



Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Chris Reykdal, State Superintendent

*All students prepared
for post-secondary pathways,
careers, & civic engagement.*

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

UPDATE: Truancy Report

2018

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

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**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

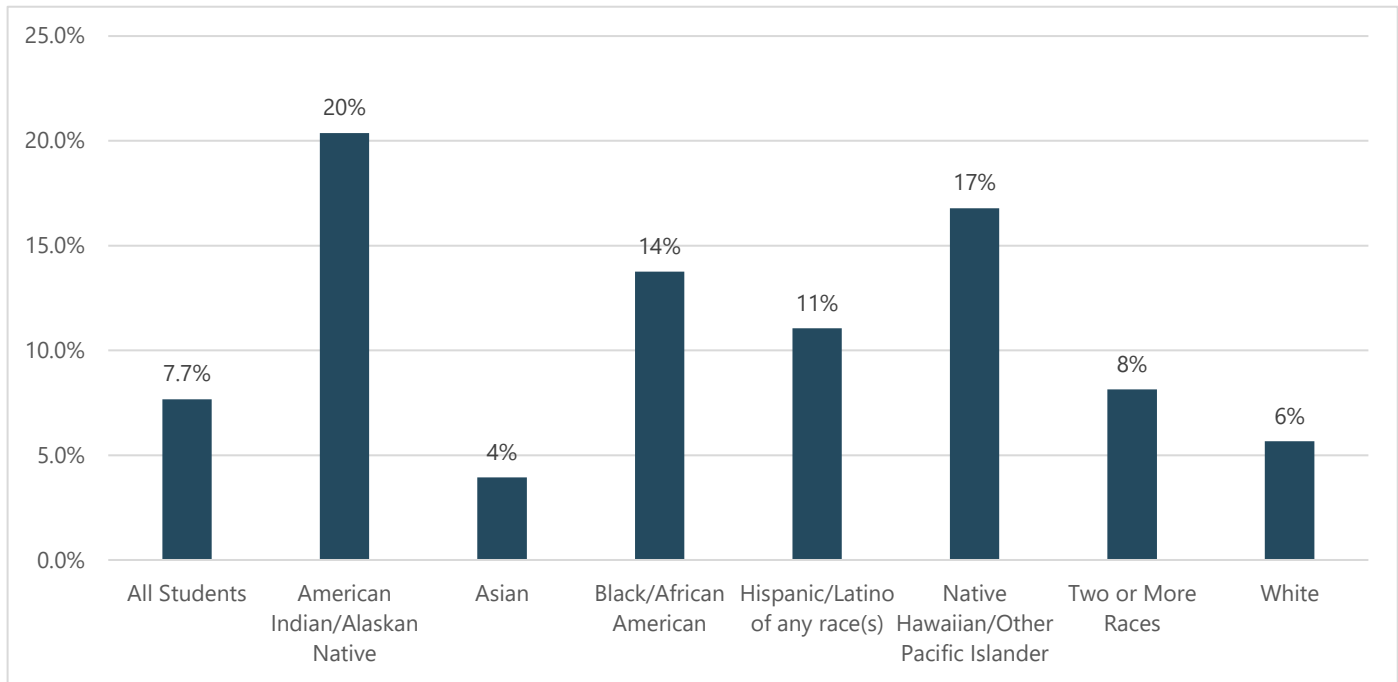
Table 3: Grades 1–12 Statewide Truancy Report Totals

	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.

