



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

August 2015

Annual Truancy Report

Introduction

In compliance with Section 38-203(i) of the District of Columbia Code, DC Public Schools (DCPS) is pleased to report to the Mayor a summary of the District's truancy data for School Year 2014-2015. As required, the report includes:

- The number of minors, categorized by grade, or equivalent grouping for ungraded schools, who had unexcused absences for:
 - 1-5 days;
 - 6-10 days;
 - 11-20 days;
 - 21 or more days.
- The work of the school-based student support teams in reducing unexcused absences, including:
 - The number of students who were referred to a school-based student support team;
 - The number of students who met with a school-based student support team;
 - A summary of the action plans and strategies implemented by the school-based student support team to eliminate or ameliorate unexcused absences;
 - A summary of the services utilized by students to reduce unexcused absences; and
 - A summary of the common barriers to implementing the recommendations of the school-based student support team.
- The number of minors, categorized by grade, or equivalent grouping for ungraded schools, that the school reported to the Child and Family Services Agency pursuant to § 4-1321.02(a-1) and (a-2).
- The number of minors categorized by grade, or equivalent grouping for ungraded schools, that the school referred to the Court Social Services Division of the Family Court of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia for truancy; and
- The policy on absences used, including defined categories of valid excuses.

HIGHLIGHTS

During SY14-15, DCPS continued its emphasis on improving the collection and analysis of attendance data. In addition, DCPS has focused on aligning attendance business rules, providing focused supports to schools, and increasing accountability for compliance with the truancy protocol and referral process. To improve outcomes for students, DCPS has provided intensive training to schools, strengthened case management, and leveraged critical supports and resources through our partner agencies.

The results of this work is that DCPS has shown continued improvement in student attendance rates as noted below:

- DCPS ended SY14-15 with an 89.5% In-Seat Attendance (ISA) rate, a 1% increase over SY13-14.
- The district also achieved a continued trend of truancy rate reduction¹, with 17.2% of our students categorized as “chronically truant.” The overall truancy rate for SY13-14 was 18.2 % and 26.9% for SY 12-13.
- The truancy rate for our *first-time* 9th graders fell by almost 7% from 50.6% to 43.7% in SY14-15, and this year, the truancy rate for all high school students fell by approximately 2%, from 47.6% to 45.2%, though high school grades still represent the largest percentage of DCPS students who are truant.

¹ The truancy definition for SY13-14 included 5 year olds regardless of whether they were 5 years old as of September 30th of the relevant school year; in SY14-15 (and moving forward), the September 30th age cut-off applies.

- And ninth-grade students continue to represent the largest group of students in the most severe truancy category (21 or more unexcused absences). Since there are more 9th graders in DCPS than any other secondary school grade, the truancy patterns of these students have a significant impact on secondary attendance data.

Unexcused Absences for Minors

A breakdown of the incidents of truancy, as required by §38-203(i) (A), is included in Table 1 below. This data represents compulsory school-aged students (ages 5 through 17) enrolled in SY14-15.

Table 1: Unexcused Absences Counting Towards Truancy by Grade

Grade	Enrollment	# 1-5 Absences	% 1-5 Absences	# 6-10 Absences	% 6-10 Absences	# 11-20 Absences	% 11-20 Absences	# 21+ Absences	% 21+ Absences
K	4,176	2,178	52%	848	20%	295	7%	121	3%
1	4,141	2,304	56%	774	19%	264	6%	124	3%
2	4,168	2,347	56%	768	18%	255	6%	89	2%
3	3,673	2,087	57%	659	18%	227	6%	68	2%
4	3,398	1,946	57%	583	17%	208	6%	39	1%
5	2,838	1,564	55%	538	19%	151	5%	50	2%
6	2,297	1,343	58%	458	20%	113	5%	55	2%
7	2,352	1,271	54%	545	23%	124	5%	100	4%
8	2,686	1,482	55%	560	21%	161	6%	110	4%
9	3,603	1,012	28%	580	16%	540	15%	1,135	32%
10	2,765	747	27%	476	17%	438	16%	832	30%
11	2,559	600	23%	440	17%	454	18%	742	29%
12	2,730	594	22%	342	13%	329	12%	504	18%
CE ²	377	57	15%	31	8%	30	8%	41	11%
EV ³	1,402	3	0%	4	0%	2	0%	16	1%
EX ⁴	20	1	5%	7	35%	7	35%	2	10%
UN ⁵	15	1	7%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	43,200	19,537	45%	7,613	18%	3,598	8%	4,028	9%

² CE: Certificate Option

³ EV: Evening Option

⁴ EX: Exchange Student

⁵ UN: Ungraded (This code has been retired in the student information and may not appear on future reports.)

Student Support Teams

Attendance Student Support Teams (SSTs) are school-based, problem solving teams that provide teachers, students and families with support for students who present attendance concerns. Attendance SST members—including attendance staff, administrators, school counselors, social workers, school nurses and other relevant school level support staff, in addition to families, and sometimes students—use a collaborative process to: (1) assess student needs and set positive goals; (2) identify barriers to attendance; (3) recommend strategies that students, families, and school staff can implement to improve attendance; and (4) develop and monitor attendance support plans.

In SY14-15, 16,947 students accrued 5 or more unexcused absences, resulting in attendance SST referrals.⁶ DCPS held SST meetings for 10,798 of these students (64%). Last year, 16,917 students were referred to an attendance SST and DCPS held SST meetings for 9,285 of these students (55%). In SY12-13, 2,619 students were referred to a school-based SST for attendance and DCPS held SST meetings for 1,757 of those students (67%). The enormous increase in referrals between SY12-13 and SY13-14 reflects the shifts in rules defining absences that year, as well as the increased accountability for holding attendance SST meetings.

DCPS attendance SSTs implement a variety of strategies to eliminate or reduce the number of unexcused absences – including making calls and issuing attendance letters to families, conducting parent conferences and home visits, developing attendance contracts with students and parents, providing school-based counseling, referrals to community agencies and partners, attendance incentives, rewards programs, as well as referrals to CFSA and CSS. The services provided to students to help to reduce unexcused absences included clothing, transportation assistance, parenting classes, uniforms, assistance with child care, vision care and referrals school-based clinical staff, Department of Mental Health social workers and counselors, as well as other community-based organizations.

DCPS continues to analyze the work of Student Support Teams to determine if the meetings, as currently constituted, are effective in assisting students. As we gain more information about what makes for successful intervention, we will expand those practices.

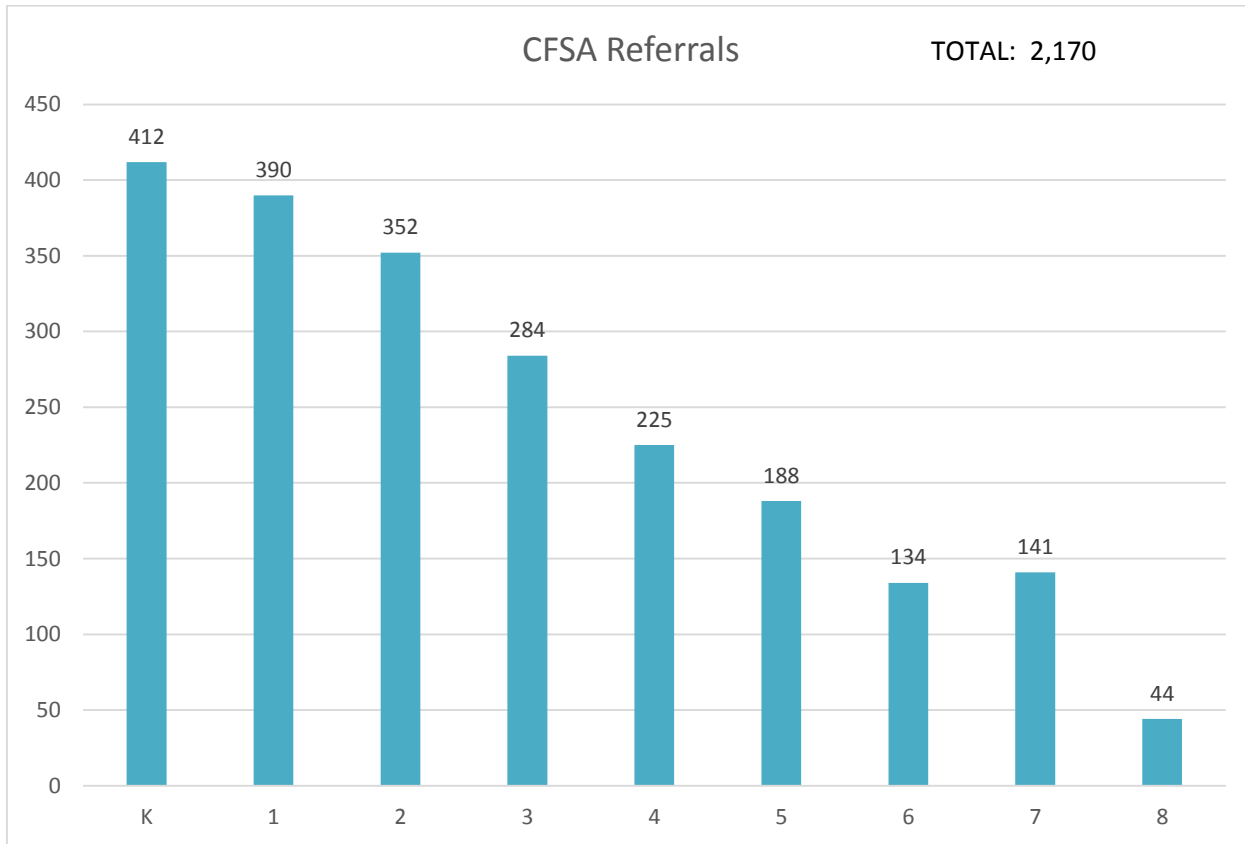
⁶ The South Capitol Street Amendment Act of 2012 and the Attendance Accountability Act of 2013 established requirements for Attendance SST referrals when a student accumulates 5 unexcused absences during a marking or similar period.

Referrals to Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA)

In SY14-15, 2,170 of the 2,713 eligible students⁷ (80%) were referred to CFSA for educational neglect. In SY 13-14, 1,177 of 2,550 students were referred to CFSA (46%). DCPS' compliance increased due to more training and emphasis on this requirement, as well as weekly monitoring and support from the OYE Attendance Team.

The table below illustrates the distribution of referrals to CFSA across grade levels. Again this year, the largest number of referrals was made to address absences in Kindergarten. Kindergarten marks the first full year of compulsory school attendance, yet our schools are challenged to correct the impression that Kindergarten is optional daycare for these students. We recognize that early intervention and instilling good habits of regular school attendance in early grades is critical to addressing truancy and we continue to communicate to parents that this is a time when key skills are developed. DCPS is also reviewing possible programs to address this concern.

Figure 1: CFSA Referrals by Grade



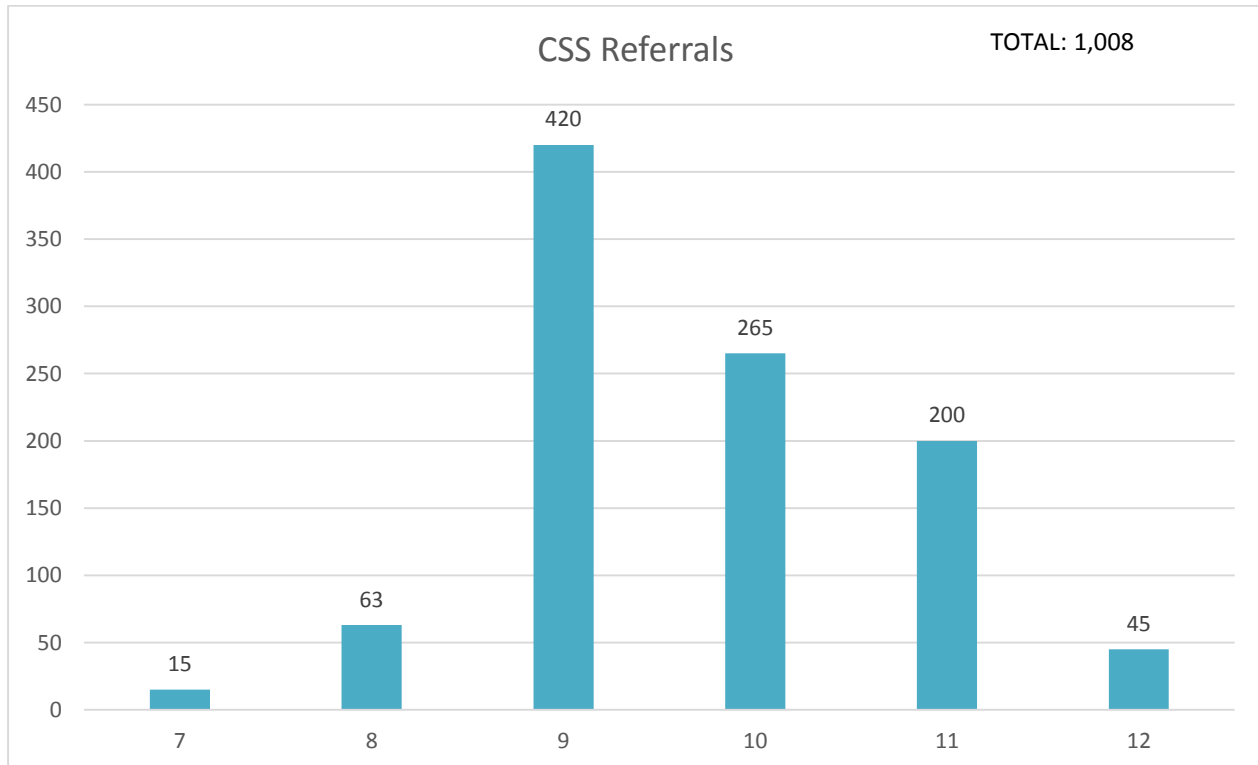
⁷ Students between the ages 5 - 13 who accumulated 10 or more unexcused absences. 2,170 reflects referrals made for currently enrolled compulsory education aged students. There were 2,739 actual referrals were made, some of which were duplicative and others are for students who subsequently withdrew.

Referrals to Court Social Services (CSS)

In SY13-14, DCPS referred 1,032⁸ of 3,721 eligible students⁹ (28%) to Court Social Services (CSS). Last year (SY14-15), DCPS referred 690 of 3,738 eligible students (18%). In SY12-13, DCPS referred 897 of 1,578 students (57%) to CSS. The compliance rate for court referrals dropped during the last two school years as schools struggled to provide the extensive proof that each of the attendance protocol steps were completed before a court referral could be made (for example, with copies of 3, 5, 7, and 15-day letters mailed to a family; CFSA referrals; attendance records; special education or Section 504 records; evidence of intervention services and copies of referral to outside resources; as well as SST plans and social history narrative).

The table below illustrates the distribution of referrals to CSS for SY14-15. The largest number of referrals was made to address absences at the ninth grade level.

Figure 2: CSS Referrals by Grade



⁸ Note: The total of 1,008 reflected in Figure 2 includes students between the ages 14-18 in grades 7-12. There were 24 additional CSS referrals made for six graders, certificate, evening students and "other" category – 2 sixth graders, 10 certificate students, 10 evening students and 2 "other" category students).

⁹ Students between the ages 14 - 18 who accumulated 15 or more unexcused absences.

Valid Reasons for Absence

Lawful reasons for absence are defined in DCMR Chapter 21. Section 2101.2 defines the following absences as excused:

- Student illness or medical cause (a doctor's note is required for a student absent five or more days)
- Medical or dental appointment for the student
- Death in the student's immediate family
- Exclusion due to quarantine, contagious disease, etc.
- Necessity for a student to attend a judicial proceeding as a plaintiff, defendant, witness or juror
- Observance of a religious holiday
- Lawful suspension or exclusion from school by school authorities
- Temporary facility closings due to weather, unsafe conditions or other emergencies
- Absences to allow students to visit their parent or a legal guardian, who is in the military; immediately before, during, or after deployment
- Failure of DC to provide transportation where legally responsible
- Emergency or circumstances approved by LEA

When school-aged students are absent from school, without a written excuse indicating a lawful reason for the absence, this absence will be deemed an unexcused absence, regardless of whether the student has parental approval.

Examples of unexcused absences include:

- Providing child care for siblings
- Personal errands
- Oversleeping
- Skipping classes
- Job hunting
- Family travel

Strategies for Improvement in SY14-15

In SY14-15, DCPS continued to provide focused training and support for schools to address attendance and truancy prevention strategies, strengthen school accountability for attendance goals, generate incentives and outreach to students and families, and connected with our community and agency partners for support. We also focused on in-seat attendance (ISA), which measures students who are in seats each day. It is a much higher standard, and one that sends the message to families and students that daily attendance matters. The following is a list of strategies schools used to improve their in-seat attendance: professional development for staff.

- Schools implementing an all hands-on-deck approach to attendance, with virtually all staff members supporting attendance work
- Focus on improving school climate and reducing suspensions
- School leaders, especially those with school ISA lower than 93%, developing their own ISA goals.
- Awards for the most improved ISA and compliance
- Student/staff incentives and giveaways
- Radio ads stressing the importance of school attendance
- Enhanced communications with parents/students about attendance
- Partnership with SYEP to reward students with good attendance
- Attendance mentorship program and external partner supports utilization

This year, we met our In-Seat Attendance goal and ended the school year with an 89.5% ISA rate for the district, an improvement over the SY13-14 ISA rate of 88.5% (The rate for SY12-13 was 86%). This rate is significant because it shows that more of our students were in school each day. DCPS monitors “in-seat attendance” — a measure that shows how many students are actually present on any given day. It also helps staff determine which schools and students have the greatest attendance challenges and reveals days or weeks when attendance tends to fall off.

In an effort to increase our compliance rate for referrals to CFSA and CSS, we prioritized support to schools with the highest truancy rates (e.g., the five comprehensive high schools that represent more than half of all DCPS chronic truants); addressed the most chronically absent students (e.g., students in early grades and grades 9-12); and focused on emphasizing and improving ISA. We also worked with schools to review current staffing models and identified ways to utilize additional supports for home visits, calls to parents, and SST meetings – both within their buildings and through partnerships. Schools were trained in best practices for using the resources of PASS, JGA, Access Youth and MPD to increase their capacity to conduct SST meetings and provide case management. DCPS also placed social work interns from local universities to support school-level attendance work. We worked closely with schools on their data entry and tracking through the student information systems; execution of SST meetings and the implementation of attendance support plans; and used data reports to centrally track attendance outcomes data for students going through the SST process. Additionally, our implementation of a Response to Intervention (RTI) approach is designed to address the needs of students with individualized supports.

Overall, we are pleased with our progress in improving student attendance. We all know that truancy is a complex issue for schools to manage; nor is there any single solution that will completely eliminate truancy. We understand that in order to curtail chronic truancy, we have to approach the problem aggressively by identifying the root causes of unexcused absences, addressing the causes by connecting students with support systems, and ensuring that students and parents are appropriately engaged. We will continue this approach, combined with our school climate work, public attendance awareness campaigns, continued focus on our Ninth Grade Academies, implementation of RTI and improving the overall quality of school experiences for our students. We are confident that a focus on compliance, student supports, and academic achievement will lay the groundwork for DCPS to further reduce our truancy rate and increase student attendance.