

# Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board

CBI Subcommittee

Virtual Meeting

July 15, 2021

1:00-2:30pm

# Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Review/Approval of June meeting minutes
3. Youth & Family Focus Group Discussion
4. Presentation from Judy Touzin, OCA Summer Research Fellow, on Truancy CRA Prevention & Intervention



# **CRA Youth and Parent/Caregiver Focus Groups: Planning Discussion**

DMA Health Strategies

July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021





## Overview

- Four virtual groups scheduled for mid-September through November
  - Two with youth ages 14 and up
  - Two with parents
- Parents will provide consent for youth to participate, except if state has custody
- Participants will receive a \$25 e-gift card
- Groups will combine open-ended discussion and interactive polling

*Note: Interpreters will be available at focus groups as needed.*





# *Recruitment and Segmentation*

- Recruitment
  - Seek support from CAFL, PPAL, JJPAD member networks, other organizations that work with parents and/or youth statewide (More Than Words, Dorchester Youth Collaborative, etc.)
  - Distribute flyers and e-announcement to FRCs and to JJPAD members to share with their networks
- Segmentation
  - Current/former CRA status
  - Length of time with CRA status
  - CRA filing initiator
  - Age at time of filing
  - FRC involvement
  - Informal or dismissed CRA
  - Sort groups once people have signed up based on sign-up sheet info





# Potential Discussion Topics

## **CRA Experience**

- Length of CRA status
- Impact on school attendance, performance, and retention
- Social and emotional issues
- Impact of race on CRA status
- FRC Role
- School District Role
- Court role
- COVID-19 Impact
- Long-term impact of CRA status
- Appropriateness of CRA filings
- Results of CRA for those placed out of home
- Appropriateness of service referrals
- DCF involvement
- Access to services

- Delinquency matters
- Prevention and intervention measures - steps taken before CRA (either parent or school filing)

## **CRA Process Improvement**

- Strengths of CRA process
- Challenges of CRA process
- Opportunities for improvement

## **Parents**

- Knowing what you know now, would you file again today?
- What would you do differently?

## **Youth**

- Knowing what you know now, what would you do differently?





# Questions and Ideas

Please contact us to share your thoughts:

Jinna Halperin, Principal – [jinnah@dmahealth.com](mailto:jinnah@dmahealth.com)

Alison Ireland, Senior Associate – [alisoni@dmahealth.com](mailto:alisoni@dmahealth.com)

Sally Amilcar, Research Assistant – [sallya@dmahealth.com](mailto:sallya@dmahealth.com)



# Truancy Presentation Overview

Judy Touzin, OCA Summer Research Fellow

- Background on the Truancy CRA Project
- National Context, Research & Promising Practices
- Massachusetts Context & Bright Spots
- Emerging Themes & Recommendations

# Background on the Truancy Project

# CRA Project Goal



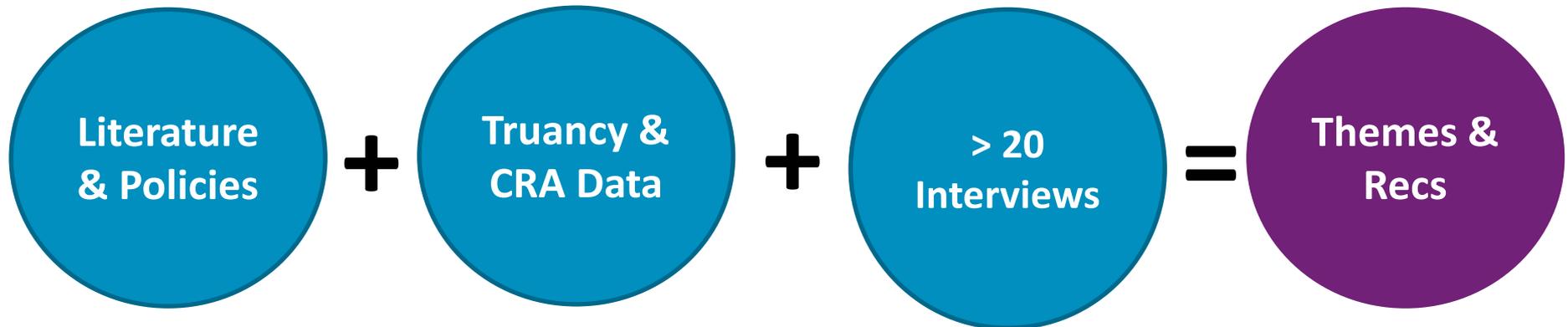
...To offer recommendations that will **reduce the use of truancy based CRAs** by **ensuring youth and families** across the state of Massachusetts **receive timely and effective supports**

# Key Research Questions



- What are some of the various **underlying causes for/drivers of truancy**?
- Where is truancy and the use of truancy CRAs of **greatest concern in the Commonwealth**?
- What are some **promising practices** locally & nationally?
- How do school truancy prevention practices vary across the state?
- What might a **“model” truancy prevention/intervention program** look like?