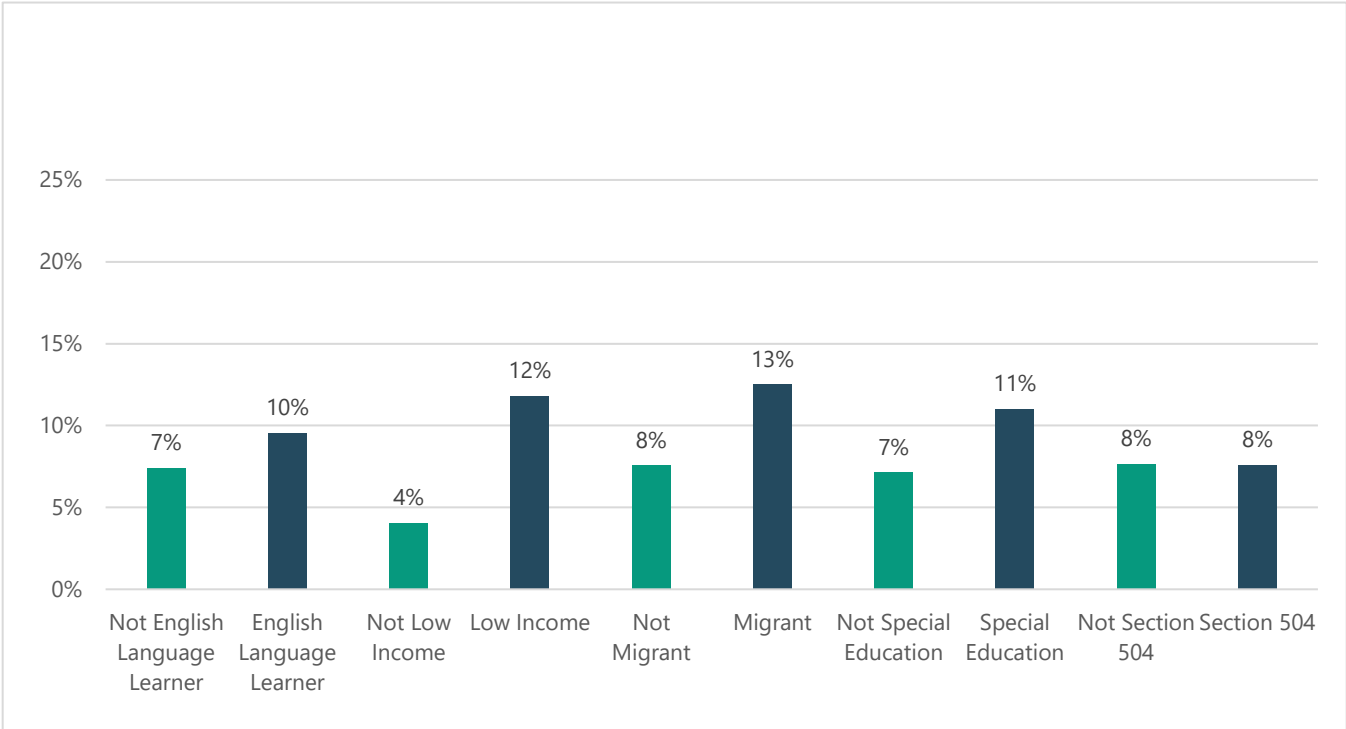
Which Students have Higher Rates of Truancy?

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.

