

2016 State Roundtable Report



Educational Success and Truancy Prevention



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Court of Common Pleas of Adams County

Honorable Mary Ann Ullman
Court of Common Pleas of Berks County

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Educational Success and Truancy Prevention Workgroup

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Introduction and Background

The Pennsylvania State Roundtable's Educational Success and Truancy Prevention Workgroup (*hereafter* ESTP) began its work in 2009 focusing on truancy prevention. In starting their work on this issue, the ESTP Workgroup surveyed Leadership Roundtable members to gain a better understanding of truancy issues at the local level and to determine if courts, child welfare agencies and schools were working collaboratively to address truancy. Based on the 2009 survey results and input from Workgroup members, the ESTP Workgroup offered five core recommendations in its May 2010 Roundtable Report, *Truancy: A Call to Action*, to assist Local Children's Roundtable's in their efforts to effectively address truancy. The recommendations included: *collaboration*; *positive school climate*; *prevention and early intervention*; *data collection*; and *sustainability*. The recommendations were unanimously adopted by the State Roundtable and subsequently incorporated into the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services funding guidelines for truancy prevention programs.

In 2013, the ESTP Workgroup once again surveyed counties to determine whether Local Children's Roundtables increased their sense of urgency about addressing truancy and if the 2010 recommendations were helpful in their efforts. The 2013 survey results indicated an overwhelming YES! Local Children's Roundtables have prioritized truancy, more Attendance Improvement Plans are being created, more collaborative truancy prevention protocols are in effect and truancy data is more accurate and being utilized more often than in 2009. With community attendance efforts well underway on the local level, the ESTP Workgroup turned its attention to legislative reform, enhancements to the Pennsylvania Toolkit for Attendance Reduction (Pennsylvania Truancy Toolkit), enhancements to training curricula for both magisterial district judges and child welfare professionals and Cyber Charter School reform.

The ESTP Workgroup's mission was expanded in 2011 to include educational stability and success for foster children. Early on, the Workgroup engaged the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, Office of Children Youth and Families (DHS/OCYF) and the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts, Office of Children and Families in the Courts (AOPC/OCFC) to approve an action plan, *The Pennsylvania Blueprint for Education Success (The Blueprint)*, and a strategy for implementation. The Blueprint was adopted by the 2013 Pennsylvania State Roundtable with a commitment to implementation from all three entities. In 2014, the Workgroup decided to encompass all priorities and outstanding initiatives into The Blueprint to have one comprehensive plan to address both truancy prevention and education success for foster youth. The Blueprint includes the following five objectives with multi-year timetables for completion. The following matrix includes efforts on addressing The Blueprint objectives.

Pennsylvania Blueprint for Education Success

Cross Systems Education
and Resources

Legislative and Policy
Reform

Collaboration

Data Collection and
Sharing

Court Competencies and
Best Practices

ENHANCED COLLABORATION

COMPLETE

- State leaders from PDE, AOPC/OCFC, DHS/OCYF and JCIC meet regularly to address systemic education issues for foster youth.
- ESTP members meet regularly to implement The Blueprint.
- Local Children's Roundtables address truancy and educational success within their own communities.
- 2011 Art Logo Contest (Awake. Attend. Achieve).

CROSS SYSTEMS EDUCATION AND RESOURCES

IN PROGRESS

- 2017 Education Summit for Foster Youth (planning in progress).
- Considerations for Cyber Charter School Enrollment Brochure – 4,000 distributed statewide.
- Presentations at the 2011 and 2015 Children's Summits.
- Enhancements to:
 - CWRC Course 202: Truancy Prevention and Intervention
 - Magisterial District Judge Truancy Education Session
 - PA Truancy Toolkit

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY REFORM

IN PROGRESS

- Legislative reform efforts (in progress).
- Participation on the 2015 Joint State Government Commission's Truancy Advisory Committee.

DATA COLLECTION AND SHARING

IN PROGRESS

- PDE/DHS/AOPC prioritize data and develop and implement policies about collecting, sharing and analyzing educational data for foster youth (in progress).

