

February 2009

WASHINGTON'S TRUANCY LAWS: SCHOOL DISTRICT IMPLEMENTATION AND COSTS*

INTRODUCTION

In 1995, the Washington State Legislature passed a law known as the "Becca Bill."¹ In addition to providing for At-Risk Youth (ARY) and Children in Need of Services (CHINS) petitions,² the Becca Bill changed the compulsory school attendance laws. The bill requires that school districts file truancy petitions in juvenile court when students accumulate a specified number of unexcused absences. Prior to 1995, school districts had considerable discretion regarding the filing of truancy petitions. As a result of the new law, the annual number of petitions increased from 91 in 1994 to over 15,000 in 1997, and has remained around this number since then.

Truancy petitions are part of a larger process that includes mandated school interventions prior to filing and a court process that results from the petitions. The court process can include multiple hearings (initial, review, and contempt). If the student continues to be truant and is found in contempt of court, the law provides for several interventions, including sending the youth to detention.

Each biennium, the state provides funds to reimburse school districts for costs associated with the truancy provisions of the Becca Bill. In the current biennium, this is \$3.6 million, or \$1.8 million per year. Each June, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) divides the allotment by the total number of petitions filed during the school year, and districts receive funds based on the number of filed petitions. The state also provides an allotment to reimburse courts for costs associated with all Becca cases: truancy, ARY, and CHINS. The biennial amount provided to courts is \$16.5 million.

¹ E2SSB 5439, Chapter 312, Laws of 1995

² At-Risk Youth and Children In Need of Services are programs for juveniles who exhibit behaviors that create a "serious risk of harm to the child or others" and are "beyond the control of their parents" (for more details, see RCW 12.32A.030).

* Suggested citation: Tali Klima, Marna Miller, & Corey Nunlist. (2009). *Washington's Truancy Laws: School District Implementation and Costs*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 09-02-2201.

Summary

In 2008, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy was directed by the Legislature to study implementation of the truancy provisions of the "Becca Bill" in school districts and courts in the state. The legislation directed the study to examine costs to school districts and courts, interventions for truant students, district definitions of absences and unexcused absences, and the academic outcomes for youth with a truancy petition.

In this first report, we focus on survey results from 72 percent of the 295 school districts in Washington State. Based on data from the survey, OSPI, and the courts, we conclude:

- Statewide, school districts file truancy petitions for 32 percent of youth who would be eligible for a truancy petition under the law. However, rates of filing truancy petitions vary widely among districts, from zero to 100 percent.
- The factors that best predict higher filing rates are: smaller district size, lower percentages of minority students, and district willingness to file before they are required by law.
- The most common reasons cited by districts for not filing truancy petitions are that youth are nearing their 18th birthday and their attendance has improved.
- Across the state, contempt motions are filed on 18 percent of youth with a truancy case.
- The court process for truancy cases costs school districts \$2.7 million per year. This amount is 1.5 times the \$1.8 million allocated by the state.

Three future reports will present: the costs to courts for truancy cases; a review of literature on interventions for truant youth; and a study of academic outcomes of youth who received a truancy petition.

Recently, concerns have been raised that the state allocation does not adequately fund the truancy activities required of schools and courts. For instance, the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) published a list of 2009 legislative positions and proposals that addressed a lack of Becca funding to schools.³

In response to the financial concerns expressed before the Legislature (for example, in testimony by the Becca Task Force during the 2008 legislative session),⁴ the Washington State Institute for Public Policy was charged with determining the costs to school districts and superior courts to comply with the truancy provisions of the Becca laws (see sidebar, this page). In addition, the Institute was instructed to "analyze local practices" included in these laws. That is, we were asked to investigate differences in implementation across the state including school definitions of absences, use of interventions, and engagement in the truancy petition process.

This report presents survey results regarding school district implementation of truancy provisions of the Becca Bill and estimates of district costs. In the coming months, additional reports will review court expenditures and implementation of truancy proceedings, the literature on truancy and dropout interventions, and academic outcomes of the truancy court process.

BACKGROUND

Washington's truancy laws seek to keep children in school by establishing a specific process that the schools must follow, which includes various interventions. These interventions are outlined briefly in Exhibit 1.

The truancy laws require that schools must notify parents after one unexcused absence. After two unexcused absences, schools are required to respond with a parent conference and individualized interventions for the student and his/her family.⁵

³ <<http://www.wssda.org/wssda/WebForms/en-us/LegislativeAndGovernmentalIssues/legpositions.pdf>>

⁴ Senate Human Services and Corrections Committee hearing on January 31, 2008.

⁵ These interventions include, "where appropriate, adjusting the child's school program or school or course assignment, providing more individualized or remedial instruction, providing appropriate vocational courses or work experience, referring the child to a community truancy board, if available, requiring the child to attend an alternative school or program, or assisting the parent or child to obtain supplementary services that might eliminate or ameliorate the cause or causes for the absence from school" (RCW 28A.225.020).

A district *may* file a truancy petition with the courts after five unexcused absences in a month, but *must* file after seven unexcused absences in one month or 10 unexcused absences in a year. This requirement to file is sometimes referred to as the 7/10 rule.⁶ The district may also file a truancy petition against a parent or both the student and parent.⁷ In such cases, the parent is held responsible for the child's attendance and sanctions may be levied on the parent.

Study Language From the 2008 Legislature

ESHB 2687, Sec. 610 (19)
Chapter 329, Laws of 2008

"\$70,000 of the general fund--state appropriation for fiscal year 2009 is provided solely for the Washington state institute for public policy to analyze local practices regarding RCW 28A.225.020, 38 28A.225.025, and 28A.225.030 [truancy laws].

(a) The institute shall:

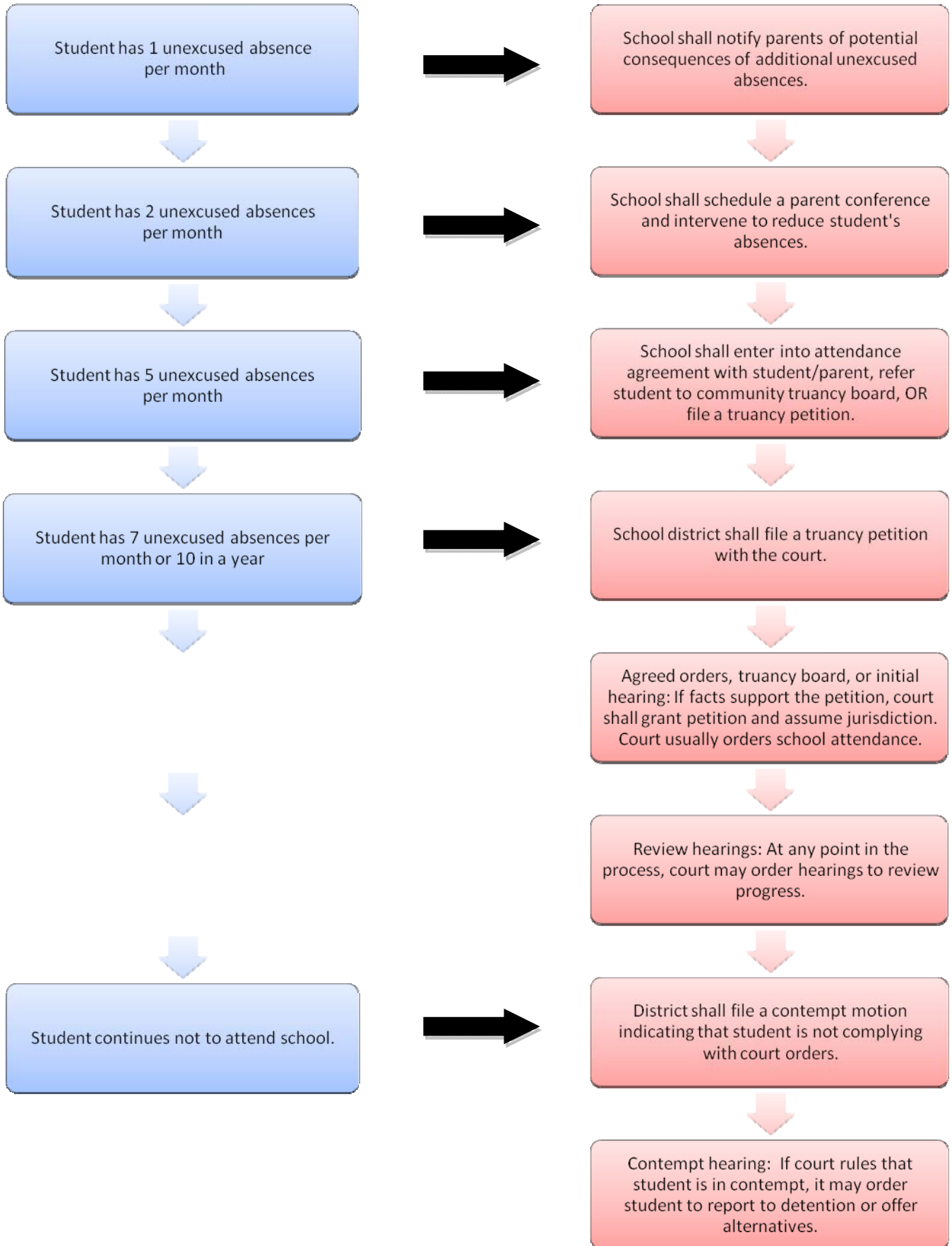
- (i) sample school districts' and superior courts' expenditures in fiscal years 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008 used to comply with [truancy laws];
- (ii) evaluate evidence-based, research-based, promising, and consensus-based truancy intervention and prevention programs and report on local practices that could be designated as such;
- (iii) survey school district truancy petition and intervention programs and services currently available and report on any gaps in accessing services;
- (iv) survey the districts' definitions of "absence" and "unexcused absence";
- (v) survey the courts' frequency of use of contempt proceedings and barriers to the use of proceedings; and
- (vi) analyze the academic impact of RCW 28A.225.030 by sampling school districts' student academic records to ascertain the students' post-petition attendance rate, grade progression, and high school graduation for students where the school district filed a truancy petition in superior court.