# Methods/Process

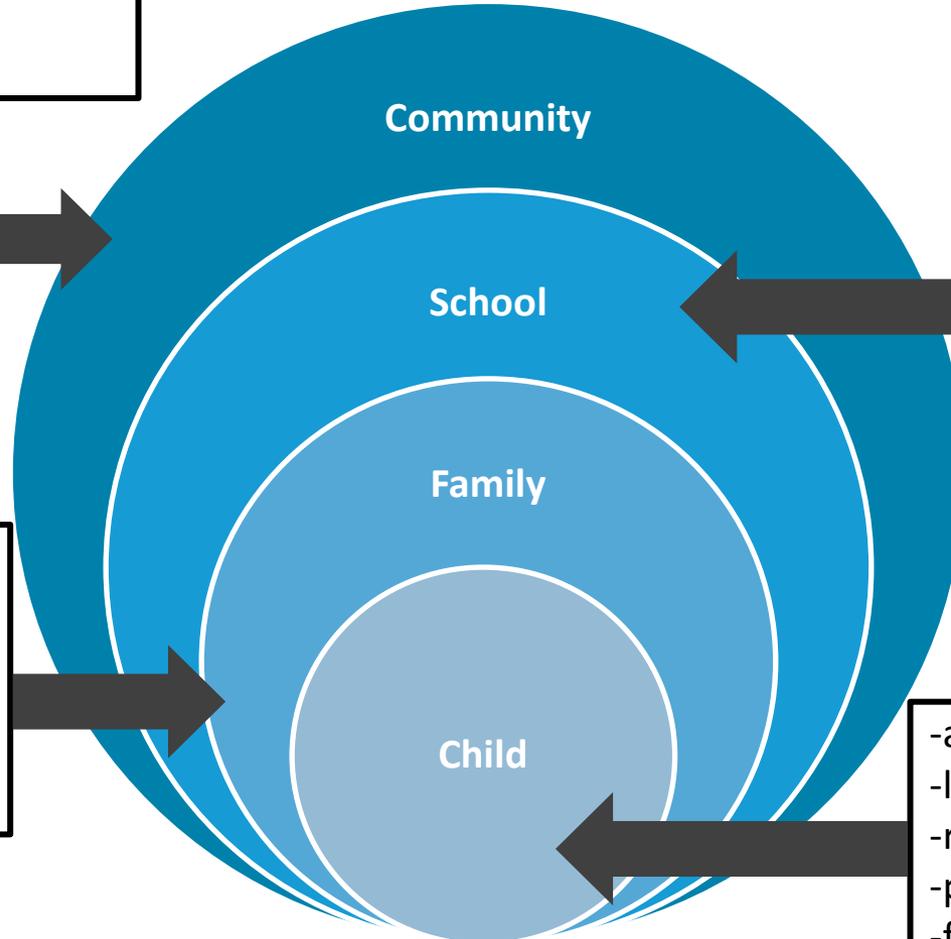


# National Context, Research & Promising Practices



# Truancy Drivers

- social service supports
- community centers
- enrichment
- job opportunities



- school culture & safety
- teaching practices
- student-teacher & student-student relationships
- family engagement practices

- housing & food security
- employment status
- access to transportation
- language barriers
- family orientation to schooling & attendance



- academic performance
- learning needs/styles
- relationships w/teachers
- peer group
- family context



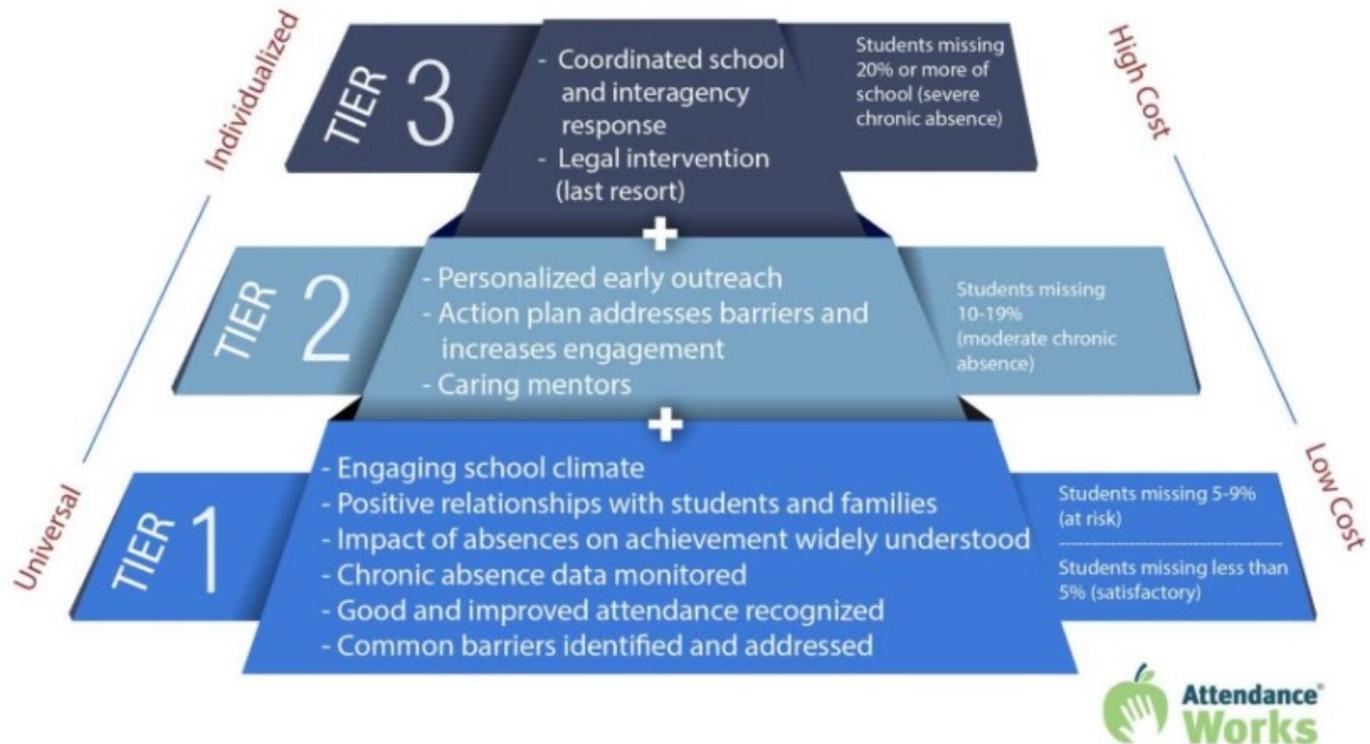
Sources: Attendance Works; Henry, K.L. & David H. Huizinga, D. H. (2007). School-related Risk and Protective Factors Associated with Truancy among Urban Youth Placed at Risk. *Primary Prevention* 28:505–519

