Senate Bill 279 Report
2021-22 School Year

September 1, 2022

Child Welfare Division
Oregon Department of Human Services
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Senate Bill 279, passed during the Oregon Legislature’s 2021 regular session, directed Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) to collect data and submit reports to the Legislative Assembly regarding the number of children in foster care who are missing school to attend visitations scheduled by the department.

This report presents data for both semesters of the 2021-2022 school year, including an analysis and policy recommendations for addressing school absences due to visitation.

REQUIREMENTS OF SENATE BILL 279

Section 2 of the bill requires the following data to be collected at the conclusion of each semester during the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years:

a) The number, age and grade of children in foster care who missed part or all of at least five but not more than six school days due to visitations scheduled by the department;
b) The number, age and grade of children in foster care who missed part or all of at least seven but not more than eight school days due to visitations scheduled by the department;
c) The number, age and grade of children in foster care who missed part or all of at least nine but not more than 10 school days due to visitations scheduled by the department;
d) The number, age and grade of children in foster care who missed part or all of at least 11 but not more than 15 school days due to visitations scheduled by the department;
e) The number, age and grade of children in foster care who missed part or all of more than 15 school days due to visitations scheduled by the department; and
f) The most common reasons given for why it was not practicable to schedule the visitations outside of school hours.

Section 3 of the bill directs that the department provide the following no later than September 1, 2022:
[A] report to the interim committees of the Legislative Assembly regarding human services with information regarding the school days missed by children in foster care during the 2021-2022 school year due to visitations scheduled by the department. The report must include information about any initiatives the department plans to implement to address school absences during the 2022-2023 school year. The report may also include recommendations regarding policy initiatives to support the department’s efforts to improve school attendance and the educational success of children in foster care and, if applicable, budgetary resources necessary to implement the recommendations.

DATA

This report includes data for two semesters of the 2021-2022 school year. The statute requires the department to collect data by semester for this report. It is important to note that not all school districts operate on a semester system; some operate on a trimester system, and moreover there is variation among the 197 school districts regarding the start and stop dates of their semesters or trimesters. The department set dates to function as approximate semesters for the purposes of compiling and analyzing statewide data. For the fall data collection, the selected dates were August 1, 2021 through January 31, 2022. For the spring, the dates were February 1, 2022 through June 30, 2022.

Currently, our OR-Kids information system does not have the capacity to track these metrics in the child’s person management or electronic casefile system. Until a permanent tracking system can be built, the department is using SharePoint to track children missing school for visitations. Managers who supervise Social Service Assistants (the staff members facilitating visitations or family time) tracked and submitted data to the SharePoint tracker. Reminder emails were sent to ensure all data were being captured, including information from districts where children in foster care did not miss any school for visitation.

Following the submission of the first report, we had to make some small changes to the first semester data, since additional fall visits were retroactively added after the fall data were pulled for reporting. While this increased the number of children/young adults who missed any part of a
school day for a visitation, it did not increase the number of children who missed part or all of more than four school days during the fall semester. As the charts below illustrate, the number of children in the different visit group categories (5-6, 7-8, etc.) changed slightly, but not enough to change the order of groupings by most children.

2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR

In the fall 2021 semester, 120¹ students missed part or all of at least one day of school for visitations scheduled by the department. Only 40 students missed part or all of more than four school days for visitations. On January 1, 2022 (the last month of the first semester), there were a total of 5,339 children in foster care. This translates to 0.75 percent of children in foster care missing part or all of more than four school days due to department-scheduled visitations. The median amount of school time missed was three-quarters of an hour (45 minutes).

In the spring 2022 semester, 81 students missed part or all of at least one day of school for visitations scheduled by the department. Only 30 students missed part or all of more than four school days for visitations. On June 1, 2022 (the last month of the second semester), there were a total of 5,119 children in foster care. This translates to 0.59 percent of children in foster care missing part or all of more than four school days due to department-scheduled visitations. Again, the median amount of school time missed was three-quarters of an hour (45 minutes).

²This number has been updated from the first fall report.
This chart displays the number of students in foster care who missed more than five days of school (all or part of the day) and the number of visitations/family time scheduled by the department for the semester. Note that the fall data changed slightly due to retroactive additions: The 5-6 visit grouping dropped by two and moved into the 9-10 visit grouping, which increased by two.