(b) In conducting its analysis, the institute may consult with employees and access data systems of the office of the superintendent of public instruction and any educational service district or school district and the administrative office of the courts, each of which shall provide the institute with access to necessary data and administrative systems."

⁶ Although schools are the most common petitioners in truancy cases, according to RCW 28A.225.030 parents may also file a petition against their child. This report addresses the school process and costs to the schools.

⁷ For students enrolled in school who are 6 or 7 years old, the school may only file a petition against the parent (RCW 28A.225.015).

**Exhibit 1
Summary of Washington's
Truancy Petition Process**



After the school district files a petition with the court, the court determines whether the necessary legal conditions⁸ have been met through a hearing or document review. If so, the court assumes jurisdiction, and the student is usually ordered to attend school.⁹ Although the court is legally responsible for the case, court personnel rely on continued monitoring and reporting by the school district about the student's attendance.

One of the intervention mechanisms created by the Becca Bill was the community truancy board. A truancy board addresses attendance problems and diverts students from the court process by involving local community members in resolving barriers to attendance during meetings with the student, family, and school officials. Although the law allows for truancy boards to be operated by either the juvenile courts or school districts, today most truancy boards are managed by the districts. In our survey, 13 percent of districts reported that they operate a truancy board.

A student who continues not to attend school is in contempt of the court order. If a contempt motion is filed (by the district or court), "coercive civil sanctions," including parental fines, child detention, and community service, may ensue. Due to the possibility of secure detention, a lawyer is offered to youth who reach this stage in the process.¹⁰ Many courts offer alternatives to detention, such as community service or electronic home monitoring, or what are known as "purge conditions," that is, requirements on the child that, when fulfilled, release him or her from detention.¹¹

While the truancy laws lay out a step-by-step process for districts and courts to follow when students have unexcused absences, many details are not specified. For instance, districts have discretion over the ways in which they monitor attendance, personnel involved, the number and types of interventions before filing, and the amount

of contact with parents. Likewise, the courts may decide how to structure hearings (number and type), involvement of personnel (e.g., whether a probation counselor provides case management services), and their use of alternatives to hearings, such as the signing of agreed orders or attendance workshops aimed at preventing youth from making a formal appearance in court.

These specifics constitute the "local practices" that the legislature asked us to investigate. In addition, this diversity may affect district costs, because varying resources are expended based on local court requirements and district practices.

METHODS

To answer the research questions, we relied on information collected from a survey of school districts, along with data from two state agencies.

To assess school district practices and policies, a survey was sent to the 295 districts. In designing the survey, we sought input from multiple district representatives. Extensive efforts were made to maximize the number of districts that responded and thereby increase the representative nature of the sample. The response rate by school districts was high: 211 districts (72 percent) responded; these districts serve 89 percent of Washington's students.

The school survey was supplemented by data published by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) on individual districts, such as enrollment, demographics, and employee compensation.

The Institute received electronic records from the Superior Court Management Information System (SCOMIS). We analyzed the records to identify the number and types of hearings in each truancy case for the cohort of youth with a truancy petition in the 2006–07 school year. This information was then used to calculate the average number of hearings per case for each school district.

Reliability of Assessment

The calculations and conclusions drawn in this report are based on information provided by districts in the survey. Because most of the requested information is not systematically collected by most districts (e.g., duration of hearings, personnel involved in each stage of the process, etc.), the answers constitute the best

⁸ RCW 28A.225.035

⁹ The student may also be ordered to undergo drug and alcohol testing (RCW 28A.225.031) or be referred to a community truancy board (RCW 28A.225.035).

¹⁰ An individual has the right to counsel when an adjudication may result in incarceration (*State ex rel. Schmitz v. Knight*, 142 Wn. App. 291, 293 [Wash. Ct. App. 2007]). In a recent Court of Appeals case (*Bellevue School District v. ES*, No. 60528-3-I [Wash. Ct. App. 2009]), it was ruled that youth with a truancy petition are entitled to a lawyer even at the initial hearing. The impact of this ruling on court practices as they pertain to truancy cases is yet to be determined.

¹¹ These court practices were reported in the Juvenile Court Administrators' phone and online surveys. An example of a common purge condition is the student completing an essay about the child's academic decisions or a book report. These assignments serve to ensure that the "key to the cell" is in the child's hands (*In re M.B.*, 101 Wn. App. 425, 3 P.3d 780 [Div. I, 2000]).

estimate from the individual who responded to the survey. The district answers were used directly in our calculations.¹² Since this study assignment was not to conduct an audit, we did not verify reported figures through other means (such as accounting records). Thus, the reliability of total cost estimates depends greatly on the accuracy of districts' own reports. The results are best viewed as good faith estimates. Similarly, findings about truancy definitions and local implementation of the process reflect the understanding of survey respondents, who may or may not have been the districts' experts on all relevant topics.

FINDINGS

In this section, we first describe the variation in petition filing rates across Washington's school districts. Next we analyze the different ways that districts implement the truancy laws to learn if definitions and policies affect filing rates. Last, we present the estimated costs of the truancy petition process to school districts.

Variation in District Filing Rates

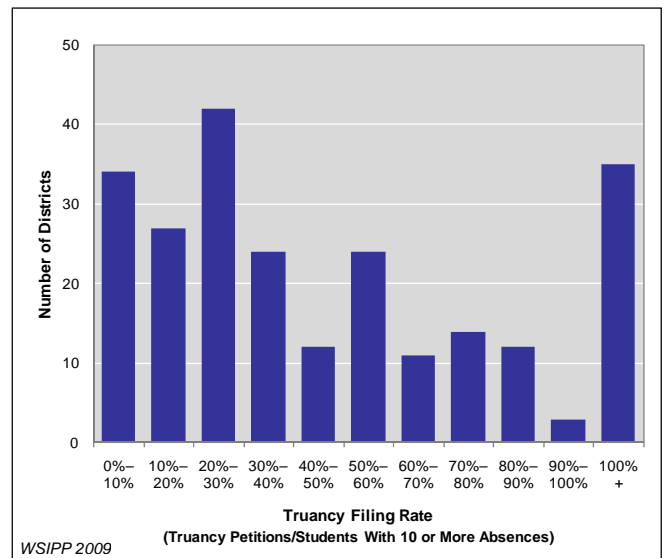
Every year, OSPI publishes a legislative report¹³ based on annual figures provided by the districts that include the number of:

- Students with unexcused absences,
- Students with at least 5 unexcused absences per month,
- Students with at least 10 unexcused absences per year,
- Truancy petitions filed in the previous school year, and
- Petitions carried forward from the year before.¹⁴

We reviewed this report from the 2007–08 school year and calculated a filing rate for each district that had at least one student with 10 or more unexcused absences (238 districts total). The filing rate is *the number of students who had truancy petitions divided by the number of students who were eligible for petitions* (because they had 10 or more unexcused absences during the year).¹⁵

Statewide, the filing rate of school districts was 32 percent. However, Exhibit 2 shows the great variation in rates across districts. Some districts did not file petitions for any eligible students (i.e., 0 percent). On the other extreme, some districts filed on all students with 10 or more unexcused absences.¹⁶

Exhibit 2
Filing Rates by Washington's School Districts
2007–08, N=238



Next, we report on differences in the way districts implement aspects of the process, specifically:

- Definitions of truancy,
- Timing of truancy petition filing,
- Reasons for not filing, and
- Interventions for truancy

We then explore how these four factors may be related to differential filing rates across the state.

¹² In cases where survey responses were extremely different from most other districts, we contacted districts so that they could confirm or modify their answers before we used them in our analyses.

¹³ Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Reports to the Legislature, Truancy/Becca Bill, 2007–08*, available at: <http://www.k12.wa.us/truancy/default.aspx>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ This is probably an overestimation of the filing rate, because we were unable to include in our denominator the number of youth with seven absences in a month, who also qualified for a truancy petition. We did not use the data for students with five unexcused absences, because by law schools do not have to file on these students.

¹⁶ See Table A4.1 in appendix for complete list of filing rates by district.

