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# Truant Students

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## Evaluating the Impact of the "Becca Bill" Truancy Petition Requirements

Mason Burley  
and  
Edie Harding

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**WASHINGTON STATE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY**

The Evergreen State College  
Seminar 3162, MS: TA-00  
Olympia, WA 98505  
Telephone: (360) 866-6000, extension 6380  
FAX: (360) 866-6825  
URL: <http://www.wa.gov/wsipp>  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Washington Legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to evaluate the effectiveness of the truancy petition process implemented under the 1995 "Becca Bill" (E2SSHB 2640). This report examines the following issues: (1) a statewide summary of Washington's truancy petition process, (2) a case study of truant students in ten school districts<sup>1</sup> during the 1996-97 school year, and (3) a national review of truancy literature and programs.

The ten school districts in the case study were selected to demonstrate how some Washington State schools are approaching truancy prevention. While the experience of these districts can provide valuable insight and information, this case study is not meant to portray information about all Washington State schools.

### Study Findings

#### Statewide Findings

- Approximately *70 percent* of the state's school districts filed petitions on truant students, with a total of *12,094* petitions filed during the 1996-97 school year.
- Truancy petitions were filed on approximately *1.2 percent of the state's enrolled students* during the 1996-97 school year.
- The number of petitions filed during the 1996-97 school year *increased by 29 percent* over the 1995-96 school year.

#### Profiling Truant Students From the Case Study

- In this case study, an average of *10 percent of all students were truant* with unexcused absences.
- School administrators emphasized that *excessive excused absences* are also a problem. *Fifteen percent* of all students in this case study had 20 or more absences (excused *and* unexcused).
- A higher percentage of truant students (*32%*) had *records of suspensions* than non-truant students (*16%*); truant students (*48%*) also *transferred, withdrew, or dropped out* of school more often than non-truant students (*17%*).
- *Thirty-seven percent* of the truant students had a truancy petition filed in juvenile court. Approximately *seven percent* of all truant students had a *contempt* order filed for continued truanancies.

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<sup>1</sup> One middle school and one high school from each district were selected to participate in the study.

- Data from this case study revealed that truant students have *recurring attendance problems*. Approximately one-third of the students with petitions filed during the 1995-96 school year had *another* petition filed in the 1996-97 school year.

### **Responses to Truancy**

- Many schools have strengthened their attendance monitoring and enforcement policies in response to the new expectations created with the truancy petition requirements.
- Juvenile courts and school districts have created *partnerships* to develop programs for truant and at-risk students.
- The truancy petition *sanctions* have caught the attention of parents and students. In many cases, they are *changing behavior patterns*.
- Students who have serious family or personal issues are much *less likely* to respond to the truancy interventions.

### **Resources**

- Schools and courts are *stretched thin* in resources to meet the petition requirements, particularly in the larger urban school districts.
- It is difficult to measure the success of truancy interventions based on the number of truancy petitions filed by a school district. Many districts spend considerable resources on truancy intervention *before* the student accumulates excessive truanancies.
- *Courts* continue to experience a *heavy workload* at the end of the year when an increased number of truancy petitions are filed.

### **National Review of Truancy**

- Students who are *beginning* to experiment with truancy are more likely to be affected through interventions than students who have long established patterns.
- Selected schools and juvenile courts in Washington are implementing programs similar to other nationwide efforts that address truancy. Success of such programs is dependent upon several factors, including: stable funding, collaboration between the schools and the legal system, clear communication with parents and students on attendance expectations, and parental involvement.

## Potential Areas for Action

- Consideration should be given to expanding the population of students covered by truancy petitions to include enrolled students ages 5 to 8.
- The transition years of middle school are critical in setting student behavior patterns and thus are a good target for intervention programs.
- Currently, school districts are only reimbursed for the number of truancy petitions filed with the juvenile court. One alternative would be to provide reimbursement to schools based on the number of students with 5 or more unexcused absences in a month (or 10 in a year) whose attendance problems are resolved without a petition process. These funds could provide schools with resources to address truancy problems early. The most difficult truancy cases could then be reserved for the courtroom, thus conserving juvenile court resources.



## PART I: OVERVIEW

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### Background

Since 1969, Washington's compulsory attendance law has required parents to send their children to school.<sup>2</sup> This law lacked the force parents and legislators believed was necessary to ensure children were attending school. In 1995, the truancy petition requirements were instituted as part of the "Becca Bill," to strengthen attendance requirements and provide services and assistance to at-risk youth and their families. Beginning in 1995, Washington State law mandated educators to take legal action against students with excessive unexcused absences.<sup>3</sup> School districts must now file a "truancy petition" in juvenile court when a student accumulates a certain number of unexcused absences.<sup>4</sup> For a complete outline of the required steps in the truancy petition process, see Appendix 4.

The school district *may* file a petition in juvenile court on truant students ages 8 to 18<sup>5</sup> alleging violation of the school attendance law, if the student accumulates five unexcused absences in a month (or ten unexcused in a year). If the district decides not to file a petition after the student reaches five unexcused absences in a month, it must choose one of the following options:

1. enter into an agreement with the parents and students about school attendance;
2. refer the matter to a community truancy board; or
3. file a petition when the student reaches seven unexcused absences in a month.

After seven unexcused absences in a month (or ten unexcused absences in a year), the school district *must* file a truancy petition on the student.<sup>6</sup> The court must then conduct a fact-finding hearing. A petition is defined as a civil action; an attorney for the student need not be present at the fact-finding hearing.

Following a fact-finding hearing, the court may assume jurisdiction over the case and order the student to attend his/her current school or a different school. If the student violates this court order, the district may file a motion of contempt. Students are entitled to legal representation during contempt hearings. If the court finds that the student violated this order, a variety of sanctions may be imposed, including detention, fines, or community service.

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<sup>2</sup> Under certain conditions, students may be exempted from Washington's compulsory attendance law (e.g., students are enrolled in private school or home schooled, or have satisfied graduation requirements or received exemption from the School District Superintendent). These provisions are outlined in RCW 28A.225.010.

<sup>3</sup> RCW 28A.225.030.

<sup>4</sup> An unexcused absence occurs when a child misses the majority of hours or class periods in an average school day (without a valid excuse), or fails to comply with a more restrictive school district policy on unexcused absences.

<sup>5</sup> The age of compulsory attendance was raised from 15 to 16 in 1996 under Washington Laws 1996, Chapter 134.

<sup>6</sup> For purposes of this report, a truant student is defined as a student who meets the statutory requirement of five unexcused absences in a month or ten unexcused absences in a school year.

The 1997 Legislature amended the law, giving courts the authority to: (1) assume jurisdiction over a truant student for as long as it is deemed necessary, and (2) require a substance abuse assessment for the student if necessary.<sup>7</sup>

## Study Direction

In 1995, the Legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to review and evaluate:<sup>8</sup>

1. the need to develop a statewide definition of excused and unexcused absences,
2. the need to prohibit school districts from suspending and expelling students who have unexcused absences, and
3. the process of filing truancy petitions.

In January 1996, the Institute outlined options for creating a statewide definition of unexcused absences and prohibition of suspension and expulsion for truancy.<sup>9</sup> During the 1996 session, the Legislature adopted a statewide definition for unexcused absences,<sup>10</sup> but allowed school districts to use a more restrictive definition if they chose. No action was taken to prohibit suspension and expulsion for truancy.

Since 1996, the Institute has continued to provide updates on the numbers of truancy petitions filed in each county in Washington State.<sup>11</sup> The purpose of this report is to examine the effectiveness of the truancy petition process and its impact on student attendance.

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<sup>7</sup> Washington Laws 1997, Chapter 68.

<sup>8</sup> Washington Laws 1995, Chapter 312, Sect. 81.

<sup>9</sup> Carol Webster, *Truancy: Preliminary Findings on Washington's 1995 Law*, Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, January 1996.

<sup>10</sup> RCW 28A.225.020.

<sup>11</sup> Washington State Institute for Public Policy, *Truancy: Preliminary Findings on Washington's 1995 Law, Second Update*, Olympia, WA, February 1996. Edie Harding and Mason Burley, *Truancy Petition Update: September 1995 – June 1996*, Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, August 1996.

## Study Methodology

Improving school attendance decreases the probability that children continue to be truant, drop out of school, or engage in acts of delinquency. Truancy interventions, however, require a substantial investment of resources for schools and courts. The Institute adopted a three-pronged approach to investigate how effective these interventions were in reducing truancy rates. This approach included: (a) a statewide review of truancy petition filings, (b) a case study in ten school districts to examine what happens to students, and (c) a national review of truancy-related programs and studies. This section outlines these three approaches. The remaining sections discuss the findings from the evaluation, and potential areas of action for future policy.

### A. Statewide Assessment of the Truancy Petition Process

The Institute examined statewide information on county and school district petition filing rates and on the state funds allocated for truancy prevention. Changes from the first and second years of implementation (September 1995 – August 1997) are documented.

### B. Case Study Schools and Selection Criteria

The Institute reviewed the truancy petition process in ten school districts (and their respective juvenile courts) for the 1996-97 school year. The study participants included one high school and one middle school in each school district. Interviews were also conducted with both school district and court personnel.

The purpose of this case study was to describe school outcomes for truant students, examine the interventions, and review the costs of truancy programs. In each of these schools and their respective courts, data was collected to address the following questions:

1. What is the *demographic profile* of truant students?
2. What are the *outcomes* for truant students?
3. How are school and court staff *addressing* their truant students' *needs*?
4. What are the *costs* associated with implementing the truancy petition process?
5. What are the *interventions* used by schools and courts to address truancy?

Given the limited resources available for this study, the investigators determined that a case study approach was best suited to assess the effectiveness of the truancy petition process. The findings offer relatively rich information, however, several caveats must be emphasized. The study participants are not randomly selected districts, schools, or students. Hence, there is no way to document direct cause and effect relationships between the truancy petition process and student attendance. This case study is not intended to portray information about all Washington State schools. Rather, the schools and court systems in this study each depict unique student populations and truancy prevention efforts.

**Selection Criteria**

The selection criteria for school districts in the case study were as follows: (1) capability to provide accurate information on students, and (2) use of innovative interventions to improve attendance and address truancy related issues (e.g., community truancy boards, agreements, parent classes, alternative schools). In addition, consideration was given to selecting schools with varying enrollment sizes and geographic locations.

The districts, schools, and their respective juvenile court systems selected for the study are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1: Schools Participating in Truancy Case Study**

<b>Juvenile Court</b>	<b>School District</b>	<b>School Building</b>
<b>Thurston County</b>	Yelm <sup>12</sup>	Yelm High School Yelm Middle School
<b>Pierce County</b>	Tacoma	Stadium High School Gray Middle School
<b>Clallam County</b>	Port Angeles	Port Angeles High School Stevens Middle School
	Quillayute Valley	Forks High School Forks Middle School
<b>Skagit County</b>	Mount Vernon	Mount Vernon High School LaVenture Middle School
	La Conner	La Conner High School La Conner Middle School
<b>Yakima County</b>	Yakima	Davis High School Wilson Middle School
	Wapato	Wapato High School Wapato Middle School
<b>Spokane County</b>	Spokane	Lewis and Clark High School Shaw Middle School
	East Valley	East Valley High School East Valley Middle School

*Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 1998.*

<sup>12</sup> Yelm School District also has students who live within Pierce County boundaries. The school district files truancy petitions in Pierce County Juvenile Court for these students.

### ***District Attributes***

After selecting schools based on the previously mentioned criteria, investigators analyzed other notable characteristics of the participating districts. In general, the case study districts filed truancy petitions at a higher rate than other Washington State districts. Each district also operated at least one alternative school or program. Finally, students in this case study included a higher percentage of Hispanic and Native Americans than the percent in the statewide average.

