



REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

## **UPDATE: Truancy Report**

**2017**

**Authorizing legislation: RCW 28A.225.151**

(<http://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28A.225.151>)

**Tennille Jeffries-Simmons**

**Assistant Superintendent of System and School Improvement**

Prepared by:

- Laurie Shannon, Graduation and Reengagement Program Supervisor  
[Laurie.Shannon@k12.wa.us](mailto:Laurie.Shannon@k12.wa.us) | 360-725-4472

## Executive Summary

At the end of the school year, each district compiles (from its schools), 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 decreased in the 2016-17 school year despite a continued increase in the number of students enrolled and meeting the definition of truant (based on attendance data collected through OSPI CEDARS). This means that fewer students are becoming involved in the juvenile justice system. And due to the changes in the law and the requirements for districts to intervene earlier, the reduction in truancy filings is interpreted as a positive change. The provision of more clearly defined rules, definitions, and reporting expectations from OSPI has assisted districts in the tracking and reporting of truancy data.

This is the first year that we are collecting truancy data at the student level and will be able to see disproportionality in the data for student sub groups. Previously we only collected data at an aggregate level. In our first year data, the disproportionality of low income students (those identified by qualifying for free and reduced lunch) is striking in the percentage of students who make up petitions filed. Low income students account for approximately 45 percent of the student population, but account for almost 94 percent of all petitions filed for truancy.

Additionally, many districts have implemented multi-tiered systems of support including the use of Community Truancy Boards and other coordinated means of intervention in truancy work ahead of the requirements in the law. Many districts and schools are continuing to implement Positive Behavior Intervention Systems (PBIS) and have focused on attendance and incorporated strategies from AttendanceWorks into their cultures.

Next steps will involve collecting more data for analysis. OSPI will continue additional work on training for attendance interventions and community truancy boards, and making resources available to Educational Service Districts (ESDs), school districts, and schools.

## Background

Over twenty years ago, the Washington State Legislature enacted the Becca Bill in response to the tragic death of Becca Hedman, whose chronic truancy and running away from home led to her murder at the age of 12. The intent of the law is to unite schools, courts, communities, and families in an effort to overcome the barriers that prevent school attendance.

## Update Status

OSPI began collecting student-level absence data, for both excused and unexcused absences, in the 2012–13 school year. Prior to that, information was only collected on an aggregate basis. WAC 392-400-325 provides the definitions for excused and unexcused daily absences. However, truancy petition information is still submitted at an aggregate level.

Data elements required in the Truancy Report include:

- Total number of unexcused absences,
- Number of students with 10 or more unexcused absences in a school year or five or more unexcused absences in a month, and the
- Number of truancy petitions filed with the courts.

