

**TRUANCY PETITION UPDATE:
September 1995 - June 1996**

BACKGROUND: In 1995, the Washington State Legislature passed E2SSB 5439 (known as the “Becca Bill”). Some minor changes were made to the bill during the 1996 session through ESHB 2640. This legislation gave parents, police, schools, and courts the ability to intervene earlier in the lives of at-risk youth and students with school attendance problems. As the student accumulates unexcused absences, schools are required to notify parents, conference with parents and students to develop a plan for success, and ultimately, file a “truancy petition” in juvenile court for students with five or more unexcused absences in one month (or ten unexcused absences in a year)¹.

The petition process allows courts to assume jurisdiction in truancy cases. Students found in violation of a court order can be ordered to attend: 1) their current school, or 2) another educational program or school. If the student does not obey the order, a judge may send the student to a detention center, or require community service. The judge may also order parents to pay a \$25 fine for each day that the student violates a court order to attend school.²

In January 1996, an Institute report outlined the first year’s experience implementing the law, reviewed the need to develop a statewide definition of unexcused absences³, and discussed prohibiting schools from suspending or expelling students as a response to truancy.⁴ This issue brief analyzes the number of petitions filed in Washington State during the 1995-96 school year.

¹ ESHB 2640 changed the provisions regarding when schools must file a truancy petition. After the fifth unexcused absence, schools *may* either file a petition or refer the student to a community truancy board. At the seventh unexcused absence, school districts are required to file a petition, even if the student has been referred to a community truancy board.