The total number missing five or more days decreased by 10 for the spring semester. There could be several reasons for the decrease – including redoubled efforts not to remove students from school for family time/visitation, the smaller number of days in the spring semester, and high school seniors getting out of school earlier for graduation. Showing the greatest improvement was the “More than 15 Visits” category, which decreased from eight students in the fall to just one in the spring.
Children/Young Adults by Age and Number of Visits

The fall scatter chart shows 34 data points but there are 40 children/young adults in total. The fall scatter chart duplicates are as follows:

- (3) six-year-olds with five visits
- (2) nine-year-olds with 5 visits
- (2) 11-year-olds with six visits
- (2) 14-year-olds with six visits
- (2) eight-year-olds with 17 visits

The spring scatter chart shows 24 data points, but there are 30 children/young adults. The spring scatter chart duplicates are as follows:

- (2) nine-year-olds with five visits
- (2) 13-year-olds with six visits
- (2) 11-year-olds with seven visits
- (2) five-year-old with seven visits
- (2) five-year-old with eight visits
- (2) six-olds with nine visits.

Overall, these scatter charts indicate that older children had fewer visits that were resulting in time missed from school. This might be reflective of courts ordering increased visitations/family time for younger children.
This chart shows the number of children by grade level and the number of visitations scheduled by the department that resulted in students missing part or all of more than four school days; there were 40 students in this category during the fall and 30 students during the spring.

There were nine students in foster care who missed part or all of more than four school days due to visits scheduled by the department, for both semesters of the school year. The cases come from the following ODHS Districts:
- (2) Marion/Polk/Yamhill (D3)
- (2) Douglas (D6)
- (3) Coos/Curry (D7)
- (1) Clackamas (D15)
- (1) Washington (D16)

Visit Reasons by Number of Visits (grouped)

Fall 2021 Semester Visit Reasons by Number of Visits

- Expediency (pick-up delays, traffic, etc.)
- Not enough staff/restricted staffing hours
- Number of visits ordered by court
- Parent/guardian schedule
- Pulled during recess/study hall
- Child/youth schedule/activities
- Cultural or religious reasons
- Teenage child needs
- Parent services
- Resource family schedule
- Incarcerated parent
Multiple reasons could be selected for each time a child missed school. Most often, multiple reasons were selected, which creates numbers greater than the actual number of visitations scheduled by ODHS. For example, a child may miss some school for expediency of pick-up, to have the court-ordered amount of visitation time, and due to a need to navigate the parent and child’s schedule.

The Expediency category (bright blue line) generally refers to the practice of picking up a child 15-30 minutes early, near the end of the school day. Most of the time, picking up a child early does not entail missing academic classes, as the end of the school day is often used as transition time, study hall, etc. Early pick-ups are a common strategy used to miss long pick-up lines and allow more time for the actual visitation. The pandemic has significantly increased the length of pick-up lines, due to a lack of school bus drivers and more families transporting their children by car as a means of reducing COVID-19 transmission risk. Staff reported some pick-up lines
being an hour long or more this year. We expect early pick-ups to decrease as pandemic-related issues are resolved.

In the fall, among children who missed more than 15 days of school (all or part of a day), the most frequently reported reasons were parent/guardian schedule and teenage child needs. In the spring, for the same category, the most common reasons were not enough staff and parent/guardian schedule. Staff reported that parents’ work, treatment, and service engagement schedules frequently posed challenges when scheduling visitations. The category of “teenage child needs” most often relates to after school activities and sports schedules.

More analysis is needed surrounding the category of “Not enough staff/restricted staffing hours.” Most Child Welfare branches around the state reported having staff work adjusted hours or on weekends to accommodate visits. In some parts of the state, this practice was easier to manage than in other parts of the state, as managers also needed to be available in case of emergencies. The pandemic may have also created temporary staffing shortages with staff being out ill with Covid-19.

ADDITIONAL DATA NARRATIVE

The department pulled additional data to aid in our analysis and develop a more complete picture. A discussion of those data appears below without charts.

