

Stark County Juvenile Division's Youth Court Chronicles:

An analysis of first-time entrants,
2019 -2021

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Executive Summary

The Stark County Family Court partnered with the Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education to conduct a recidivism analysis for the Juvenile Division. The goal was to examine characteristics of youth, focusing on first-time entrants, and understand the impact sentencing patterns had on recidivism.

Methods and Definitions

- An “intake” served as the unit of measure, representing an individual’s entry into the court system.
- Recidivism was defined as the occurrence of a new intake within one year of an individual’s initial intake.
- We considered charges ranging from minor misdemeanors (MM) to felonies of the first degree (F1).
- Each intake was assigned to one of four sentencing groups: Diversion, Probation, Community Control, or Standard, which constituted all other dispositional orders.

Key Findings

Regarding the 1,540 individuals who first entered the Juvenile Division between 2019-2021:

Demographics

- Approximately two-thirds were male (64.1%).
- The majority of youth were White (63.0%), and 34.9% were Black.
- Two-thirds fell within the 13-16 age range (66.9%).

Sentencing Group

- 8 in 10 youth were assigned to Diversion
- Black youth were significantly underrepresented in the Diversion group, though other unaccounted variables – like the severity of offenses - could have influenced sentencing decisions.

Recidivism Insights

- 85.6% of youth did not recidivate.
- Youth in the Probation sentencing group had the highest recidivism rate (36.2%).
- White youth represented just over half of those who recidivated (52.3%), reflecting a slight underrepresentation given their 63.0% majority among first-time entrants. Conversely, Black youth accounted for 44.6% of the recidivating individuals, despite constituting 34.9% of the sample, highlighting a disparity in recidivism rates.

- Hispanic youth showed a proportionate representation among youth who recidivated.
- The recidivism rate among first-time entrants (14.4%) was less than half that of youth who had prior involvement with the Juvenile Division (30.2%).

Recommendations & Conclusion

Based on the analysis, further action and research are supported. For instance, the court can focus on developing tailored Interventions for first-time entrants, as means to prevent future offenses. The data around each of the sentencing groups can be parsed further to better evaluate the effectiveness of each sentencing type. Further research can also broaden the scope of the analysis, for example, including less serious status offenses in the definition of recidivism. By understanding their youth population and recidivism patterns, the Stark County Juvenile Division can refine strategies, allocate resources effectively, and create safer communities.

Stark County Juvenile Division's Youth Court Chronicles:

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Introduction

Background & Purpose

The Stark County Family Court is located in Canton, Ohio and is comprised of the Court of Common Pleas, Domestic Relations, and Juvenile Divisions. In line with its mission to “promote a safe and healthy community by protecting and supporting children and families,” court administration partnered with the Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education at Case Western Reserve University to conduct a recidivism analysis for the Juvenile Division. This analysis provides stakeholders with tangible evidence of the court’s performance, while promoting transparency and accountability, and – most critically – allows for data-driven decision making. Analyzing its data allows the court to make informed decisions based on actual trends and outcomes, which can lead to more effective prevention and intervention strategies tailored to the youth.

Objectives

As decided in consultation with Stark County Family Court, the purpose of the project was to examine the characteristics of youth in the Juvenile Division, with a specific focus on youth who had no prior history with the court (i.e., first-time entrants) and gain understanding into sentence patterns and its impact on recidivism. For instance, what were the recidivism outcomes for youth assigned to a diversion program compared to youth assigned to probation? By focusing on first-time entrants, the court can identify critical intervention points that may prevent further engagement with the Juvenile Division. Tailoring interventions to this group could reduce the likelihood of future offenses.

Methods

Definitions

The precision of terminology is crucial in any recidivism analysis to ensure consistency, comparability, and clarity in findings. Recidivism can vary widely in how it is measured, and the specific criteria for what is considered a recidivating event can significantly affect the outcomes of an analysis. For instance, if recidivism is defined by a new arrest, it may capture a broader range of behaviors than if measured by convictions. Other factors that can influence recidivism outcomes include scope of offenses included or excluded (e.g. include

all crimes, exclude city ordinance violations, include only serious felonies); the population in review (e.g. similar characteristics like criminal history, or all individuals regardless of criminal history) and the timeframe within which a recidivating event is considered relevant to the analysis (e.g. recidivism within one year of release from detention, within two years of the incident date). Establishing clear definitions also facilitates the comparison of findings over time for Stark County or even across different jurisdictions, which may have varying legal definitions and practices.

For this analysis, the unit of measure was an ‘intake’ as this metric is most useful and directly applicable to the Court’s operations. It is defined and utilized by the Court, much like how a law enforcement agency may use ‘incident’ or ‘arrest’ or a prosecutor’s office uses ‘case.’ Additionally, only intakes with an offense severity of a felony or misdemeanor were included in the analysis; those intakes of a status-level offense were excluded¹.

Other definitions used to outline the scope, population, and timeframe were:

First-time entrants – A youth with no prior history of any offense, including status offenses, misdemeanors, or felonies.

Recidivating Event – New misdemeanor- or felony-level charges.

Recidivism Timeframe – A year from the youth’s original intake date into the Juvenile Division.

Sentencing Group – An individual’s initial intake was assigned to one of four groups based on its sentencing:

1) **Diversion:** non-court involvement handling of a juvenile complaint. Youth are charged and the case is handled by a court officer, not a hearing officer (Judge or Magistrate). The youth do not appear in front of a bench. Instead, the diversion officer can issue things like restitution, community service, and connect the family to community services. If all tasks are completed by the assigned timeline the case is closed with no formal filings and it will not show up on the youth’s record.

2) **Probation:** a formal disposition. This is a court-ordered supervision program for a length of time. Often, it carries with it some suspended sentencing options such as time in detention or a commitment to the Ohio Department of Youth Services. The Probation Officer can return the youth to court for those suspended orders to be imposed. The Probation Officer works with the youth and family to assist in curbing the issues that brought them to court while maintaining community safety.

¹ The Ohio Revised Code defines a status offense as a noncriminal act that is considered a law violation only because of a youth's status as a minor.

3) **Community Control:** a formal dispositional order. It is the least restrictive disposition order as there is no formal supervision. However, any suspended sentence can be imposed if the youth returns to court within the given community control timeframe.

4) **Standard:** the individual received none of the previous three categorizations. This group can include any other dispositional orders.

It is worthwhile to consider what these definitions do not include, particularly around the recidivating event. For instance, a failed completion at the Diversion program, for which a youth would be back in court, is not considered a recidivating event. Technical violations that did not involve new criminal activity (of the misdemeanor or felony level) were also excluded. However, such violations only number between 15–20 annually.

At times throughout the report, we examined the severity of a criminal charge. The Ohio Revised Code states a charge may be classified as either a felony or misdemeanor, with a degree of seriousness from either the first, second, third, fourth, or fifth degree². A naturally ordered relationship exists: A felony of the first degree is more serious than a felony of the fifth degree, which is more serious than a misdemeanor of the first degree. In this report the common shorthand notations used in legal documents, by law enforcement, and in court proceedings will also be used, e.g., a felony of the first degree is written as F1, a felony of the fifth degree as F5, and minor misdemeanor as MM.

Methodology

The analysis was quantitative in nature and involved reviewing data from administrative records. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized. Descriptive statistics summarized and described the dataset, while inferential statistics were employed to understand the relationships between variables, evaluate differences in group proportions, and assess the independence of variables. These methods also allowed for assessing the probability that observed differences are statistically significant. The tests included the one-sample proportion test, which compares the proportion of a specific group against a known population proportion; the Chi-square test, which evaluates the representation of categories within groups against their overall representation; and Fisher's Exact Test, which is used to compare the observed proportions of two categories within a contingency table when sample sizes are small.

² Ohio allows for a "minor misdemeanor," an offense for which the potential penalty does not exceed a fine of one hundred fifty dollars and is less severe than a fifth-degree misdemeanor.