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

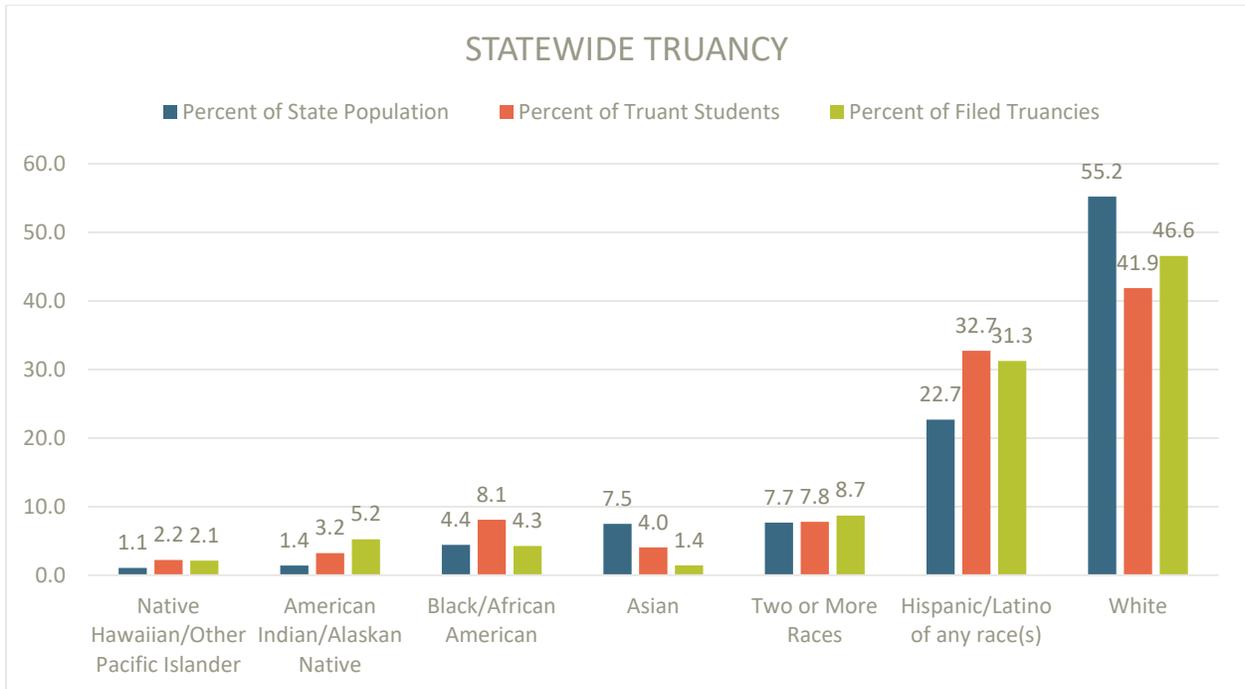
### Grades 1–8 Statewide Truancy Report Totals

	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014–2015	2013–2014
<b>October Enrollment</b>	688,022	657,781	646,576	636,621
<b>Unexcused Absences</b>	204,837	179,499	169,149	144,550
<b>5+ Unexcused Absences Within 30 Days</b>	15,314	13,663	12,184	9,658
<b>10+ Unexcused Absences in a School Year</b>	18,074	14,728	13,025	10,777
<b>Total Truancy Petitions Reported</b>	3,084	3,950	3,788	3,483

### Grades 9–12 Statewide Truancy Report

	2016-17	2015-2016	2014–2015	2013–2014
<b>October Enrollment</b>	356,737	337,694	333,274	327,161
<b>Unexcused Absences</b>	173,986	169,283	172,395	162,191
<b>5+ Unexcused Absences Within 30 Days</b>	48,138	38,655	37,990	34,042
<b>10+ Unexcused Absences in a School Year</b>	46,949	44,201	43,538	39,143
<b>Total Truancy Petitions Reported</b>	5,332	7,217	7,141	6,623