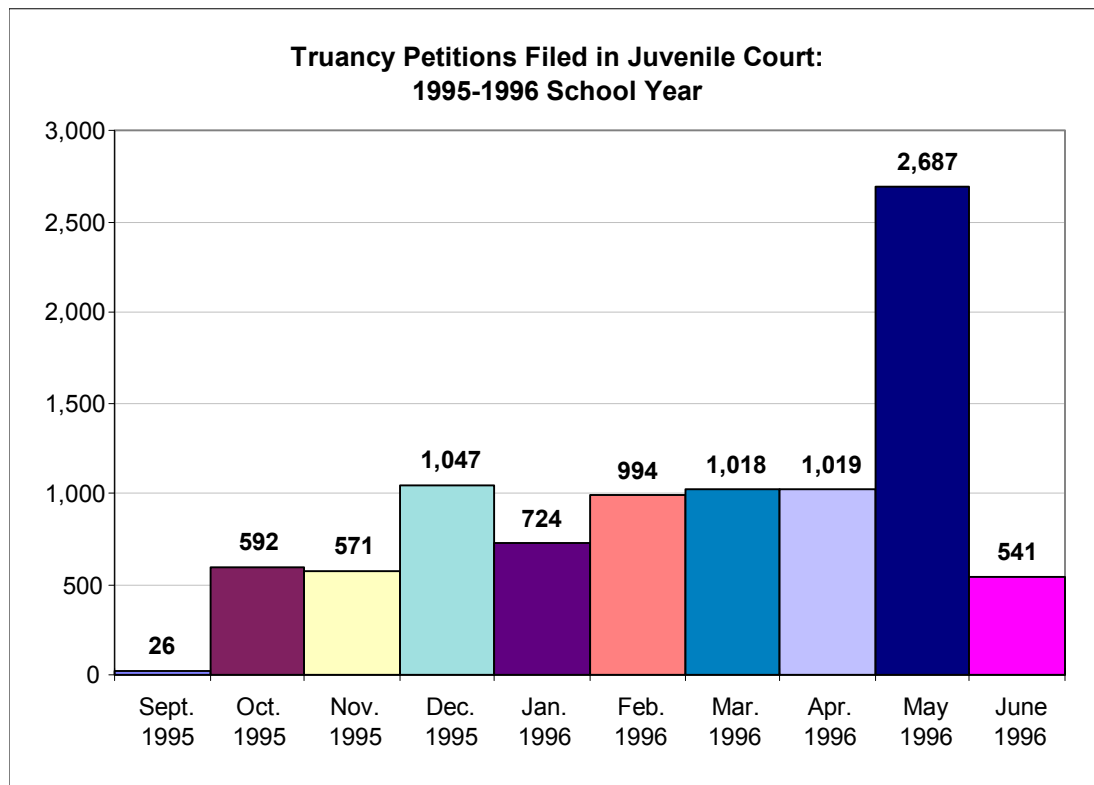
² RCW 28A.225.090

³ Following the 1996 legislative session, “unexcused absences” was defined to mean, “that a child has failed to attend the majority of hours or periods in an average school day or has failed to comply with a more restrictive school district policy.” [RCW 28A.225.020]

⁴ Washington State Institute for Public Policy. *Truancy: Preliminary Findings on Washington’s 1995 Law*, January 1996.

FINDINGS - JUVENILE COURT:

1. Between September 1995 and June 1996, 9,219 truancy petitions were filed in juvenile court.
2. Total filings increased from 1,019 petitions in April to 2,687 petitions in May 1996. Most of this increase can be attributed to a rise in petitions filed by King County school districts⁵. School district officials gave two main reasons for the increase in petitions: a) school districts improving their efficiency in the filing process, and b) students accumulating 10 or more unexcused absences at the end of the school year.

