

2020 |



# Washington Child Advocates

Report for 2017 - 2020

Report Authored by: Alicia Summers, PhD

Director, Data Savvy Consulting, LLC



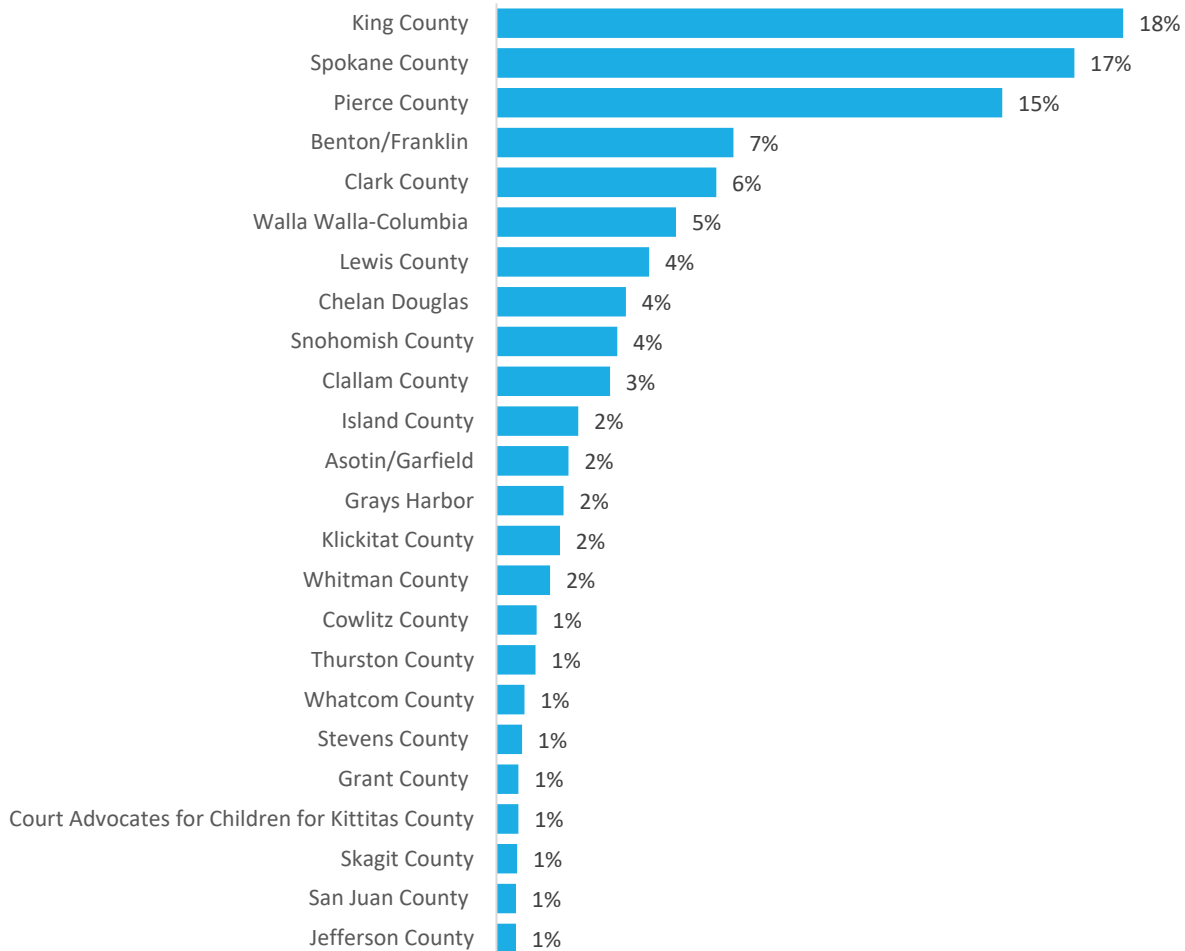
# Washington Child Advocates Report (2017- 2020)

## Introduction

In Washington State, child advocate volunteers have been asked to complete a survey every six months, beginning in September of 2017. The Survey has been completed on six occasions, September 2017, March 2018, September 2018, March 2019, March 2020, and September 2020. Data from these surveys were analyzed and provided back to the Washington State child advocate programs to better understand current practice. This report compares the six data points to examine all the data and any differences over time. It is important to note that survey responses may include the same case and multiple points in time and does not reflect new youth every time. The survey asked a series of questions about children the child advocates represent, including visitation, well-being, placement, and education related information.