Variation in Implementation of the Truancy Process

Definitions of Truancy

Washington law defines an unexcused absence as the student's failure "to attend the majority of hours or periods in an average school day or [failure] to comply with a more restrictive school district policy, and [failure] to meet the school district's policy for excused absences."¹⁷ Although the law specifies a minimum criterion for the definition of an unexcused absence, it also allows for the use of more restrictive district definitions. This discretion introduces variability into the identification of chronically truant students throughout the state. Thus, we asked districts how they define truancy.

Exhibit 3 presents district definitions from the most restrictive (late arrival) to the least restrictive (entire day absence). Almost two-thirds of districts (63 percent) had more restrictive definitions of truancy (i.e., late arrival, absence from class) than the minimum in the law.

Exhibit 3
District Definitions of Truancy
N=211

Definitions	Percentage of districts with policy	Districts with policies at least this restrictive
Unexcused late arrival	32%	32%
Unexcused absence from class	31%	63%
Unexcused absence for majority of day	28%	91%
Unexcused absence for entire day	6%	97%
Other definitions	3%	100%

District representatives were asked whether the definitions they reported (shown in Exhibit 3) were used district-wide or whether individual schools have discretion in this matter. Based on responses of 208 districts, we found:

- 39 percent provided discretion to individual schools within their district
- 61 percent had district-wide policies

To the extent that some districts allowed individual schools more independence in establishing their attendance policies, this study may not have fully captured all local variations in definitions and their potential impact on filing rates.

Filing the Truancy Petition

As explained earlier, the Becca Bill provides that school districts *shall* file a truancy petition after seven unexcused absences per month (or ten unexcused absences per year), but *may* also file after five unexcused absences.¹⁸ We asked districts at what point they file a petition. Districts' responses are presented in Exhibit 4.

Exhibit 4
When Districts Generally File Truancy Petitions
N=195

	Number of districts	Percentage of districts
After 5 unexcused absences per month	72	37%
After 7 unexcused absences per month or 10 in a year (7/10 rule)	117	60%
Other ¹⁹	6	3%

A majority of districts indicated that they make decisions based on the 7/10 rule as outlined in the law. A sizable minority (37 percent) reported that they generally file a truancy petition after a student has five unexcused absences in a month. This willingness to file before required by law is significantly related to higher district filing rates (see analysis below).

¹⁸ RCW 28A.225.030

¹⁹ Responses entered under "Other" indicate that a greater number of unexcused absences than those defined in the 7/10 rule were used as the threshold for filing.

¹⁷ RCW 28A.225.020

Reasons Districts May Not File Truancy Petitions

As shown earlier, many districts do not file truancy petitions for all eligible students. In this section, we examine why districts choose not to file petitions on students who meet the legal absence requirements. This topic was investigated via several types of questions.

First, in a multiple-choice question, district representatives were asked to indicate the main reasons why they might not file a truancy petition for a child who meets the absence requirements. Exhibit 5 shows districts' responses to the choices presented. Respondents could choose more than one answer; therefore, the percentages total more than 100 percent.

Exhibit 5
Reasons Districts Indicated They
Might Not File a Truancy Petition
N=182

	Number of districts	Percentage of districts
Student will reach age 18 during truancy process	114	63%
Student has resumed regular attendance	85	47%
Process does not improve student attendance	41	23%
Preference for handling truancy outside of court	36	20%
Lack of funds or other resources	33	18%
Process increases difficulty of collaboration with student/family	23	13%
School has not shown necessary attempts to intervene ²⁰	19	10%
Many truancy petitions reflect poorly on the district	3	2%
Other ²¹	36	20%

²⁰ This choice relates to the statute, which states the petitioner (school district) must show they have attempted to intervene to improve the student's attendance before filing a petition with the court.

²¹ A breakdown of other reasons for not filing a truancy petition is provided in Exhibit A2.3 of the appendix.

The reasons most commonly cited for not filing a petition were that the student would soon turn 18 and no longer be subject to truancy laws, or, the student's attendance had improved. Districts were less likely to cite characteristics of the system—such as perceptions that the truancy process does not help students, lack of school resources, preference for managing truancy outside of court, and perceptions regarding the interference of the process in working with families—as reasons for not filing.

An open-ended question was included in which respondents could list factors that made it least likely a truancy petition would be filed for a student who had met the unexcused absence requirement. Responses to this question were grouped into categories.²²

Once again, the most commonly cited factors in a district's decision not to file a truancy petition were students' age and improved attendance (or attendance intervention underway). Districts cited other reasons listed in Exhibit 5 less frequently and added the following factors:

- Excusable factors were revealed (e.g., mental or physical health problems, special family circumstances: 20 percent)
- Student had an alternate educational plan (e.g., alternative or GED program, dropped out: 6 percent)
- Family was uncooperative or unreachable (6 percent)
- Student was already involved with law enforcement (4 percent)

Because the adequacy of state funding for the court process has been part of legislative discussions²³ about the truancy provisions of the Becca laws, we anticipated that many districts would cite funding limitations among their reasons not to file. Instead, only a minority of districts indicated that funding or other resource concerns influenced their filing decisions.

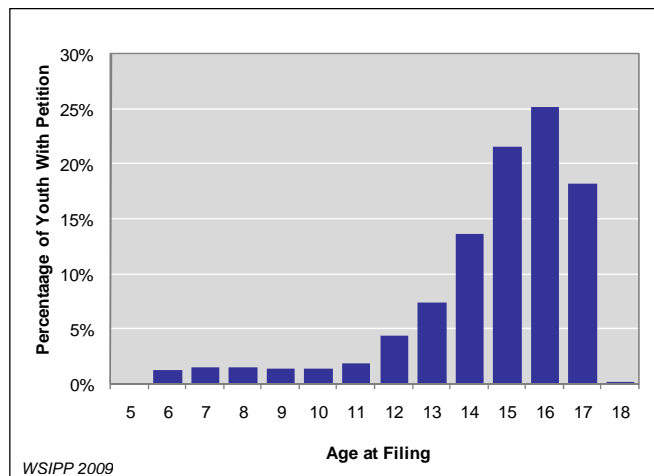
²² Two researchers classified the responses and reached agreement through a collaborative coding procedure.

²³ For example, Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA), op. cit., and Senate Human Services and Corrections Committee hearing on January 31, 2008, op. cit.

Age of Students

The majority of districts indicated they might not file a truancy petition if the youth was nearly 18 years old. Analysis of SCOMIS truancy records is consistent with this report. Exhibit 6 shows that petitions were fairly uncommon before the age of 10, peaked at ages 15 to 16, and then declined for students aged 17. There were very few petitions for students who reached age 18.

Exhibit 6
Truancy Petitions Filed by Age of Student
2006–07
(N=16,158 students)



Which District-Level Factors Influence Filing Rates?

To answer this question, we used a statistical model to determine if district characteristics and policies explain the differences among districts' filing rates. Specifically, we examined whether district demographics (size, percentage minority, percentage free or reduced price meals), definitions of truancy, timing of filing, reasons for not filing, and district interventions specifically for truant youth were associated with petition filing rates.

We found that rates of filing were significantly related to:

- District size. Smaller districts tended to have higher filing rates.
- Percentage minority. Districts with higher percentages of minority students tended to have lower filing rates.
- Filing petitions after five (rather than seven) unexcused absences in a month. Districts that reported this practice tended to have higher filing rates.

We also found some evidence that higher filing rates might be associated with special programs for at-risk students, although this effect does not rise to the same level of significance as the other three factors. These programs include referral to alternative schools, special programs for truant youth, and community truancy boards.

Filing a petition prior to the legal requirement and offering additional interventions for truant youth might be indicative of a larger district philosophy that espouses addressing truancy through various means. Thus, districts that are willing to intervene early and expend additional school resources will be more likely to file truancy petitions for their students. It is interesting that other characteristics that differ among districts, such as definitions of truancy and reported reasons for not filing, were not significantly related to filing rates.

A full description of this analysis is contained in the technical appendix.

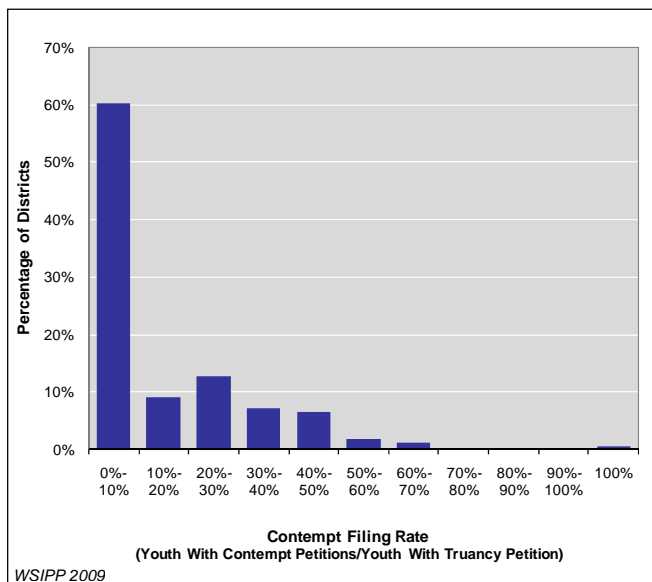
The Contempt Process

A contempt motion is filed only if a student continues to be truant after the initial court finding and a court order to attend school. If a child continues to be truant, he or she is considered in contempt of court and sanctions (including limited detention) may be levied.