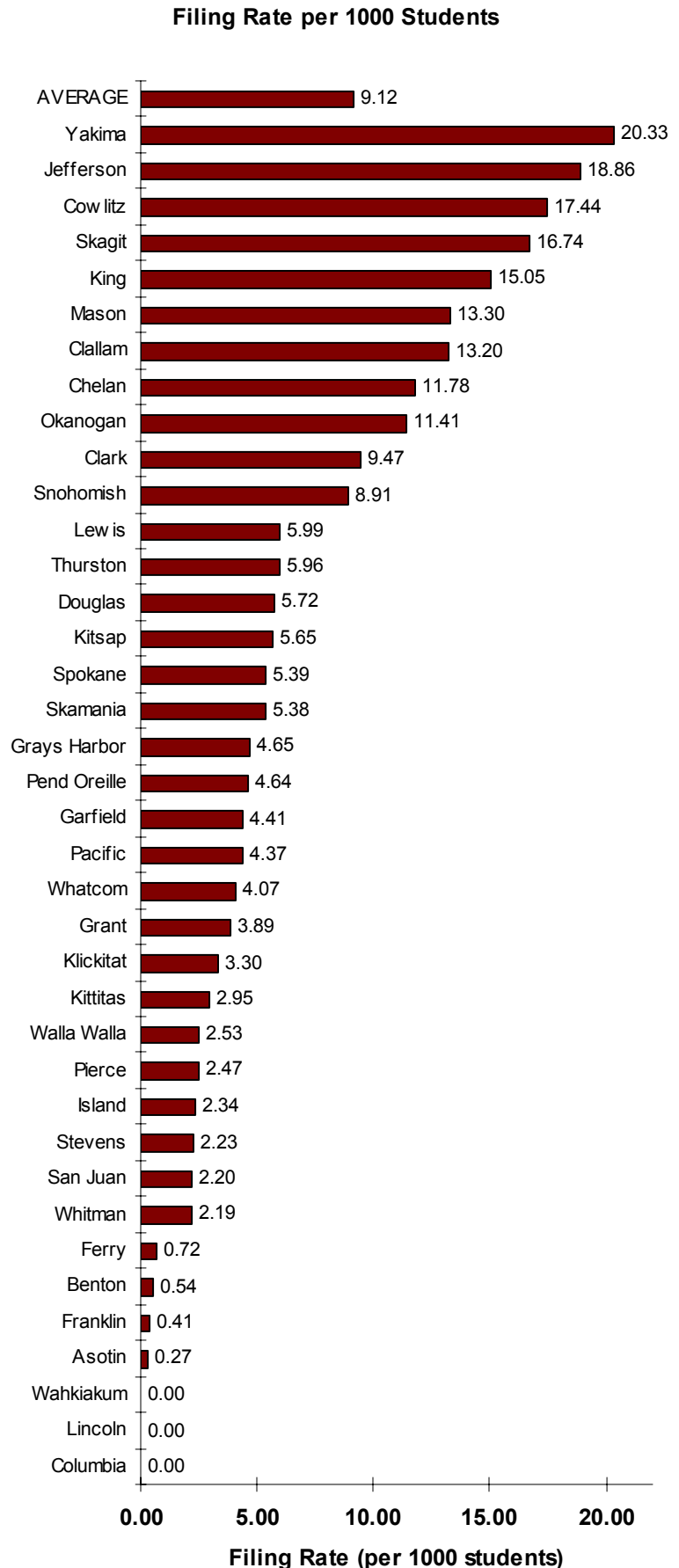


*Sources: SCOMIS (Superior Court Management Information System) Truancy Filings Report, from Office of the Administrator for the Courts. Please Note: This chart indicates the number of *petitions* filed in juvenile court, not the number of *students* who received a petition.

⁵ King County Juvenile Courts received 237 truancy petitions in April and 1,862 truancy petitions in May 1996.

FILING RATES:

- For the 1995-96 school year, the statewide filing average was 9.12 truancy petitions per 1000 enrolled students.
- While King County schools filed the largest number of truancy petitions during the 1995-96 school year (3,577), four other counties reported a higher rate of petition filing per 1000 students.
- School districts in Yakima County had the highest filing rate (20.33 petitions per 1000 students). During the school year, 953 petitions were filed in Yakima juvenile courts.



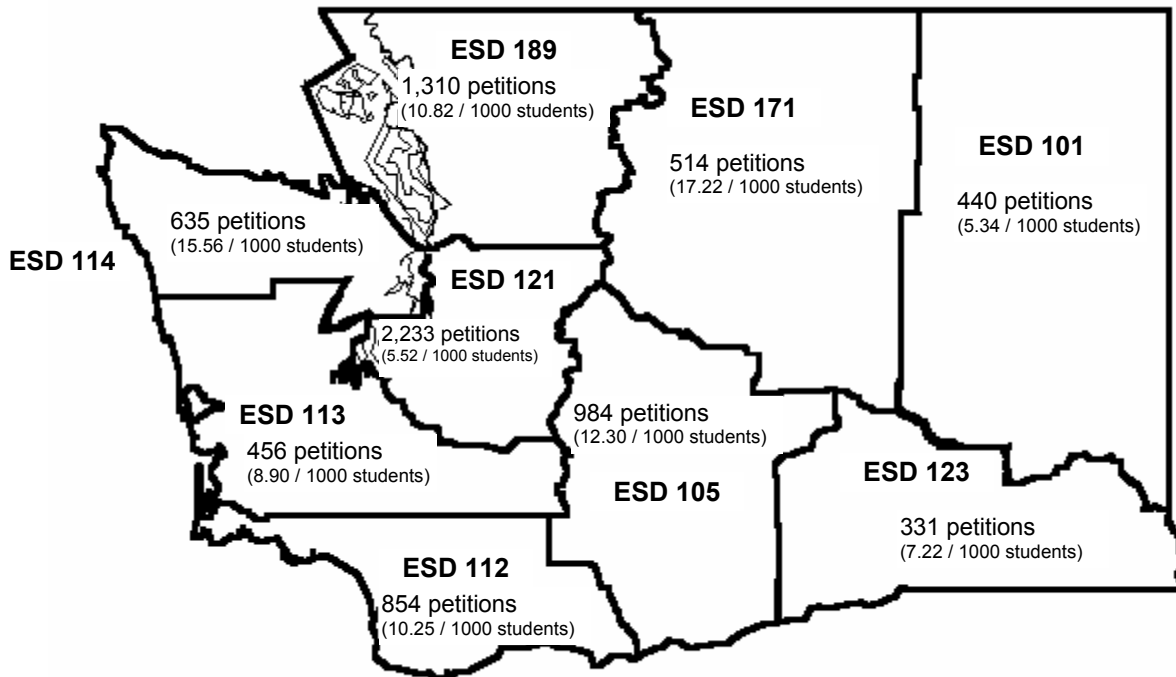
*Sources: SCOMIS (Superior Court Management Information System) Truancy Filings Report, from Office of the Administrator for the Courts. Enrollment data from October 1995 K-12 Headcount from OSPI (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction).