- Of all districts reporting missed school time because of visits, District 3 reported the most distinct number of children/young adults at 43 for the highest total hours missed (285.08 for the entire school year). Of D3’s 285.08 hours missed and 43 children/young adults, Marion branch accounted for 269.58 hours and 33 children/young adults.
- Of all grades (Kindergarten through 12th), Kindergartners missed the most amount of school for the year at 213.75 hours from 26 distinct children/young adults. Third graders had two more children/young adults at 28, however, hours missed totaled much less than Kindergartners at 130.92.
- For the 2021–2022 School Year, September and March saw the most missed school, at 162 hours and 138 hours, respectively.
Survey Results

The department conducted a survey of SSA Supervisors to better understand existing strategies, new practices implemented, and challenges related to students missing school to attend visits. A total of 13 supervisors (representing branch offices) completed the survey, representing 10 of the 16 ODHS Districts across Oregon (three responses were from one district).

- 11 of 13 branches had practices in place, before the passage of SB 279, to ensure students missed as little school as possible for visits. Most achieved this by having a structure of prioritizing afternoon visits for school aged children/young adults and employing alternative schedules for SSAs (four ten-hour days, 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. schedules, and weekend schedules).
- Five of the 13 branches employed new strategies at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year to decrease the amount of school missed for students in foster care. These strategies included increasing the number of SSAs working alternative schedules and maximizing the use of school in-service and early school release days.
- The most successful strategies included the hiring of SSAs willing to work alternate schedules and having supervisors available on evenings and weekends for emergencies; having resource parents who are willing and available to take on the transportation to/from visits, freeing up SSA’s time for more visits; and maximizing early release, in-service, and school holidays for visits.
- The biggest challenges reported by SSA supervisors were staffing shortages, parent schedules being inflexible, and students’ after-school sports and extracurricular schedules.
- Seven of the 13 branches reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had impacts on missed school trends. These included earlier pickup of students in order to avoid longer pick-up lines after school, pandemic-related staffing shortages, and students/parents being sick and/or quarantining and needing to make up visits.
- Some branches had unique circumstances which allowed them to be more successful. For instance, Grants Pass did not have any students miss school for visits. One of the main drivers of their success was having one of the two school districts in their area on a four-day school schedule. This allowed visits on students’ no-school
day and freed up the other afternoons to serve students from the other school district.

INITIATIVES

The Department has implemented the following activities related to Senate Bill 279:

- At the beginning of the 2021 school year, the Executive Leadership Team met with Child Welfare Program Managers to discuss the implementation process of SB 279 and emphasize the value of not removing students from school for visits whenever possible.
- On August 25, 2021, back-to-school guidance was sent to all child welfare staff, including a section discussing visitation and SB 279 implementation:
- On October 4, 2021, a transmittal was sent to Child Welfare staff regarding changes to chapter 5 “Services to Children,” Section 26 “Family Visitation and Contact,” of the Child Welfare Procedure Manual. Changes were updated to be in compliance with Oregon Senate Bill 279 which was signed into law at the end of the 2021 legislative session in June. 
- Child Welfare has been collaborating with the OR-Kids team to determine how best to document the number of days of school missed due to visits. A timeframe for an associated system build is still being determined.
- Throughout the 2021-2022 school year, Child Welfare has met regularly with SSA supervisors to discuss strategies, ensure data collection, and share ideas about how to decrease students missing school time for visits.

The short timeframe between the date spring data became available and the date this report is due limited our ability to complete internal conversations about, and to report on, potential practice, policy, and rule
changes to decrease the amount of time students miss school for visits. These conversations will take place in the near future.

The department values the academic success of students in foster care, and commits to the following:

- This report will be used to consider further SSA staffing allocations to branches with increased numbers of students missing school for visits.
- The department will continue to review rules and procedures to determine whether there can be further additions to embed good practices.
- The department will continue to emphasize the importance of classroom time for students in back-to-school guidance for staff.
- The department will look for partnerships with resource parents and community partners to determine whether creative options for transporting children/young adults to visits are available, to free up staff time for more after-school visit availability.
- A policy option package was submitted by Child Welfare Program, aimed at aligning with recommendations of the Every Student Succeeds Act, to have local child welfare education contacts to increase education outcomes for students in foster care. This POP was not specific to SB 279 but focused on increasing local advocacy and community partnerships to increase education strategies for better education success. We are still waiting for the outcome of proposals.

**SUMMARY**

The 2021-2022 school year data show that less than 1 percent of students in foster care miss school due to family time/visits. Improvements in practice are reflected in decreases in the amounts of missed school time from fall to spring. The department places a high value on academic success for students in foster care and will continue to work with Oregon Department of Education to develop strategies across programs that support improved education outcomes.
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