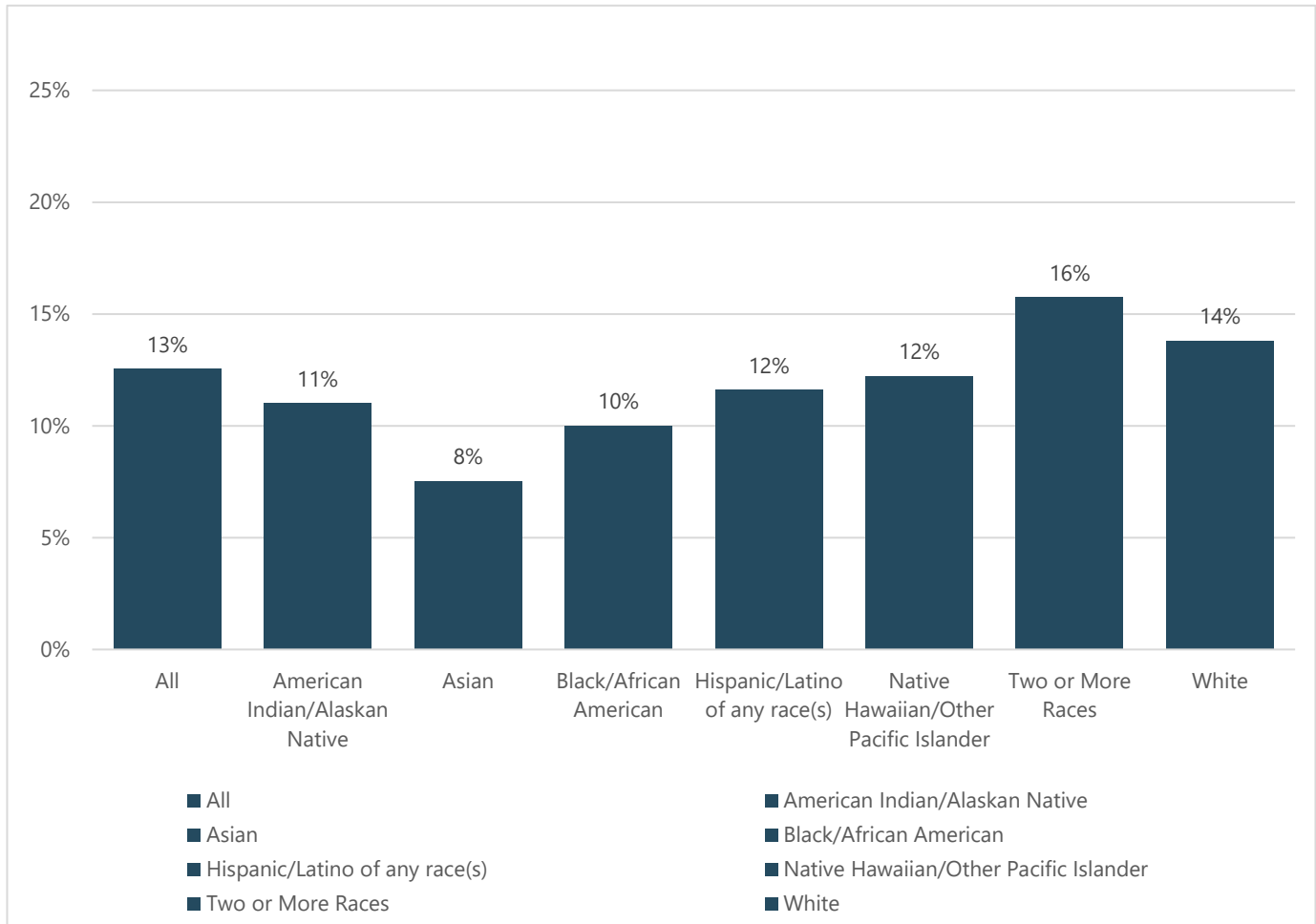
Figure 2: 2017–18 Truancy Rates by Student Group: Percentage of Student Group that Met the Definition of 'Truant'



Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018.