Statewide, 18 percent of youth with a truancy petition have at least one subsequent contempt motion filed. Exhibit 7 shows how contempt filing rates vary across school districts. There is much less variation in rates of contempt filing among districts than rates of initial petition filing. In over half of the districts, contempt petitions are filed on fewer than 10 percent of youth.

Caution must be used when interpreting contempt rates because, unlike petition filing rates, no information is available on the number of youth who continue to be truant after a petition is filed (or, the number of youth who are "eligible" for a contempt motion). Thus, it is unclear if a low contempt rate signifies the success of an intervention (carried out by the court or the school) or a lack of district follow-through in the court process.

Exhibit 7
Contempt Filings as Percentage of
Truancy Petitions²⁴
(N=164)



The Legislature specifically directed the Institute to identify barriers to contempt proceedings in the courts. Because most courts depend on districts to report the child's attendance in order to initiate the contempt process, we asked districts about the ways they follow up on youth with truancy cases.

- 63 percent of districts reported they submit attendance reports to the court for youth with open truancy cases.
- 81 percent of districts reported they file contempt motions if the student continues to have unexcused absences.²⁵

Districts were also asked to report on the number of additional unexcused absences students typically accumulate before a contempt motion is filed. Sixty-nine percent reported a motion is filed after one to three additional absences, and 90 percent reported a motion is filed between one and five absences. Thus, it appears that most districts continue monitoring attendance and file contempt motions. However, some districts do not report back to the court on student attendance, and a smaller percentage do not file contempt motions.

²⁴ Based on information from the 164 school districts in the survey that had filed at least one truancy petition and had at least one student with ten or more absences in a year.

²⁵ In some counties, the courts may take responsibility for filing the contempt motion rather than the schools.

We asked districts why they might *not* file a contempt motion for a child who continued to exhibit truant behavior after a petition. Responses were very similar to reasons for not filing a petition, shown in Exhibit 5.²⁶ That is, a student's age and resumption of regular attendance were the most frequently cited factors.

Our multivariate analysis indicates that only one factor—district size—influenced rates of contempt filing.²⁷ Larger districts were more likely to file contempt motions. Thus, while larger districts tended to have lower rates of filing initial petitions, they were more likely to file contempt motions once a truancy case was opened.

School District Expenditures

In this section, we focus on two aspects of school district costs for truancy cases. First, we consider costs incurred for actions the schools must take prior to filing a truancy petition: notifying parents and holding conferences with parents and students. Later, we estimate the costs associated with filing a truancy petition and subsequent involvement with the court.

School Responsibilities and Requirements Prior to Filing Truancy Petitions: "Overhead" Costs

Before truancy petitions are filed, schools engage in various tasks that constitute large-scale monitoring of student attendance and early intervention to improve attendance, thereby preventing the need for a petition. The cost of these activities may be characterized as overhead for the subsequent truancy petition process. As shown in Exhibit 1, the law specifies that schools must notify parents after a student has one unexcused absence per month, and schools must convene an in-person conference with the parents and student after two unexcused absences in a month.²⁸

Cost estimates of these two school responsibilities are shown in Exhibit 8. Because these activities address truancy at its early stages, students who receive these two interventions include not only those who eventually have a truancy petition but many others as well. Hence, the calculations are shown for the total student enrollment, rather than just students with petitions.

²⁶ The responses to this question about filing contempt motions are provided in Exhibit A2.5 in the appendix.

²⁷ See appendix for results of statistical analysis.

²⁸ RCW 28A.225.020

Exhibit 8
District “Overhead” Costs of Truancy²⁹

	Total	Average number per enrolled student	Average cost per enrolled student
Parent notifications	2,867,767	2.78	\$1.39
Parent conferences	76,028	.07	\$3.88

The annual statewide estimates of these costs to districts are substantial. We estimate that parent notifications cost \$1.4 million and parent conferences cost \$4 million. However, these costs cannot be fully attributed to the Becca Bill, as the requirements for notification, conferences, and interventions (with the exception of community truancy boards) were in place prior to enactment of the law in 1995. These requirements were included in the state’s previous mandatory attendance laws and may be better understood as part of the daily work of schools aimed at ensuring student success.

Costs of Filings and Hearings

The state reimburses school districts for truancy petitions by disbursing funds through OSPI. During the last school year, OSPI had a statewide truancy allocation of \$1.8 million. In this section, we describe our approach to estimating costs. We also provide our estimate of what districts spend to comply with the truancy provisions of the Becca Bill and compare the statewide total to the state allocation.

District costs associated with truancy petitions were calculated by combining data from three sources:

- Survey data of district-estimated personnel time associated with filings and hearings.
- Institute analysis of superior court records of number and types of hearings by school district.
- District-level data from OSPI on the average personnel compensation costs and the most recent (2007–08 academic year) petition counts.

²⁹ A full explanation of our method for calculating these costs is provided in the appendix.

For each step in the court process, we used estimates of time and personnel required as reported by the districts. For example, if a district indicated that a school administrator spent one hour at an initial hearing for every case, the cost per hearing was estimated as one hour multiplied by the average hourly wage of school administrators in that district.³⁰ Total costs were calculated by multiplying each district’s cost per hearing by its average number of initial hearings per case, and then multiplying by the total number of cases filed by the district in 2007–08.

After a district decides to file a truancy petition, the following steps can take place:

- Filing a petition: administrative tasks associated with the initial filing (e.g., contacts with school personnel and family, paperwork preparation, and filing procedures with court);
- Initial hearing (also known as a fact-finding hearing in some courts);
- Review hearings;
- Filing a contempt motion: administrative tasks associated with filing for contempt of court when a student continues to be truant following court orders to attend; and
- Contempt hearings.

Additional court costs may be incurred by the schools; for instance, the cost of delivering notice to students and parents for the initial and contempt filings, as well as personnel time spent on agreed orders, often negotiated in lieu of an initial court hearing. On the whole, however, the five steps listed above likely constitute a significant portion of the costs to file a petition and participate in the subsequent court process.³¹

³⁰ Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, School Apportionment and Financial Services, District Personnel Summary Reports, available at: <<http://www.k12.wa.us/safs/PUB/PER/0708/ps.asp>>

³¹ In 2000, OSPI conducted an assessment of district costs for truancy petitions which included additional steps (unpublished manuscript); however, due to different methodology and assumptions from the current study, it is difficult to compare the two estimates. OSPI estimated that the process costs approximately \$361 per case.

Exhibit 9 presents the cost of the court process to districts for each of the five steps listed in Column 1. Specifically, Column 2 represents the weighted average cost of each step in the process (for instance, the cost of an initial hearing or filing a contempt motion). This column shows, for example, that it costs more to file the initial petition than the contempt filing. Note also that, on average, contempt hearings cost more than initial hearings. The greater expense is associated with longer average hearings.

Column 3 shows the average number of filings and hearings per case in Washington. Because, by definition, a truancy case is opened by the filing of a petition, the number of petitions per case is always one. However, not all youth experience the remaining steps of the process, which is reflected in average numbers that are less than one. For example, if a student stipulates to his/her truancy through agreed order, he/she may not attend an initial hearing. If a student with an initial hearing resumes attendance, there is no need for review or contempt hearings. In many counties, contempt cases are rare: only students with the most severe attendance problems have contempt filings and are required to attend contempt hearings.

Finally, column 4 displays the average costs incurred *per case* in the state. These figures take into account the fact that not every child underwent the entire judicial process (as explained above); thus, the cost per step per case was lower than the cost of each step. The total expenses of an average truancy case in Washington were \$183.

Exhibit 9
Washington State School District Costs for Steps in the Truancy Petition Process

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Steps in truancy process	Average cost	Average number per truancy case ³²	Average cost per case
Filing a petition	\$92.68	1.00	\$92.68
Initial hearing	\$47.47	0.41	\$19.46
Review hearing	\$48.93	0.58	\$28.38
Filing a contempt motion	\$50.95	0.37	\$18.85
Contempt hearing	\$63.26	0.37	\$23.41
Total			\$182.78

Summary of District Costs for Court Process

We calculated the total statewide expenditure for districts by multiplying the average cost per case by the number of cases filed in the school year (14,838). For the academic year 2007–08, we estimated that school districts spent \$2.7 million on truancy court cases. In the same year, the state allotted \$1.8 million for truancy petitions (\$3.6 million for the biennium). Thus, statewide, districts were reimbursed for 67 percent of their costs.

The Legislature also directed the Institute to determine district costs in 2005, 2006, and 2007. To arrive at costs for these years, we assumed that personnel and time requirements remained stable across these years,³³ and thus the district cost per case was the same. We then calculated statewide truancy costs for districts based on numbers of petitions filed each year and adjusted for inflation. Estimates of costs for these years are displayed in Exhibit 10. During these years, the annual state allocation was \$1.5 million,³⁴ indicating that districts were reimbursed for 65, 57, and 54 percent of their costs for 2005, 2006, and 2007, respectively.