Note: Grays Harbor County reports does not report truancy petitions directly to SCOMIS. Their information was reported by telephone or fax.

TRUANCY PETITIONS IN WASHINGTON'S EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DISTRICTS:

At the completion of the school year, Washington school districts are eligible to receive state funding to offset the administrative and clerical costs of filing truancy petitions. The 1995 Legislature allocated \$3 million to meet these costs for the 1995-97 biennium. At the end of the 1995-96 school year, 162 of Washington's 296 school districts reported filing truancy petitions.⁶ These districts were reimbursed approximately \$193 for each petition filed, for a total of \$1.5 million for the 1995-96 school year. The map below shows petitions reported by school districts in the nine educational service districts.

Total Truancy Petitions and Filing Rates - Washington State Educational Service Districts



*Sources: Total petitions per ESD from annual report by each school district to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. These petitions include only the school districts that reported filings to OSPI for cost reimbursement purposes. Enrollment data from October 1995 K-12 Headcount (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction).

⁶ Source: Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, July 1996. See Appendix for listing of all school districts who reported filing truancy petitions.

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS: High Enrollments

The filing rate for each school district varied widely. For school districts with the largest enrollments in Washington state, the filing rate ranged between 39.48 petitions per 1000 students (Yakima) and 0.29 petitions per 1000 students (Clover Park). Seattle school district enrolls the largest number of students in the state (approximately 47,000). In 1995-96, Seattle schools filed 13.99 petitions per 1000 students. The following table lists the number of petitions filed in the school districts with the highest enrollments in Washington state.

Truancy Petitions Filed by Washington State School Districts with the Highest Annual Enrollment: 1995-96 School Year

District	ESD	County	Total Petitions (Sept. - June)	Annual Enrollment	Filing Rate (per 1000 students)
Seattle	121	King	654	46,757	13.99
Spokane	101	Spokane	366	32,341	11.32
Tacoma	121	Pierce	86	31,596	2.72
Kent	121	King	140	24,492	5.72
Lake Washington	121	King	61	24,332	2.51
Edmonds	189	Snohomish	238	20,868	11.41
Federal Way	121	King	168	20,579	8.16
Vancouver	112	Clark	23	19,910	1.16
Northshore	121	King	21	19,226	1.09
Highline	121	King	147	18,209	8.07
Evergreen (Clark)	112	Clark	288	17,596	16.37
Puyallup	121	Pierce	54	17,304	3.12
Everett	189	Snohomish	88	17,136	5.14
Bellevue	121	King	25	15,391	1.62
Bethel	121	Pierce	9	14,326	0.63
Yakima	105	Yakima	546	13,829	39.48
Clover Park	121	Pierce	4	13,692	0.29
North Thurston	113	Thurston	91	13,150	6.92
Central Kitsap	114	Kitsap	101	13,134	7.69
Kennewick	123	Benton	199	12,635	15.75
Mukilteo	189	Snohomish	160	12,191	13.12
Renton	121	King	116	12,173	9.53
Auburn	121	King	303	12,113	25.01
South Kitsap	114	Kitsap	61	11,635	5.24
Issaquah	121	King	23	11,464	2.01
Battle Ground	112	Clark	91	10,303	8.83
Bellingham	189	Whatcom	69	10,090	6.84

*Sources: Total petitions from annual report by each school district to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. These petitions include only the school districts that reported filings to OSPI for cost reimbursement purposes. Enrollment data from October 1995 K-12 Headcount (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction).