COURT COMPETENCIES AND BEST PRACTICES

COMPLETE

- Comprehensive set of Juvenile Court Procedural Rules on education for foster youth.
- Education success information included in the 2014 revised Dependency Benchbook.
- AOPC/OCFC Court Observation Form 2015 revision measures education discussed at Permanency Review Hearings.

2015/2016 Workgroup Efforts

During 2015/2016 the ESTP Workgroup continued their focus on four areas of *The Blueprint*: legislative reform, data collection/sharing, the upcoming 2017 Education Summit for Foster Youth and evaluating the Workgroup's efforts.

Legislative Reform

Truancy

The ESTP Workgroup, under the guidance of the Juvenile Court Judges Commission, spent a considerable amount of time during 2015/2016 reviewing and discussing legislative proposals related to truancy and educational success for foster youth. In addition, several members of the ESTP Workgroup participated on the **Joint State Government Commission's Truancy Advisory Committee (TAC)** pursuant to PA House Resolution 1032 of 2014. The resolution directed the Commission to appoint an Advisory Committee to conduct a comprehensive study of the issues of truancy and school dropout prevention. The TAC was comprised of PDE, DHS, representatives from county children and youth agencies, juvenile justice agencies and other stakeholders. In October of 2015, the TAC released its final report on truancy and school dropout prevention. The final TAC report included recommendations related to statutory reforms and public policy suggestions. **A significant number of the statutory reforms recommended by the TAC originated from the proposed statutory changes suggested by ESTP** surrounding clearly defining truancy, Attendance Improvement Conferences, discretion in enforcing compliance for magisterial district judges and data collection and sharing. The full TAC report can be viewed at <http://jsq.legis.state.pa.us>.

Pennsylvania General Assembly – In January of 2015, Senator Greenleaf introduced Senate Bill 359; and in March of 2016, Representative Benninghoff introduced House Bill 1907. Both bills amend the Pennsylvania Public School Code to incorporate many of the statutory reforms recommended by the TAC.

Both of the Bills:

- Add definitions of “habitually truant,” “school,” “school day,” “school year,” “truant,” and “unexcused absence,” which will **provide uniform definitions** statewide, eliminating confusion for individuals who deal with truancy on a regular basis.
- Add provisions **requiring charter and cyber charter schools to: develop attendance policies that address unexcused absences; report unexcused absences directly to the PA Department of Education** annually; take steps to

address unexcused absences; and, **file citations for truancy directly with the magisterial district judge**. These changes relieve both the charter schools and the home school districts of the burden of addressing multiple students attending multiple charter schools from multiple school districts.

- Add a **requirement that schools hold a school Attendance Improvement Conference** in order to: examine the reasons for the child's absences and develop a written school Attendance Improvement Plan. In addition to the appropriate school officials, both the child and the person in parental relation shall be invited to the conference.
- **Clarify truancy procedures** when a child is habitually truant, from the appropriate venue for filing of a citation, to notice requirements, to determining when a case should be referred to the local children and youth agency or the magisterial district judge.
- Make the penalties (fines, community service, attendance at a course or program designed to improve school attendance, and loss of driving privileges) for violating compulsory school attendance requirements optional, **providing magisterial district judges' discretion when imposing a sentence**.

At the time of this report, both bills were working their way through their respective chambers. The ESTP Workgroup is hopeful that one of the bills will gain the support of both chambers and be signed by the Governor in the near future. If signed into law, not all provisions become effective immediately, providing stakeholders time to implement the changes.

School Stability and Educational Success for Children in Foster Care Legislation

Educational outcomes for children in foster care lag behind typical outcomes of the general student population. Consequently, Congress enacted the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act in 2008, which amended parts of the Social Security Act, to address the needs of children and youth in foster care. Although the Act addressed educational stability for children in foster care, it placed most of the responsibility on child welfare agencies, which created implementation problems.