# Theoretical Frameworks

	Rational Choice Framework	School Bonding Framework
<b>Focus</b>	Family & child	Family, child, & school
<b>View of truancy</b>	Truancy is the primary concern and behavior to be addressed	Truancy is a <i>symptom</i> the primary concern(s) to be addressed
<b>Approach</b>	Punitive	Supportive & collaborative
<b>Efficacy</b>	less effective over time	more effective over time

Source: Keppens, G. & Spruyt, B. (2020) The impact of interventions to prevent truancy: A review of the research literature. *Studies in Educational Evaluation* (65) 2020.

# Promising Practice: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)



Source: Attendance works. Retrieved from <https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/>

# Promising Practice: Simplifying Communication

Figure S1. Standard truancy notification letter (Control condition)

**Condition A (Control)  
Standard Notice**

School Name  
Address  
City, State Zip

Date

Parent Name  
Parent Address  
RE: Student Name  
City, State Zip

Student ID#: XXXXX

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Good attendance is required for academic excellence. [STATE] Education Code determines what types of absences are excused or unexcused. When a child is absent from school and/or tardy in excess of 30 minutes on three (3) occasions in one school year without a valid excuse, the law considers that child to be truant. The law and district policy requires all schools to notify parents when this occurs. The [DISTRICT] central office automatically sends these letters based on school records so that parents are aware of absences and can address these concerns.

School records indicate that your child was absent from school without a valid excuse on occasions, beginning with the following dates:

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Thursday, September 12, 2015  
Thursday, September 19, 2015  
Thursday, September 27, 2015

---

Our goal is to partner with families to ensure that students are attending school every day. Although the following consequences may appear harsh we are mandated by Education Code Article 48260.5 to inform you of the following:

- That the parent or guardian is obligated to compel the attendance of the pupil at school.
- That parents or guardians who fail to meet these obligation may be guilty of an infraction and subject to prosecution pursuant to Article 6 (commencing with Section 48290) of Chapter 2 or Part 27.
- That alternative education programs are available in the district.
- That the parent or guardian has the right to meet with appropriate school personnel to discuss solutions to the pupil's truancy.
- That the pupil may be subject to prosecution under Education Code Section 48264.
- That the pupil may be subject to suspension, restriction, or delay of the pupil's driving privilege pursuant to Section 13202.7 of the Vehicle Code.
- That it is recommended that the parent or guardian accompany the pupil to school and attend classes with the pupil for one day.

Please recognize that we are required to monitor attendance and notify parents of potential problems with student attendance. If you have concerns about your child's attendance, or if you believe there is an error in this notice, contact the school at [PHONE NUMBER]. The designated attendance personnel will work with you to resolve this issue. We look forward to assisting you.

Sincerely,  
Principal Signature  
Principal Name

Figure S4. Add-up Notice (Condition D)

**Condition D  
Add-up Notice**

**We need your help.** [STUDENT NAME]'s absences from school are concerning, and your partnership is critical. Students who miss just one or two days of school each month can fall seriously behind.

[STUDENT NAME] is now "truant" because [SHE/HE] missed school (or was more than 30 minutes late) without a valid excuse on:

*Thursday, September 12, 2015  
Thursday, September 19, 2015  
Thursday, September 27, 2015*

Being absent can lead to doing poorly in school. Students who miss many days of school are more likely to:

- Fail their classes
- Drop out from high school
- Have poor relationships with parents and teachers

We are required by [STATE] law to send you this letter and to warn you of the consequences of additional unexcused absences (see sidebar).