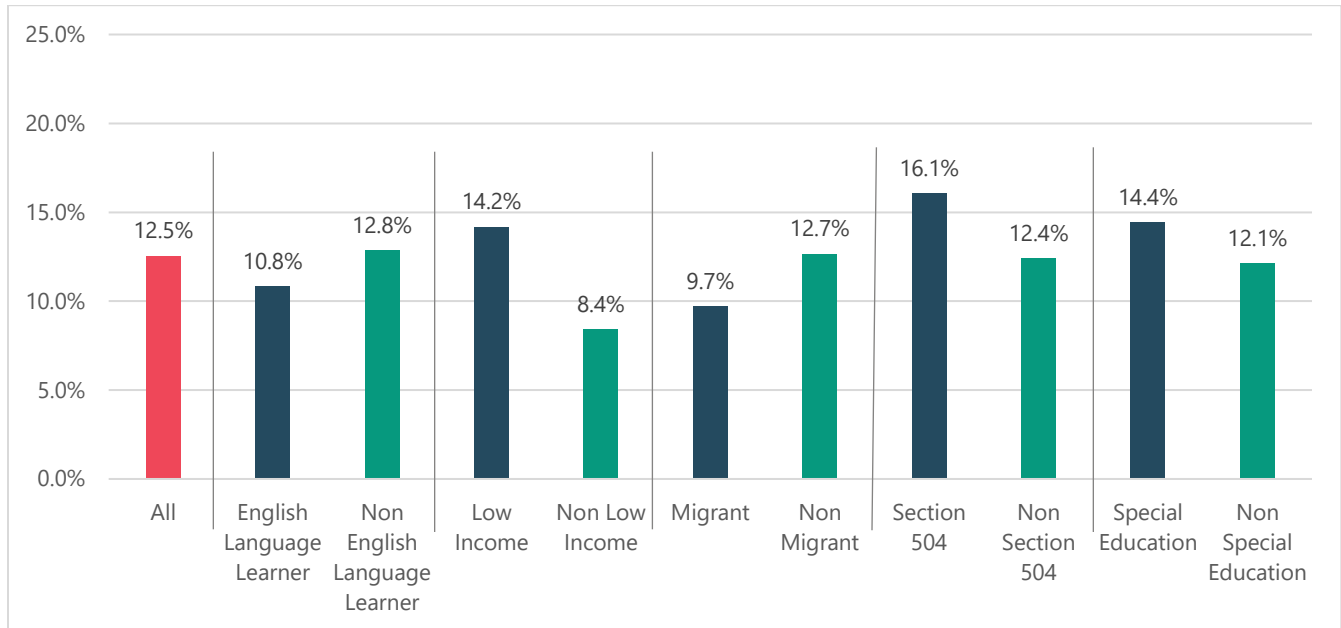
Which Students Experience Higher Rates of Petitions Filed?

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



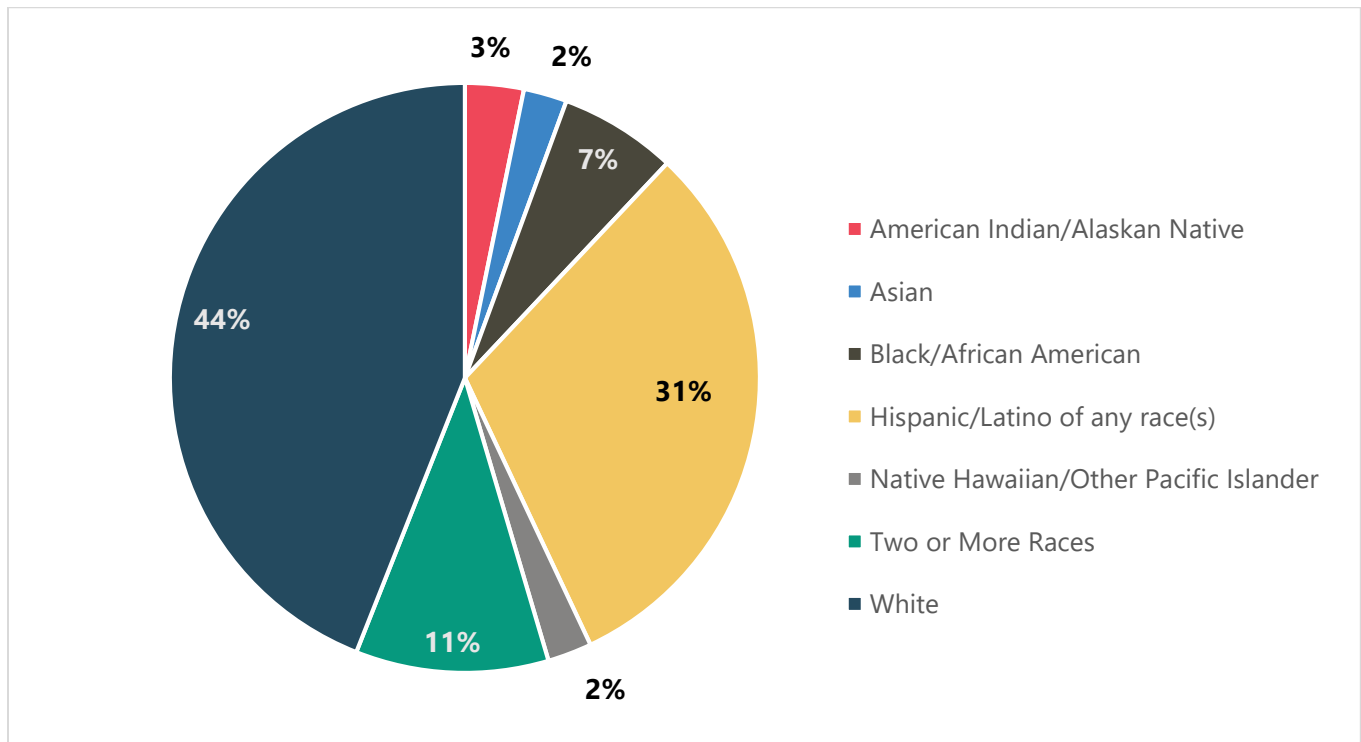
Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018.