³² These figures were calculated from our analysis of statewide court records from the 2006–07 school year.

³³ In the survey, the majority of districts indicated that during the previous three school years they had not changed their truancy-related policies or programs; only 18 percent of districts reported any kind of change. Such changes may have influenced expenditures for truancy cases.

³⁴ In 2007–08, the state allocation was increased by an additional \$300,000 per year.

Exhibit 10
Statewide School District Costs for Truancy Cases
In Millions of Dollars, 2004–08

School year	Truancy petitions filed	Cost per school year	State allotment	Percentage of costs covered by allotment
2004–05	13,982	\$2.3	\$1.5	65%
2005–06	15,637	\$2.6	\$1.5	57%
2006–07	16,190	\$2.8	\$1.5	54%
2007–08	14,838	\$2.7	\$1.8	67%

CONCLUSIONS

We estimate that statewide school districts spend an average of \$183 per truancy case. In school year 2007–08, districts spent an estimated \$2.7 million for personnel to file petitions and contempt motions and to attend hearings. In that same year, the state allotted OSPI \$1.8 million to reimburse districts. Thus, the state allotment did not cover \$900,000 of actual district costs.

Based on information from OSPI, in 2007–08 districts filed petitions for 32 percent of students for whom the law indicates a petition should be filed. Although the statewide average is relatively low, district filing rates vary widely (from 0 to over 100 percent).

Differences in filing rates are best explained by district size. In general, small districts and districts with lower percentages of minority students have higher filing rates. Higher filing rates are also associated with districts that file truancy petitions after five unexcused absences in a month, when the law indicates they *may* file, rather than waiting for the seven absences in a month or ten in year when the law says they *must* file.

There is some evidence that higher filing rates may also be associated with special programs for truant students, although this effect does not rise to the same level of significance as the other three factors.

Thus, filing rates may be the result of district philosophies that entail tackling truancy through various means; districts that are willing to intervene

early and expend additional school resources will be more likely to file truancy petitions for their students.

FUTURE REPORTS ON TRUANCY

This report is the first in a series of publications addressing truancy questions posed by the Legislature. In the coming months, we will produce three additional reports:

- 1) Costs related to truancy cases and diversity of implementation.
- 2) Research review of programs for truant youth and youth at risk of dropping out of school.
- 3) Outcomes of truant youth with prior truancy petitions.

TECHNICAL APPENDIX

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A1. Methods

A1.1 Data Sources. This study used data from four sources:

- 1) A survey of Washington school districts.
- 2) Superior Court Management Information System (SCOMIS). The Administrative Office of the Courts provided the Institute with electronic data, including docket records, for all truancy cases. Institute analysis identified the hearings by type:
 - Initial petition hearings
 - Review hearings
 - Contempt hearings

In addition, we identified arrests based on docket codes indicating “Return on bench warrant.”

For each school district, we focused on truancy petitions filed during the 2006–07 school year. This allowed us at least one year of follow-up time for calculations of average numbers of hearings in cases that were carried forward into the following school year (2007–08).

- 3) Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, School Apportionment and Financial Services, District Personnel Summary Reports available at: <http://www.k12.wa.us/safs/PUB/PER/0708/ps.asp>

This set of reports provides information on compensation for each of Washington’s school districts by category of personnel. The information in these reports was used to calculate staff costs for steps involved in truancy cases.

- 4) Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Reports to the Legislature, Truancy Becca Bill, 2007–08, available at: <http://www.k12.wa.us/truancy/default.aspx>

For each school district, this report includes:

- Students with unexcused absences,
- Students with at least five unexcused absences per month,
- Students with at least ten unexcused absences per year,
- Truancy petitions filed in the previous school year, and
- Petitions carried forward from the year before.

A1.2 Survey of School Districts. In designing this survey, we consulted with truancy specialists in several of Washington’s school districts. The truancy specialists advised us on procedures, and five of them tested the survey before it was distributed.

- 1) Survey questions. The survey questions were arranged in four sections:
 - a. School district definitions. We asked how districts define absence, unexcused absence, excused absence, and truancy.
 - b. Time, effort, and expenditures. This section asked about resources required by districts to comply with compulsory attendance laws. The activities we inquired about were:
 - Notification of parents
 - Parent conferences
 - Filing truancy petitions
 - Community truancy boards
 - Initial petition hearings
 - Filing contempt motions
 - Contempt hearings

For each of these activities, we asked about the time required and personnel involved. Since parent notifications and conferences are not recorded elsewhere, the number of each of these activities was also reported in the survey.

Finally, we inquired about additional expenses districts may have encountered specifically related to truancy cases, for instance, intervention programs or staff development.

- c. Truancy petitions and contempt filings. In this section, we asked about the ways decisions are made regarding filings, specifically, who identifies truant youth, who makes the decision to file a truancy petition, and whether the district generally files after five petitions in a month or is guided by the 7/10 rule (seven unexcused absences in a month or ten in a year). We asked districts whether they routinely provide the courts with attendance information for students with petitions, whether they file contempt motions, and, if so, after how many unexcused absences. This section also included questions about reasons districts might NOT file truancy petitions and contempt motions.
 - d. Truancy reduction programs. In this section, districts were asked whether they refer truant students to alternative school programs. We also asked about any programs in the district high school that are designed specifically for truant students and students at risk of dropping out of school; in addition, we inquired if any of these interventions are evidence-based. Information from this portion of the survey will be available in an upcoming report.
- 2) Administering the survey. The survey was prepared in two formats: paper and web-based. We used a phased notification and reminder procedure in order to increase the response rate. A week before the survey, a notification letter was sent to all school district superintendents, advising them about the survey and requesting their participation. Next, a letter was sent with the paper survey attached. This letter also explained that districts could complete the survey online and provided instructions for accessing the website. Districts that did not respond to the survey within two weeks were sent an email reminder. Districts without an email address were mailed a letter and another copy of the survey. Finally, to increase the survey response rate, phone calls were made to several larger districts that had expressed an interest in completing the survey but had not done so.

A1.3 Estimating Costs. We calculated the costs by combining information from the survey, OSPI Personnel Summary Reports,³⁵ and counts of petitions and hearings from analyzed court data.

- 1) Costs related to parent notifications and conferences. Each district in the sample reported the numbers of notifications and conferences that took place last school

year. Because these districts represent approximately three-fourths of Washington's students, we used their figures to project a total for the entire state. Note that these costs were calculated per enrolled student, not per student with a truancy petition, because many more students receive parent notifications and conferences than just those with a petition.

The cost of parent notifications was calculated by multiplying the annual number of parent notifications reported by each district by \$0.50, which is an estimate of the cost for each possible method of notification (i.e., mailed letter, phone call by staff, or automated call), and dividing by the number of enrolled students in the district. We were unable to distinguish among costs for different methods of notification or to ascertain the number of notifications made with each method for districts that reported multiple methods.

The cost of parent conferences was computed by multiplying the annual number of conferences by the average amount of time per conference by the compensation for staff present at each conference and dividing by the number of enrolled students per district. Districts were allowed to report more than one type of staff member at the conferences (e.g., district administrator, school administrator, certified instructor or ESA, classified staff); however, after reviewing the data and discussing responses with several districts, it came to our attention that some districts may have reported all staff who *could* be present at conferences, rather than those who were typically present. In order not to overestimate these districts' costs, we computed the average costs for all staff reported by any given district and allowed for two such "average" staff members.

- 2) Costs related to truancy petitions. Based on discussions with courts and school districts, five key steps were identified that are part of the court process and require school district resources. These activities are:
 1. Filing truancy petitions
 2. Attending initial petition hearings
 3. Attending review hearings
 4. Filing contempt motions
 5. Attending contempt hearings

Cost per step: For each of these steps, we asked which personnel were involved and the time required to complete the task. For court hearings, we requested that districts include travel time to and from the court and average wait time in court. For the current cost analysis, we assumed that review hearings last as long and require the same school/district staff as the initial petition hearing.

The time required per step was multiplied by the district-level compensation (wages and benefits) for the personnel involved to arrive at a cost per step for every district.

Because not every case involves all five steps, the cost per case is not a simple summation of all of the step costs. Instead, it requires the calculation of the average frequency of each step per case. State court data were analyzed to arrive at the average numbers of filings and hearings per case.

³⁵ Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Final School District Personnel Summary Reports, 2007–08 School Year*, available at: <<http://www.k12.wa.us/safs/PUB/PER/0708/ps.asp>>.

The average cost per step was multiplied by the average frequency of that step per case. For example, we estimated a cost of \$47.47 per initial hearing. Analysis of court data indicated that there are 0.41 such hearings per case in Washington. Thus, we calculated that the average cost of initial hearings per case is:

$$\$47.47 \times 0.41 = \$19.46 \text{ per case}$$

We repeated this calculation for each step in the truancy court process and summed these costs for an estimate of the average *total* cost per truancy case.