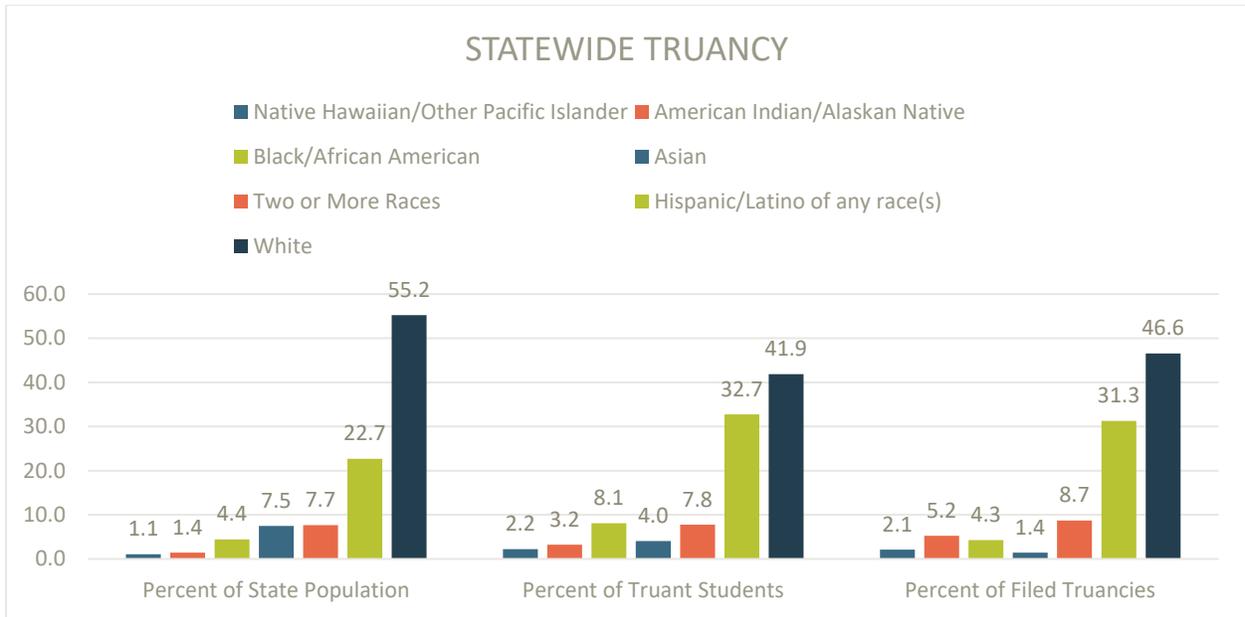
## Student Level Data by Race



Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander make up only 1.1 percent of the student population but double to 2.2 percent of the truant population, American Indian/Alaskan Native only make up 1.4 percent of the student population but more than double to 3.2 percent of the truant population, Black/African American make up 4.4 percent of the student population but nearly double to 8.1 percent of the truant population. While Hispanic/Latinx students make up about 23 percent of the student population they account for 33 percent of truant students.

We can see that we have disproportionality in who is meeting the definition of truant, but not necessarily in who has a petition filed with the exception of American Indian/Alaska Natives. American Indians/Alaska Natives make up 3.2 percent of the truant students but account for 5.2 percent of truancy petitions. The trend is reversed for Asian students who make up 4.0 percent of the truant students but only 1.4 percent of the students who had a truancy petition filed.

## Student Level Data by Race



Only 10.5 percent of students that meet the definition of truant have truancy petitions filed on them. This is a decrease from last year when approximately 20 percent of students who met the definition of truant had a petition filed.

One striking trend in the data relates students from economically disadvantaged families. When we look at poverty as a sub group, students who are on free and reduced lunch make up **44.7 percent of the population**. However, they account for **62.7 percent of truant youth**, and make up **93 percent of all petitions filed**. Therefore, low income students are nearly twice as likely to become involved with the juvenile justice system due to truancy. On average, a truant student misses about 21 days of instruction.

## 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. OSPI provided clearer, more defined guidance on the definition of *unexcused absences*, and more accountability for districts to report the data to OSPI. This encouraged districts to review and redefine attendance policies across the state. The new data analytics that OSPI has released on chronic absenteeism and the intentionality on early intervention, needs assessment and responses to root causes may be contributing factors to not filing truancy petitions.

With only one year of student level data it may be early to draw any conclusions with the

exception of low income. Next year, with the passage of SSHB 1170, a request has been made to the Data Governance group to collect at the student level, whether the truancy petition was stayed and the student and family were served by a community truancy board or other coordinated intervention and whether the stay was lifted and the student went to court. This new data will allow us to see who is gaining access to interventions as well as who ends up in the juvenile justice system.

All of the work being done to address truancy is part of the larger efforts to create a systems approach to a continuum of work on attendance. This work includes a clearer understanding and definition of attendance, positive messaging about the importance of attendance, clearer expectations and policies shared with families and community stakeholders about both the benefits of attendance and the hazards of absenteeism, whether the absence is excused or not.

---

*OSPI provides equal access to all programs and services without discrimination based on sex, race, creed, religion, color, national origin, age, honorably discharged veteran or military status, sexual orientation including gender expression or identity, the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability. Questions and complaints of alleged discrimination should be directed to the Equity and Civil Rights Director at 360-725-6162 or P.O. Box 47200 Olympia, WA 98504-7200.*

*Download this material in PDF at <http://k12.wa.us/LegisGov/Reports.aspx>. This material is available in alternative format upon request. Contact the Resource Center at 888-595-3276, TTY 360-664-3631. Please refer to this document number for quicker service: 17-0048.*



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