Please remember that every absence matters and just a couple days each month adds up. **You are key to improving [STUDENT NAME]'s attendance.**

Sincerely,  
Principal X

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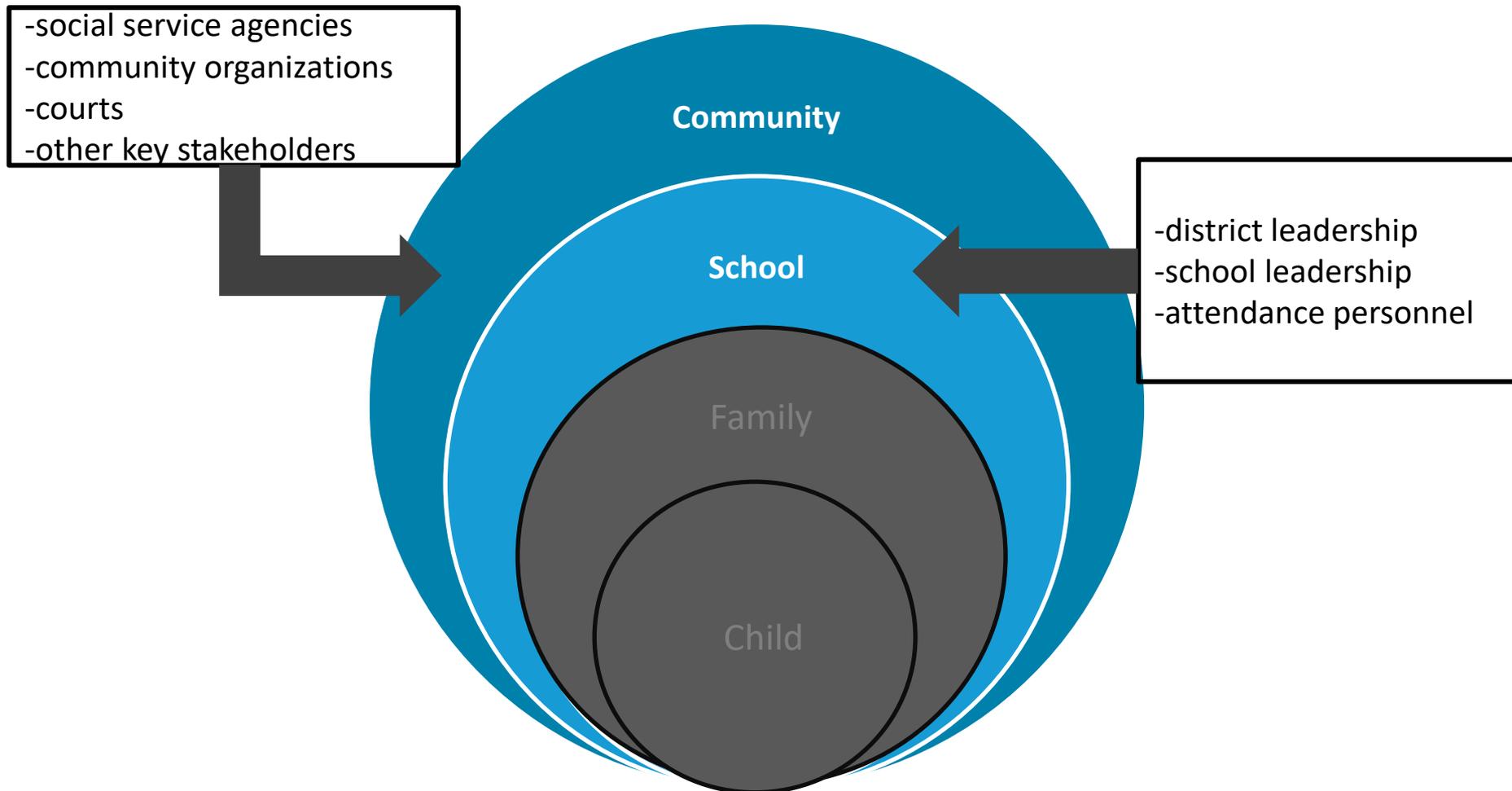
Truancy- [STATE] Education Code School administrators determine what types of absences are excused or unexcused based on state law and on the facts of the pupil's circumstances. When a child is absent from school and/or tardy in excess of 30 minutes on three (3) occasions in one school year without a valid excuse, the law considers that child to be truant. Education Code Section 48260.5 requires us to inform you of the following:

- That the parent or guardian is obligated to compel the attendance of the pupil at school.
- That parents or guardians who fail to meet these obligations may be guilty of an infraction and subject to prosecution pursuant to Article 6 (commencing with Section 48290) of Chapter 2 or Part 27.
- That alternative education programs are available in the district.
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- That the pupil may be subject to suspension, restriction, or delay of the pupil's driving privilege pursuant to Section 13202.7 of the Vehicle Code.
- That it is recommended that the parent or guardian accompany the pupil to school and attend classes with the pupil for one day.

If you have concerns about your child's attendance or if you believe our records are inaccurate contact the school at [PHONE NUMBER].