The variance among case study schools in student population, school policies, and available resources provide an interesting perspective on the impact of the truancy petition requirements. However, these differences also make it difficult to generalize reported findings beyond the case study schools.

### **C. Review of Truancy Literature and Nationwide Truancy Programs**

Finally, the Institute examined available research literature on truancy and truancy programs in other states to place Washington's efforts in a broader, national context. A complete description of truancy research and programs is available in a technical appendix to this report.



## **PART II: WASHINGTON'S TRUANCY PETITION PROCESS**

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Although this case study focuses primarily on ten Washington State school districts, the Institute also tracked data on the total number of truancy petitions filed in Washington State between September 1995 and August 1997. The percent of enrolled students with petitions filed was calculated using court records from the Office of the Administrator for the Courts and school enrollment data from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. County variations in truancy petition filing rates were also examined using these data.

This section provides a statewide summary of the number of truancy petitions filed during the 1995-96 and 1996-97 school years. Legislative appropriations for truancy programs and related services for at-risk youth are also included.

### **Statewide Summary**

During the 1996-97 school year (September 1996 – August 1997):<sup>13</sup>

- School districts in Washington State filed *12,094 truancy petitions*.
- *Seventy percent* of all school districts reported filing truancy petitions, according to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).
- School districts filed *29 percent* more truancy petitions than the previous school year.
- Approximately *1.24 percent* of enrolled students were the subject of truancy petitions.
- *King County* filed the highest number of truancy petitions (3,352).
- *Cowlitz County* had the highest percentage of enrolled students with truancy petitions (2.92 percent).

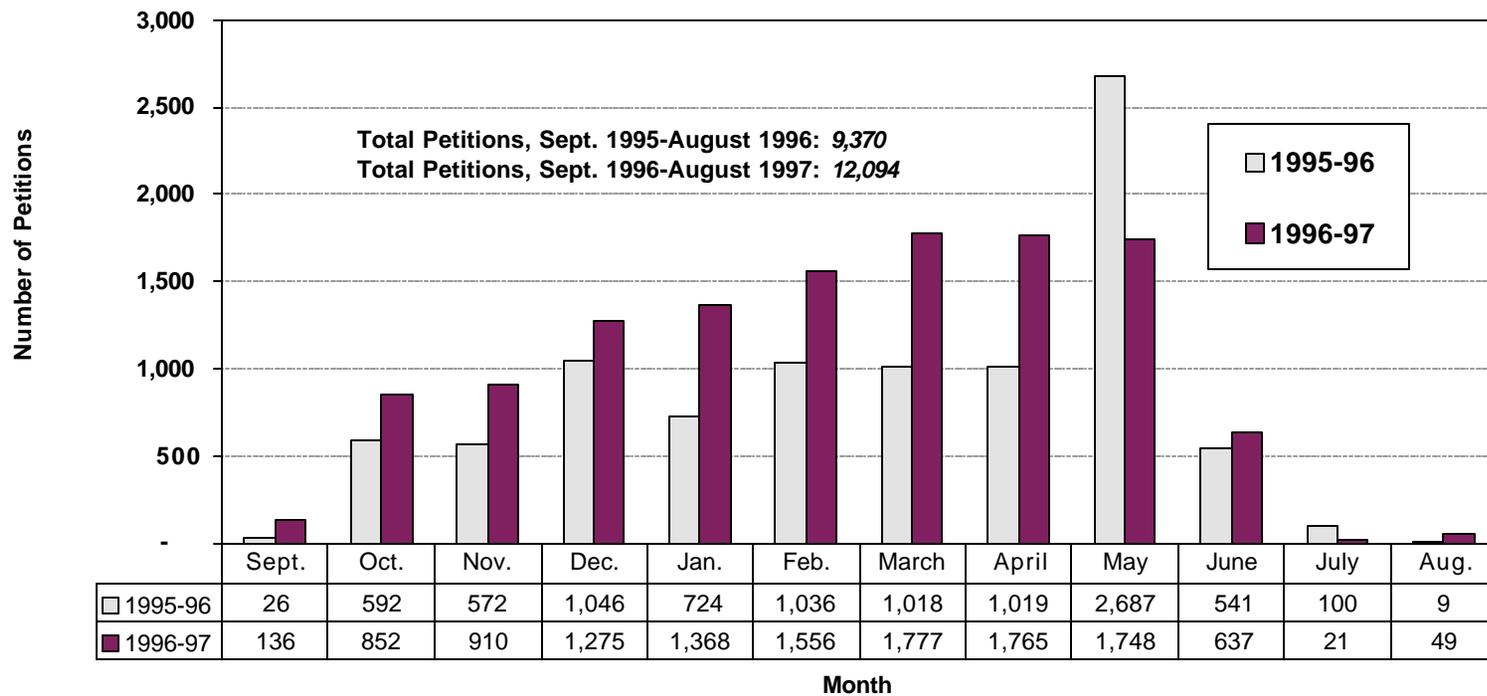
Figure 1 shows the total number of petitions filed in Washington State between September 1995 and August 1997. Truancy petition numbers for each county are found in Appendix 1. Petitions filed by each school district are listed in Appendix 2.

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<sup>13</sup> The Office of the Administrator for the Courts provides the most accurate data on the number of truancy petitions filed in Washington State. Monthly counts are available for each county in the state. Data on student enrollment in each county was obtained from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

**Figure 1:**

**Truancy Petitions Filed in Washington State Juvenile Courts:  
September 1995 - August 1997**



Note: High number of petitions filed in May 1996 occurred primarily in the Seattle School District.

Source: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, December 1997.  
Petition counts from Office of the Administrator for the Courts.

## State Allocations for Truancy

During the 1995-97 biennium, the Legislature appropriated \$8.3 million for programs serving truants and at-risk youth: \$3 million to reimburse schools for the cost of filing petitions; \$2 million to implement alternative school programs; \$1 million for community truancy boards; and \$2.3 million for juvenile courts to process truancy, children in need of services, and at-risk youth petitions. Table 2 lists truancy-related funding sources for Fiscal Year 1995 through 1999.

**Table 2: Legislative Appropriations for Truancy Petitions**

<b>Agency: Program</b>	<b>1995-97</b>	<b>1997-99</b>
Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction: Petition Cost Reimbursement	\$3 million	\$3 million
Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction: Alternative Schools/Programs	\$2 million	\$1 million
Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction: Community Truancy Boards	\$1 million	None
Department of Social and Health Services: "Becca Bill" cost reimbursement to juvenile courts for truancy, children in need of services, and at-risk youth	\$2.3 million	\$4.6 million
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$8.3 million</b>	<b>\$8.6 million</b>

*Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 1998.*

School districts may receive reimbursement for the cost of filing truancy petitions from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). The total allocation of funds available for truancy reimbursement is fixed for each budgetary period. Consequently, the amount each district receives depends on the total number of petitions reported to OSPI. At the end of the year, school districts submit the number of petitions they filed during the school year. OSPI then divides the total state allocation by the number of petitions reported, and sets a cost reimbursement per petition filed.



## PART III: CASE STUDY IN WASHINGTON STATE

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This section details the findings from the case study of truant students in ten Washington school districts. The information collected for this study helps to answer the following questions:

1. *Who is truant?*
2. *Do truant students stay in school?*
3. *Do truant students continue to have attendance problems from year to year?*
4. *How are schools and courts addressing their truant students' needs?*
5. *What are the costs of filing truancy petitions for the schools and courts?*

The information in this section was collected on 21,228 students from the ten school districts selected for this study. As discussed previously, these school districts generally filed petitions at higher rates than other Washington schools. In addition, the districts in this case study have student bodies that may differ from the average school population in Washington.

### ***Who Is Truant?***

Data from the case study schools found an average of **10 percent** of all students were truant (2,212).<sup>14</sup> However, the percentage of truants varied significantly in each district,<sup>15</sup> ranging from 1 percent (lowest) to 29 percent (highest). Interviews with the participating schools revealed that variations in rates may be influenced by the following factors:

- **School District Policy:** A school district's attendance policy determines the type and number of absences that constitute a truancy. School districts may have a more restrictive policy for unexcused absences than the state definition, which results in more students classified as truant.
- **School District Resources:** Districts with smaller enrollments or a willingness and ability to devote staff resources to attendance matters were more likely to classify students as truant.
- **Computer Attendance Systems:** Many schools initially list every student absence as unexcused in their computerized attendance systems. Students then have a fixed period of time to present the school with a valid excuse to have their absence changed to "excused." Schools with this type of information system may have a higher number of trancies if students fail to have their absences properly excused. In contrast, some schools maintain attendance systems that automatically list absences as "excused." These schools may have a lower number of truants if they fail to follow up on the nature of students' absences.

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<sup>14</sup> In this report, a "truant" student refers to a student who has met his or her *school district's* definition of truancy due to an excessive number of unexcused absences.

<sup>15</sup> "District" refers to the selected middle school and high school in each school district.

Tables 3 and 4 describe the student profile in the case study schools for the 1996-97 school year. Each category compares the percent of truant students to total students.

**Table 3: Student Profiles From Case Study**

	<i>Truant Students in Case Study</i>	<i>Total Students in Case Study</i>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	55%	52%
Female	45%	48%
<b>Ethnicity<sup>16</sup></b>		
Asian	1%	4%
Black	4%	4%
Hispanic	32%	15%
Indian	11%	6%
White	52%	71%
<b>Grade</b>		
6	3%	7%
7	6%	13%
8	8%	13%
9	34%	21%
10	22%	17%
11	17%	15%
12	10%	13%

*Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 1998.*

<sup>16</sup> Based on classifications reported to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

**Table 4: Student Profiles From Case Study**

	<i>Truant Students in Case Study</i>	<i>Total Students in Case Study</i>
<b>Special Education<sup>17</sup></b>		
Yes	11%	8%
No	89%	92%
<b>Bilingual Student<sup>17</sup></b>		
Yes	20%	12%
No	80%	88%
<b>Living Situation<sup>18</sup></b>		
One Parent	42%	32%
Two Parents	36%	56%
Other	22%	12%
<b>Suspended<sup>19</sup></b>		
Yes	32%	16%
No	68%	84%

*Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 1998.*

<sup>17</sup> Based on classifications reported to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

<sup>18</sup> Indicates whether the student lived with one parent, two parents, or guardian. "Other" category includes students living with step-parents, a foster care family, an agency, or by him (or her) self.

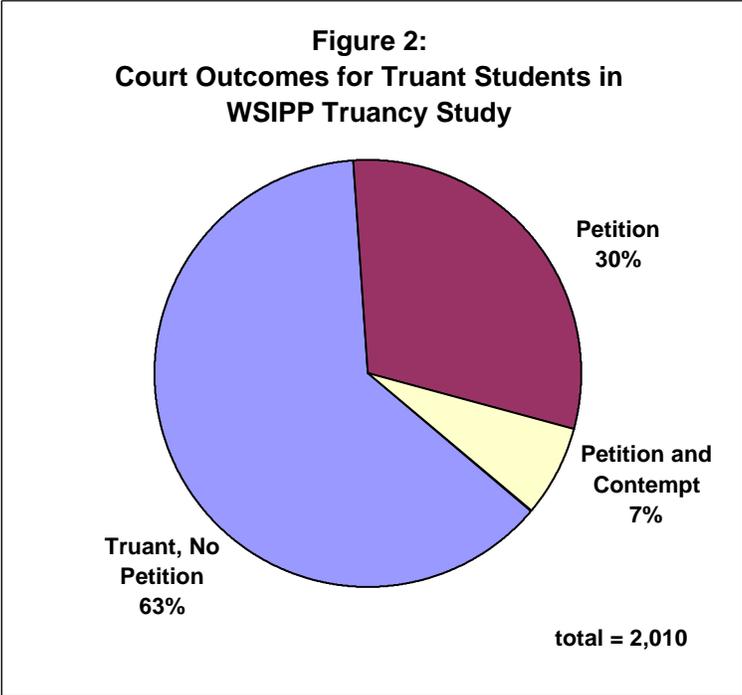
<sup>19</sup> Indicates whether the student received any type of suspension for any length of time during the 1996-97 school year.