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS: High Filing Rates

The truancy petition process requires a high degree of cooperation and communication between parents, teachers, school administrators, and court officials. During the first year of the new law's implementation, school districts and courts were asked to draw on existing resources to develop the most effective methods of dealing with truanancies. Schools from both small rural towns and large cities were active in the petition process. The following table lists schools districts that filed 20 or more petitions per 1000 enrolled students.

Washington State School Districts Filing 20 or More Truancy Petitions per 1000 Enrolled Students: 1995-96 School Year

District	ESD	County	Total Petitions (Sept. - June)	Enrollment	Filing Rate (per 1000 students)
Nespelem	171	Okanogan	13	229	56.77
Wapato	105	Yakima	161	3,426	46.99
Omak	171	Okanogan	100	2,515	39.76
Yakima	105	Yakima	546	13,829	39.48
Index	189	Snohomish	1	31	32.26
Mt Vernon	189	Skagit	151	5,069	29.79
Grand Coulee Dam	171	Grant	29	985	29.44
Brewster	171	Okanogan	27	934	28.91
North Mason	114	Mason	69	2,432	28.37
Moses Lake	171	Grant	165	6,092	27.08
Washougal	112	Clark	66	2,597	25.41
Longview	112	Cowlitz	194	7,692	25.22
Auburn	121	King	303	12,113	25.01
Sunnyside	105	Yakima	116	4,920	23.58
Port Townsend	114	Jefferson	44	1,870	23.53
Prosser	123	Benton	63	2,759	22.83
Port Angeles	114	Clallam	118	5,323	22.17
Shoreline	121	King	220	9,929	22.16
Granger	105	Yakima	27	1,248	21.63
Kelso	112	Cowlitz	113	5,244	21.55
Quilcene	114	Jefferson	6	295	20.34
Sultan	189	Snohomish	38	1,883	20.18
White Pass	113	Lewis	20	994	20.12
Burlington Edison	189	Skagit	66	3,288	20.07

*Sources: Total petitions from annual report by each school district to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. These petitions include only the school districts that reported filings to OSPI for cost reimbursement purposes. Enrollment data from October 1995 K-12 Headcount (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction).

NEXT STEPS:

This fall, the Institute will initiate a study of the *effectiveness of the petition process in reducing unexcused absences*, focusing on a limited number of schools with active filing rates and good databases. The final report, due January 1998, will

1. follow truant students and evaluate which measures had the greatest effect on improving attendance;
2. evaluate the costs incurred in the petition filing process; and
3. describe whether actual truancy rates were changed in response to the petition process.

(For more information, contact Edie Harding or Mason Burley at the Institute for Public Policy: (360) 866-6000 ext. 6380)

APPENDIX: Washington State School Districts - Total Petitions Reported to OSPI for Reimbursement, 1995-96 School Year *

District	Petitions	Allocation	Enrollment	Filing Rate (per 1000 students)
Aberdeen	21	4060.83	4,230	4.96
Adna	4	773.49	620	6.45
Anacortes	39	7541.55	2,978	13.10
Arlington	12	2320.48	4,143	2.90
Auburn	303	58592.02	12,113	25.01
Battle Ground	91	17596.94	10,303	8.83
Bellevue	25	4834.33	15,391	1.62
Bellingham	69	13342.74	10,090	6.84
Bethel	9	1740.36	14,326	0.63
Bremerton	91	17596.94	6,033	15.08
Brewster	27	5,221.07	934	28.91
Bridgeport	2	386.75	735	2.72
Burlington Edison	66	12762.62	3,288	20.07
Camas	20	3867.46	2,962	6.75
Castle Rock	5	966.87	1,389	3.60
Central Kitsap	101	19,530.67	13,134	7.69
Centralia	33	6381.31	3,480	9.48
Chehalis	4	773.49	2,958	1.35
Cheney	1	193.37	3,627	0.28
Chewelah	17	3287.34	1,270	13.39
Chimacum	25	4834.33	1,498	16.69
Clarkston	3	580.12	3,077	0.97
Cle Elum-Roslyn	5	966.87	1,066	4.69
Clover Park	4	773.49	13,692	0.29
Columbia (Walla)	7	1353.61	922	7.59
Colville	6	1160.24	2,634	2.28
Concrete	11	2127.1	912	12.06
Coupeville	6	1160.24	1,183	5.07
Curlew	1	193.37	359	2.79
Cusick	1	193.37	380	2.63
East Valley (Spok)	2	386.75	4,743	0.42
East Valley (Yak)	15	2900.6	2,232	6.72
Eastmont	52	10055.4	4,530	11.48
Eatonville	3	580.12	1,972	1.52
Edmonds	238	46022.77	20,868	11.41
Ellensburg	6	1160.24	2,796	2.15
Enumclaw	1	193.31	5,044	0.20
Ephrata	7	1353.61	2,328	3.01
Everett	88	17016.82	17,136	5.14
Evergreen (Clark)	288	55691.42	17,596	16.37
Federal Way	168	32486.66	20,579	8.16
Ferndale	18	3480.71	4,482	4.02
Fife	12	2320.48	2,589	4.63
Finley	9	1740.36	1,221	7.37
Franklin Pierce	35	6768.06	6,655	5.26