Importantly, for this analysis, we assumed that **each** contempt hearing was associated with the filing of a motion by the school district. However, in some courts, the district files only the first contempt motion and any subsequent motions are generated by the court. Exhibit 9 in the main body of the report shows the average cost per case for filing contempt motions to be \$18.85. That cost is an upper limit, or the highest possible estimate. If we assume that all districts file only once per case, the estimate is reduced to \$9.28 per case, which is the lower limit.

Statewide costs: To estimate the cost of truancy cases to all districts in Washington, we multiplied the average total cost per case (derived above) by the number of petitions filed in 2007–08 and multiplied by two to estimate statewide costs for a biennium.

A2. Survey Responses

We received responses from 211 school districts, representing 89 percent of students statewide. The following exhibit lists characteristics of all districts across the state and compares them to districts responding to the survey. Proportionately fewer districts serving only grades K-8 responded to the survey.

Exhibit A2.1

Comparison of All Washington School Districts With Districts Responding to the Survey

	All School Districts (N=295)	Districts Responding (N=211)	Percentage Responding
Total Enrollment	1,031,175	913,201	89%
K–8 only (no high school)	48	30	63%

Exhibit A2.2 provides information on school district demographics across the state and among the schools responding to the survey. It includes the percentage of students in the district who were chronically truant (students with ten or more absences in a year) and the truancy petition filing rate (the number of petitions filed as a percentage of all youth with ten or more absences). The exhibit demonstrates the similarity between all districts in the state and districts that responded to the survey, suggesting that the sample is representative of Washington’s districts.

Exhibit A2.2

Comparison of Student Characteristics and Truancy in All School Districts and Districts Responding to Survey

Characteristics	All School Districts (N=295)	Districts Responding to Survey (N=211)
Free/Reduced Meals	43%	42%
Special Education	12%	12%
Racial/Ethnic Minority	27%	28%
Bilingual/ESL	6%	6%
Chronically Truant	4%	5%
Filing Rate	32%	32%

A2.1 Filing Truancy Petitions. In the body of the report, we provide information on the reasons districts indicated they would not file a truancy petition (see Exhibit 5). Thirty-six districts volunteered additional reasons why they might not file truancy petitions. They are listed in Exhibit A2.3, below.

Exhibit A2.3

Other Reasons District Might Not File A Truancy Petition (N=36)

Other Reasons	Number of Districts
Excusable factors such as illness	9
Student is transferring (to another educational program) or is unreachable	6
Student is involved in another system (e.g., juvenile justice, disciplinary system at school, child protective services)	6
Truancy not a problem for this district	6
Student engaged in intervention	4
Other	5

After districts listed all reasons for not filing truancy petitions, we asked them what would make it **least likely** that they would file a petition for a chronically truant student. The responses from this open-ended question are shown in Exhibit A2.4. District responses could be classified into more than one category; therefore, responses total more than 100 percent.

Exhibit A2.4
Reasons That Would Make it Least Likely a District Would File a Truancy Petition
(N=171)

Reasons	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Student demonstrates school improvement or intervention taking place	46	27%
Student reaches age 18 during process	44	26%
Excusable factors were revealed	35	20%
Lack of school resources	13	8%
Student has alternate educational plan ³⁶	11	6%
Court process is ineffective	11	6%
District follows the law ³⁷	11	6%
Student/family are uncooperative or unable to be reached	10	6%
Law enforcement is already involved with student	6	4%
Miscellaneous	15	9%

A2.2 Filing Contempt Motions. Across the state, we find that districts file contempt motions for 18 percent of youth with a truancy petition. Exhibit A2.5 presents district responses to the question of why districts might not file **contempt** motions with the court.

Exhibit A2.5
Reasons District Might NOT File a Contempt Motion for a Student Who Has Truancy-Related Court Orders But Continues to Have Unexcused Absences
(N=156)

Reasons	Number of Districts	Percentage of Districts
Student will be 18 years old by contempt hearing	97	62%
Student has resumed regular attendance	71	46%
Process does not improve school attendance/achievement	26	17%
Lack of funds or other resources	23	15%
Preference for handling outside of court	16	10%
School has not shown necessary efforts to intervene	12	8%
Process increases difficulty of collaborating with family	11	7%
Other	34	22%

³⁶ These include transferring to another school, attending an alternative school or GED program, or formal withdrawal of enrollment (i.e., the student has decided to drop out).

³⁷ Districts whose comments were classified in this category indicated that their decision to file depends on the requirements of the Becca Bill.

The 34 districts indicating other reasons for not filing listed the following reasons shown in Exhibit A2.6.

Exhibit A2.6
Other Reasons Indicated for Not Filing a Contempt Motion
(N=34)

Other Reasons	Number of Districts
Student has moved or is unreachable	7
District attempting other interventions	6
Excusable factors revealed	5
Juvenile court makes decision to file	5
Truancy not a problem for this district	5
Court process is ineffective	3
Other	3

A3. Regression Analyses

Many factors may combine to influence local filing practices in the school districts. These factors may interact with each other. Regression analysis allows us to combine all known district characteristics, including their responses to survey questions, to determine which factors exert significant influence on filing rates, accounting for other factors known about the districts.

A3.1 Factors influencing the filing of truancy petitions.

Each district's rate of filing truancy petitions ("filing rate") was calculated as the number of petitions out of the number of students with ten or more unexcused absences, based on the OSPI truancy report.³⁸ This is an overestimate of filing rates, because districts are also required to file petitions if students accumulate seven or more unexcused absences in a month; however, this information is not included in the OSPI report.

Because the filing rates for truancy petitions vary widely, we categorized districts into high or low filers based on the following definitions:

- "High filing" districts: Those filing petitions for at least 50 percent of eligible youth. Forty percent of districts fell into this category.
- "Low filing" districts: Those filing petitions for fewer than 50 percent of eligible students. Sixty percent of districts fell into this category.

³⁸ Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Reports to the Legislature, Truancy Becca Bill, 2007-08, op. cit.

Predictor variables included in the model.

In order to determine the factors influencing filing rates, we examined multiple variables:

- 1) District demographics (OSPI):³⁹
 - Percentage minority students
 - Percentage receiving free or reduced price meals
 - Percentage bilingual
 - District size. We coded this variable based on district enrollment. Districts with fewer than 1,000 students were coded 1; districts with 1,001 to 5,000 were coded 2; and district with 5,001 or more were coded 3.
- 2) Urban. We used the Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) designations from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. These designations represent a continuum from central city urban to rural. For this analysis, we collapsed the ten RUCA classifications down to four and assigned an urban code for each district based on zip code. The final coding was as follows: 1 for urban (central cities of at least 50,000 people), 2 for large towns (10,000 to 49,999 people), 3 for small towns (2,500 to 9,999 people), and 4 for rural (less than 2,500).
- 3) District policies and practices (survey responses). All responses were coded categorically: if a respondent chose an answer, the response was coded 1; if they did not choose a response, the variable was coded 0. If respondents skipped the question altogether, then the response was coded as missing.
 - Reasons not to file a truancy petition
 - Youth will turn 18
 - Insufficient school resources
 - Hinders collaboration with student and family
 - Court process does not improve attendance
 - Too many petitions reflect badly on district
 - Prefer to handle truancy outside of court
 - Student attendance has improved
 - School has not shown efforts to intervene
 - Interventions: Schools refer youth to alternative programs, have special truancy or dropout prevention programs, or operate a community truancy board.
 - Schools file truancy petitions after the fifth unexcused absence in a month (which is *not* required by law).

We found that there were interactions between some of the variables. For example, the percentage of bilingual students in a district was highly predictive of districts having interventions.⁴⁰ (In a logistic regression, AUC=0.738.) For the analysis, we eliminated percentage bilingual and retained interventions.

Likewise, four of the reasons not to file were significantly correlated with each other (p-values all less than 0.01), and all seemed to indicate that the districts preferred to avoid court involvement:

- Hinders collaboration with student and family
- Court process does not improve attendance
- Too many petitions reflect badly on district
- Prefer to handle truancy outside of court

Thus, we created a composite variable we call “avoidance of court” that was coded as 1 if the district endorsed any one of these reasons and coded 0 if none of them were mentioned.

How to read exhibits showing logistic regression results.

Exhibit A3.1 provides information on the likelihood of a high filing rate for truancy petitions. Reading left to right, the exhibit first shows the average values and standard deviations for the independent variables used in the analysis. The two right-hand columns provide the output from the logistic regression: the standardized parameter estimate and p-value for each characteristic used in the model. The standardized estimate indicates the size and direction of the effect. For example, the variable with the largest absolute value is district size, indicating this variable is the best predictor of high filing rate. The estimate is negative, indicating that larger districts are less likely to have high filing rates. The p-value is a measure of statistical significance; that is, the likelihood that we would observe this value if, in fact, there was not a relationship between the variable and outcome (i.e., if the null hypothesis was true). P-values range from zero to one. In general, statisticians consider an effect significant if the p-value is 0.05 or less. In the case of the variable, district size, the p-value is 0.009, indicating that this effect is highly significant.

