1.2% | 13.6% |
| Two or More Races | 32.2% | 4.6% | 0.8% | 17.8% |
| White | 24.8% | 2.5% | 0.4% | 17.3% |
| Student Program | | | | |
| English Language Learner | 38.8% | 5.0% | 0.5% | 9.9% |
| Low Income | 40.4% | 6.0% | 1.0% | 16.0% |
| Migrant | 39.3% | 5.9% | 0.5% | 8.9% |
| Section 504 | 26.2% | 3.5% | 0.7% | 20.5% |
| Special Education | 36.5% | 5.7% | 0.9% | 15.9% |

Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018

**Students without a provided Race/Ethnicity are included in the All Student Group*

Table 6: Grades 9–12 Truancy Table Numbers

| Student Group | Enrollment | Total Unexcused Absences | Number of Students with 1 or more Unexcused Absence | 5+ Absences in a Month | 10+ Absences in the School Year | Truant* | Filed Truancy Petition |
|--|------------|--------------------------|---|------------------------|---------------------------------|---------|------------------------|
| All | 357248 | 1882413 | 173948 | 43575 | 51424 | 55038 | 6453 |
| Gender | | | | | | | |
| Female | 173227 | 870365 | 83694 | 20149 | 24052 | 25807 | 2928 |
| Male | 184021 | 1012048 | 90254 | 23426 | 27372 | 29231 | 3525 |
| Race/Ethnicity | | | | | | | |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 5260 | 58463 | 3526 | 1411 | 1615 | 1699 | 200 |
| Asian | 27745 | 80751 | 9662 | 1729 | 2046 | 2215 | 171 |
| Black/African American | 16748 | 155360 | 10773 | 3432 | 4046 | 4277 | 413 |
| Hispanic/Latino of any race(s) | 77505 | 638808 | 48444 | 14579 | 17404 | 18404 | 2071 |
| Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander | 4002 | 43260 | 2884 | 1020 | 1223 | 1286 | 147 |
| Two or More Races | 24714 | 139106 | 12186 | 3280 | 3845 | 4100 | 591 |
| White | 201179 | 766154 | 86414 | 18109 | 21229 | 23041 | 2857 |
| Student Program | | | | | | | |
| English Language Learner | 24807 | 239088 | 17017 | 5454 | 6389 | 6760 | 772 |
| Low Income | 151913 | 1287975 | 96517 | 30077 | 35619 | 37754 | 4978 |
| Migrant | 7003 | 60021 | 4619 | 1456 | 1719 | 1820 | 183 |
| Section 504 | 19767 | 86282 | 9067 | 2071 | 2426 | 2616 | 379 |
| Special Education | 43577 | 354368 | 26000 | 8148 | 9466 | 10054 | 1362 |

Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018

**Students without a provided Race/Ethnicity are included in the All Student Group*

Table 7: Grades 9–12 Truancy Table Percentages

| Student Group | Percent of Students with 1 or more unexcused absence | Percent of Students that are Truant | Percent of Students With a Filed Truancy Petition | Percent of Truant Students That have a Truancy Petition Filed on Them |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| All | 48.7% | 15.4% | 1.8% | 11.7% |
| Gender | | | | |
| Female | 48.3% | 14.9% | 1.7% | 11.3% |
| Male | 49.0% | 15.9% | 1.9% | 12.1% |
| Race/Ethnicity* | | | | |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 67.0% | 32.3% | 3.8% | 11.8% |
| Asian | 34.8% | 8.0% | 0.6% | 7.7% |
| Black/African American | 64.3% | 25.5% | 2.5% | 9.7% |
| Hispanic/Latino of any race(s) | 62.5% | 23.7% | 2.7% | 11.3% |
| Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander | 72.1% | 32.1% | 3.7% | 11.4% |
| Two or More Races | 49.3% | 16.6% | 2.4% | 14.4% |
| White | 43.0% | 11.5% | 1.4% | 12.4% |
| Student Program | | | | |
| English Language Learner | 68.6% | 27.3% | 3.1% | 11.4% |
| Low Income | 63.5% | 24.9% | 3.3% | 13.2% |
| Migrant | 66.0% | 26.0% | 2.6% | 10.1% |
| Section 504 | 45.9% | 13.2% | 1.9% | 14.5% |
| Special Education | 59.7% | 23.1% | 3.1% | 13.5% |

Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018

**Students without a provided Race/Ethnicity are included in the All Student Group*

Table 8: Grades 1–12 Truancy Table Numbers

| Student Group | Enrollment | Total Unexcused Absences | Number of Students with 1 or more Unexcused Absence | 5+ Absences in a Month | 10+ Absences in the School Year | Truant | Filed Truancy Petition |
|--|------------|--------------------------|---|------------------------|---------------------------------|--------|------------------------|
| All | 1053588 | 2796995 | 381972 | 61978 | 72633 | 80837 | 10139 |
| Gender | | | | | | | |
| Female | 511981 | 1309393 | 185005 | 28927 | 34182 | 38171 | 4672 |
| Male | 541607 | 1487602 | 196967 | 33051 | 38451 | 42666 | 5467 |
| Race/Ethnicity* | | | | | | | |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 14542 | 99457 | 8532 | 2318 | 2794 | 2962 | 326 |
| Asian | 81191 | 111905 | 19415 | 2575 | 2664 | 3194 | 241 |
| Black/African American | 47301 | 227188 | 24394 | 4970 | 6004 | 6506 | 652 |
| Hispanic/Latino of any race(s) | 244757 | 947563 | 113582 | 20365 | 24860 | 27047 | 3139 |
| Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander | 11988 | 65637 | 6961 | 1513 | 1846 | 2012 | 246 |
| Two or More Races | 83677 | 229810 | 31167 | 5276 | 6068 | 6809 | 1072 |
| White | 569822 | 1114600 | 177776 | 24938 | 28373 | 32280 | 4459 |
| Student Program | | | | | | | |
| English Language Learner | 120929 | 408213 | 54301 | 8692 | 10480 | 11542 | 1247 |
| Non-English Language Learner | 932659 | 2386758 | 327168 | 62098 | 53225 | 69223 | 8895 |
| Low-Income | 492149 | 1982815 | 233847 | 44118 | 53357 | 58088 | 8234 |
| Non-Low-Income | 561439 | 812156 | 147622 | 19221 | 17799 | 22677 | 1908 |
| Migrant | 21319 | 89888 | 10249 | 2067 | 2485 | 2670 | 259 |
| Non-Migrant | 1032269 | 2705083 | 371220 | 70093 | 59850 | 78095 | 9883 |
| Section 504 | 46775 | 119575 | 16135 | 2781 | 3193 | 3553 | 571 |
| Non-Section 504 | 1006813 | 2675396 | 365334 | 69385 | 59136 | 77212 | 9571 |
| Special Education | 142384 | 543907 | 62036 | 12166 | 14323 | 15680 | 2258 |
| Non-Special Education | 911204 | 2251064 | 319433 | 58255 | 49751 | 65085 | 7884 |

Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018

**Students without a provided Race/Ethnicity are included in the All Student Group*

Table 9: Grades 1–12 Truancy Table Percentages

| Student Group | Percent of Students with 1 or more unexcused absence | Percent of Students that are Truant | Percent of Students With a Filed Truancy Petition | Percent of Truant Students That have a Truancy Petition Filed on Them |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| All | 36.3% | 7.7% | 1.0% | 12.5% |
| Gender | | | | |
| Female | 36.1% | 7.5% | 0.9% | 12.2% |
| Male | 36.4% | 7.9% | 1.0% | 12.8% |
| Race/Ethnicity* | | | | |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 58.7% | 20.4% | 2.2% | 11.0% |
| Asian | 23.9% | 3.9% | 0.3% | 7.5% |
| Black/African American | 51.6% | 13.8% | 1.4% | 10.0% |
| Hispanic/Latino of any race(s) | 46.4% | 11.1% | 1.3% | 11.6% |
| Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander | 58.1% | 16.8% | 2.1% | 12.2% |
| Two or More Races | 37.2% | 8.1% | 1.3% | 15.7% |
| White | 31.2% | 5.7% | 0.8% | 13.8% |
| Student Program | | | | |
| English Language Learner | 44.9% | 9.5% | 1.0% | 10.8% |
| Non-English Language Learner | 35.1% | 7.4% | 1.0% | 12.8% |
| Low-Income | 47.5% | 11.8% | 1.7% | 14.2% |
| Non-Low-Income | 26.3% | 4.0% | 0.3% | 8.4% |
| Migrant | 48.1% | 12.5% | 1.2% | 9.7% |
| Non-Migrant | 36.0% | 7.6% | 1.0% | 12.7% |
| Section 504 | 34.5% | 7.6% | 1.2% | 16.1% |
| Non-Section 504 | 36.3% | 7.7% | 1.0% | 12.4% |
| Special Education | 43.6% | 11.0% | 1.6% | 14.4% |
| Non-Special Education | 35.1% | 7.1% | 0.9% | 12.1% |

Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018

**Students without a provided Race/Ethnicity are included in the All Student Group*



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