Source: Lasky-Fink, J., Robinson, C., Chang, H., & Rogers, T. *Using behavioral insights to improve school administrative communications: The case of truancy notifications.* [Working Paper]. [https://scholar.harvard.edu/todd\\_rogers/publications](https://scholar.harvard.edu/todd_rogers/publications)

# Promising Practice: Community Collaboration



Source: Keppens, G. & Spruyt, B. (2020) The impact of interventions to prevent truancy: A review of the research literature. *Studies in Educational Evaluation* (65) 2020; Reville, P. & Sacks, L. (2021). Collaborative Action. Harvard University Press.

# Massachusetts Context

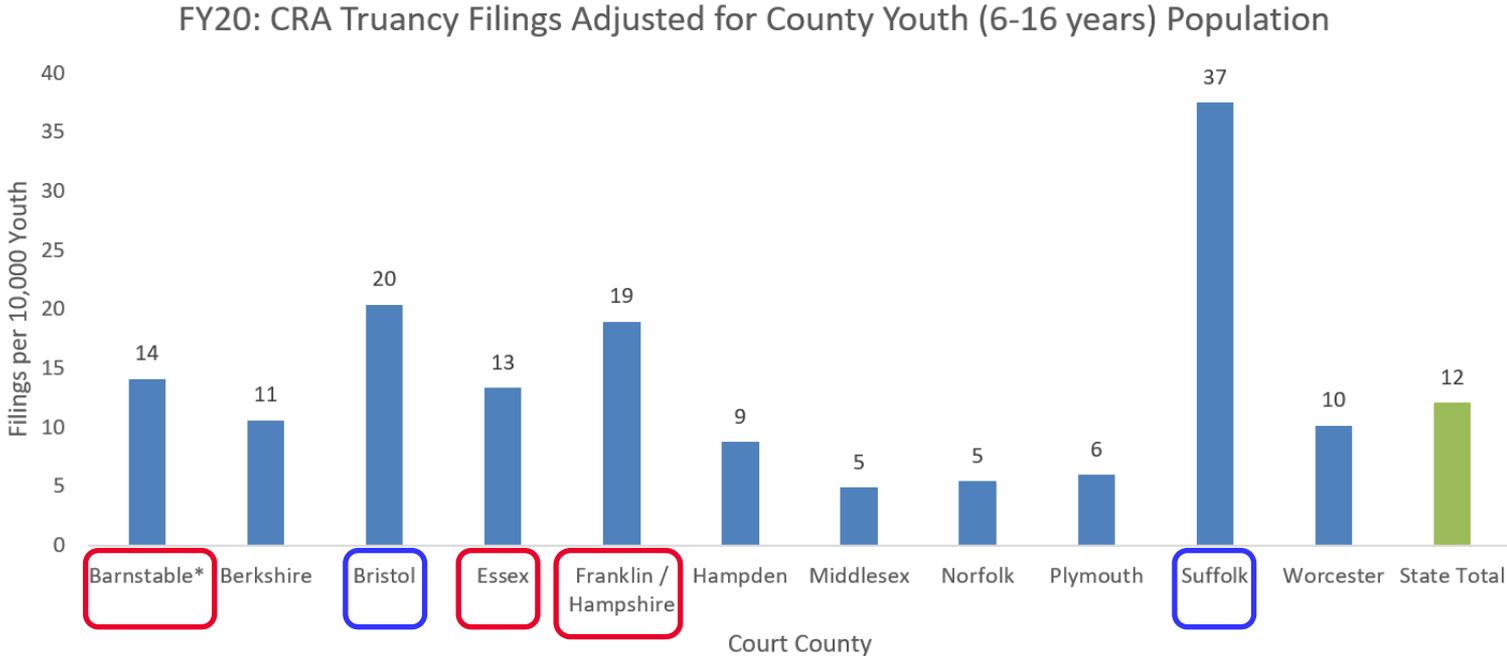


# Truancy CRAs by County

County	Rank for total # CRAs	Total #CRA's filed in 2019	Truancy #	% of CRAs Truancy
Suffolk	1	975	503	52%
Essex	2	754	187	25%
Middlesex	3	696	146	21%
Worcester	4	649	160	25%
Bristol	5	582	206	35%
Hampden	6	327	65	20%
Norfolk	7	327	112	34%
Plymouth	8	248	63	25%
Berkshire	9	180	18	10%
Barnstable	10	179	38	21%
Hampshire/Franklin	11	174	63	36%
Massachusetts	NA	5091	1561	31%

Source: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/viz/DemographicsofChildRequiringAssistanceFilings/>