We also list the statistic, Area Under the Receiver Operating Characteristic (AUC). This statistic provides a measure of how well the model predicts an outcome. AUC can vary between 0 and 1. A value of 0.5 or less indicates the model does not predict the outcome. Values of 0.7 or greater would indicate the model does well in predicting the outcome.

³⁹ Data downloaded from the OSPI Report Card, Demographic Information by District, for 2008, available at: <http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/DataDownload.aspx>.

⁴⁰ In a logistic regression predicting interventions as a function of percent bilingual, AUC=0.738. See the last paragraph on this page for an explanation of interpreting AUC.

Exhibit A3.1
Truancy Petitions
Results of Logistic Regression Model Predicting High Filing Rates
AUC=0.788 (N=150)

Characteristics used in model	District Statistics		Regression Results	
	Average	Std Dev	Standardized Estimate	P-value
District Demographics				
Percent minority	28.3	21.7	-0.307	0.045
Percent with free or reduced price meals	41.9	19.6	0.172	0.275
District size (1=small to 3=large)	2.01	0.80	-0.434	0.009
Urban code (1=urban to 4=rural)	2.02	1.17	0.019	0.895
School District Policies and Practices				
Reasons not to file petition				
Youth will turn 18	0.70	0.46	0.135	0.235
Insufficient resources	0.19	0.39	-0.027	0.827
Avoidance of court	0.36	0.48	-0.073	0.536
Student attendance has improved	0.47	0.50	0.083	0.469
School has not shown efforts to intervene	0.12	0.32	0.176	0.148
Interventions ^s	0.74	0.44	0.205	0.085
File truancy petition after 5th unexcused absence in a month	0.35	0.48	0.386	0.0005
Outcome: High filing rate (at least 50 percent of truant youth have petition)	0.407			

^s Interventions include special programs for truant students, referral to alternative schools, and use of a community truancy board.

A3.2 Factors influencing the filing of contempt motions. Since school districts file not only the initial truancy petition but also a contempt motion, we calculated a *contempt* filing rate: the number of contempt motions filed divided by the number of students with truancy cases. This definition limited the districts in the analysis to those with any truancy petitions. To avoid confounding effects, we also eliminated districts that have no high schools. Exhibit 7 in the report indicates that rates of filing contempt motions are highly skewed to low values. Because of this skew, the cutoff value for categorizing districts based on *contempt* filing rates was lower than that of petition filing rates. Below are the definitions of the groups:

- “High” contempt filers: Districts filing contempt motions for at least 10 percent of students who had a truancy petition. Sixty percent of districts were in this category.
- “Low” contempt filers: Districts filing contempt motions for fewer than 10 percent of students who had a truancy petition. Forty percent of districts were in this category.

Factors used in the regression analysis include the same district demographic characteristics used in the regression for truancy petition filing. We also included (1) reasons for not filing *contempt motions*, (2) truancy and dropout interventions, and (3) filing truancy petitions prior to the legal requirement (after five unexcused absences in a month). Once again, we combined into a single variable, which we name “avoidance of court,” the following reasons for not filing contempt motions: contempt motions hinder collaboration with the student and family; contempt motions do not improve attendance; and preference for handling cases outside of court.

Means for each variable used in the analysis are provided in Exhibit A3.2. Regression results are provided in the two right-hand columns.

Only one factor—district size—was significantly associated with filing contempt motions.

Exhibit A3.2
Contempt Motions
Results of Logistic Regression Model Predicting High Filing Rates
AUC=0.699 (N=133)

Characteristics used in model	District Statistics		Regression Results	
	Average	Std Dev	Standardized Estimate	P-value
District Demographics				
Percent minority	29.4	21.6	-0.237	0.154
Percent with free or reduced price meals	42.5	18.3	0.094	0.588
District size (1=small to 3=large)	2.10	0.79	0.551	0.001
Urban code (1=urban to 4=rural)	1.90	1.12	0.251	0.094
School District Responses				
Report attendance to court	0.62	0.49	0.162	0.171
File contempt motions	0.97	0.17	0.186	0.130
Reasons not to file contempt				
Youth will turn 18	0.68	0.47	-0.111	0.34
Insufficient resources	0.16	0.37	-0.092	0.400
Avoidance of court	0.23	0.42	-0.014	0.897
Student attendance has improved	0.50	0.50	-0.059	0.604
School has not shown efforts to intervene	0.09	0.29	0.015	0.900
Interventions ^s	0.80	0.40	0.002	0.989
File truancy petition after 5th unexcused absence in a month	0.38	0.49	-0.031	0.781
Outcome: High contempt filing rate (at least 10 percent of truant youth have contempt motion)	0.602			

^s Interventions include special programs for truant students, referral to alternative schools, and use of a community truancy board.

A4. Truancy Filing Rates

Exhibit 2 in the report displays filing rates graphically. The following table provides filing rates by district.

Exhibit A4.1
Truancy (Becca) Filing Rates by Washington School Districts: 2007–08 School Year
(Districts Ranked by Filing Rate—Low to High)

Washington law requires districts to file a petition with juvenile court if a student accumulates 10 or more unexcused absences in a year, or 7 or more in a month.

District	Total District Student Enrollment	Number of Students With 10 or More Unexcused Absences (as reported to OSPI by districts)	Number of Truancy Petitions Filed by School District (as reported to OSPI by districts)	Petition Filing Rate [column(3) divided by column(2)]; see note at end of table
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Lind	217	1	0	0%
Asotin-Anatone	537	1	0	0%
Entiat	352	10	0	0%
Crescent	226	2	0	0%
Mansfield	81	4	0	0%
Keller	30	6	0	0%
Riverview	2,873	19	0	0%
Snoqualmie Valley	5,298	79	0	0%
Central Kitsap	11,190	146	0	0%
Kittitas	718	4	0	0%
Bickleton	94	3	0	0%
Pe Ell	312	2	0	0%
Hood Canal	258	12	0	0%
Nespelem	128	1	0	0%

District	Total District Student Enrollment	Number of Students With 10 or More Unexcused Absences (as reported to OSPI by districts)	Number of Truancy Petitions Filed by School District (as reported to OSPI by districts)	Petition Filing Rate [column(3) divided by column(2)]; see note at end of table
Lopez	227	3	0	0%
Orcas Island	450	2	0	0%
Freeman	871	1	0	0%
Wahkiakum	456	3	0	0%
Waitsburg	328	5	0	0%
Granger	1,365	68	0	0%
Mount Adams	882	330	0	0%
Zillah	1,202	12	0	0%
Mercer Island	3,784	90	2	2%
Taholah	190	38	1	3%
Puyallup	20,327	1,046	44	4%
Highline	15,906	2,141	99	5%
Tonasket	984	20	1	5%
Inchelium	187	73	4	5%
Enumclaw	4,216	158	9	6%
Sunnyside	5,217	584	38	7%
Issaquah	15,265	301	23	8%
Washougal	2,814	129	10	8%
Lynden	2,589	33	3	9%
South Kitsap	9,740	504	54	11%
Fife	3,247	100	11	11%
Vancouver	20,773	2,356	287	12%
Mount Baker	2,039	106	14	13%
Royal	1,288	7	1	14%
Shoreline	8,662	420	62	15%
Tahoma	6,672	179	27	15%
Steilacoom Hist.	2,308	26	4	15%
Quincy	2,207	159	25	16%
Onalaska	826	18	3	17%
Tacoma	26,659	1,368	228	17%
Naches Valley	1,391	6	1	17%
West Valley (Yakima)	4,537	106	18	17%
Orting	1,993	134	23	17%
Yakima	12,977	3,179	547	17%
Stanwood-Camano	5,048	261	46	18%
Oroville	609	34	6	18%
Monroe	6,635	271	48	18%
Kent	25,419	1,807	327	18%
Coupeville	1,096	33	6	18%
Sumner	7,746	354	66	19%
Pasco	11,998	1,295	245	19%
Ferndale	4,571	222	42	19%
Snohomish	8,893	426	81	19%
Concrete	586	21	4	19%
Olympia	8,632	235	45	19%
Clover Park	10,697	538	106	20%
Lake Chelan	1,257	70	14	20%
Hockinson	1,929	25	5	20%
Colfax	649	10	2	20%
Evergreen (Clark)	23,382	1,478	303	21%
Peninsula	8,735	329	68	21%
Tumwater	5,877	255	54	21%
Yelm	5,052	297	63	21%
Winlock	793	28	6	21%
Ocean Beach	743	14	3	21%
Chewelah	1,024	42	9	21%
Renton	12,629	988	212	21%
Nooksack	1,526	55	12	22%
Wapato	3,134	356	79	22%
LaConner	618	9	2	22%
Camas	5,294	79	18	23%
Granite Falls	2,187	151	35	23%