**Outcomes: Do Truant Students Stay in School?**

Court data from this case study indicate that 37 percent of the identified truant students had a truancy petition filed in juvenile court. Approximately 7 percent of truant students continued to miss school after the petition and had contempt orders filed.

It is difficult to measure the "success" of a school's truancy interventions solely by the number of students who did (or did not) appear in court. In many cases, it becomes unnecessary (or impossible) for a district to file a petition on a truant student.

As Figure 2 indicates, 63 percent of students in this case study were classified as "truant" by their schools, but did not have truancy petitions filed. Interviews with school and court administrators and data analysis revealed that a student may be classified as "truant" and not have a truancy petition filed for one of the following reasons:



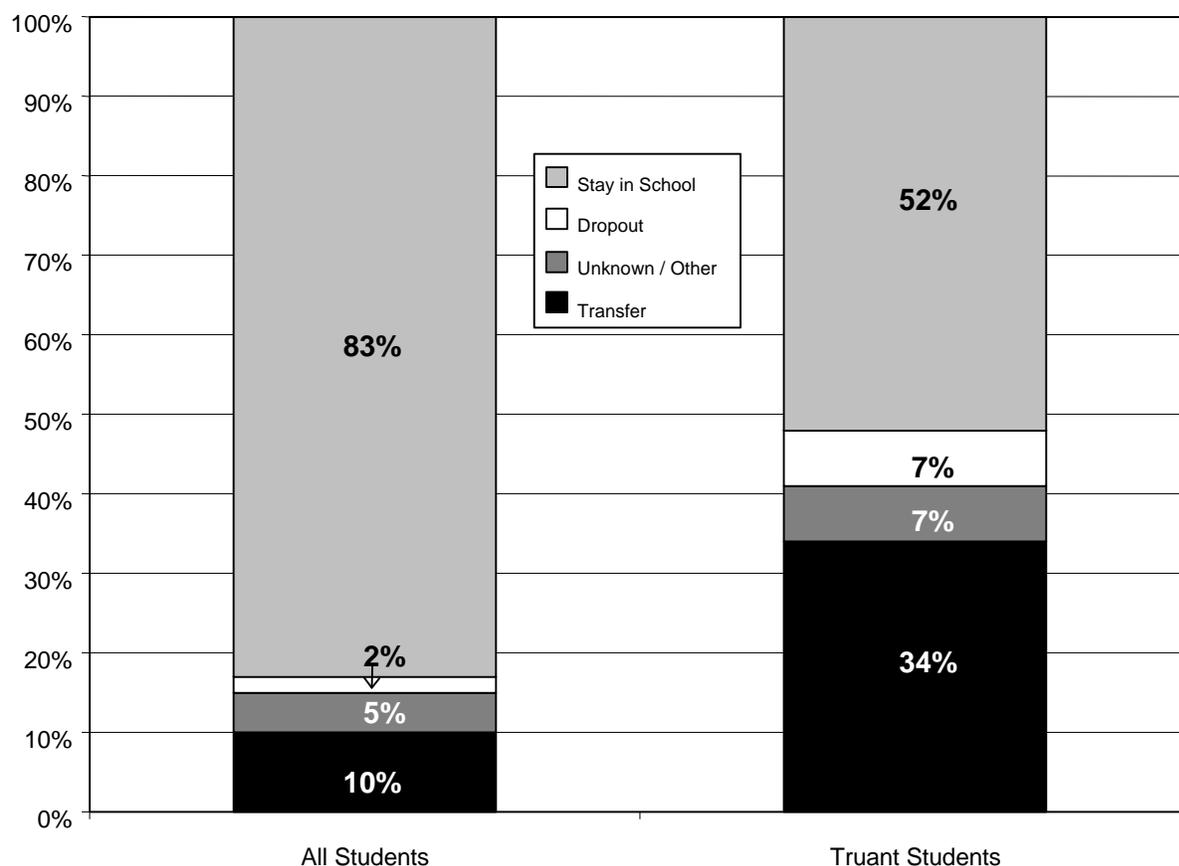
- School's Intervention Strategy:** A student may be classified as truant after five unexcused absences in a month. However, the school is not required to file a truancy petition until the student accumulates seven unexcused absences in a month (or ten unexcused absences in a school year). Prior to the required filing time, the school may attempt several interventions including: referring the student to a community truancy board, altering the student's schedule, or providing individual instruction or alternative programs for the student. If any of these efforts is successful, court intervention may prove unnecessary.
- Limits on the Jurisdiction of Juvenile Courts:** During the 1995-96 and 1996-97 school years, courts were only able to order a student to attend school for the remainder of the school year. Schools may have been reluctant to file truancy petitions at the end of the school year because court jurisdiction ended in June. Due to legislative changes, courts may now extend jurisdiction over a student's attendance for as long as they deem necessary.
- Student Mobility:** Truant students in this study were more likely to transfer, withdraw, or drop out of school than non-truants. Figure 3 on the next page shows the school outcomes of truant students.

Compared to the entire population of students, a higher percentage of truants transferred, dropped out, or withdrew by the end of the school year. Figure 3 compares the mobility of total students to truant students in this study. For example, if students had petitions or contempt orders filed, *but* were still enrolled for the entire year, their final outcome is "Stay in School." Students who left school have a final outcome of "Transfer," "Dropout," or "Unknown/Other."<sup>20</sup>

Among the **total students** in this study (truant and non-truant), *83 percent* stayed in the same school for the entire school year. The remaining students transferred, dropped out, or withdrew for other reasons.

However, among the **truant students** in this study, slightly more than half (*52 percent*) stayed in the same school for the entire school year. *Forty-eight percent* of the truant students transferred to another school (in-district or outside school district), dropped out, or were classified as unknown/other withdrawal.

**Figure 3: School Outcomes  
for Students in WSIPP Truancy Study**

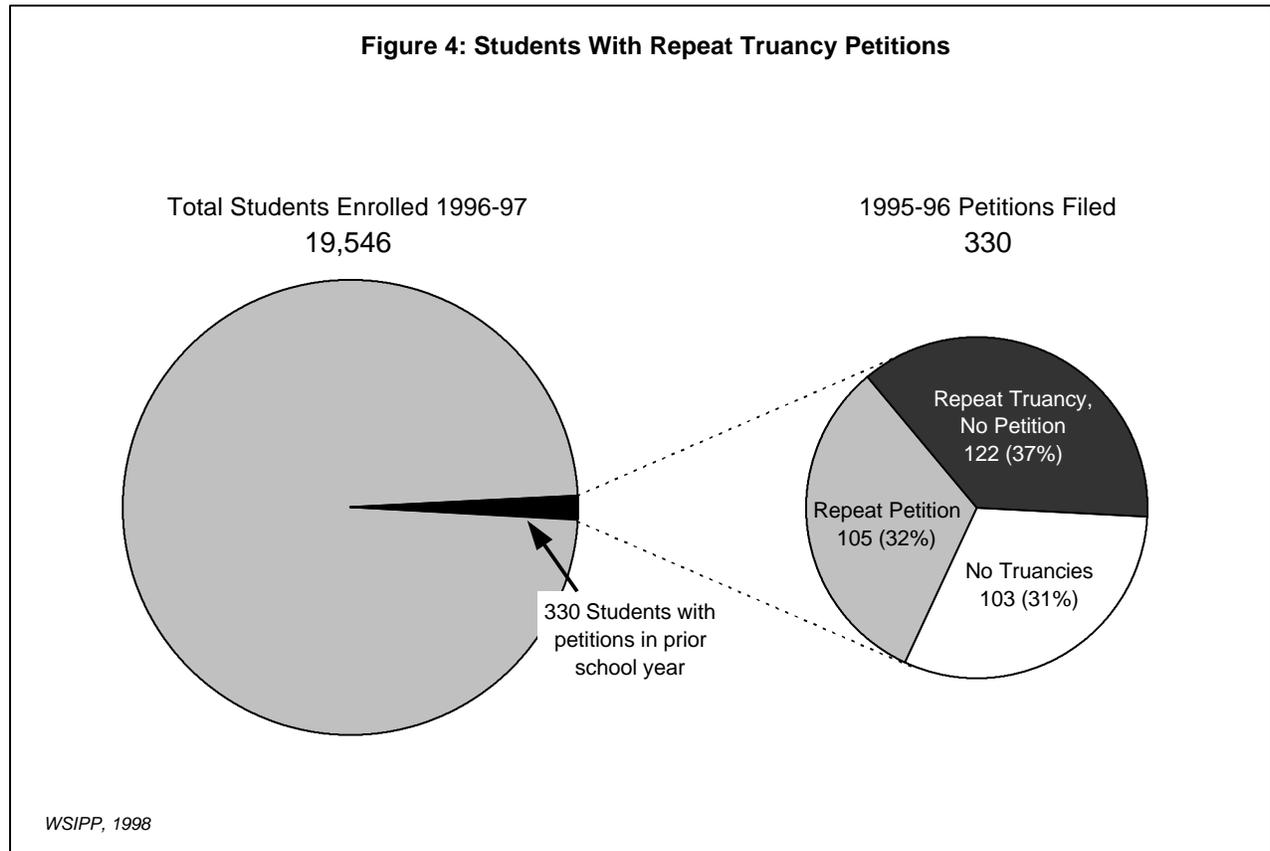


WSIPP, 1998

<sup>20</sup> Mobility categories are based on classifications reported to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

## Repeat Truancies

Because preventing truancy is an important goal of the petition requirements, study schools were asked to identify enrolled students who had truancy petitions filed during the 1995-96 school year. Schools reported 330 students had truancy petitions filed. Of those students, 32 percent had another truancy petition filed in their school district during the 1996-97 school year.



## Excessive Student Absences

Many school administrators assisting with this study emphasized that attendance problems are not solely restricted to unexcused absences; students who miss school with extended excused absences are also in danger of falling behind, losing credits, or dropping out of school. Schools in this study also provided information on the number of students with excessive absences (defined as missing 20 or more days of school, either excused or unexcused). Of students enrolled the entire school year, *15 percent* were absent 20 or more school days. Approximately two-thirds (*64 percent*) of the students with excessive absences were **not** marked as "truant" by their schools.

Table 5 lists the total attendance statistics (with ranges) for the districts selected for this study (middle school and high school only).<sup>21</sup>

**Table 5: Attendance in Case Study Schools**

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Range of Case Study Schools</i>
<b>Enrollment</b>	<b>21,228</b>	<b>426 – 2,915</b>
<b>Number of Truant Students</b>	<b>2,212</b>	<b>19 – 852</b>
<i>Percent of Enrolled</i>	<i>10%</i>	<i>1% - 29%</i>
<b>Number of Students With Truancy Petitions Filed</b>	<b>768</b>	<b>7 - 308</b>
<i>Percent of Enrolled</i>	<i>3.6%</i>	<i>0.3% - 10.6%</i>
<b>Students With 20 or More Absences</b>	<b>3,094</b>	<b>70 - 525</b>
<i>Percent of Enrolled</i>	<i>15%</i>	<i>11% - 20%</i>
<i>Percent of Students With 20 or More Absences That Were Also Truant</i>	<i>34%</i>	<i>4% - 63%</i>

*Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 1998.*

<sup>21</sup> Court data were not available for one district in this case study. Percentages in this table may differ slightly from reported court outcomes in previous tables as a result of missing data from this district.