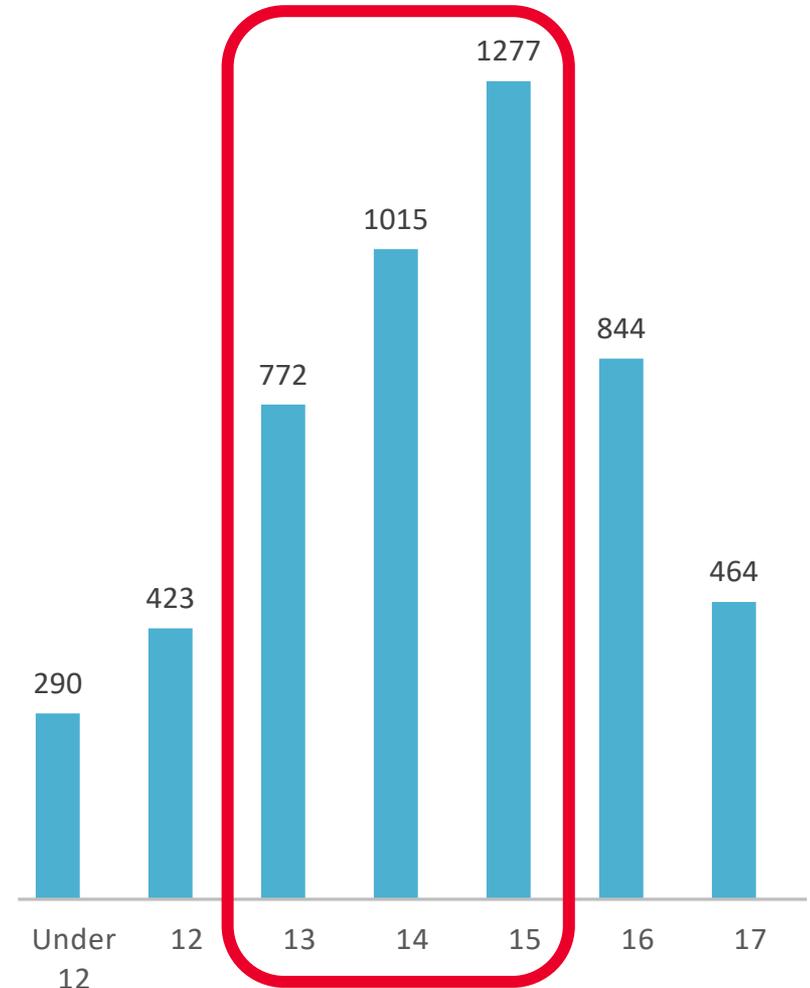
# Truancy CRAs Adjusted for Population



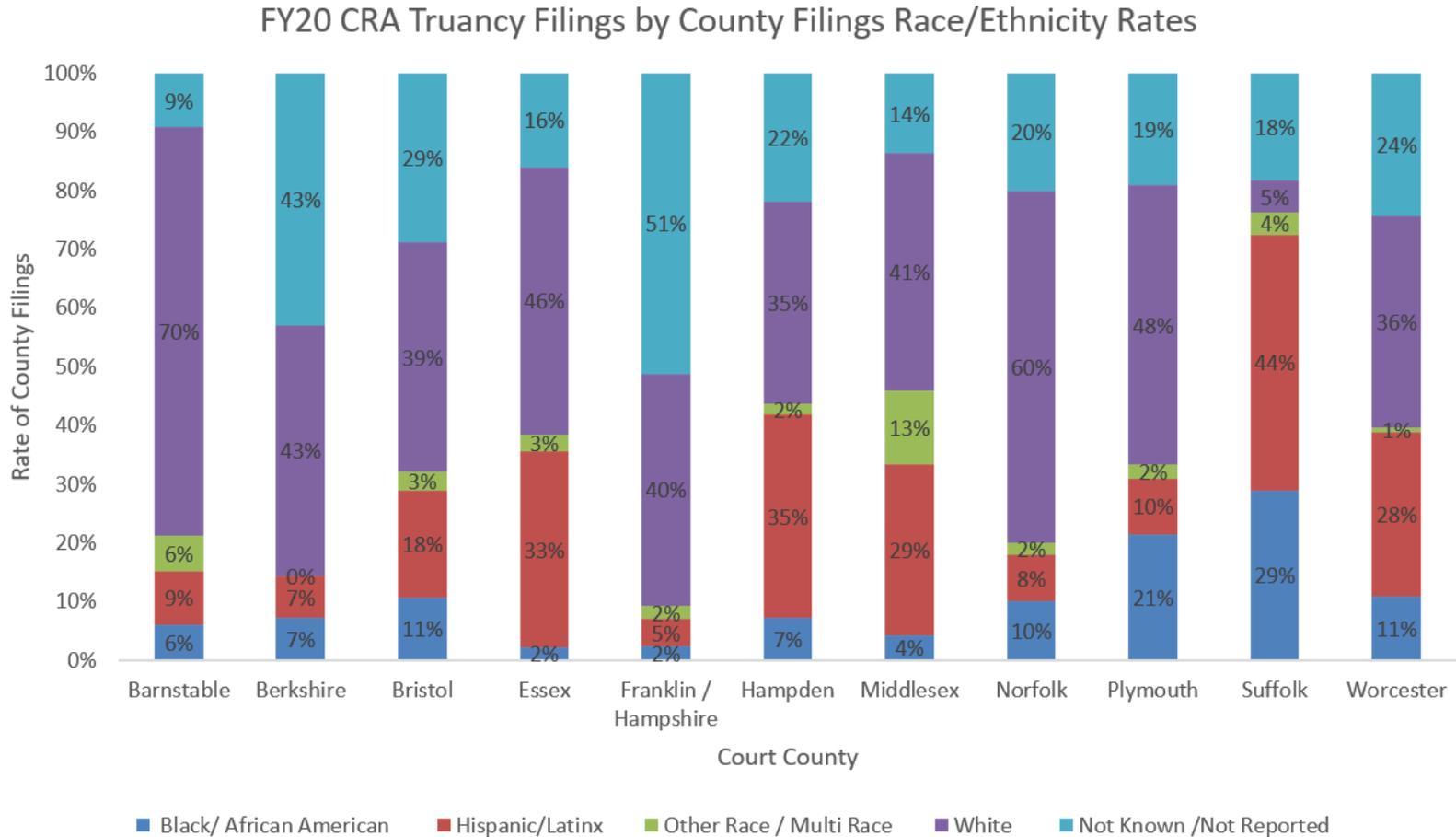
Source: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/viz/DemographicsofChildRequiringAssistanceFilings/>