Data Grouping: Classifications and Numerical Transformations

While an individual's intake in the court records system was the unit of measure, an intake often consisted of multiple charges. To address the multiple charge severity degrees and sentencing outcomes, we distilled them into a singular measure for each intake. This was accomplished by adopting a hierarchical approach that prioritized the most severe charge and intensive sentencing order associated with each intake. When possible and appropriate, the degree severity, a categorical variable, was converted to numerical values to allow for statistical analysis. This conversion helps identify trends, differences, and patterns that would not otherwise be apparent. This methodology ensured that our analysis captured the most critical aspects of severity and sentencing outcomes.

Sentencing Group

To categorize an individual's initial intake as either Diversion, Probation, Community Control or Standard, the sentencing associated with each charge listed was evaluated. For individuals with multiple charges listed on an intake, we employed a hierarchical approach to assign a singular sentencing group for the entire intake. This hierarchical categorization reflects varying levels of court oversight and the following prioritization: Diversion, Probation, Community Control and Standard. For the small number of intakes that included charges that qualify for different sentencing groups (n=56, 3.6%), the intake was categorized according to the most prioritized one. For example, if an intake had multiple charges with both Probation and Standard sentencing types, it was categorized solely in the Probation sentencing group. If an intake had multiple charges with both Community Control and Probation sentencing types, it was categorized solely in the Probation sentencing group.

While the hierarchical categorization approach ensures a consistent assignment of sentencing groups, its implications for recidivism analysis are noteworthy. Specifically, it may place some individuals into categories with more intensive oversight than warranted by their individual charges, potentially affecting the evaluation of intervention effectiveness. Despite these considerations, we find the approach valid, both allowing for accurate reflection of the judicial system's intent and approach to each case and allowing for a nuanced analysis of sentencing outcomes.

Criminal Severity

We evaluated an individual's initial intake by examining the severity of their charge(s). Given that an intake may include multiple charges of varying degree severity, we identified and utilized the charge with the highest degree of severity for our analysis. This approach ensures that our assessment reflected the most serious charge associated with each intake.

Subsequently, for part of the analysis, we converted this ordinal variable to numerical values. Each classification was assigned a unique number that reflected its position in the hierarchy of crime severity, whereby the lower numbers represented the less severe crimes and higher numbers represented more severe crimes. A value of one represents status offense ('SO') the least severe category, while a value of 12 represents 'F1,' the most severe category. This effort maintained the ordinal nature of the original degree severity while allowing for additional statistical analysis.

Data Sources

Stark County Court Records

Administrative data records for the Juvenile Division covering the period of 2019-2022 were gathered by Stark County court employees.

U.S Census Bureau Records

Data from the 2020 Census was utilized to provide additional context on the Stark County population. This data can be accessed at <http://data.census.gov/>.

Limitations

The analysis had several limitations relating to decisions for the analysis, the data source, and the nature of recidivism and the timeframe of interest.

First, the decision to exclude intakes of status offenses could constrain the analysis: it could result in an incomplete understanding of youth behavior patterns, as status offenses may or may not be early indicators of a trajectory towards more serious offenses. Similarly, status offenses may be linked to broader social issues, such as family dysfunction, poverty, or educational challenges, so their exclusion could obscure the role these social factors play in contributing to a youth's court involvement. Finally, the analysis does not account for all types of offenses that could lead to recidivism, it was limited to a subset of the spectrum of offense severity, so the breadth of the analysis is narrowed.

Next, the analysis included records for the Juvenile Division only. Challenges that are unique to this population and such records exist. These challenges, listed below, constrain the analysis, and when possible, we assessed the scope of their impact:

Aging out: Youth often "age out," or reach the maximum age for jurisdiction, of the juvenile justice system. For our dataset, just over 20 percent of the individuals (n=330) were aged 17 years and older when they appeared in the Juvenile Division for

the first time. While they were followed for a year following their initial intake, it is likely that had some of them engaged in new criminal activity, they would have been too old to matriculate through the Juvenile Division, hence their recidivating events would not appear in this dataset.

Bindover: A youth's case can be "bound over," whereby the court transfers a case involving a minor to the adult criminal court. Subsequent criminal activity would likely not be captured in Juvenile Division data; more likely, bindovers often involve serious offenses (such as homicide or certain violent crimes), and the youth would be committed to a facility, which can lead to an underestimation of recidivism rates. In our dataset, less than half a percent of youth (n=7) had an initial intake whereby a disposition involved a bindover, and 1.6% (n=24) of youth with a recidivating event had one whereby a disposition involved a bindover.

Individual mobility: Youth who move to different geographic locations present a challenge, as any new criminal activities may occur outside the jurisdiction of Stark County, thereby remaining unaccounted for in this analysis as no universal data system for juvenile offending exists. This may also lead to an underestimation of recidivism rates.

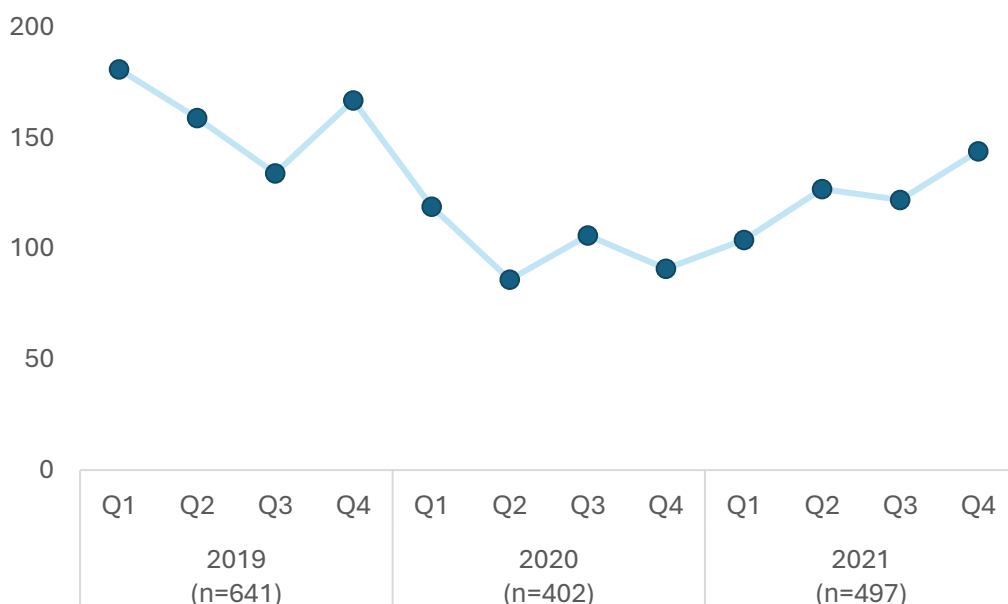
Expungement: Expungement is the legal erasure of court records, an outcome that complicates the accuracy of recidivism calculations, potentially leading to either an underreporting or overreporting of rates. If a youth's record is expunged following a single offense and they do not reoffend, their initial case no longer contributes to the statistical pool of known intakes, potentially inflating the apparent rate of recidivism; if a youth engages with the system and their initial case remains known but subsequent interactions with the criminal justice system were expunged, it could lead to an underreporting of recidivism rates since these offenses will not appear in the juvenile system's data.

Finally, the years from 2019 to 2022 are marked by the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic led to a variety of temporary and permanent changes in the justice system at-large, ranging from altered law enforcement practices, court closures, and the suspension of programs – or at the very least, a change in programming modality and requirements. On one hand, these realities may have reduced opportunities for reoffending (or affected the likelihood of re-arrest). On the other hand, the pandemic's influence on societal norms and economic conditions (e.g., isolation, disrupted education, and household financial stress) could have exacerbated the drivers of delinquency among youth (though perhaps the reduction in social interactions could have decreased opportunities for delinquent behavior for others). Ultimately, given these factors, interpreting data from this period requires careful consideration.

Results

Between 2019 and 2021, 2,129 unique individuals matriculated through the Juvenile Division. For the 1,540 individuals who did not have a prior criminal history, Figure 1 captures the point in time when the individual had their first intake in the Juvenile Division system. The year 2019 accounted for the largest proportion of the population (41.5%, n=641), likely reflecting the impact of COVID-19 in subsequent years.