A total of 2,818 entries, representing more than 2,000 children involved in the foster care system, were made by child advocates across the state of Washington. Thirty-one counties were represented in the survey, with the highest percentage (18%) from King County. Eight counties are not included on the chart as they represent than 1% of the sample. These included Mason, Quileute, Yakima, Ferry, Pend Orielle, Skamania, Kistap, and Okanogan counties. Percentages may not equal 100% as some advocates indicated multiple counties.

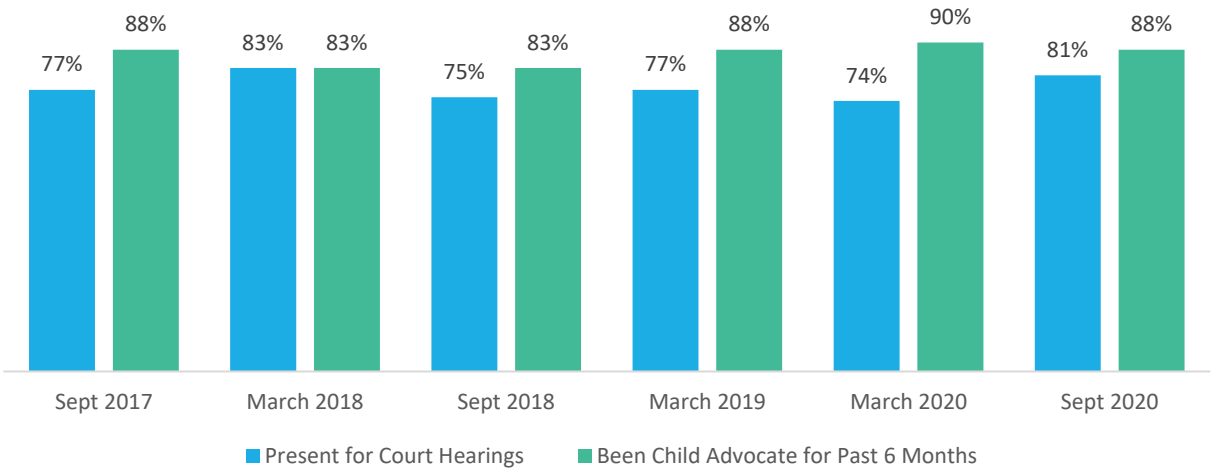
Child Advocate Volunteer County



# Findings

Child advocates reported the petition filing date and the date they were appointed. There were several data errors making it challenging to determine accurate dates. All outliers were removed from the analysis. The child advocates were appointed a median of 33 days after the case opened, with an average of 147 days after the case opened (cases ranged of 119 days prior to case opening, to more than 10 years after a case opened). Child advocates were asked if they were present at the most recent court hearing and if they have been the child advocate the entire time for the last 6 months. *There was a significant difference between time periods for presence at court hearings. The March 2020 sample was significantly more likely than the 2018 samples to be present at court.*

Child Advocate Assignment and Presence



	Sept 2017	March 2018	Sept 2018	March 2019	March 2020	Sept 2020
Has the child reunified with his/her parents?	17%	21%	20%	18%	38%	17%
Any additional findings of abuse/or neglect?	9%	6%	5%	5%	7%	8%

The median number of child advocate visits in the last six months was **6** across all samples, with a range of 0 to more than 20.