## ***How Are Schools and Courts Addressing Truant Students?***

Interviews with selected school and court personnel revealed that school and court responses to truancy have increased awareness and changed behaviors of a number of students and their families regarding the importance of attendance. As a result of the truancy petition process, most schools have strengthened their monitoring and enforcement of attendance policies. Courts are also adding programs and revising policies to ensure truant and at-risk students receive the appropriate sanctions and services. This section highlights the responses of school and court professionals to the truancy petition process in their local jurisdictions.

### **Schools**

Schools make an early effort to prevent trancies by notifying parents of truant students as early as the first unexcused absence. School administrators and principals involved with this study emphasized that schools are attempting multiple interventions to reduce truancy rates for all students. These efforts focus on the stage before and after a truancy petition is filed in juvenile court.

#### **Profile of Truant Students**

Schools interviewed for this study typically described two categories of truant students. The easiest group to reach are those students trying to "test the system," who may skip school, but do not exhibit serious attendance problems. The more challenging truants are students who have developed chronic attendance problems. These students most often come from families that include members with significant social, health, criminal, or employment issues. Students who establish patterns of truancy continue to be truant year after year. Data in the study indicate that two-thirds of the students with petitions in 1995-96 continued having attendance problems during the 1996-97 school year.

School personnel expressed a need to target selected age groups to make an impact on reducing attendance problems. In terms of truancy prevention, elementary students are the most important age group. Currently, the law does not authorize schools to file truancy petitions on children under eight years of age. To stop long-term truancy problems, school personnel believe they must reach young students just beginning to develop poor attendance habits. This can be difficult, however, because some parents contribute to the trancies of young students. Many school administrators expressed a desire to hold parents of all enrolled students accountable for attendance, regardless of the child's age.

The second group viewed as important to help was 8th or 9th graders. Many students struggle with the transition between middle school and high school. Additional focus through special programs or meeting individual student's needs during this period was deemed a high priority. Quillayute Valley School District has started a special program for 8th graders with attendance problems. Port Angeles and East Valley School Districts have created an alternative middle school modeled after their successful high school alternative programs.

### Truant Students: School Intervention Options

Schools attempt a range of interventions with truant students, depending on the severity of the attendance problems. If a student continues to be truant after the school has notified the parent about the first unexcused absences, the school begins a progressive set of truancy interventions. Some of the most frequent school interventions provided to truant students are:

- **conferences** with the student and parent to agree on an attendance plan;
- **service referrals** for students with substance abuse or other health issues; and
- **alterations** of school, class schedule, or the addition of tutoring.

Each of the ten districts selected for this study operates an alternative high school. Truant students often need an alternative setting to make up credit lost to absences. School administrators stated that high school students ordered back to school are often reluctant to return without a means of making up lost credit.

At the fifth unexcused absence, four of the school districts in this study referred students to **community truancy boards**.<sup>22</sup> School districts reported both advantages and disadvantages to utilizing community truancy boards. The smaller districts were reluctant to use the boards, viewing this step as simply another layer of bureaucracy. Larger school districts were enthusiastic about community truancy boards and their ability to "personalize" the student's situation.

### Students With Petitions

In general, the school district personnel interviewed expressed the belief that court intervention caused most truants to stay in school. For the small percent of students who went on to face contempt charges, school personnel recognized that the court process did not influence their attendance. In many cases, these students were already involved in the juvenile justice system or had serious family issues that could not be easily overcome. Both school and court staff believe that an important prevention tool for improving attendance was to help students with serious social and health issues receive the assistance they needed. However, this intervention was often lacking; schools and courts did not always possess the resources to provide the necessary personal attention.

### Sanctions

According to interviews conducted for this study, judges generally sentenced students who violated attendance orders to juvenile detention (for up to seven days). Community service was used less frequently and depended upon whether the court had an adequate community services system in place. Courts rarely exercised their option to fine parents of truant students. In addition, most courts did not require parents to perform community service. Administrators interviewed stated that schools did not want to take on the additional burden of supervising

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<sup>22</sup> Two of these boards will not be continued in the 1997-98 school year due to lack of funding.

parents and performing the necessary background checks to ensure the safety of students when a parent was performing community service.

Through the truancy petition process, some school districts and courts have established strong partnerships. In Pierce County, school districts and the county have agreed to jointly provide funds that enable the prosecutor's office to file petitions for the district. Consequently, school staff will be required to attend only contempt hearings. In Skagit County, the school districts and the county have agreed to fund a court-school liaison who will be located at the Mt. Vernon School District.

## **Courts**

With the passage of the Becca Bill, courts are finding new ways to work with schools and community service providers to create appropriate sanctions and services for at-risk and truant youth. Interviews with selected court administrators and judicial officers for this study revealed that court sanctions can be an effective solution for some truants; for others, alternatives to legal action may be a more practical option.

### *Procedural Issues*

Juvenile courts generally reserve one or two court-days each week for truancy cases. The truancy docket (session) lasts between three and five hours; a judge (or court commissioner) hears 15 to 30 cases each week. Three of the six courts interviewed hold review hearings after the initial truancy fact-finding hearing. At the time of the fact-finding hearing, if the court decides a case needs additional attention, another review hearing (usually within two weeks) can be scheduled to determine whether a student is attending school regularly. In Yakima County, approximately 50 percent of the truancy cases are scheduled for a review hearing to follow up on the student.

Courts may choose to hold truancy hearings in either an open or closed courtroom. Two courts surveyed hold truancy cases in a closed courtroom, where only parties involved in the case may be present. This approach, according to judicial officers, allows participants to discuss family or personal problems in a more confidential setting. Due to the number of petitions, other courts have found it more efficient to hold truancy hearings in an open courtroom. In these counties, students, families, and school officials sit in the courtroom until their case is called. Judicial officers who presided over an open court emphasized that the impact on the courtroom audience was beneficial. As one court commissioner observed, "When someone is taken to detention in handcuffs, it has an impact on the other students."

Due to the large number of cases, judges typically spend a brief amount of time on each truancy case. Juvenile courts have even less time to deal with individual cases during the last three months of the school year when the number of truancy filings increases substantially. In the counties surveyed for this study, 20 to 50 percent of all truancy petitions were filed at the end of

the school year.<sup>23</sup> Many courts are forced to increase the time (and court staff) devoted to truancy at this time of year.

Court personnel stated that the process for filing truancy petitions and holding hearings improved significantly during the 1996-97 school year. Nevertheless, because truancy hearings are civil proceedings, necessary documents must be filed properly and all parties must be served with a notice to appear. The process of serving court documents also affects the time before a hearing can take place. While some courts served truancy petitions by mail, others required the documents be served personally. It can take up to three weeks from the time a petition is filed until the hearing occurs. Students with significant attendance problems may continue to skip school during the time before a hearing. Because an immediate sanction is delayed, many students believe they can continue to evade the consequences for truancy.

### School Relationships

Court staff are continuing to support and assist schools in developing alternatives to filing truancy petitions in juvenile court. In some counties, courts have assisted schools with the implementation and operation of community truancy boards. These boards offer a level of accountability for student attendance before legal intervention is necessary. Truancy boards are able to respond to truancy problems in a short time frame, while it may take several weeks after a petition is filed before a student appears in court.

While courts would like to encourage primary intervention efforts and reserve serious cases for legal proceedings, not all schools have the resources to handle truancy effectively at an early stage. As noted earlier, schools are reimbursed for truancy interventions according to the number of filed petitions. Consequently, districts that attempt multiple interventions and bring fewer cases to court receive smaller reimbursements than districts with fewer interventions and more filed petitions. To reduce unnecessary filings, Thurston County has established a "reasonable efforts" criterion to ensure schools have exhausted all options before bringing a truancy matter to court.

### Alternative Sanctions

Court commissioners and judges believed that in the majority of cases, a court order compelling school attendance reduced future unexcused absences for truant students. The courts surveyed, however, believed more could be done for students who violated court orders and exhibited serious attendance problems. While administrators stated that detention is an important final consequence for truants, most believed a graduated system of sanctions is necessary. Courts with established community service programs referred some truant students to work crews or community service.

Those interviewed echoed the concern that habitual truancy is the result of many other issues in the student's life. Judges and administrators are attempting to implement educational and

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<sup>23</sup> Data from the Office of the Administrator for the Courts; truancy petitions counted between September 1996 and June 1997.

learning requirements with contempt sanctions. When possible, courts order evening or weekend school, or extra school projects, in addition to community service hours or detention.

According to the administrators interviewed, most courts did not impose financial sanctions or penalties on the parents of truant students. In cases where the court found that the parents did contribute to their child's truancy and ordered a fine, it was difficult for the court to collect those fines. One court suggested parents should be given more responsibility in monitoring their children's attendance by requiring parents to obtain attendance forms from their children's school and submit the forms to the court at periodic intervals.

### ***What Are the Costs of Filing Truancy Petitions for Schools and Courts?***

The Washington State Legislature appropriated \$1.5 million to reimburse schools that filed truancy petitions in 1996-97. School districts received approximately \$128 for each truancy petition filed. During the 1996-97 school year, 150 schools applied for reimbursement. The total reimbursements ranged from \$128 for 11 school districts that filed only one petition to \$223,191 for the Seattle School District, which filed 1,740 truancy petitions during the 1996-97 school year.

Truancy allocations and expenditures for school districts and juvenile courts in this case study were collected by survey. See Appendix 5 for a copy of the survey. The data was not audited for accuracy, although every attempt was made to clarify the data received.

### **Schools**

The cost survey results for five school districts in the case study are summarized in Table 6. The available funds included an average of \$52,745 per school district from state reimbursement for truancy petitions. Additional funds included an average \$46,067 for each of the three large districts that received community truancy board grants.

School districts incurred two types of costs for filing truancy petitions: 1) central office expenditures, where petitions were usually processed, and 2) school building costs, where teachers and administrators tracked attendance, held conferences, and implemented alternatives for truant students. The average cost for the school district's central office was \$50,448. The combined average cost for a high school and middle school equaled \$115,404.

Table 6 shows that state allocations received by school districts for truancy covered central office administration expenditures, but did not sufficiently address the costs of individual building administration. The costs for the high school and middle school in this case study represent only a percentage of the actual costs incurred by all buildings in each district. From district to district, expenditures varied considerably in each building depending upon the role the district central office assumed in filing petitions. It is not possible to develop a cost per petition for schools in this case study because the expenditures provided in the survey also included attendance monitoring, conferencing, and other means of working with students which are not directly related to filing truancy petitions. In addition, costs were not included for alternative

programs or special services that might have been provided to truant students. As shown in Table 6, the large school districts' central offices had a more active role in the truancy petition process than the smaller school districts.

**Table 6: Truancy Related Costs for School Districts in Truancy Case Study**

	<i>Average of Five School Districts</i>	<i>Average of School Districts With Enrollments Under 10,000</i>	<i>Average of School Districts With Enrollments Over 10,000</i>
<b>REVENUES</b>			
State Allocations Received for Truancy Petition Reimbursement	\$52,745	\$10,198	\$81,110
Total State Grants for Community Truancy Boards	N/A	N/A	\$46,067
<b>EXPENDITURES</b>			
Total Central Office Expenditures	\$50,448	\$17,223	\$72,599
Costs in One High School and One Middle School in Each District	\$115,404	\$148,341	\$93,446

*Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 1998.*

## Courts

The truancy-related allocations and expenses for the six juvenile courts in this case study are summarized in Table 7. These courts received an average of \$121,581 per county in state allocations related to truancy. Juvenile courts incurred costs for monitoring and assisting with filing petitions, court time, attorney time, detention and clerical costs for processing. The average cost for handling truancy petitions was \$181,367 per court.<sup>24</sup> Thus, state allocations for these six counties covered approximately 67 percent of the costs incurred. Truancy costs were higher in counties with larger populations where detention and prosecuting attorneys were used more frequently.