Figure 1: Quarterly Intake Trend of First-Time Entrants in the Juvenile Division, 2019-2021



Sentencing Group

Each of the initial intakes were assigned to one of the four sentencing groups (Diversion, Probation, Community Control, and Standard). The large majority of first-time entrants (82.0%) were assigned a sentence involving Diversion. The next most frequent sentencing group was Standard (12.6%). Together, Probation and Community Control constituted about five percent of the sentence groups (3.1% and 2.3%, respectively). Figure 2 illustrates this breakdown.

Figure 2: Composition of Youth Sentences by Group, 2019-2021

Over **80 percent** of youth **entering** the Juvenile Division for **the first time**, receive **a sentence involving diversion**.

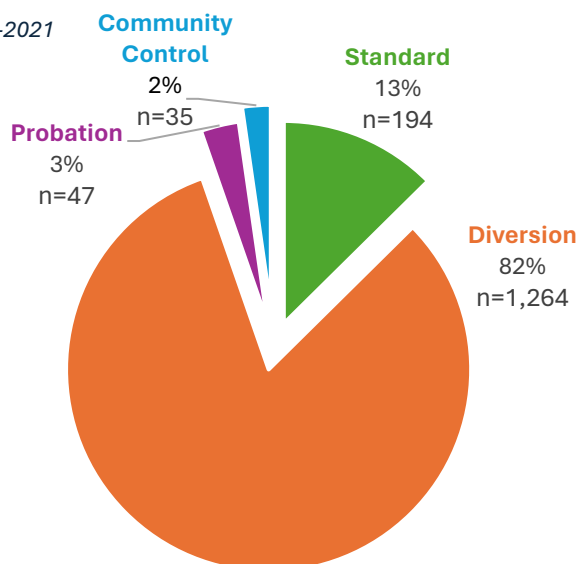
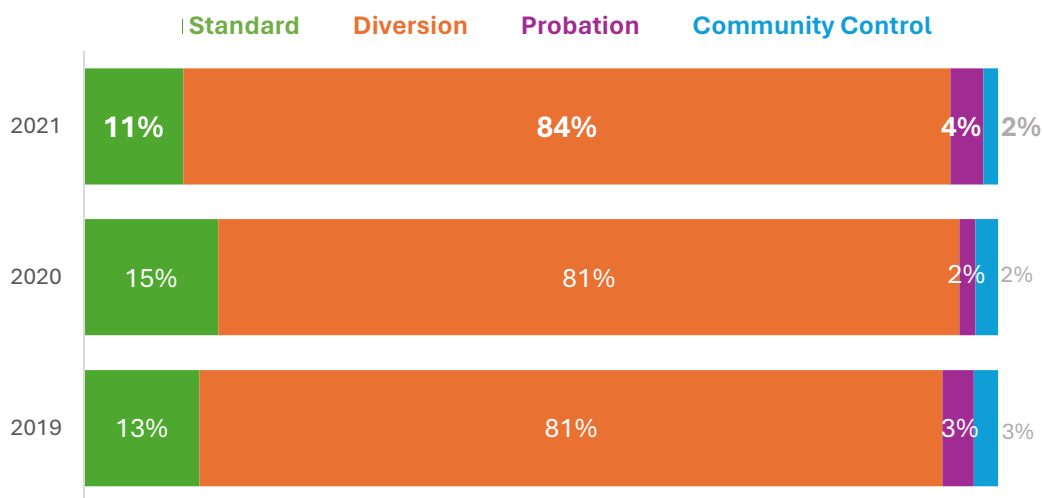


Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of sentencing groups for youth between 2019 to 2021. Over the three years, there was an increasing trend in the share of youth given Diversion sentences, from 81% in 2019 and 2020 to 84% in 2021. The proportion of Standard sentences decreased over this period, from 13% in 2019 to 11% in 2021. Community Control sentences were the least common type of sentence across the three years.

Figure 3: Trends in Youth Sentencing: Comparison of Sentence Group from 2019 to 2021



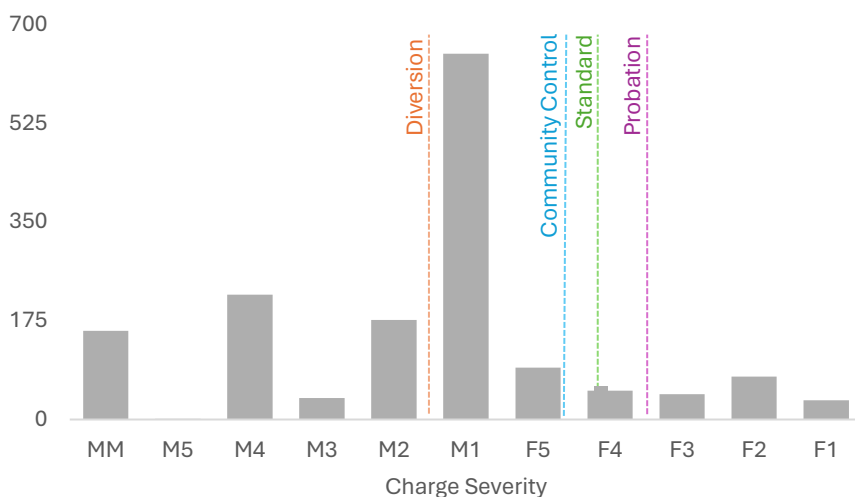
2021 saw the **smallest share** of youth **receiving standard sentences**, with increases in diversion and probation sentences

Intake Severity

We evaluated the severity of an individual's charge(s) upon their initial intake. For all youth in the Juvenile Division, the charges range from minor misdemeanors, representing the least severe offenses, up to felonies of the first degree, which denote the most serious crimes, and the average severity of their charge was between M1 and M2. For first-time entrants, the average severity of their charge was closest to that of an M2. Figure 4 displays the count of initial intakes by charge severity, starting with the least severe charge, minor misdemeanor (MM) to most severe, felony of the first degree (F1).

Additionally, as the average charge severity is a useful metric for understanding a typical entry point into the juvenile system, we plotted it for each sentencing group along the x-axis continuum. The Diversion group had the least severe charge group average, falling in between a M1 and M2, suggesting that youth who received sentences involving diversion had charges of a less serious nature than all other sentencing groups. Progressing along the continuum, the Community Control and Standard sentencing groups had a slight increase in their average severity of charge, both fell between the lowest felony levels, F5 and F4. This progression culminated with intakes in the Probation sentencing groups, where the average charge severity fell between a F4 and F3.

Figure 4: Charge Severity Distribution of First-time Entrants to the Juvenile Division, 2019-2021



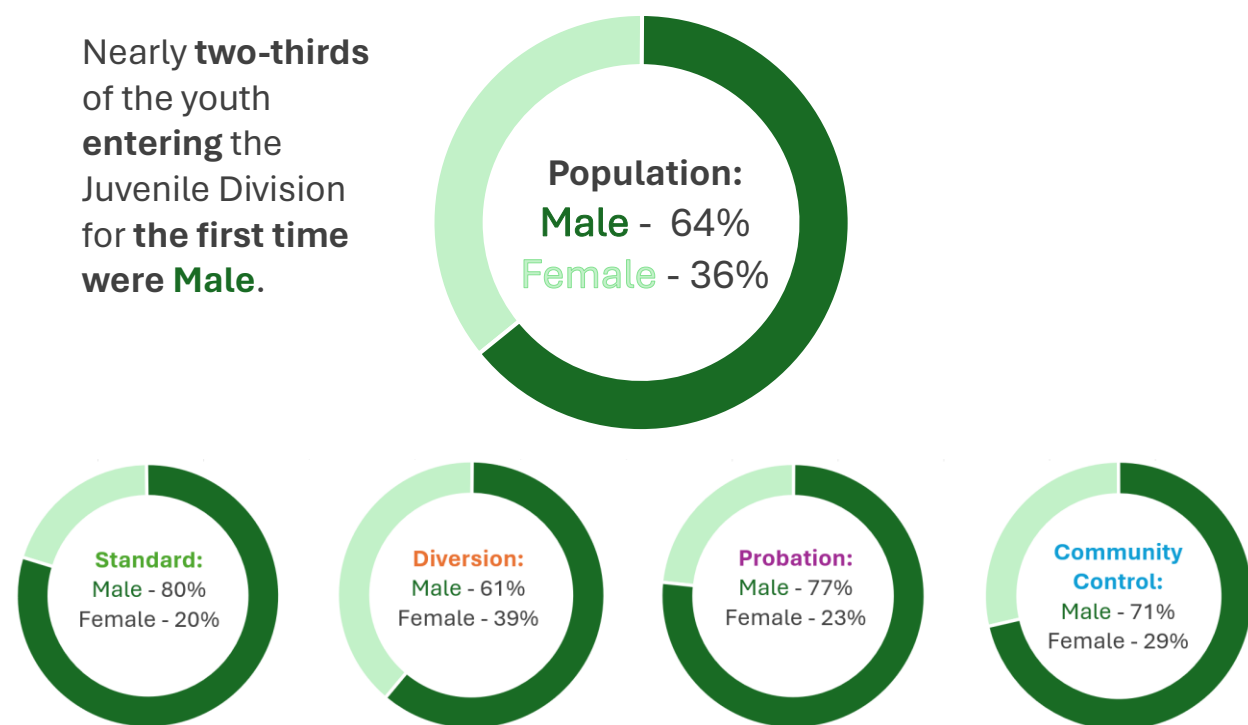
For youth first entering the Juvenile Division, the average charge severity was closest to that of a M2.