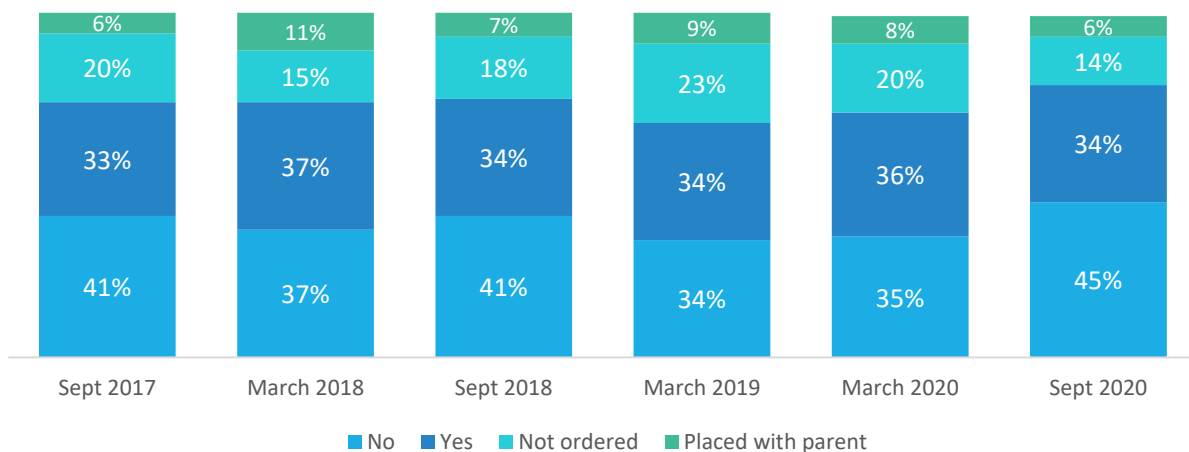
## Placement & Visitation

A series of questions asked about child’s placement and visitation with the mother, father, and siblings on the case. The data collected was compared to statewide data from the 2016-2019 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data. The child advocate survey data is consistent with the national data trends for placement type. As illustrated in the table below, the most common placement type is Foster Care with a non-relative. Most children had not had a placement move in the last 6 months.

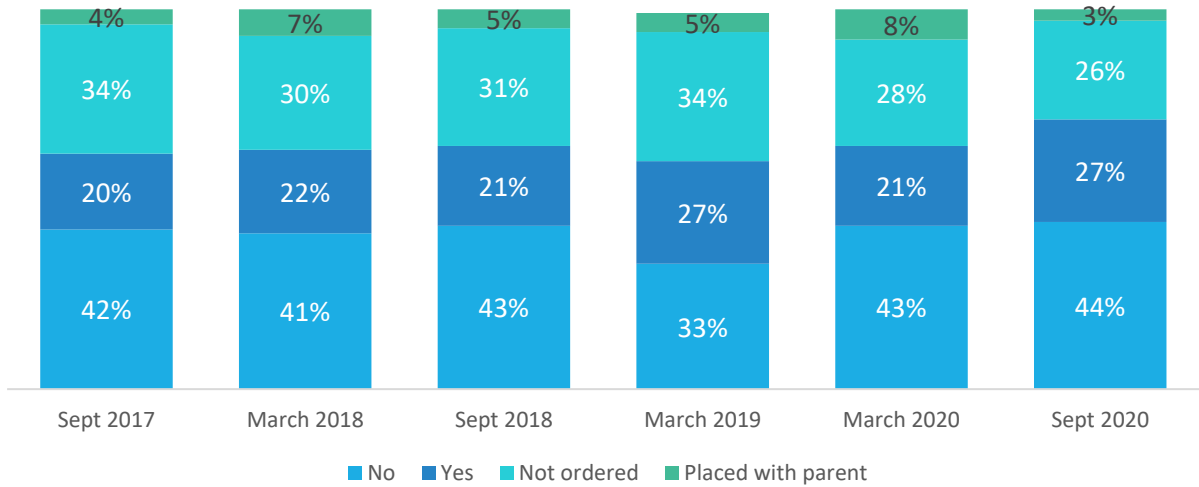
Placement	Sept 2017	March 2018	Sept 2018	March 2019	March 2020	Sept 2020
In home with parents	15%	20%	17%	17%	24%	16%
With relatives/kin	35%	33%	37%	35%	30%	28%
Foster Care	43%	43%	42%	46%	39%	46%
A “suitable” other	3%	3%	2%	2%	3%	5%
Group/Congregate Care	2%	1%	1%	<1%	2%	3%
Hospital/Treatment Center	1%	1%	< 1%	< 1%	1%	1%
Detention	1%	<1%	0	<1%	< 1%	3%
<b>Placement Moves</b>						
0	65%	68%	65%	68%	59%	64%
1	20%	22%	22%	24%	26%	22%
2	9%	6%	10%	5%	10%	9%
3	4%	3%	2%	1%	4%	4%
4 or more	2%	1%	1%	0	1%	1%

The survey also asked if the child has maintained consistent visits with parents and siblings in the last six months. As noted in the Visitation graphs below, the most common response for maintaining visits with mothers and fathers was “No.” For sibling visits, the majority of cases indicate that this was not applicable (i.e., youth did not have siblings or were placed together). *There was a statistically significant difference in maintaining visits across the sample time periods. The difference appears to be in comparing the highest and lowest in the categories (e.g., for mothers September 2020 was significantly different from March 2019 in terms of visits not occurring). No trends emerged from the data. That is, there was no consistent increase or decrease in any variable over time.*