# By Age: Preteen to Early Adolescence CRAs (2019)

CRA Type	Number of CRAs	% of all CRAs	Mean Age
Stubborn Child	2,297	51.5%	15.3
Truant	1,438	32.2%	14.2
Habitual School Offender	407	9.1%	13.8
Runaway	319	7.1%	15.9



# Truancy CRAs by Race & Ethnicity



Source: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/viz/DemographicsofChildRequiringAssistanceFilings/>

# Truancy Prevention Programs & Safe & Supportive Schools Framework

## Six Lever Topics

### Implementation Level 1: Leadership and Culture:

Leadership fosters the creation of a safe and supportive school by developing and implementing a strategic and integrated plan to improve climate, culture and supports for students, staff, and the community.

### Implementation Level 2: Family Engagement:

Safe and supportive schools have structures in place to enable staff to partner effectively with all families and community members to support the educational success of their children.

### Implementation Level 3: Professional Learning Opportunities

School leaders, teachers, and staff engage in professional development and other targeted learning to improve school climate, culture, safety and social and emotional learning based on the needs of all staff, students, and families.

### Implementation Level 4: Access to Resources and Services

Safe and supportive schools ensure that all students and families have access to culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate supports, programs, and services made available in school, and through partnerships with external service providers that are integrated into the whole school learning environment. "Supports" include a wide range of things such as supportive relationships, access to food, access to stable housing, access to medical care, access to academic support, access to after school opportunities, as well as mental health services.

### Implementation Level 5: Teaching & Learning that Fosters Safe and Supportive Environments:

Students improve their learning in classroom and school cultures that are safe and supportive, and leverage diversity and culture to deepen learning.

### Implementation Level 6: Policies and Procedures

Safe and supportive schools have policies, procedures and protocols that are student-centered, equitable and unbiased.

## Essential Elements of Safe and Supportive Schools



# Prevention & Intervention Practices

**From what we've learned, practices may include:**

- letters home
- attendance committee meetings
- home visits
- school based interventions & supports
- case management by School Adjustment Counselors (SACs)
- referral to FRCs
- filing for CRA

# Truancy Prevention Personnel

## Roles may include:

- Assistant Principals
- Attendance Officers
- School Adjustment Counselors
- School Clerks
- School Resource Officers

\*FRC roles include family partners & school liaisons

# Voices from the Field...

DESE has been clear about accountability. And we understand that. What we need now is more guidance and support.

*-Assistant Superintendent*

Communication & collaboration have been the keys to our success. Everyone (schools, FRC, courts, businesses) has a part to play in supporting our families.

*-Lead SAC & Dir. Of Family Engagement*

Sometimes we feel as though we are engaged too late in the process. We want to be a support to families before it ever becomes a court matter.

*-FRC Program Directors*

Transportation is often a key barrier for our families. So is language. For instance, some schools even use Google Translate for IEPs. This shouldn't be the case. *-FRC Family Partner & School Liaison*

# Bright Spots Across the Commonwealth



# Fonseca & Fitchburg: Tiered Approaches

## Tiered System at Fonseca Elementary

Mary L. Fonseca Elementary School  
Attendance MTSS

Tier 1 Supports
Attendance Team: Meets 1x per week SACs, SSC, Parent Worker, Office Staff, Attendance Officer, VP, Principal
Daily phone calls to parents regarding absences - completed by Parent Worker beginning at 9:30am daily and all communication is posted in x2 journals.
Incentives available to all students:
Weekly top 3 Attendance winners announced in all call/announcements
Students with 100% weekly attendance are entered for a raffle and given a prize
Freestyle Fridays in the Cafeteria for top class each week - announced in Morning Announcements
Tier 2 Supports
Identify students who are at chronic status will be placed on an action plan. The action plan contains: Expectations of teacher / Expectations of parent / Expectations of SAC or SSC & Expectations of student
Follow-up of Action Plan if absences continue: SAC, SSC, teacher, BT, and attendance officer meeting to review action plan and student will enter RTI for attendance and engagement under SEL with a referral to the Family Resource Center. Team referral to be made completing Form B & C with parent. Behavior Therapist joins the team to support with engagement and work completion. Attendance Officer conducts home visit if contact isn't made above.
Tier 3 Supports
Refer parent to the Family Resource Center with a home visit by Attendance officer
Failure to follow-up will result in a referral to Truancy Court
Failure to attend court- warrant issued, and 51a filed

## Truancy Heatmap at Fitchburg High

Students	Attendance	Point Person	Notes/ Next Steps
Student A			
Student B			
Student C			
Student D			
Student E			

# Barnstable & Worcester: “Fresh Start” & “Keep ‘em Coming” Meetings

Meeting w/ all stakeholders to:

- discuss attendance concerns
- get to “the why” behind absences
- develop shared plan
- Connect families to supports
- explain CRA process as a last resort



# Fall River: Attendance Task Force

Monthly meeting with  
community stakeholders to:

- clarify concerns at the school and community level
- reinforce vision for collaboration
- align resources and strategies *(i.e. pediatricians not scheduling appts. during the school day; using a 'walking' school bus)*



# Taunton School District: Cultivating a Culture of Care & Belonging

Key practices include:

- over 75 clubs in the high school
- leisure survey for students
- four community facilitators
- truancy officers are embedded in community (no uniforms or police cruisers)
- pre CRA filing meeting w/ magistrate
- implementation of integrated care plans
- CRA filing is last resort



# Emerging Themes

# What Works

WHAT	HOW
Ongoing communication & collaboration	Regular meetings with community stakeholders to ensure shared vision, practice, and coordination of efforts
Monitor, identify, & intervene early	Attendance teams/committees work to review school level data and identify students
Orientation towards support, not punishment	School and community partners explicitly name and work towards a mindset that views truancy as a symptom of a larger concern that warrants support as opposed to a problem behavior to be corrected.
Getting to the 'why' behind the truancy	Adults take the time and action necessary to learn what families actually need

# Key Barriers

- No statutory or regulatory guidance on what truancy prevention efforts are required before a CRA is filed and/or what best practice would look like
- Data visibility beyond county level
- FRCs often engaged late in the process
- School/Court/FRC partnerships vary widely
- Inadequate translation & transportation services for families

# Recommendations

# Recommendations Overview

## Recommendation #1

### PROVIDE MORE DIRECT GUIDANCE & SUPPORT

Set vision for stakeholder collaboration & model prevention practices

## Recommendation #2

### INCREASE DATA VISIBILITY

Increase data visibility to allow more targeted and timely intervention

## Recommendation #3

### REQUIRE ROBUST INTERVENTION BEFORE CRA FILING

Ensure CRAs are filed as a last resort after individualized efforts

# Recommendation 1:

## Provide more direct guidance & support

- Set vision and direction for community level partnerships & collaboration
- Share guidance on minimum expectations for operating mechanisms
- Provide targeted technical assistance to counties/districts/schools of concern
- Highlight existing partnerships and truancy prevention programs that are working well

# Recommendation 1: Sample Model Program

Area of Focus	Looks Like
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-family receives communication about school attendance policy and child's attendance early and often</li> <li>-communication is provided in family's native language</li> </ul>
<b>Collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-there is a clearly established partnership between the schools, courts, and local FRCs</li> <li>-stakeholders meet regularly (i.e. once per month or per quarter) to align vision and strategy for their partnership and the youth and families they serve</li> </ul>
<b>Culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-school is intentional about creating a safe and supportive school environment where all students feel like they belong and have a relationship with at least one caring adult</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-school has established an attendance committee</li> <li>-Attendance committee meets weekly to review attendance data, flag students of concern, and follow up on any previously discussed intervention measures</li> </ul>
<b>Intervention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-school has met and engaged with family at least 3-5 times and implemented interventions based on family &amp; child's unique circumstances</li> <li>-interventions include a range of supports both within and outside of school as warranted</li> </ul>
<b>CRA Filing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-occurs only after all other measures and efforts have been exhausted</li> <li>-application thoroughly documents the targeted steps that have been taken and their outcomes</li> <li>-proof of demonstrated engagement with FRC <i>before</i> filing</li> </ul>
<b>Supports for 16+</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-alternative education programs</li> <li>-credit recovery models</li> <li>-strategically selected staff that can meet students where they are</li> </ul>

# Recommendation 2: Increase Data Visibility

- Collect, disaggregate, and disseminate CRA data at the district and school level
  - by race, ethnicity, and gender
  - already collect attendance, suspension, discipline and delinquency court referral data
- Increased data visibility will allow:
  - more thoughtful analysis and identification of areas of concern
  - more targeted supports to districts and schools

# Recommendation 3:

## Require robust intervention *before* CRA

### Process

Revise CRA application process to include:

- detailed record of interventions
- proof of engagement with FRC & outcomes

### Practice

- Identify and highlight strong intervention programs across the state
- Provide targeted technical assistance

# Contact

Melissa Threadgill

Director of Juvenile Justice Initiatives

[melissa.threadgill@mass.gov](mailto:melissa.threadgill@mass.gov)

617-979-8368

Kristi Polizzano

Juvenile Justice Specialist

[Kristine.Polizzano@mass.gov](mailto:Kristine.Polizzano@mass.gov)

617-979-8367