Demographics

Sex

At their initial intake, approximately two-thirds of the youth were male (987, 64.1%) and one-third were female (553, 35.9%). Figure 5 displays the proportions of males and females, first in the entire population and then for each sentencing group.

Figure 5: Sex Distribution of First-Time Entrants to the Juvenile Division by Sentencing Group



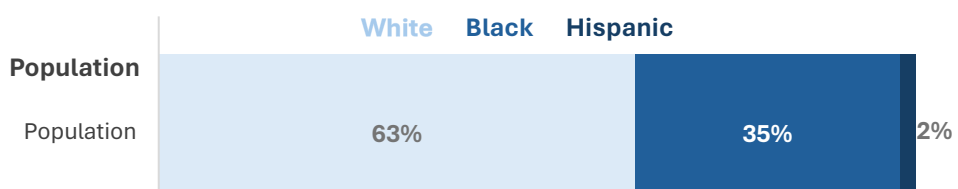
Given the proportions for each sentencing group, males are significantly overrepresented in the Standard sentencing group when compared to their overall proportion in the dataset. The observed proportion of males in this group is approximately 79.9%, which is significantly higher than the baseline proportion of 64.1% for males in the dataset. Additionally, males are underrepresented in the Diversion sentencing group, as their percentage in this group (60.9%) is lower than would be expected based on their distribution across the entire dataset. This could be of interest for further analysis or policy review to understand the reasons behind this distribution (e.g., it could be due to factors such as the severity of the crimes leading to intake).

Race

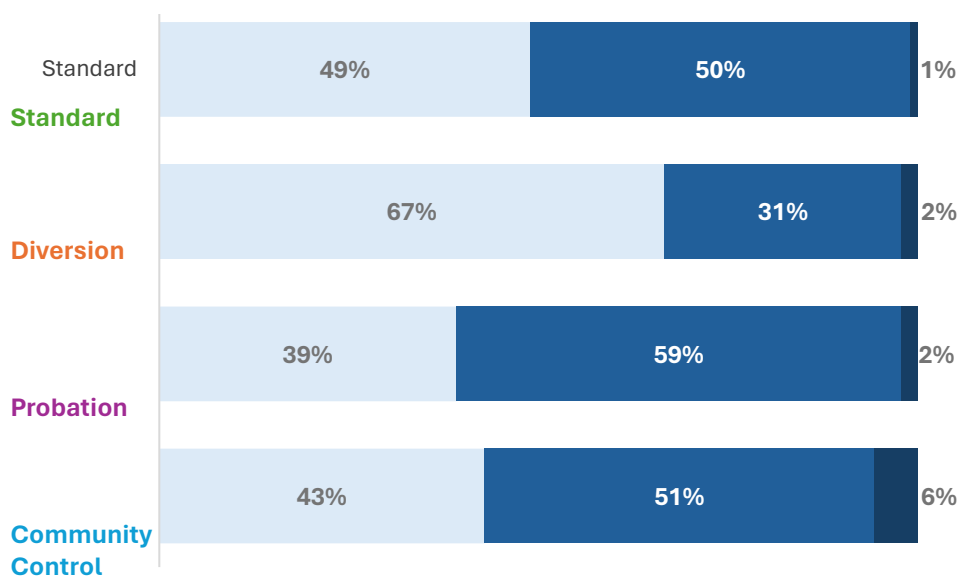
At the time of their initial intake, almost two-thirds of the youth entering the Juvenile Division were listed as White (953, 63.0%), while 34.9% (n=528) were listed as Black and 2.1% were listed as Hispanic (n=32). Figure 6 displays the racial proportions first in the entire population and then for each sentencing group.

Figure 6: Racial Distribution of First-Time Entrants to the Juvenile Division by Sentencing Group

Nearly **two-thirds** of the youth **entering** the Juvenile Division for **the first time** were **White**.



White youth compromise just under **half** of the **Standard** sentencing group.



We examined the significance of the groups' racial distribution, limiting the analysis to the Standard or Diversion sentencing groups, since 95 percent of the youth were in one of these groups. For both the Standard and Diversion group, the racial distribution is significantly different from what would be expected based on their proportions in the overall dataset³.

³ Significant results notwithstanding, the Chi-square test's reliability may be compromised by small, expected counts, especially for Hispanic youth in the Sentencing and Diversion groups. The test assumes expected counts are typically at least 5, but the low proportion of Hispanic youth could lead to less reliable outcomes.

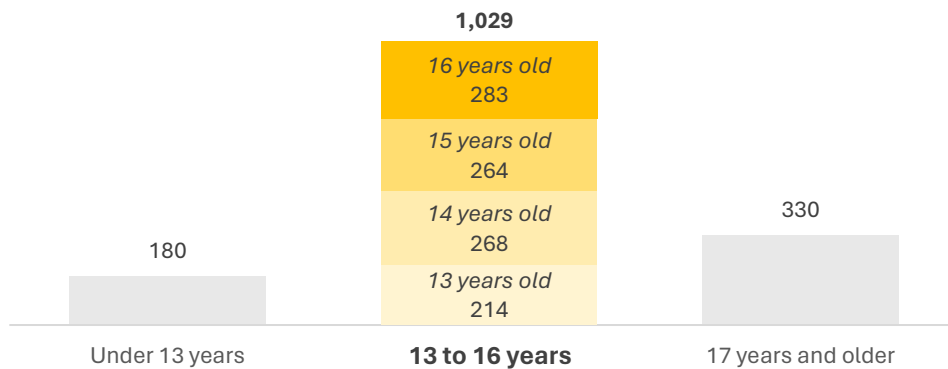
Specifically, Black youth are significantly overrepresented in the Standard sentencing group and significantly underrepresented in Diversion group. Like with the sex distribution, further analysis is warranted: Other variables not accounted for in the analysis could influence sentencing decisions, potentially affecting the distribution of racial groups across buckets. These could include factors such as the severity of offenses, geographical considerations, or program availability. It is crucial to understand all results within the broader context of the dataset and the juvenile justice system.

Age

The age range of individuals at the time of their initial intake ranged from 8-22 years, with a median age of 15 years and mean of 14.7 years. Youth aged 13-16 comprised two-thirds of the total (66.9%, n=1,029) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Age Distribution of First-Time Entrants to the Juvenile Division

Just over **two-thirds** of the youth **entering** the Juvenile Division for **the first time were between 13 and 16 years old.**



Stark County – 2020 U.S. Census data

To place these demographics in a greater context, we examined the 2020 Stark County Census Bureau data on age and race. Although the census and administrative data do not align perfectly, all limitations are footnoted, and despite these discrepancies, we believe the analysis yields valuable insights that surpass the constraints.

Table 1: Analysis of 2020 Stark County Racial Representation Differences: County Census and Juvenile Division, captures the differences in racial representation between the Juvenile Division and Stark County census data in 2020. White youth comprised 63.9% of all in the Juvenile Division, while White people comprised 82.6% of the population in Stark County.