**Table 7: Truancy Related Costs for Juvenile Courts in Truancy Case Study**

	<i>Average of Six Counties</i>	<i>Average of Counties With Population of 50,000 or Less</i>	<i>Average of Counties With Population Over 50,000</i>
<b>State Allocations</b>	\$121,581	\$117,812	\$152,910
<b>Court Expenditures</b>	\$181,367	\$105,325	\$257,408

*Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 1998.*

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<sup>24</sup> This survey asked courts to report truancy costs incurred between July 1996 and June 1997.

## PART IV: TRUANCY EVALUATIONS AND RESEARCH

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As part of this evaluation, the Institute examined available research literature on truant students. A survey was also conducted of truancy-related programs implemented throughout the country. These reviews helped provide insight to the types of interventions that are successful in reducing truancy. An examination of these programs found definitions of truancy and program features differ considerably from state to state. These differences make it difficult to draw direct comparisons to truancy prevention efforts in Washington State. However, the research literature and program information can help policy makers target specific and effective interventions for truant students in our state. An extensive **Technical Appendix** that provides detailed information on surveyed programs and research literature is available upon request.

The research literature revealed students may be truant for a number of reasons, including:

- a) **personal traits** such as academic failure, poor social and emotional functioning, ethnic or racial issues, or physical issues;
- b) **family traits** such as low parental value of education, physical or substance abuse, or need for child care; or
- c) **school characteristics** such as policies, rules, curriculum, or teacher conflicts.

Typical interventions discussed in the literature range from firm sanctions with legal consequences to family and individual counseling. Almost any intervention is more likely to be successful with first-time truants than with those who have a history of truancy. These interventions are implemented with the realization that poor attendance in school can result in several negative outcomes during the course of a student's life. According to available research, students with excessive absences are more likely to experience lower earnings, unemployment, greater delinquency, and higher rates of divorce after their childhood.

Many cities, counties, and schools around the country are developing programs to prevent students from skipping school. Successful programs unite local schools, law enforcement, courts, and social services to respond to truancy and help the student and family address issues that may be causing the student to miss school. Communities rely on several approaches to respond to truancy. The types of programs that are most prevalent include:

- a) **Truancy Centers and "Street Sweeps"**
- b) **Truant Officers in the Community**
- c) **Court Interventions and Legal Sanctions**

Most truancy programs have not gathered sufficient longitudinal data to demonstrate the effect of their program on attendance levels. Program administrators interviewed for this review believed the following factors are important elements of a successful program:

1. Stable funding commitment: Programs with ongoing funding can modify and improve their efforts based on available resources.
2. Collaboration between schools and the legal system: Through the joint efforts of law enforcement, courts, and schools, students realize the serious nature of missing school. Predictable, serious consequences for truancy provide additional reinforcement for schools working with truants.
3. Clear communication: Before implementing major changes in attendance rules, programs that expect continued support notify parents and community members about changes in guidelines and possible sanctions.
4. Parental involvement: Requiring parents to come to a truancy center, attendance review board, or court helps reinforce the expectation that parents are responsible for their child's attendance. Parental involvement also helps school or court officials work with the family to identify barriers to attendance.

As local cities and counties in Washington State continue to develop truancy prevention programs, information from other states on "what works" will provide assistance in allocating truancy resources. A complete discussion of the truancy research literature and program reviews is available from the technical appendix to this report.

## **PART V: WHAT ARE THE INTERVENTIONS FOR TRUANT STUDENTS?**

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Truancy interventions that are both effective and comprehensive generally exist in areas where community leaders see truancy as a public problem and not just the responsibility of schools. This section focuses on three approaches that rely on community partnerships to work with truant students and their families: (1) truancy classes, (2) local truancy centers, and (3) community truancy boards.

### ***Truancy Classes for Students and Parents: Skagit County***

During the 1995-96 school year, court officials in Skagit County observed truancy cases and concluded that many students and parents could have resolved truancy problems before coming to court. Skagit County developed evening truancy classes to prevent the easily resolved cases from appearing in court and to provide an avenue for parents and students to resolve attendance problems in a less formal arena. The classes are held from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. two nights a month. Each session draws between 15 and 20 students and their parents.

After the school district files a truancy petition on a student, the family receives a letter from the juvenile court. The notice informs the family that they will not be required to appear in court if they attend, and satisfactorily complete, the next scheduled truancy class. The class costs \$25 for each family. During the first part of the evening, parents and students go to separate rooms. A school district official reviews the legal ramifications of unexcused absences with the parents and also identifies available alternatives for their children. During this time, students meet with a community volunteer to learn about goal-setting and the importance of school attendance in achieving goals. Available educational options in the county are described. The speaker emphasizes that the educational alternatives require students to take the initiative and make the choices necessary to achieve their goals.

After each segment, parents remain separated and have a similar opportunity to discuss their experiences with each other. During this time, students meet together and receive information about the legal consequences of unexcused absences. Students are informed if they continue to be truant, the school may file a contempt petition with the juvenile court.

In the last segment, students and parents are encouraged to create a written agreement on attendance problems. Professional mediators first present a skit on problem solving and different methods of dealing with conflict. The mediators encourage parents and students to offer suggestions about how they might work to better understand the problems in each other's lives. At the conclusion of the evening, students and parents find a private area of the building to talk and come up with their own agreement about school attendance and other issues. Four or five additional volunteer mediators are available to facilitate constructive conversations and resolve potential problems.

Skagit County's truancy class is now in its second year. Between September 1996 and May 1997, 135 students enrolled. Only 14 of those students (10 percent) had to appear in juvenile court as a result of continued truantries. During the first year of the class, families paid only \$5

with the additional funding provided by a state grant for community truancy boards. Because this grant was not available for the 1997-98 school year, the class fee was raised to \$25. School districts in the county will be asked to contribute to any costs not covered by class fees.

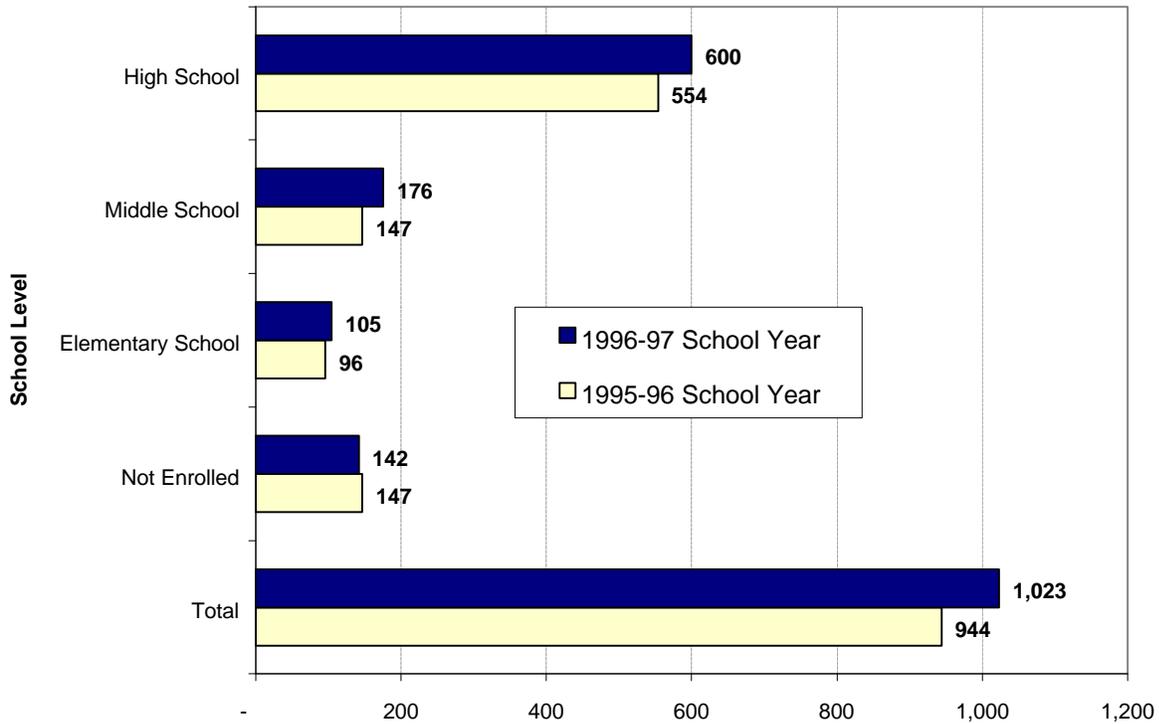
### ***Community Truancy Center and Police Street Sweeps: Spokane***

Spokane's Community Truancy Center was designed to prevent students from loitering during school hours. In operation since September 1995, the Truancy Center operates as a partnership among the Spokane Police Department, the Spokane School District and other community agencies. Two full-time officers patrol the city and pick up students who should be in school. The officer brings the truant student to the Truancy Center, located in Spokane's Havermale Alternative School. The student remains at the Center until released to a parent or guardian. If a parent cannot be reached, the student is transported to the local crisis residential center.

After arriving at the Truancy Center, the truant meets with a staff member to discuss why the student is truant and determine if other services are needed. A full-time manager and part-time counselor staff the Truancy Center; they see their mission as supportive, rather than punitive in nature. The Center works with the student to resolve issues that may be interfering with school attendance. In these cases, counselors work directly with parole officers, CPS caseworkers, and social service agencies that may have direct knowledge of the truant student's situation.

An alternative high school and eight other alternative programs are housed in the building with the Truancy Center. After speaking with Truancy Center counselors, students not presently enrolled in school or having difficulty in their current school can be placed quickly in one of the programs at Havermale Alternative School. The Center is open between September and June during school hours. In 1995-96, Spokane police officers brought 944 students to the Truancy Center; in 1996-97 the number rose to 1,023. Approximately 15 percent of the students brought to the Center in 1996-97 were repeat referrals. Figure 6 (next page) shows the distribution of students sent to the Truancy Center by year and school.

**Figure 6: Number of Truants Processed by Spokane Truancy Center**



Spokane’s Truancy Center is modeled after a similar program in Salt Lake City, Utah. After Spokane School District officials and police representatives visited the Salt Lake City center, they formed a planning group. Less than a year later, the Truancy Center was open with funding from the school district, local police department, and a federal education grant.<sup>25</sup> The city pays the salaries of the two police officers assigned to the Truancy Center, while the Spokane School District covers the capital costs and salaries for a manager and counselor to run the Center. In addition, the Truancy Center received several in-kind contributions and donations from private businesses during its first year of operation.

<sup>25</sup> Federal "Safe and Drug Free Schools" grant covers approximately 20 percent of the operating cost for the Center.

## ***Community Truancy Boards: Yakima, Tacoma, Spokane, and Port Angeles***

The current truancy statute authorizes the use of community truancy boards prior to a petition.<sup>26</sup> The purpose of a board is to help individual students and families identify the reasons for truancy, and structure solutions. In many cases, the board assists in identifying and obtaining available resources such as counseling, medical services, drug or alcohol assessment, or special school arrangements. A truancy board is usually composed of representatives from the local community where the student attends school.