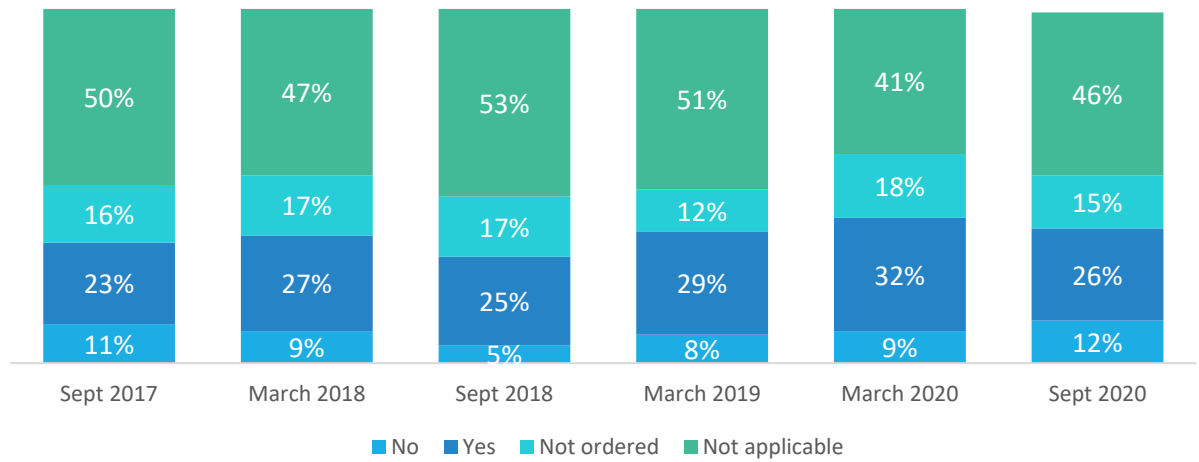
### Maintained Consistent Visits with Mother



### Maintained Consistent Visits with Father



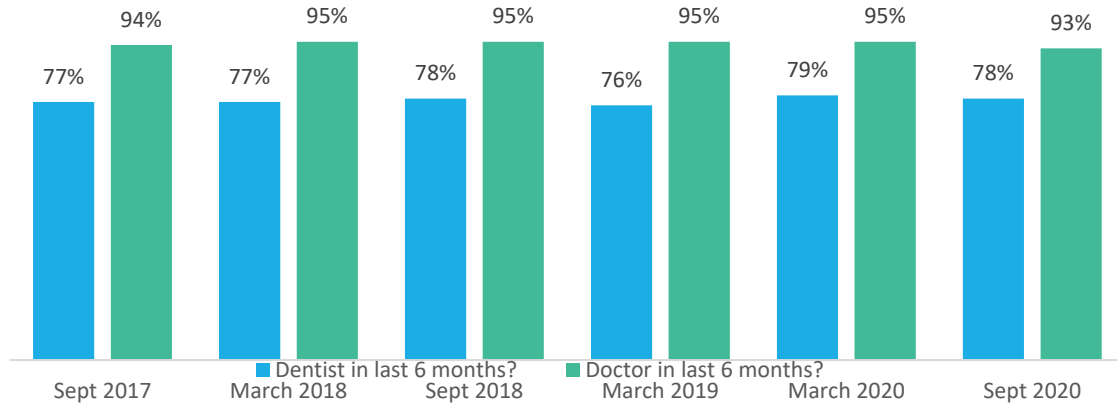
### Maintained Consistent Visits with Siblings



## Health & Well-being

The child advocate survey asked about child's health and wellbeing. In particular, the survey asked about participation in services with the last 6 months. The majority of children had been to the dentist and to the doctor in the last 6 months. There were no significant differences in the last six reporting periods.