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Everett	17,206	658	154	23%
Bellevue	15,495	393	93	24%
Wahluke	1,701	21	5	24%
Lake Quinault	240	29	7	24%
Ephrata	2,111	98	24	24%
North Mason	2,148	61	15	25%
Auburn	13,593	936	233	25%
White Salmon Valley	1,071	92	23	25%
Pioneer	648	8	2	25%
Cusick	267	8	2	25%
Conway	401	4	1	25%
Battle Ground	11,705	331	84	25%
Moses Lake	6,685	462	119	26%
South Whidbey	1,837	81	21	26%
Cle Elum-Roslyn	900	34	9	26%
La Center	1,452	11	3	27%
Newport	1,047	55	15	27%
Rochester	1,929	80	22	28%
Bethel	16,729	464	128	28%
Columbia (Walla Walla)	902	29	8	28%
Elma	1,665	76	21	28%
Arlington	5,122	210	59	28%
College Place	711	7	2	29%
Meridian	1,511	42	12	29%
Seattle Public Schools	41,013	1,508	442	29%
Reardan-Edwall	645	17	5	29%
Shelton	4,025	288	89	31%
Sultan	2,009	79	25	32%
University Place	5,131	198	63	32%
Omak	1,450	164	53	32%
Lake Stevens	7,155	275	89	32%
Mount Vernon	5,460	549	182	33%
Manson	564	15	5	33%
East Valley (Spokane)	3,865	108	36	33%
North Kitsap	6,275	164	56	34%
Federal Way	20,718	882	302	34%
East Valley (Yakima)	2,574	61	21	34%
Anacortes	2,727	66	23	35%
Lake Washington	21,801	327	114	35%
Clarkston	2,487	133	47	35%
Richland	9,470	335	119	36%
Ritzville	336	14	5	36%
Ridgefield	1,988	11	4	36%
Quilcene	246	11	4	36%
Castle Rock	1,278	46	17	37%
Eatonville	1,967	35	13	37%
Mead	8,686	79	30	38%
Chimacum	1,082	59	23	39%
White River	4,159	105	41	39%
Nine Mile Falls	1,634	33	13	39%
Woodland	2,069	30	12	40%
Lyle	314	5	2	40%
Mary Walker	418	25	10	40%
Hoquiam	1,884	142	57	40%
Toppenish	2,941	122	51	42%
Mukilteo	13,224	719	302	42%
Grandview	3,067	284	120	42%
Highland	1,055	20	9	45%
Sedro-Woolley	4,236	214	97	45%
Vashon Island	1,501	24	11	46%
Colville	1,965	42	20	48%
Franklin Pierce	7,120	475	230	48%

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Washtucna	53	4	2	50%
Warden	896	28	14	50%
Thorp	139	2	1	50%
Adna	544	8	4	50%
White Pass	458	8	4	50%
Deer Park	2,305	16	8	50%
Rainier	896	4	2	50%
Spokane	27,030	2,695	1,368	51%
Blaine	2,081	53	27	51%
Burlington-Edison	3,671	165	86	52%
Chehalis	2,779	44	23	52%
Union Gap	533	53	28	53%
Dayton	497	17	9	53%
Stevenson-Carson	940	32	17	53%
Ellensburg	2,711	63	34	54%
Wellpinit	514	47	26	55%
Soap Lake	454	16	9	56%
Central Valley	11,462	277	159	57%
Goldendale	1,024	52	30	58%
Darrington	509	26	15	58%
Northshore	18,609	180	104	58%
North Thurston	12,697	673	394	59%
Pullman	2,078	34	20	59%
Aberdeen	3,260	272	163	60%
Davenport	540	15	9	60%
Brewster	811	55	33	60%
St. John	188	5	3	60%
San Juan Island	857	29	18	62%
Cascade	1,230	24	15	63%
Oak Harbor	5,093	332	209	63%
Riverside	1,594	17	11	65%
Marysville	11,061	890	590	66%
Pateros	265	3	2	67%
Selkirk	304	3	2	67%
Cheney	3,423	141	96	68%
Bainbridge Island	3,819	20	14	70%
Kettle Falls	754	24	17	71%
Selah	3,170	36	26	72%
Walla Walla	5,582	202	146	72%
North Franklin	1,653	11	8	73%
Medical Lake	1,997	74	55	74%
Centralia	3,190	113	84	74%
Bremerton	4,571	299	223	75%
Kennewick	13,779	301	225	75%
Toutle Lake	603	4	3	75%
Toledo	911	12	9	75%
Sequim	2,769	86	65	76%
Kiona-Benton City	888	37	28	76%
Othello	3,073	33	25	76%
Mossyrock	598	5	4	80%
Port Angeles	4,016	389	312	80%
Edmonds	19,230	923	741	80%
Bridgeport	651	85	69	81%
Finley	917	16	13	81%
Wenatchee	6,958	291	240	82%
Valley	518	6	5	83%
Kelso	4,798	248	208	84%
Grand Coulee Dam	697	60	51	85%
Republic	395	14	12	86%
Cashmere	1,376	8	7	88%
Oakville	255	26	23	88%
Prosser	2,704	87	79	91%

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Cape Flattery	437	11	10	91%
Tenino	1,269	38	35	92%
Kalama	937	2	2	100%
Waterville	291	4	4	100%
Kahlotus	59	1	1	100%
Coulee-Hartline	146	3	3	100%
Trout Lake	144	1	1	100%
Almira	92	1	1	100%
Mary M Knight	173	2	2	100%
Naselle-Grays River Valley	324	2	2	100%
Dieringer	1,118	1	1	100%
Liberty	467	4	4	100%
Griffin	588	1	1	100%
Garfield	100	1	1	100%
LaCrosse	143	1	1	100%
Longview	6,699	304	309	102%
Port Townsend	1,342	30	32	107%
Bellingham	10,016	213	231	108%
Montesano	1,202	34	37	109%
Tukwila	2,603	52	61	117%
South Bend	539	4	5	125%
Okanogan	903	9	13	144%
Raymond	493	6	9	150%
Quillayute Valley	2,237	65	100	154%
Eastmont	5,044	49	78	159%
Columbia (Stevens)	195	3	5	167%
West Valley (Spokane)	3,544	160	302	189%
North Beach	638	11	21	191%
Curlew	217	1	2	200%
Willapa Valley	331	2	4	200%
Oakesdale	105	1	2	200%
Klickitat	126	2	5	250%
Methow Valley	531	2	5	250%
Ocosta	600	8	22	275%
Napavine	708	1	3	300%
Lakewood	2,351	8	25	313%
Wishkah Valley	155	1	8	800%
Benge	5	0	0	Not calculated
Paterson	90	0	0	Not calculated
Stehekin	14	0	0	Not calculated
Green Mountain	110	0	0	Not calculated
Starbuck	25	0	0	Not calculated
Orondo	159	0	0	Not calculated
Palisades	30	0	0	Not calculated
Orient	47	0	0	Not calculated
Star	13	0	0	Not calculated
Pomeroy	340	0	0	Not calculated
Wilson Creek	116	0	0	Not calculated
Cosmopolis	160	0	0	Not calculated
McCleary	231	0	0	Not calculated
Satsop	56	0	0	Not calculated
Brinnon	42	0	0	Not calculated
Queets-Clearwater	20	0	0	Not calculated
Skykomish	53	0	0	Not calculated
Damman	33	0	0	Not calculated
Easton	103	0	1	Not calculated
Glenwood	56	0	0	Not calculated
Roosevelt	25	0	0	Not calculated
Wishram	62	0	0	Not calculated
Boistfort	67	0	0	Not calculated
Evaline	44	0	0	Not calculated
Morton	370	0	4	Not calculated

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Creston	109	0	0	Not calculated
Harrington	113	0	1	Not calculated
Odessa	208	0	0	Not calculated
Sprague	88	0	2	Not calculated
Wilbur	236	0	3	Not calculated
Grapeview	180	0	0	Not calculated
Southside	208	0	0	Not calculated
North River	53	0	0	Not calculated
Carbonado	167	0	0	Not calculated
Shaw Island	17	0	0	Not calculated
Mill A	59	0	0	Not calculated
Mount Pleasant	47	0	0	Not calculated
Skamania	63	0	0	Not calculated
Index	18	0	0	Not calculated
Great Northern	30	0	0	Not calculated
Orchard Prairie	52	0	0	Not calculated
Evergreen (Stevens)	9	0	0	Not calculated
Loon Lake	221	0	1	Not calculated
Northport	191	0	0	Not calculated
Onion Creek	30	0	0	Not calculated
Summit Valley	81	0	0	Not calculated
Dixie	18	0	0	Not calculated
Prescott	210	0	1	Not calculated
Touchet	297	0	0	Not calculated
Colton	179	0	0	Not calculated
Endicott	78	0	0	Not calculated
Lamont	32	0	0	Not calculated
Palouse	191	0	0	Not calculated
Rosalia	229	0	0	Not calculated
Steptoe	33	0	0	Not calculated
Tekoa	196	0	0	Not calculated
Mabton	845	0	0	Not calculated

Source: WSIPP analysis of data from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Note: The filing rate shown is the number of petitions filed divided by the number of students with 10 or more unexcused absences in a year. A filing rate is not calculated for districts that have no students with 10 or more unexcused absences. A district's filing rate may exceed 100 percent if the district files a petition before a student has accumulated 10 unexcused absences.

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