This is 18.7% less than their demographic share reported in the census data. In contrast, Black or African American individuals were represented in the Juvenile Division 26.9% more than their demographic share (34.6% to 7.7% respectively). Hispanic or Latino representation in the juvenile division differs from their demographic share by a percentage point difference of 1.3.

Table 1: Analysis of 2020 Stark County Racial Representation Differences: County Census and Juvenile Division ^{4,5}

	Census Data	Juvenile Division Data	Percentage Point Difference
White	82.6%	63.9%	-18.7%
Black or African American	7.7%	34.6%	26.9%
Hispanic or Latino	2.8%	1.5%	-1.3%

Of the **46,491** youth aged 10-19 in Stark County in 2020, 532, or **1.1%**, were **involved** in the **Juvenile Division**.

The Census Bureau provides population estimates in 5-year increments and estimated for Stark County the number of youth between the ages of 10-19 in 2020 was 46,901. In 2020, 532 youths, not just first-time entrants, had an intake in the Stark County Juvenile Division. This represents approximately 1.1 percent of the population⁶.

⁴ For U.S. Census data, includes persons reporting only one race.

⁵ The U.S. Census treats Hispanic/Latino as an ethnicity, not a race, so individuals who identified as Hispanic or Latino were also included in the applicable race categories. This means that a person who identifies as Hispanic or Latino might also be counted in the White or Black racial categories depending on their racial identification. In the Juvenile Division data, Hispanic is a distinct racial group. This might lead to underrepresentation in the White and Black categories in the Juvenile Division data when compared to Census data.

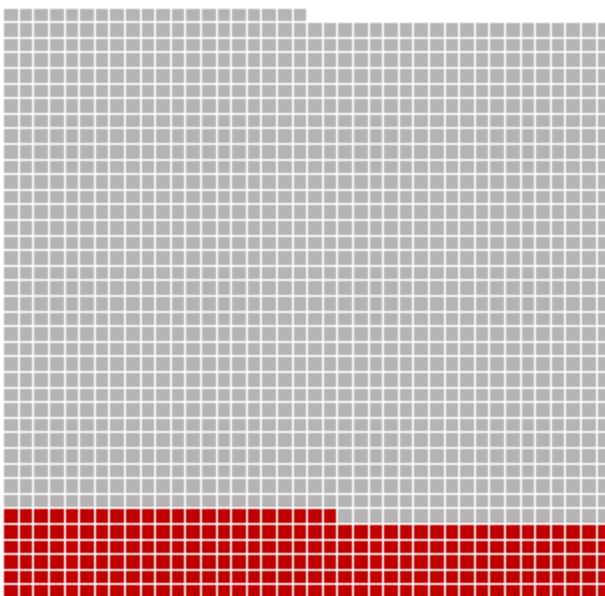
⁶ This comparison, while informative, has limitations: the Census Bureau's age categorization includes youth up to 19 years old; however, youth in Stark County aged 18 and older accused of a crime would likely matriculate through the adult justice system, not the Juvenile Division. Therefore, the proportion of justice-involved youth may be slightly underestimated in this analysis.

Recidivism Review

Profile and Demographics

Of the 1,540 individuals who were first-time entrants, 222 (14.4%) had another intake, i.e., recidivating event, within a year of their initial intake (Figure 8). Most youth, 85.6% (n=1,318), did not have a recidivating event within the first year.

Figure 8: One-Year Recidivism Among First-time Entrants



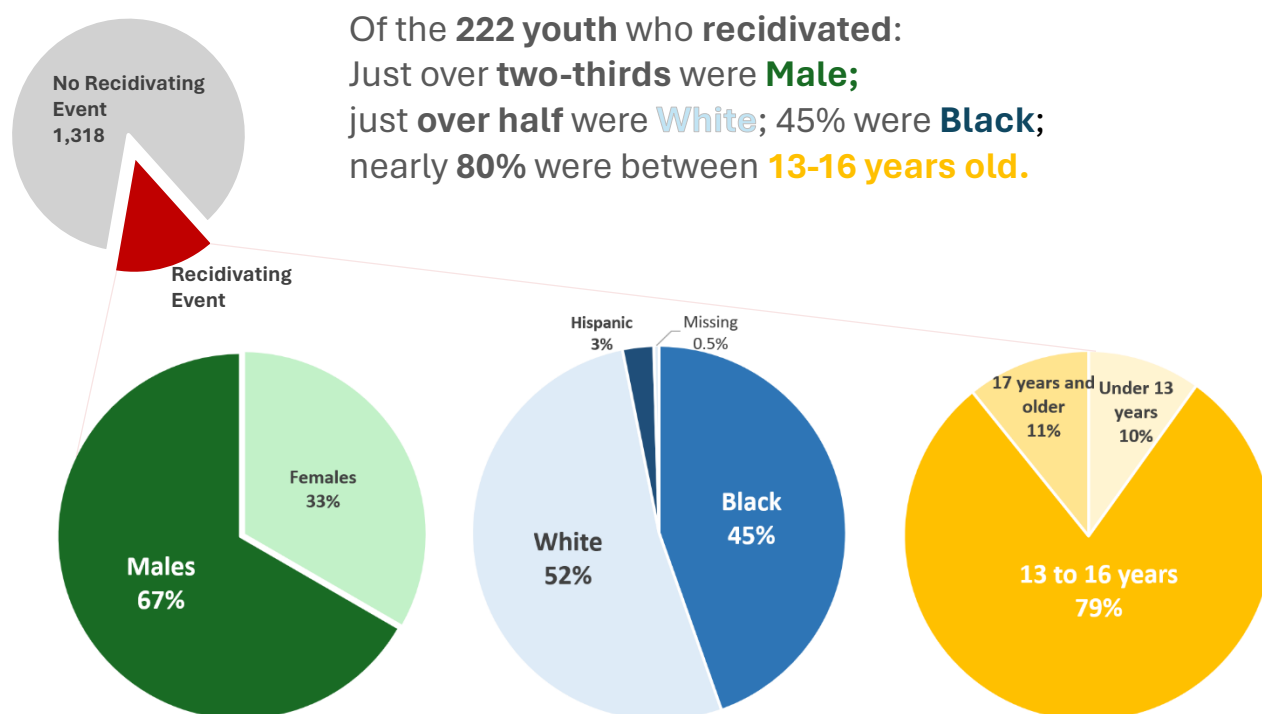
86 percent of the youth
who entered the Juvenile
Division for **the first time**
did not recidivate
within the first year.

Of the 222 youth who recidivated within a year, most had a single additional intake (81.5%, n=181); 29 youth had two intakes (13.1%); and 12 youth had 3 or more intakes (5.4%), suggesting a relatively low level of high-frequency recidivism. The data indicated that while a small proportion of individuals were responsible for multiple recidivating events, most recidivating youth did not engage in repeated offenses within the year.

Additionally, we profiled this subset as we did the larger population of first-time entrants to the Juvenile Division, looking at sex, race, and age group. A majority of youth who recidivated were male, accounting for two-thirds of the recidivating population (66.2%, n=148). A slight majority were identified as White, comprising just over half of the recidivating group (52.3%, n=116), while Black youth represented nearly half (44.6%, n=99), and Hispanic youth represent nearly 3% (2.7%, n=6). Approximately 80% of youth who recidivated fell within the 13-16 year age bracket. This demographic profile of youth who recidivated presents notable parallels and deviations from the broader population of those entering the Juvenile Division.

Like the initial intake demographics, approximately two-thirds of the recidivating youth were male. However, while just under two-thirds of the youth at initial intake were White, this group constituted just over half of those who recidivated, indicating a slight underrepresentation in the recidivism data. Black youth, who represented approximately 35% of the initial intake, accounted for nearly half of the recidivating individuals, suggesting a disproportionality in recidivism rates. Hispanic youth maintained a proportionate representation with respect to recidivism rates. The age trend among recidivating youth closely aligned with the broader intake population, with a concentration in the 13–16-year age range and a median age of 15 years and mean of 14.6 years.