* School districts that filed but did not request reimbursement assistance are not reflected in this list.

APPENDIX: Washington State School Districts - Total Petitions Reported to OSPI for Reimbursement, 1995-96 School Year*

District	Petitions	Allocation	Enrollment	Filing Rate (per 1000 students)
Grand Coulee Dam	29	5607.82	985	29.44
Grandview	7	1353.61	2,828	2.48
Granger	27	5221.07	1,248	21.63
Highline	147	28425.83	18,209	8.07
Hoquiam	9	1740.36	2,459	3.66
Index	1	193.37	31	32.26
Issaquah	23	4447.58	11,464	2.01
Kelso	113	21851.15	5,244	21.55
Kennewick	199	38481.23	12,635	15.75
Kent	140	27072.22	24,492	5.72
Kittitas	1	193.37	577	1.73
La Conner	13	2513.85	748	17.38
Lacenter	3	580.12	1,220	2.46
Lake Chelan	15	2900.6	1,494	10.04
Lake Stevens	14	2707.22	5,286	2.65
Lake Washington	61	11795.75	24,332	2.51
Lakewood	2	386.75	1,986	1.01
Liberty	1	193.37	693	1.44
Longview	194	37514.36	7,692	25.22
Lyle	3	580.12	435	6.90
Lynden	6	1160.24	2,581	2.32
Mabton	3	580.12	960	3.13
Mary M Knight	2	386.75	216	9.26
Marysville	139	26878.85	9,947	13.97
Mead	9	1740.36	7,727	1.16
Medical Lake	4	773.49	2,431	1.65
Methow Valley	3	580.12	812	3.69
Monroe	75	14502.98	4,838	15.50
Moses Lake	165	31906.55	6,092	27.08
Mount Pleasant	1	193.37	59	16.95
Mt Vernon	151	29199.32	5,069	29.79
Mukilteo	160	30939.68	12,191	13.12
Napavine	1	193.37	676	1.48
Naselle Grays Riv	1	193.37	478	2.09
Nespelem	13	2,513.85	229	56.77
Nooksack Valley	4	773.49	1,815	2.20
North Kitsap	71	13729.48	6,890	10.30
North Mason	69	13342.74	2,432	28.37
North Thurston	91	17596.94	13,150	6.92
Northshore	21	4060.83	19,226	1.09
Oak Harbor	35	6768.06	6,372	5.49
Ocean Beach	14	2707.22	1,419	9.87
Ocosta	5	966.87	1,046	4.78
Olympia	26	5027.7	8,632	3.01
Omak	100	19337.3	2,515	39.76

* School districts that filed but did not request reimbursement assistance are not reflected in this list.