Last December, Congress passed the **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**, which President Obama signed on December 10, 2015. The ESSA, a federal education law, contains provisions related to school stability for children in foster care. The bill rejects the overuse of standardized tests and one-size-fits-all mandates on schools, ensures that our education system will prepare every child to graduate from high school ready for college and careers, and provides more children access to high-quality state

preschool programs (*thewhitehouse.gov FACT SHEET: Congress Acts to Fix No Child Left Behind*). **ESSA contains key protections for students in foster care including:**

- Remain in the same school when it is in the child's best interest
- Immediate enrollment and transfer of school records
- School transportation when necessary
- Local Educational Agency point of contact
- Required data collection and reporting
- States receiving charter school grants under Title IV Part C of the new law must work with charter schools on recruitment and enrollment practices to promote inclusion of all students. This includes eliminating any barriers to enrollment for youth in foster care.

<http://www.childrensdefense.org/library/data/how-will-the-every-student.pdf>

The following Pennsylvania bills have been introduced to address school stability, enrollment procedures, transportation, transfer of records and credit retrieval, and the designation of a point of contact. In addition to aligning all of the applicable Pennsylvania laws, the changes will align Pennsylvania laws with the new federal ESSA requirements.

- House Bill 1808, introduced by Representative Toohil, amends the Human Services Code
- House Bill 1809, introduced by Representative Toohil, amends the Juvenile Act
- House Bill 1828, introduced by Representative Lewis, amends the Pennsylvania Public School Code
- A Senate Bill is also expected to be introduced to address similar issues.

Data Collection and Sharing

During 2015/16 the ESTP Workgroup continued efforts on collaborating with AOPC/OCFC, PDE and DHS/OCYF on collecting and sharing data on Pennsylvania foster youth. The Workgroup and its partners agree there is a critical need to gather, share and analyze educational information for youth in foster care. **Studies show educational outcomes for children in care are often worse than their peers not in foster care.** Youth in care often experience lower standardized test scores, grade retention and graduation rates and higher rates of discipline problems and dropping out. (Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care Jan 2014). But, we still do not know specifically how

Pennsylvania foster youth fair educationally as no Pennsylvania specific data exists. The lack of readily available data coupled with the absence of a formal data sharing agreement made it impossible initially to obtain information. **However, during 2015/2016 the Workgroup and its partners reaffirmed their commitment and have made significant progress in collectively planning how and what data could be shared.** The stakeholder group decided on sharing data in the following categories: (1) **Demographic**; (2) **Enrollment, Attendance and School Stability**; (3) **Academic Status and Progress**; (4) **School Discipline**; and (5) **graduation-post graduation**. The vast majority of data elements are currently collected by PDE and will be shared with partners in the aggregate. Three data elements will be collected at a later date through the Child Welfare Information Solution: (1) reason for school move; (2) information on school connectedness; and (3) whether or not an Attendance Improvement Plan was offered/completed. Once it is available, AOPC/OCFC plans to share two data elements: (1) Whether or not an educational decision maker was appointed and (2) whether or not education was discussed at observed Permanency Review Hearings. At this time we cannot share any specific data except for the information gathered during the 2015-2016 court observations done by AOPC/OCFC. During January 2015 – March 2016, a total of 415 Permanency Review Hearings were observed in 61 Pennsylvania counties. In **85% of the observed Permanency Review Hearings for school aged youth education was discussed. Education was the most discussed well-being indicator in all observed hearings.**

Limitations on the Data

The group has identified some limitations to the data that will be shared. First, **the data will only include those children in out of home foster care placements who attend public schools. Dependent youth at home or in informal kinship placements will not be included. Also, those who attend a private school or an on grounds school in a congregate care facility, operated by the facility, will not be included in the initial data set as this information is not currently collected.** While it is recognized the data set is not all encompassing of youth in the dependency system, significant progress has been made on the data sharing front. Partners should be commended on their continued commitment and efforts to find solutions to data collection and sharing barriers.

2017 Education Summit for PA Foster Youth

In 2013, the PA State Roundtable approved and supported the Workgroup's recommendation to hold the **first ever Education Summit for Pennsylvania Foster Youth**. During 2015-2016, a subgroup of the ESTP Workgroup had regular meetings to begin planning for the Education Summit hosted by AOPC, DHS, DPE and JCJC. This event, modeled after the 2011 National Summit, **will provide a unique opportunity for**

county leaders and key decision-makers from child welfare, education, and the courts to develop an action plan with concrete goals for collaborative efforts to improve educational outcomes for PA foster youth.

The Education Summit Objectives are to:

- Encourage participation in enhancing existing cross-system efforts to address educational stability and continuity issues;
- Showcase collaborative projects and initiatives at the local level that support educational well-being outcomes;
- Focus on being data driven and data informed; and
- Facilitate the development of action plans by participating counties that set forth strategies for improving educational outcomes for foster youth by using the 8 Education Goals for Youth in Out of Home Care (Blue Print for Change, Legal Center for Foster Care and Education) as the cornerstone of the action plan.

The 8 Education Goals for Youth in Out of Home Care are:

1. *Youth are entitled to remain in their same school when feasible.*
2. *Youth are guaranteed seamless transitions between schools and school districts when school moves occur.*
3. *Young children enter school ready to learn.*
4. *Youth have the opportunity and support to fully participate in all aspects of the school experience.*
5. *Youth have support to help prevent school dropout, truancy and disciplinary actions.*
6. *Youth are involved and engaged in all aspects of their education and educational planning and are empowered to be advocates for their education needs and pursuits.*
7. *Youth have an adult who is invested in his/her education during and after his or her time in out of home care.*
8. *Youth have supports to enter into, and complete, post-secondary education.*

Youth will participate in many aspects of the Education Summit as a constant reminder to keep the Summit and the county action plans “**Youth Focused**”. Youth will act as Keynote Speakers, panel presenters (ask the expert role) and will assist as facilitators along with Workgroup members during the county breakout sessions.

Planning efforts will continue during the remainder of 2016/2017. At the time of this report, the actual date of the Education Summit has not been set but the **Summit will occur in 2017**.

Planning to Evaluate

The ESTP Workgroup plans to evaluate the Workgroup's efforts from 2010-2016. Evaluation efforts will be multifaceted, focusing on the initial Workgroup charge in 2009 concerning truancy and the expansion of the charge in 2011 focusing on educational success for youth in foster care. In 2010, the Workgroup was tasked with the following: *to identify barriers and systemic issues in Pennsylvania regarding truancy; outline an approach and a series of recommendations to address truancy at the local level; and to create a sense of urgency to address truancy.* In 2011, the Workgroup's focus expanded to include *examining barriers and best practices regarding educational success and stability, court competencies and data sharing.*

Evaluation efforts will examine both outcomes (state and local) and outputs. The list below outlines the evaluation and program/protocol collection efforts that will take place during 2016-2017.

1. **Surveying Local Children's Roundtables** – Local Children's Roundtables were surveyed in 2010 and 2013. In 2010, survey results were used as the primary basis to develop the Workgroup's five core recommendations: *collaboration; early identification and intervention; positive school climate; data and sustainability.* In 2013, Local Children's Roundtables were surveyed again, asking similar questions that were asked in 2010 and additional questions related to educational success for youth in foster care. Those survey results were used as the Workgroup's preliminary evaluation results. The Workgroup plans to resurvey in 2016. The questions will gauge local success with recommendation implementation and the effectiveness in creating a sense of urgency to collaboratively address truancy. As with the 2013 Survey, questions surrounding educational success for foster youth will also be included.
2. **Surveying Magisterial District Judges** – In 2013, Workgroup members submitted recommended enhancements to the Magisterial District Judge education session offered through the Minor Judiciary Education Board. Enhancements resulted in the truancy curriculum being expanded from one to three hours in duration and now include Workgroup concepts and recommendations in the curriculum. The Workgroup plans to conduct a survey of magisterial district judges and to review evaluation results of the education session to determine if the information presented in the training was useful to magisterial district judges in their work.
3. **Gathering and Collecting Protocols, Program Information and Best Practices** – As part of the 2010 survey, counties submitted truancy protocols and programs. The Workgroup will once again request counties to submit current

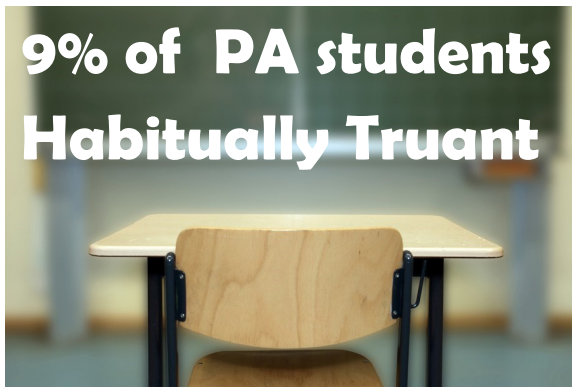
truancy protocols, programs with proven outcomes and any best practices that have effectively addressed truancy and/or educational success for foster youth. Information will be gathered in a template and housed on the OCFC/ESTP and PA Truancy Toolkit websites.

4. **Reviewing Court Observation Data** – In 2015, OCFC enhanced their Permanency Review Hearing Court Observation Form to collect information on well-being indicators discussed during hearings. Education is one of the well-being indicators being measured. The Workgroup will review and compare 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 court observation data on education to determine how often a youth's education is being discussed during court hearings.
5. **Measuring the Effectiveness of Outputs** – In order to complete a comprehensive evaluation, the Workgroup's outputs must be considered. During the past seven years, the Workgroup has spearheaded many positive reform efforts surrounding educational success and truancy prevention. The evaluation plan will also include a component to measure the effectiveness of the following outputs:
 - Truancy Legislation Recommendations
 - Recommendation on Data Collection and Sharing
 - Enhancements to the Magisterial District Judge Education Session
 - Enhancements to the Child Welfare Resource Center Truancy Curriculum
 - Revisions to the PA Dependency Benchbook
 - Enhancements to the PA Truancy Toolkit
 - Creation of the Truancy Logo
 - Development of the Cyber School Brochure
 - Enhancements to the Attendance Improvement Plan (formerly Truancy Elimination Plan)
 - Workgroup Presentations (state and local)
 - Workgroup Ambassadors
 - Recommendation for PDE, DHS, AOPC, JCJC administrators to meet regularly
 - Special grants included in the Needs Based Plan and Budget for truancy programs that incorporate the five core recommendations

Recommendations

The Educational Success and Truancy Prevention Workgroup respectfully submits to the Pennsylvania State Roundtable the following Recommendations:

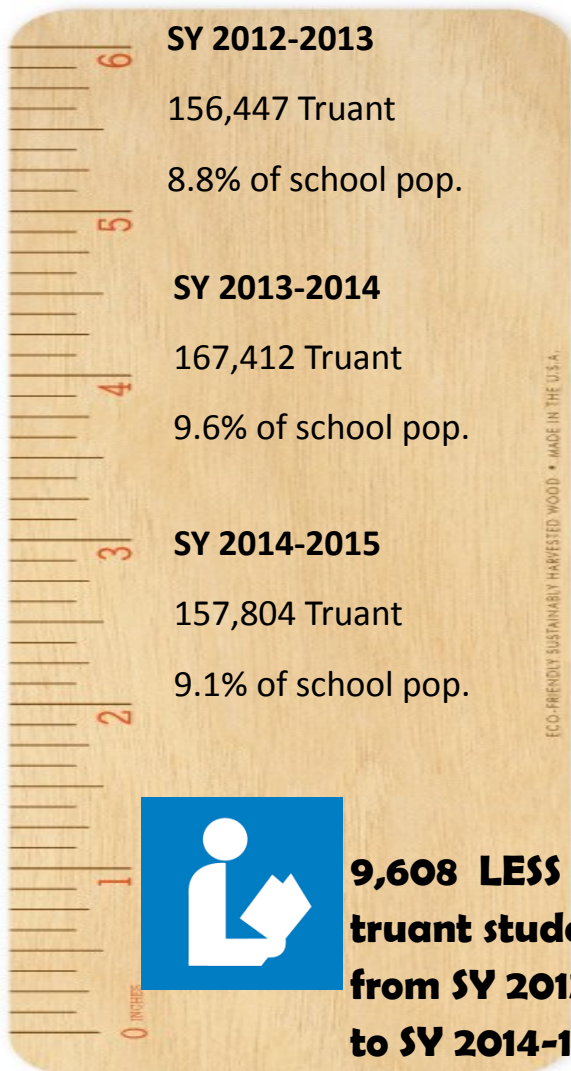
1. Finalize and implement the remaining components of the *Pennsylvania Blueprint for Education Success* including: cross systems education, legislative reform and data collection and sharing.
2. Evaluate the impact and efforts of the Educational Success and Truancy Prevention Workgroup from 2010-2016.
3. Continue to support Local Children's Roundtables in the implementation of the Workgroup's recommendations.