Figure 9: Demographic Composition for First-Time Entrant Recidivists



Sentencing Group

We compared recidivism proportions across sentencing groups—Standard, Diversion, Probation, and Community Control—to assess significant differences in recidivism rates. The Standard sentencing group had a recidivism rate of 15.5% (30 out of 194 individuals recidivated). The Diversion group, the largest sentencing group, had a recidivism rate of 13.4% (170 out of 1,264 individuals recidivated). The Probation group exhibited the highest recidivism rate at 36.2%, with 17 out of 47 individuals recidivating. The Community Control

group, the smallest group, had a recidivism rate of 14.3%, with 5 out of 35 individuals recidivating.

Table 2 displays the recidivism data based on sentencing groups. Testing revealed a statistically significant difference in recidivism rates across groups, indicating varying outcomes by sentencing group.

Table 2: Recidivism Rates and Counts Among First-time Entrants by Sentencing Group

Sentencing Group	Recidivism Rate	Recidivism Count	Total Individuals
Standard	16%	30	194
Diversion	13%	170	1,264
Probation	36%	17	47
Community Control	14%	5	35
Total	14%	222	1,540

Further testing was completed to determine which specific sentencing groups had different recidivism proportions and comparisons were made between each pair of sentencing groups. The variance in outcomes by sentencing group was primarily due to the significant difference between the recidivism rates of the Diversion (13%) and Probation (36%) groups, and between the Probation (36%) and Standard (16%) groups⁷. To summarize, while the overall test indicated differences, not all groups differed from each other with respect to recidivism rates, and the significant result was driven by specific group differences.

The absence of statistically significant differences in some comparisons is also a useful finding. For instance, the lack of a significant difference in recidivism proportions between the Diversion group (13%) and both the Community Control (14%) and Standard (16%) groups could suggest that while the requirements of youth in receiving a sentence involving diversion has some effect compared to the requirements of youth receiving a sentence involving Probation, it may not be the most effective sentencing strategy when compared across all groups. Given the similarities in recidivism rates between the Diversion and Standard group, it might also indicate that certain interventions do not significantly outperform traditional sentencing in reducing recidivism. However, these interpretations cannot stand alone, and external and contextual factors must be considered (in addition to methodological limitations of using a hierarchical model discussed earlier). Differences in youth characteristics, external events affecting youth (ranging from personal to geographic locations, i.e., living in a location with high police surveillance), variations in how the

⁷ When examining differences between groups like Community Control and Probation, the relatively small number of individuals in some groups (e.g., 47 in Probation and 35 in Community Control) can make it more challenging to detect statistical significance. This means that even if there appears to be a difference, the small sample sizes may not provide enough evidence to conclusively say the groups are different.

requirements of sentencing groups (if applicable) were administered across groups all must be considered. For instance, the higher recidivism rate for the Probation sentencing group may be related to the fact that youth receiving that sentence had the greatest average charge severity out of all the sentencing groups (Figure 4).

Deeper Dive: Recidivism Factors

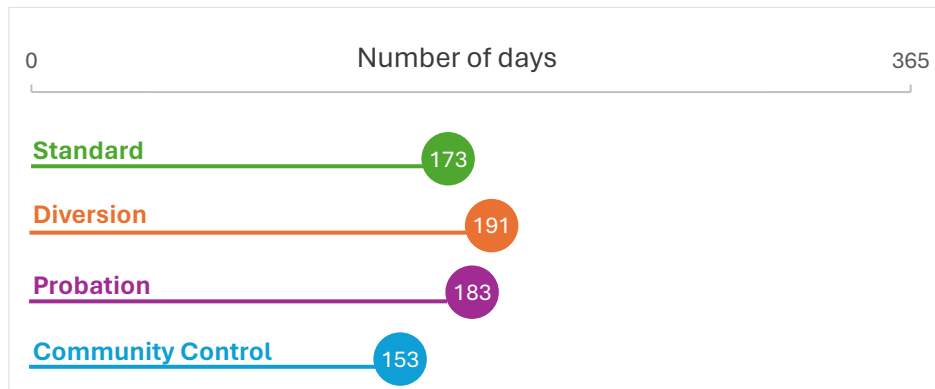
Complexities around recidivism itself is best considered not as a binary perspective of “did this youth return [within a certain period of time]?” as it oversimplifies the complex nature of reoffending and can overlook context around a youth’s reengagement with the system. Some of these factors, which may include the number of charges an individual faces upon re-arrest, can provide insight into the extent of their return to criminal activity; the severity and types of the charges can indicate whether an individual is engaging in more serious crimes compared to their prior offenses; the time to next court appearance can indicate a successful period of reintegration into society (i.e. a longer gap suggesting more success). Other factors – unavailable to us in administrative data – such as the youth’s engagement in sentencing requirements and their access to support systems upon completion of their original sentencing, can also provide a deeper understanding of recidivism rates. For our analysis we considered charge severity and the time from a youth’s initial intake into the system as compared to their recidivating events, both by sentencing groups.

A review of charge severity indicated that for each sentencing group, the average initial charge severity score did not drastically differ from the average charge severity score of their recidivating event. For instance, youth in the Diversion group (n=1,109) had an average charge severity at their initial intake between an M1 and M2. Of the 170 youth who recidivated from the Diversion group, the average charge severity of their initial intake was slightly lower, an M2, and then for their recidivating event, the charge severity increased to an M1. The other sentencing groups—Probation, Community Control, and Standard—followed a similar pattern with minor variations in initial intake charge severity scores and recidivating intake charge severity. For all the youth who recidivated, the difference between the initial intake’s charge severity and the recidivating event’s charge severity was relatively small, suggesting that generally, youth tended to recidivate with offenses of similar severity to their initial ones. The data does not demonstrate a marked escalation or de-escalation in average charge severity upon re-entry into the Juvenile Division, though further statistical testing could reveal whether the initial intake’s charge severity is predictive of either the severity of subsequent intake’s charge severity or the likelihood of recidivism.

Figure 10 presents data on the average number of days to a recidivating event after their initial intake by sentencing groups. For youth in the Diversion group (n=170), it took an average of 191 days for a recidivating event to occur, the longest period time before a

recidivating event among sentencing groups; youth in the Standard sentencing group (n=30) had an average of 173 days; youth in the Probation sentencing group (n=17) had an average of 183 days; finally, youth in the Community Control sentencing group, the smallest group (n=5), had the shortest average time, 153 days, to their recidivating event.

Figure 10: Average Number of Days to Recidivating Event by Sentencing Groups for First-Time Entrant Recidivists



First-Time Entrants vs. Youth with Prior Criminal History

The analysis has highlighted some of the nuances of first-time entrants' interactions with the Juvenile Division, revealing varied rates of recidivism across different sentencing groups. We then broadened the scope of the recidivism analysis beyond the initial parameters of first-time entrants to include the remainder of the youth in the dataset, youth who were not first-time entrants in the system (n=589)⁸. In expanding the analysis, a distinct pattern emerged and highlighted a notable difference in recidivism rates among first-time entrants versus individuals with previous system involvement, emphasizing the impact of previous system involvement on the likelihood of recidivating. First-time entrants to the Juvenile Division (n=1,540) exhibited a recidivism rate of 14.4%, indicating that a relatively small fraction of individuals who are new to the system recidivated. In contrast, individuals across all sentencing types with prior Juvenile Division involvement demonstrated a recidivism rate of 30.2%. This comparison may underscore the significance of prior interactions with the justice system as a factor in the likelihood of recidivism. Initial encounters with the justice system may serve as critical intervention points to prevent future offenses, and tailoring interventions to this group could reduce the likelihood of future offenses.

⁸ While these youth had prior Juvenile Division involvement, the extent of each individual's involvement is unknown, and they likely had varying numbers of prior interactions.

Conclusion

When reviewing the characteristics of youth engaged with Stark County's Juvenile Court, a profile emerged of first-time entrants: they were mostly White youth; they were predominately male; they were primarily between the ages of 13 and 16 years; and they were charged with offenses that approximate the severity of an M2. Upon their entry into the Juvenile Division, most youth (82.0%) were handed down a sentence involving Diversion. Between 2019-2021, annualized sentencing group trends suggested an increase in Diversion sentences and a slight decline in more traditional Standard sentencing.