APPENDIX: Washington State School Districts - Total Petitions Reported to OSPI for Reimbursement, 1995-96 School Year*

District	Petitions	Allocation	Enrollment	Filing Rate (per 1000 students)
Onalaska	3	580.12	928	3.23
Oroville	11	2,127.10	962	11.43
Orting	3	580.12	1,522	1.97
Pasco	6	1160.24	7,882	0.76
Pe Ell	4	773.49	306	13.07
Peninsula	7	1.353	9,331	0.75
Pioneer	15	2900.6	861	17.42
Pomeroy	2	386.75	454	4.41
Port Angeles	118	22818.01	5,323	22.17
Port Townsend	44	8508.41	1,870	23.53
Prosser	63	12182.5	2,759	22.83
Pullman	13	2513.85	2,207	5.89
Puyallup	54	10442.14	17,304	3.12
Quilcene	6	1160.24	295	20.34
Quillayute Valley	15	2900.6	1,535	9.77
Rainier	4	773.49	846	4.73
Renton	116	22431.27	12,173	9.53
Richland	26	5027.7	8,762	2.97
Ridgefield	4	773.49	1,607	2.49
Ritzville	7	1353.61	462	15.15
Riverview	30	5801.19	2,757	10.88
Rochester	16	3093.97	1,967	8.13
Rosalia	3	580.12	307	9.77
San Juan	3	580.12	959	3.13
Seattle	654	126465.94	46,757	13.99
Sedro Woolley	37	7,154.80	3,932	9.41
Selah	22	4254.21	3,694	5.96
Sequim	34	6574.68	2,828	12.02
Shelton	63	12,182.50	4,124	15.28
Shoreline	220	42542.06	9,929	22.16
Snohomish	76	14696.35	8,352	9.10
Snoqualmie Valley	6	1160.24	4,111	1.46
Soap Lake	3	580.12	492	6.10
South Bend	7	1353.61	524	13.36
South Central	38	7348.17	2,163	17.57
South Kitsap	61	11,795.75	11,635	5.24
Southside	2	386.75	226	8.85
Spokane	366	70774.52	32,341	11.32
Stanwood	11	2127.1	4,138	2.66
Steilacoom Hist.	7	1353.61	1,647	4.25
Stevenson-Carson	5	966.87	1,228	4.07
Sultan	38	7348.17	1,883	20.18
Sumner	14	2707.22	7,138	1.96
Sunnyside	116	22431.27	4,920	23.58

* School districts that filed but did not request reimbursement assistance are not reflected in this list.

APPENDIX: Washington State School Districts - Total Petitions Reported to OSPI for Reimbursement, 1995-96 School Year*

District	Petitions	Allocation	Enrollment	Filing Rate (per 1000 students)
Tacoma	86	16630.08	31,596	2.72
Tahoma	19	3674.09	5,100	3.73
Tenino	2	386.75	1,493	1.34
Tonasket	10	1933.73	1,244	8.04
Toppenish	53	10248.77	3,422	15.49
Tumwater	28	5414.44	6,242	4.49
Union Gap	6	1160.24	551	10.89
University Place	9	1740.36	5,070	1.78
Vancouver	23	4447.58	19,910	1.16
Vashon Island	9	1740.36	1,666	5.40
Wahkiakum	2	386.75	576	3.47
Wahluke	10	1933.73	1,092	9.16
Walla Walla	16	3093.97	6,894	2.32
Wapato	161	31133.05	3,426	46.99
Washougal	66	12762.62	2,597	25.41
Waterville	4	773.49	443	9.03
Wenatchee	73	14116.23	6,810	10.72
West Valley (Spok)	9	1740.36	4,508	2.00
West Valley (Yak)	4	773.49	3,524	1.14
White Pass	20	3,867.46	994	20.12
White River	7	1353.61	3,524	1.99
White Salmon	20	3,867.46	1,369	14.61
Winlock	13	2513.85	796	16.33
Wishkah Valley	4	773.49	237	16.88
Wishram	1	193.37	79	12.66
Yakima	546	105581.66	13,829	39.48
Yelm	79	15276.47	4,172	18.94
Zillah	2	386.75	1,222	1.64

* School districts that filed but did not request reimbursement assistance are not reflected in this list.