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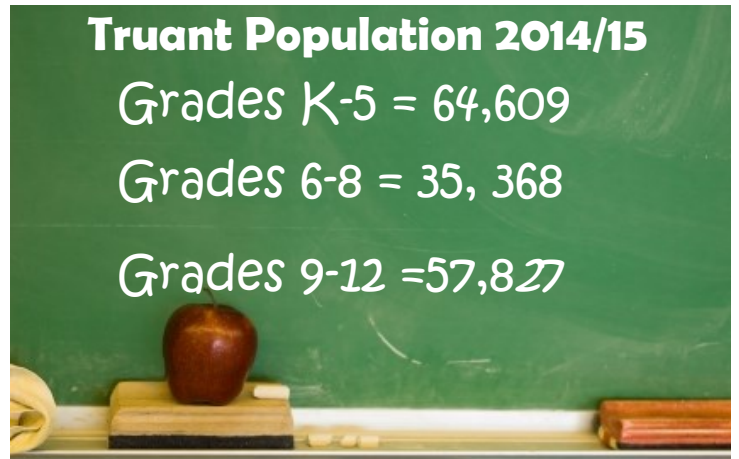


PA Habitually Truant by Year

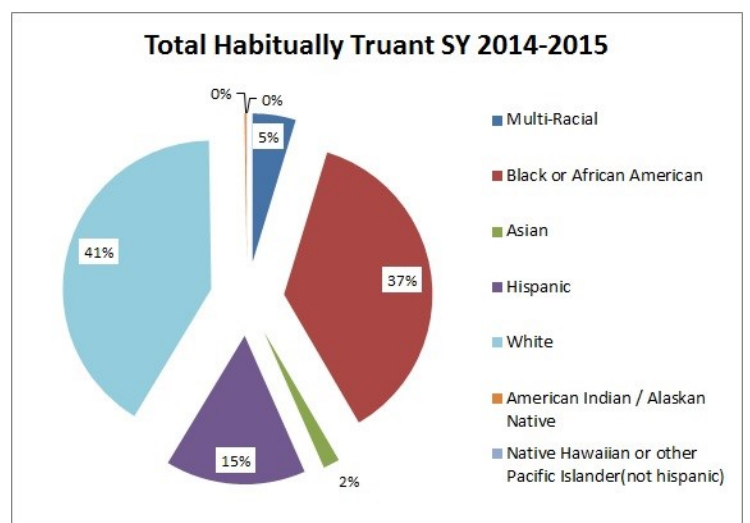
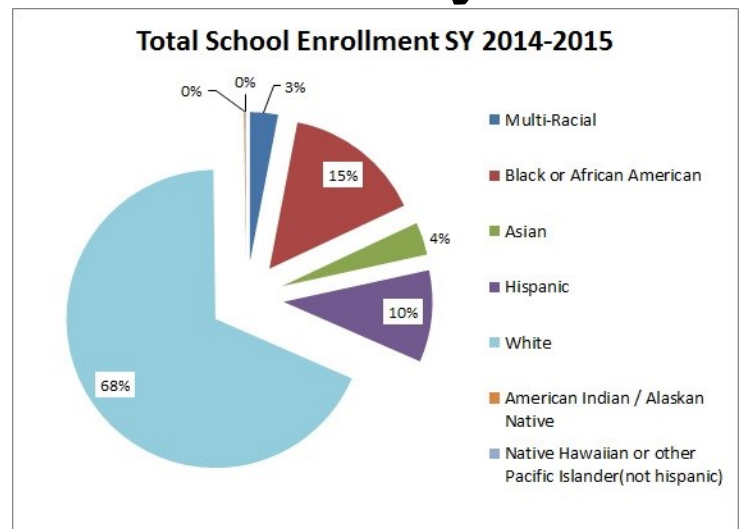