Eighty-five percent of the youth who entered the Juvenile Division for the first time did not have another intake within a year. Of the 15 percent of youth who did recidivate, their demographic composition was like the first-time entrants in that the nearly two-thirds were male, and the large majority were between the ages of 13 and 16 years (80%). This groups deviates from first-time entrants in that White youth, who accounted for two-thirds of the youth at initial intake, constituted just over half of those who recidivated, and Black youth, who accounted for approximately 35% of youth at the initial intake, constituted nearly half of the recidivating individuals. This suggests a disproportionality in recidivism rates.

Regarding sentencing groups and recidivism rates, the Standard sentencing group had a recidivism rate of 16%; the Diversion group, the largest sentencing group, had a recidivism rate of 13%; the Probation group had the highest recidivism rate at 36%; the Community Control group, the smallest group, had a recidivism rate of 14%. The variability in recidivism rates across different sentencing groups could suggest that the type of sentence may influence recidivism outcomes; however, this variability could also be attributed to the distinct characteristics of youth within each group, such as varying charge severity, risk levels, and average ages. Notably, we found that much of the variability among the groups was driven by the Probation sentencing group. Preliminary observations suggest there are minimal differences between sentencing groups in terms of factors like charge severity and time to recidivating event. More detailed statistical analysis, which would quantify these differences, could be a focus for subsequent research.

As indicated, these findings leave the door open to further analysis. In consultation with Stark County Family Court, we excluded data on status offenses from this report. The inclusion of status offenses would broaden the scope of the analysis, so as not to bias the analysis toward more severe cases. Additional examination of demographic characteristics and sentencing patterns may provide insight into any differential recidivism rates based on factors like sex or race. Additional research might explore factors that best predict recidivism and identify risk factors associated with higher recidivism rates. In this analysis, youth sentenced to Diversion were considered as a whole; however, dividing this group into

those youth who were successful and unsuccessful at completing diversion could provide further insights into the impact program completion status has on recidivism. Considering additional timeframes for recidivating and parameters of analysis could be useful, particularly given the global health crisis during the time of this analysis. Using additional years of data would be critical in discerning whether observed trends were indicative of long-term patterns or anomalies resulting from the extraordinary context of COVID-19. These additional analyses could produce more detailed and precise outcomes, which would help inform policy recommendations and interventions.

This report supports the court's effort to better understand patterns occurring, particularly among first-time entrants, around sentencing outcomes and recidivism rates. While this analysis, limited to administrative data, represents only a portion of the multifaceted puzzle of understanding recidivism, insights from such data analysis can be one tool to guide policy development in a meaningful way. Comparing recidivism results of sentencing outcomes, like diversion programs and more traditional sentencing, allows for the Juvenile Division to assess their effectiveness, providing essential insight for the continuous improvement and enhancement of these programs and their success rates. Moreover, understanding what sentencing outcomes yield the best recidivism rates enables the Juvenile Division to allocate resources more efficiently, focusing on programs that reduce recidivism and are cost-effective. This analysis can additionally reveal potential disparities, allowing for mitigation of potential biases within the system. In the end, by supporting this analysis and focusing on what works to prevent recidivism, Stark County's Juvenile Division contributes to the creation of safer and healthier communities.

ADDENDUM:

Stark County Juvenile Division's Examination of Habitual School Truancy and Recidivism:

**An analysis of first-time entrants,
2019 - 2021**

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Research and Education**

Introduction

Background & Purpose

The Stark County Family Court partnered with the Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education (Begun Center) at Case Western Reserve University to conduct a recidivism analysis for the Juvenile Division. A secondary analysis was requested, whereby the focus was on youths who enter the Division for the first time with a charge related to school truancy (rather than all youth who enter the Division for the first time with a misdemeanor or felony level offense). The Court's request addressed concerns that minor acts of deviance – those identified as status offenses – often escalate into more frequent and more serious criminal behavior among youth, particularly when it involves school truancy. Consequently, under that circumstance we would expect to observe in the data that for youth in Stark County, following an initial intake involving “habitual school truancy”, additional intakes would follow – and intakes with charges perhaps of misdemeanors and felony level. This analysis allows the court to understand the validity of such concerns and view actual trends and outcomes. Subsequently, informed decisions can be made, leading to more effective strategies tailored to the youth.

Objectives

The objective of the analysis was to examine the characteristics of youth who first enter the Juvenile Division with a charge of “Habitual School Truancy,” with a particular focus on recidivism rates for this subset of youth.

Methods

The definitions, data sources and methodology mirrored those of the “Stark County Juvenile Division's Youth Court Chronicles: An analysis of first-time entrants”, with two modifications:

First-time entrants – A youth with no prior history of any offense, including status offenses, misdemeanors, or felonies *AND whose initial charge(s) included “Habitual School Truancy.”*

Recidivating Event – New misdemeanor-level, felony-level charges *OR status offense-level charges*

The definition of habitual school truancy is defined by the Ohio Department of Education's website⁹:

In ORC 2151.011(B)(18), a habitually truant student is “any child of compulsory school age who is absent without legitimate excuse for absence from the public

⁹ Ohio Department of Education, "Ohio Attendance Laws FAQs," accessed 2024 February 22, [https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Student-Supports/Attendance-Support/Ohio-Attendance-Laws-FAQs#:~:text=In%20ORC%202151.011\(B\),\(or%20more%20hours%20in%20one.](https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Student-Supports/Attendance-Support/Ohio-Attendance-Laws-FAQs#:~:text=In%20ORC%202151.011(B),(or%20more%20hours%20in%20one.)

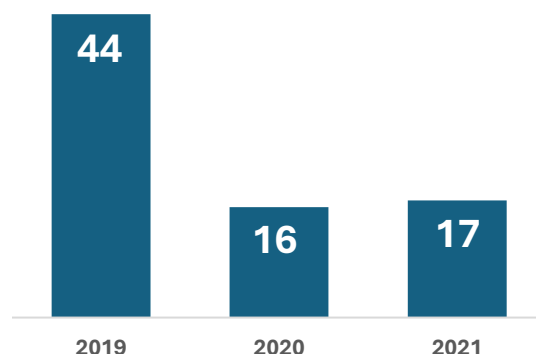
school the child is supposed to attend for thirty or more consecutive hours, forty-two or more hours in one school month, or seventy-two or more hours in one school year.”

Habitual truancy is different from chronic absenteeism. Habitual truancy only counts absences without a legitimate excuse. When a student meets the definition of habitually truant, the district is required to assign the student to an absence intervention team to develop a plan with the family. Only when those interventions are unsuccessful does the school or district file a truancy complaint.

Findings

Between 2019 and 2021, 77 individuals matriculated through the Juvenile Division for the first time and with at least one charge of ‘habitual school truancy’ associated with their intake (to be referenced as first-time truancy entrants). Figure 1 captures the point in time when the individuals’ first intake occurred. Most individuals in the analysis first entered the justice system in 2019 (57.1%, n=44), likely reflecting the impact of COVID-19 in subsequent years. Seventy-five out of the 77 individuals (97.4%) received a sentencing involving diversion.

Figure 1 - Annual Intake Count of First-Time Truancy Entrants in the Juvenile Division, 2019-2021

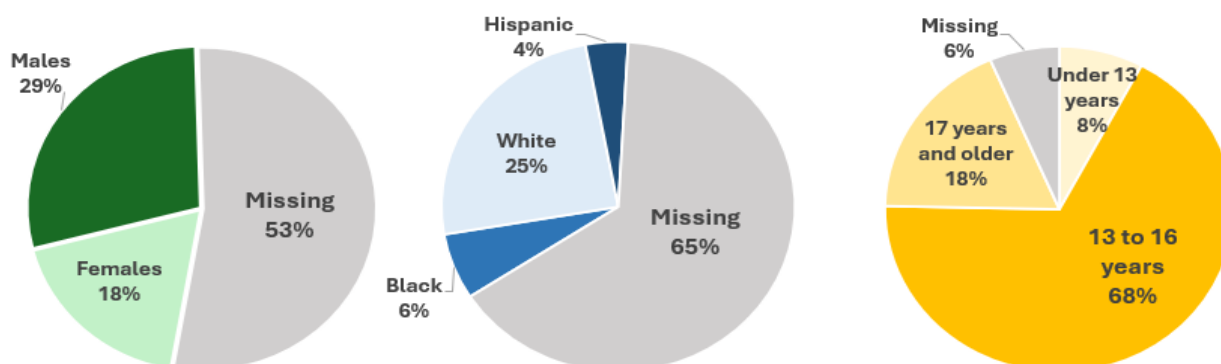


Over 97 percent of youth entering the Juvenile Division for the first time for truancy receive a sentence involving diversion.

Demographics

Much of the demographic information (sex, race, and age) for youth at their initial intake was missing: 53% for sex and 65% for race (Figure 2). The absence of over half the data imposes limitations on the representativeness and reliability of these findings. The available data, however, aligns with the larger population's demographic distribution: nearly two-thirds male and over two-thirds White. The age data was more complete, with only 6% missing. While accounting for the missing data, the proportions are fairly reflective of the larger population as 68% of the youth are between 13 to 16 years old.

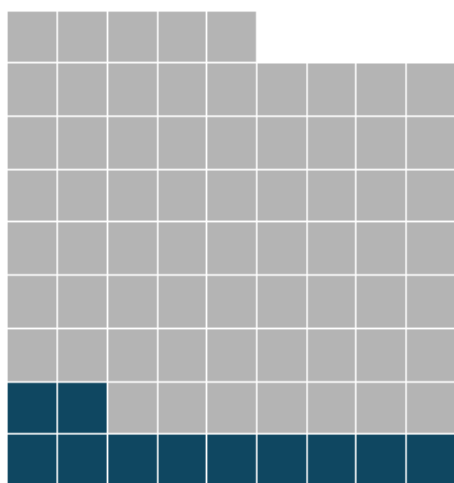
Figure 2 - Demographic of First-Time Truancy Entrants to the Juvenile Division by Sentencing Group



Recidivism Review

Of the 77 first-time truancy entrants, 9 (11.7%) had a recidivating event, within a year of their initial intake (Figure 3). The large majority of youth, 88.4% (n=68), did not have a recidivating event within the first year.

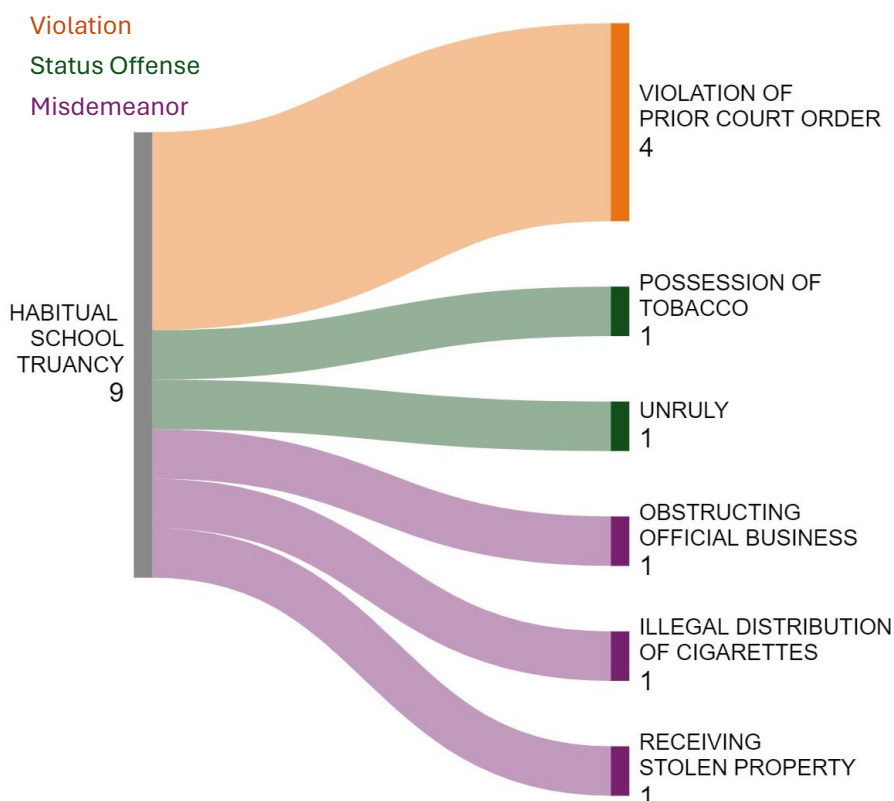
Figure 3 – One-Year Recidivism Among First-time Truancy Entrants



84 percent of the youth
who entered the Juvenile Division for
the first time for truancy
did not recidivate
within the first year.

Of the nine youth who recidivated within a year, all of them had a single additional recidivating event. No one had multiple instances of charges brought against them within the year. Additionally, we examined both the type and severity of the recidivating event (Figure 4). For three youth, their recidivating event had two charges, so we analyzed the most severe of the two. The results of the charge type and severity for the recidivating event are in Figure 4. For four of the nine youth (44%), their recidivating event was a violation of a prior court order. For two youth, their recidivating event was a status offense; for three, it was of a misdemeanor level.

Figure 4 – Recidivating Event Type and Count and for First-Time Truancy Entrants



Conclusion

We conducted a focused recidivism analysis, examining the characteristics and recidivism rates of youth who first entered the Juvenile Division with a charge of “habitual school truancy.” Between 2019 and 2021, 77 youth were identified as first-time truancy entrants. Most of these individuals first entered the justice system in 2019, and 97.4% received a sentencing involving diversion. However, the demographic data was largely incomplete. Despite this, the available data suggested that the demographic distribution of these individuals was similar to that of the larger population of youth in the Juvenile Division.

Regarding recidivism, within a year of their initial intake, 11.7% (n=9) of these individuals had a recidivating event. This outcome, where the vast majority of youth (88.3%) did not recidivate, suggests that the concern over habitual school truancy escalating into more severe criminal behaviors is not substantiated by strong evidence for this cohort. Moreover, among the small share of youth who recidivated, all of them experienced only a single recidivating event within the year, with violations of prior court orders being the most common reason.

The recidivism rate, along with the high rate of sentences involving diversion, could suggest that early intervention strategies might be effective in deterring further involvement with the juvenile justice system. The data does not support a pattern where youth, initially enter the justice system due to “habitual school truancy”, continue to engage with the system and escalate to increasingly more serious criminal behaviors, progressing from status offense to misdemeanors and felony level charges.

Limitations and Future Analyses

Some limitations existed within the data and parameters of the analysis, both of which may be considered before undertaking future analyses. The incompleteness of the demographic data presents a limitation to fully understanding dynamics and limit the findings’ interpretability and generalizability, though it also represents an opportunity for more robust data collection practices. Future analyses can be modified to further understand patterns within the Juvenile Division and community. For instance, placing the 77 first-time truancy entrants and truancy-related charges in a greater context: how many other youth first enter the Juvenile Division with a status offense (not truancy-related); is truancy a proportionally large or small share of all intakes, not just first-time intakes? Knowing this can answer questions around whether specific interventions related to truancy are worthwhile for the Court to explore. The analysis could also be modified to look at all first-time entrants, those with a status offense (not just a status offense related to truancy) or misdemeanor-level or felony-level offenses on their initial intake. By expanding to all first-time entrants, this would

give further credence or disproof of the theory that youth charged with habitual school truancy – or status offenses generally – are on a trajectory towards more frequent and serious criminal involvement. Finally, time parameters can be considered: how have patterns of habitual school truancy changed or not in the context of pre-, during- and post-COVID-19. Understanding these trends can once again provide direction on whether truancy-related interventions are a potential effort worth Court resources to explore.

For now, this analysis provides valuable insights into the characteristics and outcomes of youth charged with habitual school truancy, which can inform future interventions and policies. By partnering with the Begun Center, the Stark County Family Court conducts its mission to “promote a safe and healthy community by protecting and supporting children and families,” as it enables more data-driven informed decision-making to support the development of effective, evidence-based strategies to support youth.