## Percent Yeses Regarding Health Check-ups

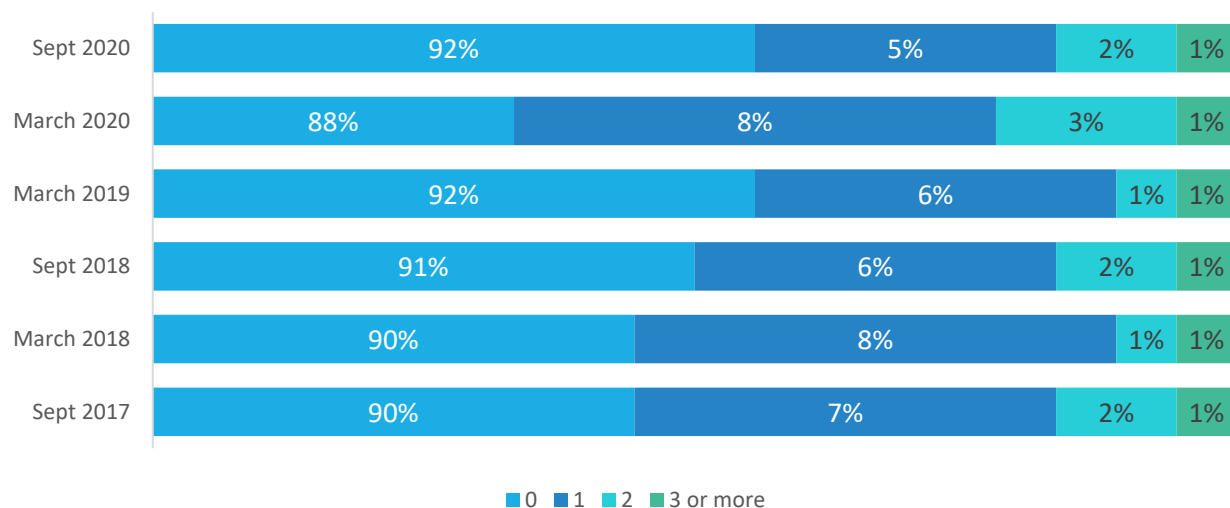


In addition to general wellbeing the survey asked about mental health. The majority of youth were not ordered to go to mental health counseling by the court. Of those who were ordered, the vast majority were being provided services. *There was very little variation across time periods. The highest percentage of youth not receiving services if ordered was in September 2020 (21%), which was significantly different from other years.*

	Sept 2017	March 2018	Sept 2018	March 2019	March 2020	Sept 2020
<b>Not Ordered</b>	55%	55%	60%	58%	57%	64%
<b>If ordered, services being provided (YES)</b>	88%	88%	89%	88%	89%	79%
<b>If ordered, services not being provided (NO)</b>	12%	12%	11%	12%	11%	21%

The survey also asked about psychotropic medication use. Ninety percent of youth were not reported to be on any psychotropic medications. Seven percent were on one psychotropic medication and 3% were on two or more. There were no differences between years.

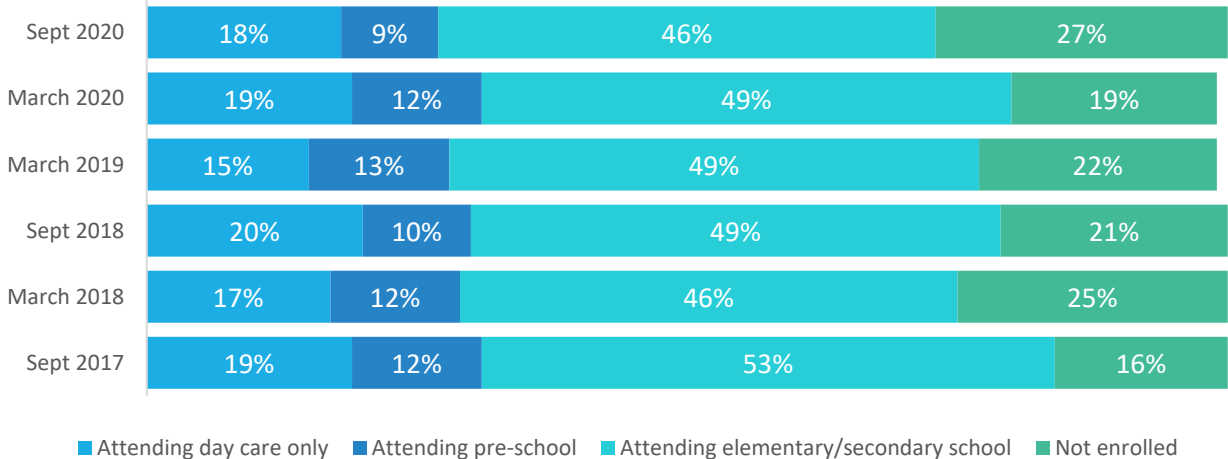
## Number of Psychotropic Meds Ordered for Children