During School Year 2014-2015

157,804 Pennsylvania Students in public schools were reported to have 6 or more unexcused absences.



Ethnicity



SY 2014-2015 Total Habitually Truant Rate by County

County	Total Enrolled	Total Truant	Truancy Rate
Adams	13,895	613	4.4%
Allegheny	148,643	13,267	8.9%
Armstrong	9,607	123	1.3%
Beaver	32,466	2,071	6.4%
Bedford	7,126	1,265	17.8%
Berks	68,342	1,368	2.0%
Blair	17,736	1,117	6.3%
Bradford	9,429	1,198	12.7%
Bucks	88,226	2,666	3.0%
Butler	25,227	898	3.6%
Cambria	17,098	2,137	12.5%
Cameron	600	17	2.8%
Carbon	9,007	148	1.6%
Centre	13,135	71	0.5%
Chester	89,857	1,377	1.5%
Clarion	5,739	70	1.2%
Clearfield	11,965	700	5.9%
Clinton	4,449	190	4.3%
Columbia	9,753	2,561	26.3%
Crawford	8,990	596	6.6%
Cumberland	29,619	469	1.6%
Dauphin	44,604	4,799	10.8%
Delaware	73,698	5,362	7.3%
Elk	3,594	152	4.2%
Erie	39,656	3,913	9.9%
Fayette	17,092	3,871	22.6%
Forest	461	-	0.0%
Franklin	19,601	969	4.9%
Fulton	2,126	79	3.7%
Greene	5,042	796	15.8%
Huntingdon	5,678	355	6.3%
Indiana	9,688	182	1.9%
Jefferson	5,174	80	1.5%
Juniata	2,933	1,953	66.6%
Lackawanna	13,598	976	7.2%

County	Total Enrolled	Total Truant	Truancy Rate
Lancaster	67,619	5,428	8.0%
Lawrence	12,394	832	6.7%
Lebanon	19,290	1,358	7.0%
Lehigh	51,027	3,905	7.7%
Luzerne	42,553	3,610	8.5%
Lycoming	16,024	594	3.7%
McKean	6,240	60	1.0%
Mercer	15,811	439	2.8%
Mifflin	5,180	554	10.7%
Monroe	26,483	2,118	8.0%
Montgomery	108,698	5,196	4.8%
Montour	2,321	271	11.7%
Northampton	44,539	1,646	3.7%
Northumberland	11,818	499	4.2%
Perry	6,175	190	3.1%
Philadelphia	198,895	59,906	30.1%
Pike	7,953	956	12.0%
Potter	2,363	35	1.5%
Schuylkill	18,511	511	2.8%
Snyder	4,911	1,585	32.3%
Somerset	9,441	318	3.4%
Sullivan	625	4	0.6%
Susquehanna	6,386	788	12.3%
Tioga	5,356	313	5.8%
Union	3,967	44	1.1%
Venango	8,244	543	6.6%
Warren	4,819	76	1.6%
Washington	27,853	2,493	9.0%
Wayne	4,747	22	0.5%
Westmoreland	48,215	1,536	3.2%
Wyoming	3,644	394	10.8%
York	68,860	5,828	8.5%

Source: PA Department of Education

Prepared by: Administrative Office of PA Courts/Office of Children & Families in the Courts