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



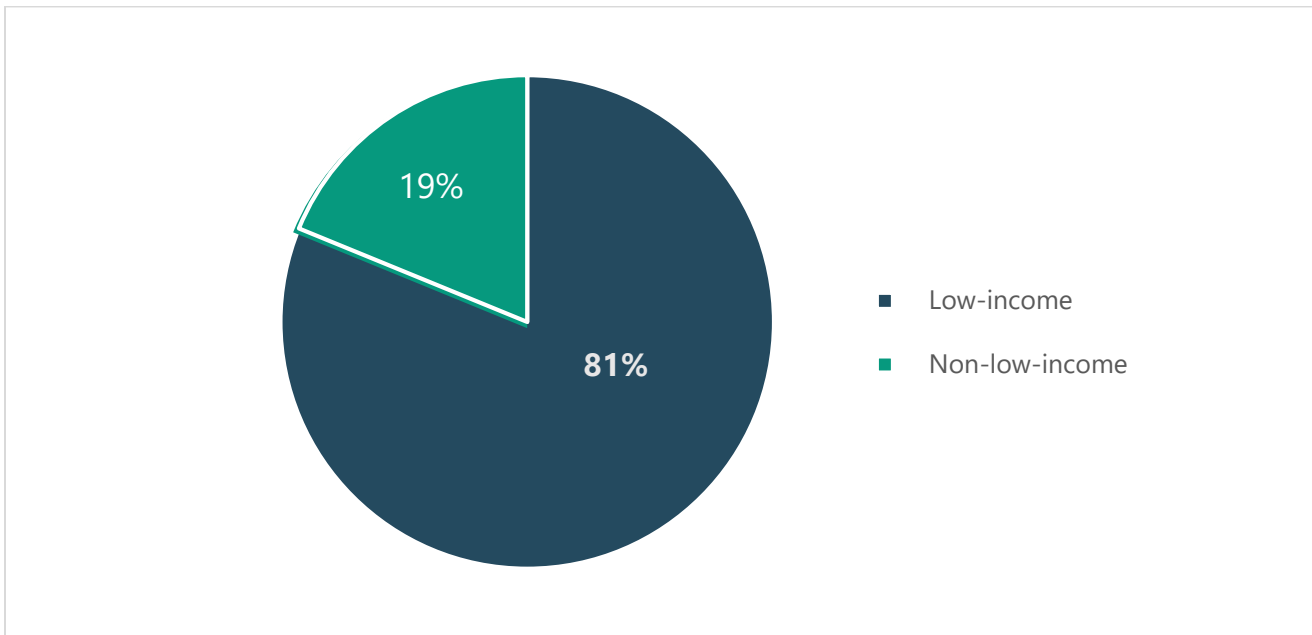
Source: CEDARS, 10/10/2018.

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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