# Education

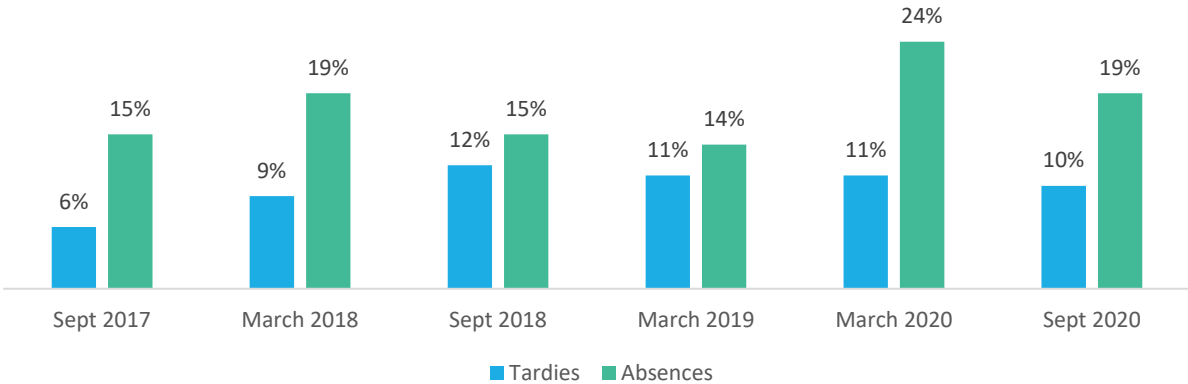
A final set of questions asked about the child’s current education setting and needs. Most youth were attending elementary or secondary school.

Child's Educational Setting



The survey also asked about absences and being tardy from school. In each year, for 36 to 44% of youth, child advocate marked this as not applicable. For the remaining sample of youth, the majority were indicated as no’s. The graph below indicates the percentage of child advocates who indicated “yes” that their student had missed more than 2 days of school per month for two months or more (absences) and whether the child had been tardy for school on a recurrent basis (tardies). *There were significant differences between time periods for tardies and absences. Tardies increased steadily until September of 2018. There does not seem to be a pattern for absences over time, but March of 2020 had the highest rate, significantly higher than all other samples. By September 2020, the rates were similar again.*

Percentage of Child Advocates Reporting Tardies and Absences for Youth



The survey also asked about school specific information, including whether the child had a reliable way to get to school, whether the child was on track to be promoted to the next grade level, whether they had current IEP/504 plans, and whether the youth participated in extracurricular activities. The table below illustrates variations in time. These percentages represent of applicable youth, how many did the child advocate indicate a Yes response. *September 2020 represents the lowest percentage of child advocates reporting that the child participates in extra curricular activities.*

Does the child/ is the child....	Sept 2017	March 2018	Sept 2018	March 2019	March 2020	Sept 2020
<b>Have a reliable way to get to and from school?</b>	99%	98%	100%	99%	99%	99%
<b>On track to be promoted to the next grade?</b>	93%	93%	94%	93%	90%	93%
<b>Have a current IEP/504 Plan?</b>	43%	38%	40%	37%	42%	38%
<b>Participate in extra curricular activities?</b>	47%	52%	51%	49%	43%	30%

## Conclusions

The data collected for this report illustrate point-in-time snapshots of the youth that child advocates serve in Washington State. As indicated with the findings, there were very few differences between the six reporting periods. This illustrates fairly consistent practice and youth outcomes across the state. The statistically significant differences between samples were typically between the highest and lowest sample responses. There did not appear to be any trends in the data. That is, nothing consistently went up or down over time for these samples. It is important to note that there were some differences in the September 2020 sample that may be related to the COVID-19 Pandemic. In particular:

- **Visits.** Mother, father, and sibling visits had the highest percentage of “no” or not visiting consistently than all other time points.
- **Mental Health Services.** Sept 2020 had the highest rates of reported youth who have been ordered mental health services not receiving services.
- **Extracurriculars.** Sept 2020 had the highest rates of youth not engaged in extracurricular activities.

As indicated in prior reports, the majority of practices or outcomes identified in this report are positive (e.g., 99% of youth have a reliable way to get to school). It is important to note that this report cannot draw a causal inference between child advocate behavior and these outcomes. Considerations for using this data to improve practices:

- **Parent Visitation.** Approximately 40% of cases indicate the youth are not visiting their mother or father. As visitation is a significant predictor of reunification, further exploration of why this is the case is needed, including a discussion of what the child advocates role is in this.
- **Current IEP/504 Plan.** Less than half (37-43%) of youth who are applicable to have an IEP, do not have one according to the survey. As educational outcomes are often poorer for foster youth, it is important to identify why this might be the case and how to improve these numbers.
- **Extracurricular Activities.** Child advocates report only about half of students (47-52%) that are age applicable participate in extracurricular activities. These activities can help provide normalcy for the child and may serve as a resilient factor for youth. More discussion should occur about why this number is so low.