For fiscal year 1997, the Washington State Legislature appropriated \$1 million to school districts for community truancy board grants. No money was appropriated for this purpose in the 1997-99 biennium. This section will describe the operation of boards in Yakima, Tacoma, Spokane, and Port Angeles. Outcomes that were tracked during the 1996-97 school year are also reported. These outcomes should be viewed with caution – the boards served relatively few students, making it difficult to draw comparisons to the success of potentially larger scale efforts. For a complete listing of the community truancy board awards and programs in the state, see Appendix 3.

The ***Yakima School District*** focused its initial efforts on middle school students but expanded to serve elementary students. A juvenile court staff person recruited and trained members for the community truancy boards. Students and their families spent more time with community truancy boards resolving truancy issues than they spent in court. Americorps volunteers participated on the county boards. The boards tried to isolate a primary cause (e.g., chemical dependency) for the truancy and then address ways to obtain help. Fifty-one (*30 percent*) of the truant students in the Yakima School District's middle schools went to a community truancy board; the other *70 percent* went directly to a fact-finding hearing in juvenile court.

According to interview responses and a written evaluation, the most challenging issue for the boards was monitoring and following up with students and families. A bilingual truancy officer worked in each of the middle schools, filed petitions for the boards, and made home visits to students and families. Outcomes were not provided to determine how many of the students referred to community truancy boards returned to school and improved their attendance.

The ***Tacoma School District*** contracted with a non-profit agency to provide case management for selected students with a court order to attend school. The community truancy board did not review individual cases, but provided oversight to the agency. Although there was no formal evaluation of this project, a school administrator reported that the community truancy board served 30 students, and approximately *90 percent* of these students returned to school.

The ***Spokane School District*** had three different attendance review boards: one in a high school (which had been in place prior to the Becca Bill), one in the alternative high school, and one district-wide middle school board. The community truancy board worked with the truant student to develop attendance agreements that served as binding contracts requiring the student to attend school. The juvenile court judge authorized many of the agreements reached between the community truancy board and the student. When authorized, the agreement became a court-sanctioned order to attend school. Thus, if the student did not follow the agreement, he or she could be found in contempt of court without an initial hearing. Parents, teachers, and students serve on the district high school board. Of the 53 students who went

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<sup>26</sup> RCW 28A.225.025.

before the board during the 1996-97 school year, *50 percent* improved their attendance. The attendance review board has expanded its scope to include students who accumulate excessive absences (either excused or unexcused).

The ***Port Angeles School District*** created a Community Truancy Board in March 1997 to focus on elementary and middle school students with large numbers of excused and unexcused absences. The Board included excused absences because they suspect that parents sometimes excuse their children for reasons other than illness or family emergencies. There was strong support between the school district and the juvenile court for the creation of this Board. A truancy specialist was hired to recruit Board members and set up standards for Board operations. The Board has heard 28 cases. Of the 26 for which there is data, *92 percent* had no further unexcused absences, although *69 percent* had a further excused absence. Most frequently, the Board recommended that the student obtain tutoring assistance. According to interviews with school officials, the two biggest challenges were: (1) ensuring students and their families obtained the social or health services recommended by the Board, and (2) finding ways for students to earn course credit when they returned to school.

### ***Summary***

The early success of these community truancy boards can often be attributed to the combined commitment on the part of the juvenile court and schools. While the long-term effects of these boards are still uncertain, boards that have operated for over a year are showing promising results. The longer the board has been in existence, the more students have been served, and the greater the success rate (usually *over 50 percent*) in terms of returning and keeping students in school.<sup>27</sup> The biggest challenge for all boards was "case management" – ensuring that students and families received help finding and continuing with the needed services. This required a significant investment of staff and volunteer time that was not available in the projects surveyed for this study.

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<sup>27</sup> See the discussion of Benton County's Community Truancy Board in Appendix 3.



## **PART VI: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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Data from the first two years of Washington State's truancy law show that juvenile justice and education professionals are increasing their efforts in holding students accountable for school attendance. Partnerships between the courts and schools have strengthened the process and reduced paperwork, when possible. In this case study, the majority of students who had truancy petitions filed in court returned to school. However, many students may need additional assistance in order to be successful in school.

To address certain gaps identified as a result of this evaluation, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Consider expanding the population** covered under the truancy process to include enrolled students from ages 5 to 8. National research reveals that elementary truancy is a predictor of high school truancy. During the interviews conducted for this study, school administrators stressed the need to reach families with young children regarding the importance of good school attendance habits. Families with younger students exercise more control over the school attendance of their children. If young children (ages 5 to 8) are frequently truant, the court should determine if the parents are contributing to the truancy of the child. In such cases, it may be appropriate to order court sanctions for these parents.
2. School districts may want to **target students in 8th and 9th grades** with attendance problems. In the data collected for this study, students in these grades seemed to be struggling the most with attendance issues. Special programs such as those in East Valley, Port Angeles, and Forks middle schools are potential models for other districts to examine.
3. Long-term truancy solutions will require a **stable funding commitment** to develop the programs and resources necessary to improve school attendance. The current reimbursement system does not provide fixed revenue to establish lasting truancy programs. Because the current reimbursement system is based on truancy petitions filed, districts that invest in programs which target truants *before* going to court receive lower compensation than districts that provide little intervention and file a higher number of petitions. A fixed truancy grant, or reimbursement tied to student outcomes may provide a more equitable system of financial support for truancy efforts. One option would be to reimburse districts based on the number of students with five or more unexcused absences in a month who *do not* have truancy petitions filed and stay in school. This funding could serve as an additional allocation to assist school districts that implement truancy interventions designed to reduce the number of petitions filed.



## **APPENDICES**

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Appendix 1: Truancy Petitions Filed by County

Appendix 2: Truancy Petitions Filed by School District

Appendix 3: Community Truancy Boards

Appendix 4: The Truancy Petition Process

Appendix 5: Survey on Truancy Costs



## Appendix 1: Truancy Petitions Filed by County

<i>County</i>	<i>Total Petitions Filed: September 1996 to August 1997</i>	<i>K-12 Headcount: October 1996</i>	<i>Percent of Enrolled Students With Truancy Petitions Filed: 1996-97</i>
Adams	34	3,763	0.90%
Asotin	14	3,735	0.37%
Benton	53	28,184	0.19%
Chelan	210	12,890	1.63%
Clallam	270	10,716	2.52%
Clark	587	60,098	0.98%
Columbia	1	826	0.12%
Cowlitz	515	17,641	2.92%
Douglas	72	6,420	1.12%
Ferry	9	1,357	0.66%
Franklin	91	9,980	0.91%
Garfield	1	440	0.23%
Grant	145	16,003	0.91%
Grays Harbor	75	13,876	0.54%
Island	189	9,888	1.91%
Jefferson	77	3,802	2.03%
King	3,352	244,284	1.37%
Kitsap	224	42,031	0.53%
Kittitas	13	4,785	0.27%
Klickitat	15	4,014	0.37%
Lewis	160	13,335	1.20%
Lincoln	5	2,365	0.21%
Mason	149	8,674	1.72%
Okanogan	149	8,043	1.85%
Pacific	19	3,523	0.54%
Pend Oreille	13	2,409	0.54%
Pierce	793	120,513	0.66%
San Juan	7	1,835	0.38%
Skagit	407	17,985	2.26%
Skamania	7	1,443	0.49%
Snohomish	1,885	96,273	1.96%
Spokane	593	72,306	0.82%
Stevens	22	6,942	0.32%
Thurston	416	37,181	1.12%
Wahkiakum	0	586	0.00%
Walla Walla	45	9,326	0.48%
Whatcom	132	24,548	0.54%
Whitman	15	5,068	0.30%
Yakima	1,330	47,417	2.80%
<b>State Average</b>	<b>12,094</b>	<b>974,505</b>	<b>1.24%</b>

Sources: OSPI 1996 headcount data and SCOMIS (Superior Court Management Information System)



## Appendix 2: Truancy Petitions Filed by School District

<i>School District</i>	<i>Total Petitions Filed: September 1996 to August 1997</i>	<i>K-12 Headcount: October 1996</i>	<i>Percent of Enrolled Students With Truancy Petitions Filed: 1996-97</i>
Aberdeen	31	4,269	0.7%
Adna	1	584	0.2%
Anacortes	47	3,005	1.6%
Arlington	52	4,255	1.2%
Auburn	291	12,434	2.3%
Bainbridge	3	3,609	0.1%
Battle Ground	22	10,892	0.2%
Bellevue	145	15,533	0.9%
Bellingham	108	10,179	1.1%
Bethel	60	14,798	0.4%
Blaine	5	1,782	0.3%
Bremerton	88	6,197	1.4%
Brewster	33	1,002	3.3%
Bridgeport	3	788	0.4%
Burlington Edison	79	3,406	2.3%
Camas	13	3,125	0.4%
Cape Flattery	16	660	2.4%
Cascade	11	1,602	0.7%
Cashmere	3	1,618	0.2%
Castle Rock	10	1,428	0.7%
Central Kitsap	106	13,610	0.8%
Central Valley	41	10,741	0.4%
Centralia	66	3,440	1.9%
Chehalis	30	2,985	1.0%
Chewelah	17	1,381	1.2%
Chimacum	32	1,470	2.2%
Clarkston	37	3,141	1.2%
Cle Elum-Roslyn	7	1,085	0.6%
Clover Park	39	13,737	0.3%
Colfax	1	803	0.1%
Columbia (Stevens)	1	262	0.4%
Columbia (Walla Walla)	5	920	0.5%
Colville	2	2,625	0.1%
Concrete	8	1,080	0.7%
Coupeville	10	1,192	0.8%
Curlew	3	321	0.9%
Darrington	5	637	0.8%
Davenport	1	470	0.2%
Dayton	1	789	0.1%
East Valley (Spokane)	15	4,761	0.3%

Source: Office of the Superintendent of Public Instructions, December 1997.

<b>School District</b>	<b>Total Petitions Filed: September 1996 to August 1997</b>	<b>K-12 Headcount: October 1996</b>	<b>Percent of Enrolled Students With Truancy Petitions Filed: 1996-97</b>
East Valley (Yakima)	12	2,288	0.5%
Eastmont	64	4,705	1.4%
Eatonville	27	2,070	1.3%
Edmonds	541	21,469	2.5%
Ellensburg	5	2,779	0.2%
Elma	16	2,149	0.7%
Entiat	8	378	2.1%
Enumclaw	14	5,102	0.3%
Ephrata	11	2,391	0.5%
Everett	288	17,553	1.6%
Evergreen (Clark)	323	18,366	1.8%
Federal Way	232	20,862	1.1%
Ferndale	3	4,641	0.1%
Fife	9	2,637	0.3%
Finley	3	1,271	0.2%
Franklin Pierce	23	6,793	0.3%
Garfield	1	206	0.5%
Glenwood	3	135	2.2%
Grand Coulee Dam	39	967	4.0%
Grandview	17	2,919	0.6%
Granger	16	1,237	1.3%
Granite Falls	47	1,806	2.6%
Highland	6	1,179	0.5%
Highline	171	18,403	0.9%
Hoquiam	34	2,335	1.5%
Issaquah	26	12,032	0.2%
Kahlotus	1	94	1.1%
Kalama	4	851	0.5%
Keller	6	58	10.3%
Kelso	167	5,205	3.2%
Kent	152	24,820	0.6%
Kettle Falls	4	912	0.4%
Kiona Benton	13	1,738	0.7%
Kittitas	1	582	0.2%
Klickitat	1	180	0.6%
La Conner	14	664	2.1%
Lacenter	20	1,315	1.5%
Lake Chelan	14	1,489	0.9%
Lake Stevens	65	5,707	1.1%
Lake Washington	120	24,852	0.5%
Lakewood	11	2,010	0.5%
Longview	300	7,752	3.9%

<b>School District</b>	<b>Total Petitions Filed: September 1996 to August 1997</b>	<b>K-12 Headcount: October 1996</b>	<b>Percent of Enrolled Students With Truancy Petitions Filed: 1996-97</b>
Lopez	1	310	0.3%
Lyle	5	442	1.1%
Lynden	12	2,562	0.5%
Mabton	3	919	0.3%
Mary M Knight	4	219	1.8%
Mary Walker	1	617	0.2%
Marysville	209	10,318	2.0%
Mc Cleary	1	362	0.3%
Mead	13	7,859	0.2%
Meridian	6	1,444	0.4%
Methow Valley	6	767	0.8%
Monroe	62	4,864	1.3%
Montesano	8	1,634	0.5%
Morton	8	538	1.5%
Moses Lake	69	6,109	1.1%
Mossyrock	5	676	0.7%
Mount Baker	1	2,097	0.0%
Mt Vernon	189	5,173	3.7%
Mukilteo	286	12,722	2.2%
Napavine	5	692	0.7%
Naselle Grays River	3	342	0.9%
Nespelem	10	223	4.5%
Newport	14	1,582	0.9%
Nine Mile Falls	2	1,495	0.1%
Nooksack Valley	8	1,843	0.4%
North Beach	4	677	0.6%
North Franklin	5	1,897	0.3%
North Kitsap	51	6,939	0.7%
North Mason	47	2,509	1.9%
North Thurston	164	13,049	1.3%
Northshore	30	19,457	0.2%
Oak Harbor	164	6,385	2.6%
Oakesdale	1	184	0.5%
Oakville	6	373	1.6%
Ocean Beach	12	1,431	0.8%
Ocosta	1	1,007	0.1%
Okanogan	4	1,132	0.4%
Olympia	54	8,916	0.6%
Omak	48	2,365	2.0%
Onalaska	8	973	0.8%
Onion Creek	2	61	3.3%
Oroville	9	981	0.9%
<b>School District</b>	<b>Total Petitions</b>	<b>K-12 Headcount:</b>	<b>Percent of Enrolled</b>

	<b>Filed: September 1996 to August 1997</b>	<b>October 1996</b>	<b>Students With Truancy Petitions Filed: 1996-97</b>
Othello	36	2,895	1.2%
Pasco	94	7,974	1.2%
Pateros	2	357	0.6%
Pe Ell	2	325	0.6%
Peninsula	11	9,465	0.1%
Pioneer	20	895	2.2%
Pomeroy	1	440	0.2%
Port Angeles	144	5,347	2.7%
Prosser	17	2,795	0.6%
Pullman	8	2,220	0.4%
Puyallup	59	18,545	0.3%
Quilcene	18	331	5.4%
Quillayute Valley	82	1,569	5.2%
Quinault	7	303	2.3%
Quincy	12	2,190	0.5%
Rainier	6	873	0.7%
Raymond	2	672	0.3%
Renton	65	12,333	0.5%
Republic	2	616	0.3%
Richland	40	8,982	0.4%
Ridgefield	2	1,695	0.1%
Ritzville	3	472	0.6%
Riverview	17	2,803	0.6%
Rochester	39	1,772	2.2%
Rosalia	1	309	0.3%
San Juan	6	951	0.6%
Satsop	2	66	3.0%
Seattle	1,740	47,629	3.7%
Sedro Woolley	88	4,189	2.1%
Selah	22	3,713	0.6%
Sequim	56	2,827	2.0%
Shelton	84	4,155	2.0%
Shoreline	172	10,277	1.7%
Snohomish	117	8,515	1.4%
Snoqualmie Valley	7	4,177	0.2%
Soap Lake	6	523	1.1%
South Bend	7	488	1.4%
South Central	69	2,377	2.9%
South Kitsap	106	11,676	0.9%
South Whidbey	9	2,311	0.4%
Southside	2	246	0.8%

<b>School District</b>	<b>Total Petitions Filed: September 1996 to August 1997</b>	<b>K-12 Headcount: October 1996</b>	<b>Percent of Enrolled Students With Truancy Petitions Filed: 1996-97</b>
Spokane	447	32,041	1.4%
Sprague	3	141	2.1%
Stanwood	42	4,468	0.9%
Steilacoom Hist.	15	1,746	0.9%
Stevenson-Carson	11	1,231	0.9%
Sultan	100	1,918	5.2%
Sumner	53	7,221	0.7%
Sunnyside	137	4,986	2.7%
Tacoma	601	31,844	1.9%
Tahoma	16	5,451	0.3%
Tekoa	2	263	0.8%
Tenino	18	1,522	1.2%
Tonasket	6	1,216	0.5%
Toppenish	73	3,529	2.1%
Toutle Lake	29	744	3.9%
Tumwater	87	6,114	1.4%
Union Gap	1	570	0.2%
University Place	11	5,099	0.2%
Vancouver	174	20,657	0.8%
Vashon Island	5	1,682	0.3%
Wahkiakum	3	586	0.5%
Wahluke	9	1,191	0.8%
Walla Walla	40	6,448	0.6%
Wapato	96	3,372	2.8%
Warden	20	966	2.1%
Washougal	54	2,681	2.0%
Washtucna	1	122	0.8%
Waterville	1	417	0.2%
Wellpinit	6	350	1.7%
Wenatchee	186	7,108	2.6%
West Valley (Spokane)	34	3,570	1.0%
West Valley (Yakima)	27	4,583	0.6%
White Pass	24	974	2.5%
White River	34	3,759	0.9%
White Salmon	13	1,390	0.9%
Winlock	25	859	2.9%
Wishkah Valley	4	248	1.6%
Wishram	1	83	1.2%
Woodland	6	1,661	0.4%
Yakima	949	14,043	6.8%
Yelm	63	4,264	1.5%
Zillah	1	1,251	0.1%



### Appendix 3: Community Truancy Boards

The 31 school districts (or a consortia of districts) that received these grant funds in FY 97 are listed below:

<i>ESD</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>School District</i>	<i>CTB Grant</i>	<i>1st or 2nd Round</i>
123	Benton	Finley	\$ 20,000	1st
		Kennewick	\$ 40,000	2nd
		Kiona-Benton	\$ 20,000	2nd
		Prosser	\$ 18,898	2nd
		Richland	\$ 30,000	2nd
171	Chelan	Cascade	\$ 19,844	1st
		Wenatchee	\$ 28,720	1st
114	Clallam	Port Angeles	\$ 30,000	2nd
		Sequim	\$ 20,000	2nd
112	Clark	Vancouver (Consortium)	\$ 50,000	1st
123	Franklin	Pasco	\$ 30,000	1st
		North Franklin	\$ 20,000	2nd
171	Grant	Moses Lake	\$ 28,960	1st
121	King	Renton	\$ 38,638	1st
		Seattle	\$ 50,000	1st
		South Central	\$ 20,000	1st
		Highline	\$ 38,510	2nd
		Northshore	\$ 40,000	2nd
		Shoreline	\$ 23,365	2nd
114	Kitsap	South Kitsap (Consortium)	\$ 50,000	1st
101	Lincoln	Davenport	\$ 19,767	2nd
121	Pierce	Tacoma	\$ 50,000	1st
		White River	\$ 19,860	2nd
189	Skagit	Anacortes (Consortium)	\$ 38,446	1st
189	Snohomish	Monroe (Consortium)	\$ 26,410	2nd
101	Spokane	Spokane	\$ 48,200	1st
		West Valley	\$ 20,000	1st
		Colville	\$ 19,925	1st
123	Walla Walla	Columbia	\$ 20,000	2nd
105	Yakima	Yakima	\$ 40,000	1st
		Zillah	\$ 20,000	1st
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$ 939,543</b>	

### **Community truancy board evaluations for school districts not included in case study:**

- The Clark County Community Truancy Project was created and funded in 1996-97 by the juvenile court and a nine-school-district consortium. When a truant student did not return to school after a court order, the student was referred to the Clark County Truancy Board. The Board developed an agreement with the student and the family. Staff from the educational service district and nine school districts provided services based on the agreement. The services included a weekly family support group meeting available for all families; connection with community services, such as counseling or mental health and drug assessments; and mentoring by Americorps volunteers with individual students for several months. Forty-five students participated in the Truancy Project and 57 percent made significant improvement in their attendance.
- The Benton County Truancy Board was established in 1995-96 as a joint project between the Benton-Franklin Juvenile Justice Center and four school districts in the county. The prosecuting attorney sent letters to truant students requesting they be present at the community truancy board. If they did not attend, the prosecutor's office would file a petition with the juvenile court. Community Truancy Board meetings were attended by 133 students; 63 percent of these students made an improvement in their attendance. The board assisted students by helping them obtain counseling, tutoring, drug/alcohol assessment, or a change in school program.

The success of the community truancy boards often could be attributed to the combined commitment on the part of the juvenile court and schools. Frequently, the countywide approach to include several or all school districts seemed to be most effective. Several boards that have existed for more than a year were able to serve more students and keep more students in school.<sup>28</sup> The biggest challenge for all boards was "case management" to ensure students and families received help finding and continuing with the services they needed. This required a significant investment of staff time which was not always available.

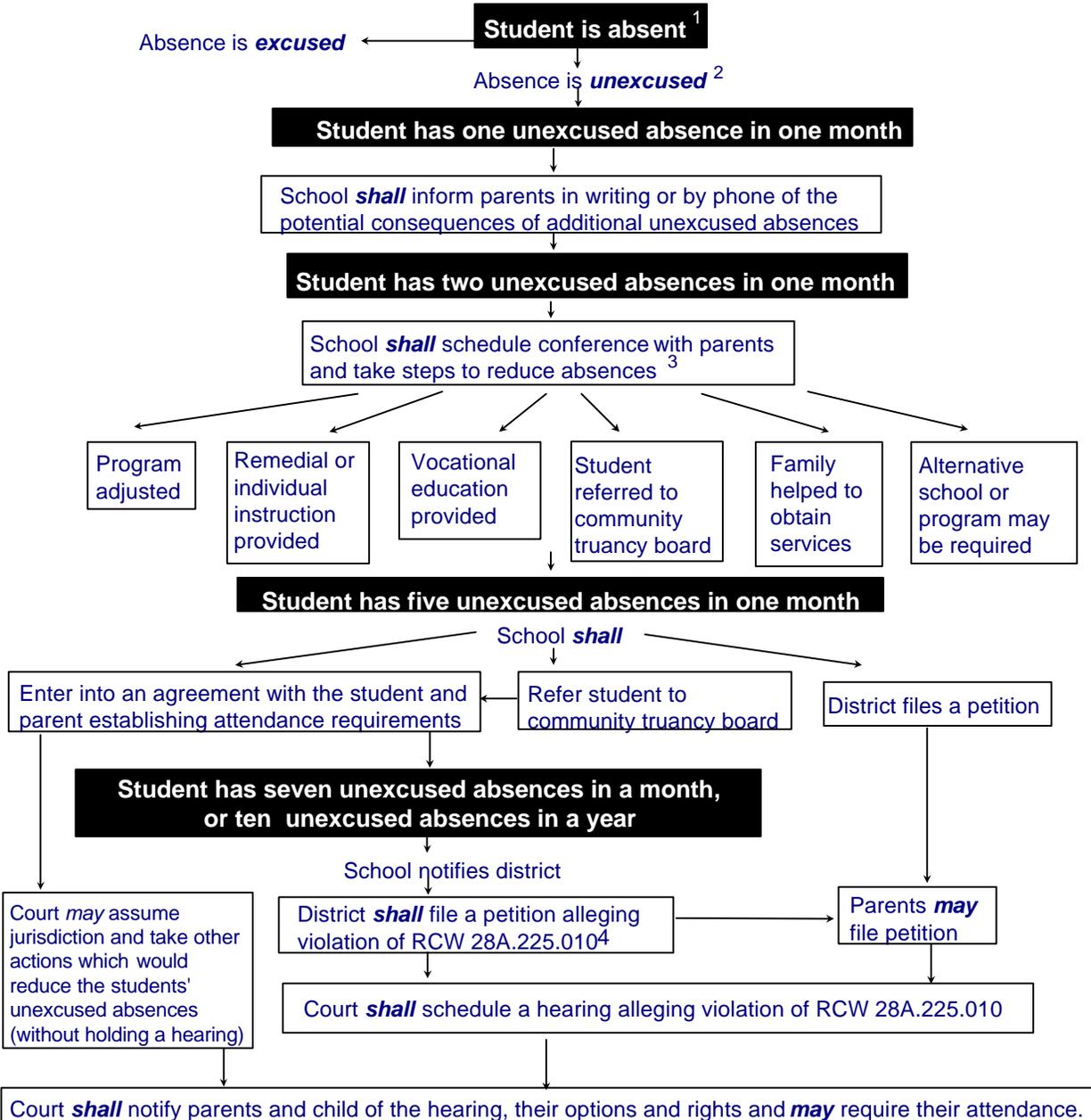
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<sup>28</sup> Fifty percent or more students stayed in school in these instances.

## Appendix 4

# The Truancy Petition Process

RCW 28A.225.010, 28A.225.020, Chapt. Law 1995 c 312 (66-69), and Chapt. Law 1996 c 134.

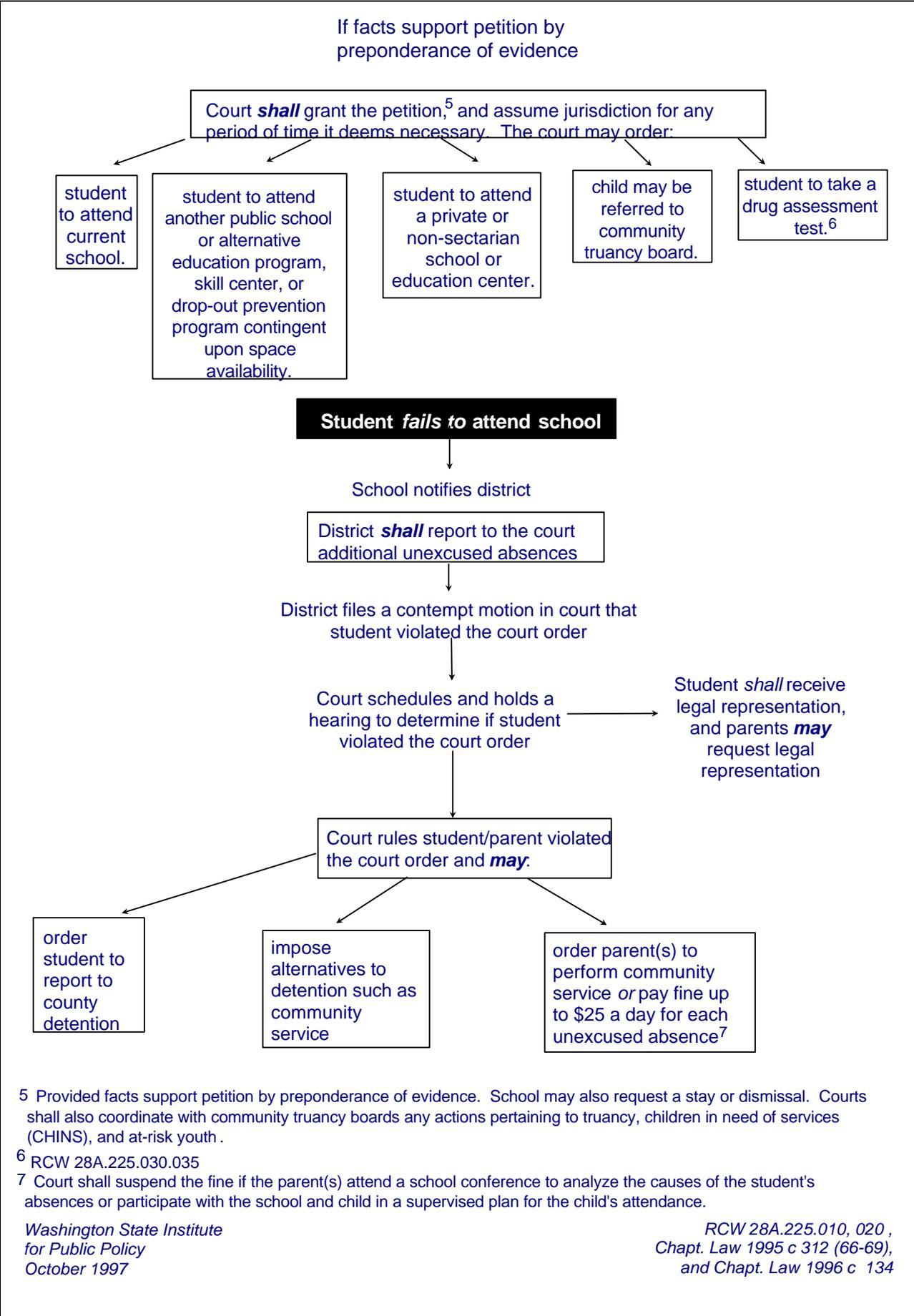


1 Ages of compulsory attendance are 8 to 18 (with exceptions). Schools must annually inform parents of the compulsory attendance requirements.

2 An unexcused absence means a child has failed to: 1) attend the majority of hours or periods in an average school day, or 2) comply with a more restrictive school district policy.

3 If a parent does not attend, the conference may be held with the student and school official. The school must notify parents of the steps taken.

4 School district employee who is not an attorney may file the petition.



## Appendix 5: Survey on Truancy Costs

### 1996-97 Cost Data on Truancy Case Studies in Selected School Districts

As a part of the Washington State Institute for Public Policy's truancy petition evaluation for the state legislature, we would like to collect some basic data on the **on - going (operating) costs** involved in implementing the truancy petition process in «District». The first two questions are for the central district office operations. The individual high school and middle school should answer the third question separately. If you have any questions, please call us. Otherwise, we will contact you in late May to follow up on this cost information. A copy of this data will be sent to each central district office contact and the individual schools participating in the study. Thanks again for your willingness to assist us! **Please share this piece with your budget office!**

#### 1. District-wide receipt of cost reimbursement for truancy petitions

a) How many petitions did you file? \_\_\_\_ How many did you claim for reimbursement?

b) What dollar amount did you receive from OSPI for reimbursement for truancy petitions for 1995-96: \_\_\_\_\_?

c) Please describe how the reimbursement money you received for 1995-96 was used for the 1996-97 school year:

**2. Please estimate the on going costs related to truancy incurred solely by the district’s central office in the following areas:**

**a) Central Staff Time Dedicated to Truancy Petition Process**

	<b>FTEs (last name)</b>	<b>New Position due to Becca? (yes, no)</b>	<b>Percent Time on Petition Process</b>	<b>Annual Salary &amp; Benefits (or total amount paid if a contract)</b>
<b>Clerical support</b>	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
<b>Professional support</b>	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
<b>Attorney In house</b>	1.		1.	1.
<b>External</b>	1.		1.	

**b) Central Office Additional Costs for Truancy Petitions**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Expenditure Estimates for 1996-97 School Year</b>
<b>Technology (specify)</b>	\$
<b>Space (room)</b>	\$
<b>Phone</b>	\$
<b>Office Equipment (desk, chair, specify)</b>	\$
<b>Supplies (paper, copying)</b>	\$
<b>Personal Service</b>	\$
<b>Postage</b>	\$
<b>Mileage</b>	\$
<b>Other (specify):</b>	\$

**c) Do you have any additional comments related to central office expenditures on truancy?**

**(«High\_School» / «Middle\_School») DATA**

**3. Please estimate «\_School»'s on-going costs to support the truancy effort in your district:**

**a) «\_School»'s Staff Time Dedicated to Truancy Petition Process**

	<b>FTEs (last name)</b>	<b>New Position due to Becca? (yes, no)</b>	<b>Percent Time on Petition Process</b>	<b>Annual Salary &amp; Benefits (or total amount paid if a contract)</b>
<b>Clerical support</b>	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
<b>Professional support (vice principal, principal)</b>	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.

**b) «\_School»'s Additional Costs for Truancy Petitions**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Expenditure Estimates for 1996-97 School Year</b>
<b>Technology (specify)</b>	\$
<b>Space (room)</b>	\$
<b>Phone</b>	\$
<b>Office Equipment (desk, chair, specify)</b>	\$
<b>Supplies (paper, copying)</b>	\$
<b>Personal Service</b>	\$
<b>Postage</b>	\$
<b>Mileage</b>	\$

**c) Are you using new software and/or information systems designed for gathering attendance data?    Yes    No**

**d) If yes, how many years have you used it and what is the product name:**

Years                      Brand

**e) Are you using automated phone calls to contact students with unexcused absences?**

Yes    No

**f) If yes, how many years have you been using this system?**

**g) Have you received or used other sources of funds to address truancy?**

Yes    No

**h) If yes, please describe the sources and amounts:**

<b>Source</b>	<b>Amount for 1996-97 School Year</b>
<b>OSPI Alternative School Grant</b>	
<b>OSPI Community Truancy Board</b>	
<b>District fund balance</b>	
<b>District local levy</b>	
<b>Other</b>	
<b>Other</b>	

**i) How are these other sources of funds being used**

**j) Other comments related to truancy expenditures at the high school level? (use reverse side)**

**SURVEY ON COSTS FOR TRUANCY PETITIONS PROCESSED BY THE JUVENILE COURT:**

Note: This form is the same as was prepared by Harold Delia of Kitsap County with a few variations. We would like you to provide cost information to update what he collected. We will share this information with him as well. Could you please provide the costs for petitions you processed for July 1 1996 through June 30 1997? If you have questions please call: Edie Harding 360-866-6000 ext. 6380. We would like this information by October 15.

Juvenile Court: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Contact Person and Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Does your county have the county prosecutor handle the petitions? Yes No

**Expenditures:**

Facilitate Process = \_\_\_ hrs @ \$\_\_\_/hr x \_\_\_ petitions processed  
 Total \$  
 (e.g., county prosecutor, court liaison, etc)

Monitoring = \_\_\_ hrs @ \$\_\_\_/hr x \_\_\_ petitions processed  
 Total \$  
 (e.g., following up on court order)

Court Time = \_\_\_ hrs @ \$\_\_\_/hr x \_\_\_ petitions processed  
 Total \$

Attorney = \_\_\_ hrs @ \$ \_\_\_/hr x \_\_\_ petitions processed  
 Total \$

Contempt =

Facilitate \_\_\_ hrs @ \$\_\_\_/hr x \_\_\_ petitions processed  
 Total \$

Detention \_\_\_ hrs @ \$\_\_\_/hr x \_\_\_ petitions processed  
 Total \$

Other costs (specify):

\_\_\_ hrs @\$ \_\_\_/hr x \_\_\_ petitions processed Total \$

**Revenues:**

Amount received by **state general fund** to meet Becca requirements for July 1996-June 1997 \$

Amount received by **county general fund** to meet Becca requirements for July 1996-June 1997: \$

(e.g., the use of a county prosecutor or clerk, indicate time devoted to Becca and annual salary of the person

Other amounts received (specify fund source and time frame) for July 1996-97:

**Petitions filed July 1996-June 1997:**

(please do not double count a petition that was filed under truancy and then combined with at risk youth, etc

Number of truancy petitions:

Number of at youth risk petitions:

Number of children in need of services petitions: