

## LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD

# Overview of the Effects of Changes to Texas Truancy Laws

PREPARED BY LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD STAFF

FEBRUARY 2017

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# OVERVIEW OF THE EFFECTS OF CHANGES TO TEXAS TRUANCY LAWS

In fiscal year 2015, the Texas Legislature passed legislation that decriminalized truancy by repealing the criminal offense for failure to attend school. Before this change in law, Legislative Budget Board staff conducted targeted reviews of nine Texas school districts in fiscal year 2014 to gain an understanding of student attendance and truancy at the district level. Legislative Budget Board staff followed up with these districts in 2016 to gather information regarding the effects of the changes in the truancy laws. This report includes a summary of the changes in statutory requirements related to attendance and truancy, a summary of the targeted reviews, and an overview of each district's effort to implement the changes to statute.

## FACTS AND FINDINGS

- ◆ The Eighty-fourth Legislature, 2015, passed legislation to reduce the number of students referred to truancy court.
- ◆ One significant reform was to change the offense of Failure to Attend School from a Class C misdemeanor offense to a civil offense called truant conduct.
- ◆ The Legislature also required school districts to enhance interventions to address students' attendance issues before referring students to truancy court.
- ◆ In general, districts are working to implement these statutory changes. Most districts reviewed did not refer students to truancy court during school year 2015–16.
- ◆ On a statewide level, school districts referred fewer students to truancy court and filed fewer Parent Contributing to Nonattendance (PCN) complaints since the statutory changes took effect in September 2015.
- ◆ County and municipal governments may see reduced revenue due to the repeal of the Class C misdemeanor offense and the removal of the associated fines. However, the reduction in revenue may be offset by the \$50 court cost that the new truancy courts are authorized to collect from families. At the time of the review, data was not available to assess the financial impact to the county and municipal courts that serve the nine targeted review districts.

## DISCUSSION

The objectives of the Legislative Budget Board School Performance Review Team's targeted reviews conducted in 2014 were to learn: how districts were tracking, recording, and reporting attendance; districts' policies, procedures, practices, and management of attendance and truancy; and how districts and courts worked together to address attendance and truancy. To gather information, Legislative Budget Board (LBB) staff conducted onsite activities at each district, including: interviewing key district staff; conducting focus groups of staff, administrators, and teachers; reviewing district data and related attendance and truancy information; and observing truancy court proceedings and meeting with court staff.

House Bill 2398, Eighty-fourth Legislature, 2015, reformed truancy laws to strengthen truancy prevention measures that are required of school districts and to reduce the number of students referred to truancy court. One of the more significant reforms was to change the offense of Failure to Attend School (FTAS) from a criminal to a civil offense called truant conduct. The Legislature added requirements to enhance interventions that school districts must perform to address students' attendance issues before referring them to truancy court. LBB staff followed up with each targeted review school district to gather information regarding the effects of the changes in the truancy laws. The follow-up inquiries found that the districts were working to implement the statutory changes. Although the districts have made some changes to their processes, they were waiting for the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to release minimum guidelines for truancy prevention measures before they finalized their new procedures. **Figure 1** shows the truancy laws before school year 2015–16 and the changes made by the Eighty-fourth Legislature, 2015. In August 2015, TEA notified school districts that it will establish minimum standards for truancy prevention measures, establish best practices for truancy prevention measures, and provide sanctions for districts that are not in compliance with the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915. In September 2016, notice of TEA's proposed Commissioner's Rules Concerning Prevention Measures and Sanctions for truancy was published in the

**FIGURE 1 KEY CHANGES TO TRUANCY LAWS, AS OF SCHOOL YEAR 2015–16**

| CATEGORY                  | BEFORE SCHOOL YEAR 2015–16   | CHANGES MADE BY THE EIGHTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE, 2015   |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Judicial Process          | Truant students could be referred to court for the criminal offense of Failure to Attend School (FTAS). FTAS is a Class C misdemeanor with fines up to \$500 per offense.  | Truancy is a civil offense called truant conduct. Truancy cases will continue to be heard in justice and municipal courts, but courts no longer fine students. Instead, courts may issue remedial orders for a student to attend counseling or tutoring. Courts may order students found to have engaged in truant conduct to pay a court cost of \$50 if the students or parents are financially able to pay the cost. A truancy court is required to dismiss a petition filed by a truant conduct prosecutor if the court determines that the district's referral does not meet certain conditions, including an accompanying statement regarding the district's application of truancy prevention measures and a statement regarding whether the student is eligible for special education services. Districts may not refer a student to a truancy court if the student's absences are the result of homelessness, being in foster care, or acting as the main income earners for their families. |
| Expunction of Records     | N/A  | Courts must order documents related to FTAS offenses, including documents in the possession of a school district or law enforcement agency, to be expunged from the individual's record.  |
| Compulsory Attendance Age | Children younger than age 18 were required to attend school.   | Compulsory age of attendance extended. Children younger than age 19 are required to attend school.  |
| Unexcused Absences        | Districts referred a student to truancy court after 10 unexcused absences in a six-month period. Schools also had the option to refer a student to truancy court after three unexcused absences in a four-week period.   | The optional referral to court for three unexcused absences in a four-week period is removed; districts may only refer students to truancy court after 10 unexcused absences in a six-month period. Districts may choose not to refer students to truancy court if the district determines that truancy prevention measures are succeeding.   |
| Truancy Prevention        | Districts were required to adopt truancy prevention measures to address student conduct related to truancy in a school setting and minimize the need for referrals to court. No specifications or minimum standards were defined for what constitutes truancy prevention measures. | Districts are required to initiate truancy prevention measures on a student on the third unexcused absence within a four-week period. School districts' truancy prevention measures must include at least one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a behavior improvement plan that includes a specific description of required or prohibited behavior, the period the plan will be effective (not to exceed 45 days after the effective date of the contract), and penalties for additional absences;</li> <li>• school-based community service; or</li> <li>• referral to counseling, mediation, mentoring, teen court, community-based services, or other services to address the student's truancy.</li> </ul> TEA is required to establish minimum standards and best practices for truancy prevention measures, and adopt rules for sanctioning school districts found to be noncompliant with those minimum standards.   |
| Parent Offenses           | Parents and guardians can be charged with the criminal offense of Parent Contributing to Nonattendance (PCN). A PCN offense is a Class C misdemeanor.  | A PCN offense remains a misdemeanor, but it is punishable by fine only, in an amount not to exceed \$100 for a first offense, and to increase by \$100 for each subsequent offense up to a maximum of \$500.  |

SOURCE: House Bill 2398, Eighty-fourth Legislature, Regular Session, 2015.

Texas Register. TEA adopted the rules adopted the rules in December 2016.

**EFFECTS OF STATUTORY CHANGES REGARDING TRUANCY**

In 2016, LBB staff interviewed staff at nine school districts and courts to determine how school districts have implemented the key changes to truancy laws shown in **Figure 1**. The districts included Burlison Independent

School District (ISD), Corpus Christi ISD, Del Valle ISD, Ector County ISD, Everman ISD, Garland ISD, Pasadena ISD, Raymondville ISD, and Roma ISD. The following observations summarize the interview responses provided by districts and courts.

**JUDICIAL PROCESS**

The review could not assess the effect of changes to the judicial process for attendance enforcement, because most of the nine districts reviewed did not refer students to truancy court during school year 2015–16. Several districts stated that they did not refer students to truancy court because TEA had not yet published minimum standards for truancy prevention measures.

Other districts stated that they did not refer students to truancy court because they have struggled to implement the steps that must be taken before referring a student to court. Of the districts that had referred students to court, most cases were pending at the time of the review. Interviews with court staff confirmed that student truancy filings have decreased in school year 2015–16. However, courts stated that insufficient time has passed to determine whether the decrease in student truancy cases and corresponding revenue from fines will affect court staffing.

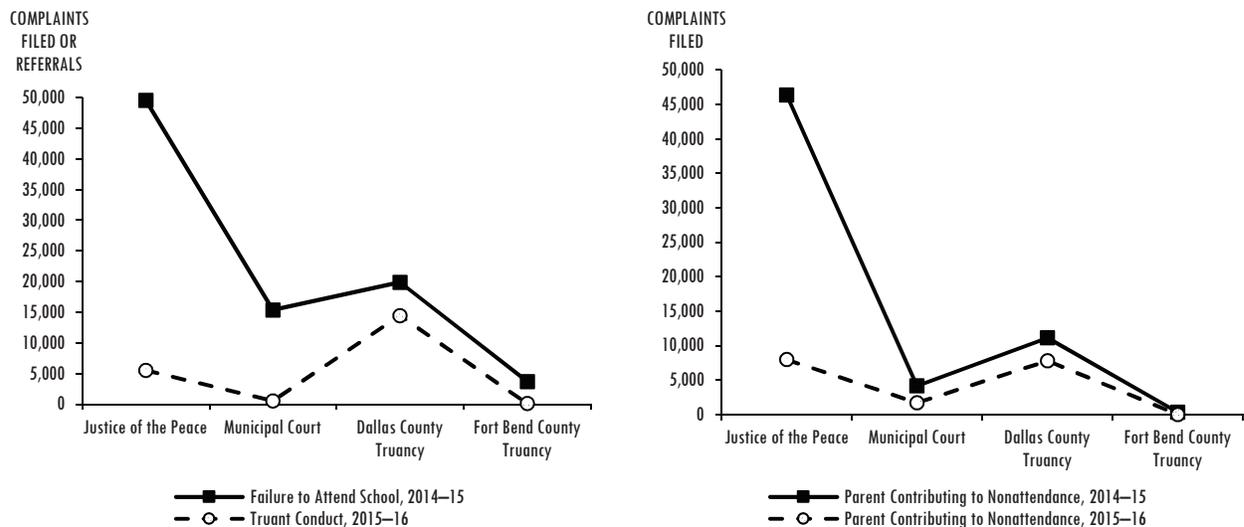
Data from the Office of Court Administration confirms that truancy court cases have dropped on a statewide level since the implementation of the new truancy laws. **Figure 2** shows a comparison between the number of FTAS and PCN complaints filed statewide in school year 2014–15 to the number of referrals for truant conduct and PCN complaints filed statewide in school year 2015–16.

**Figure 2** shows that, statewide, school districts referred only 20,555 students to truancy court in school year 2015–16, compared to the 88,576 truancy complaints filed in school year 2014–15. Similarly, school districts filed only 17,447 PCN complaints in school year 2015–16, compared to the 61,907 complaints filed in school year 2014–15.

Some districts and courts included in the targeted review reported that decriminalizing truancy has weakened their ability to enforce compulsory attendance. These districts and courts stated that changing truancy to a civil offense and removing courts’ ability to impose fines diminishes the consequences that students face for failure to attend school. According to these districts and courts, students feel they no longer have to attend school due to the absence of a criminal or financial impact. However, as shown in **Figure 3**, the data do not suggest a systemic increase in truancy.

**Figure 3** shows the attendance rates for the targeted review districts and the statewide attendance rates for school years 2010–11 to 2015–16. The statewide attendance rate slightly increased from 95.7 percent to 95.8 percent after the new truancy laws took effect in school year 2015–16. **Figure 3** also shows that four of the nine targeted review districts’ attendance rates stayed the same or increased in school year 2015–16. Although five of the nine targeted review districts’

**FIGURE 2 COMPLAINTS FILED FOR FAILURE TO ATTEND SCHOOL, REFERRALS FOR TRUANT CONDUCT, AND PARENT CONTRIBUTING TO NONATTENDANCE BY COURT, SCHOOL YEARS 2014–15 AND 2015–16**



SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board; Texas Office of Court Administration, Justice Courts Summary of Juvenile or Minor Activity by County, September 2014 to June 2015; Justice Courts Summary of Juvenile or Minor Activity by County, September 2015 to June 2016; Municipal Courts Summary of Juvenile or Minor Activity by City, September 2014 to June 2015; Municipal Courts Summary of Juvenile or Minor Activity by County, September 2015 to June 2016; Dallas County Truancy Court; Fort Bend County Truancy Court.

**FIGURE 3  
TARGETED REVIEW DISTRICT ATTENDANCE RATES, SCHOOL YEARS 2010–11 TO 2015–16**

| DISTRICT         | 2010–11      | 2011–12      | 2012–13      | 2013–14      | 2014–15      | 2015–16      |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Burleson         | 95.9%        | 96.2%        | 96.1%        | 96.4%        | 96.2%        | 96.1%        |
| Corpus Christi   | 94.9%        | 94.9%        | 94.5%        | 94.6%        | 94.5%        | 94.8%        |
| Del Valle        | 95.8%        | 95.5%        | 95.4%        | 95.1%        | 95.0%        | 94.9%        |
| Ector County     | 94.6%        | 94.3%        | 94.4%        | 94.7%        | 94.3%        | 94.7%        |
| Everman          | 95.5%        | 95.5%        | 95.7%        | 95.4%        | 95.2%        | 95.5%        |
| Garland          | 96.7%        | 96.5%        | 96.3%        | 96.4%        | 96.1%        | 96.1%        |
| Pasadena         | 95.6%        | 95.6%        | 95.2%        | 95.1%        | 95.3%        | 94.9%        |
| Raymondville     | 93.4%        | 93.6%        | 94.1%        | 94.4%        | 94.0%        | 93.8%        |
| Roma             | 95.7%        | 95.5%        | 95.4%        | 95.8%        | 95.8%        | 95.3%        |
| <b>Statewide</b> | <b>95.7%</b> | <b>95.9%</b> | <b>95.8%</b> | <b>95.9%</b> | <b>95.7%</b> | <b>95.8%</b> |

NOTE: Attendance rates for school years 2014–15 and 2015–16 have been calculated in a manner consistent with the methodology described in the Texas Education Agency’s (TEA) 2014–15 Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) Glossary, posted on the TEA website, and may vary from official TAPR documents for those years when published.

SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board; Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Reports, school years 2010–11 to 2013–14.

attendance rates slightly decreased in school year 2015–16, the greatest decrease was by 0.5 percent.

**EXPUNCTION OF RECORDS**

Most districts and courts interviewed have begun the process of expunging FTAS records. Most districts and courts have completed the expunction of all electronic records, and some are expunging paper records. Large school districts reported that the process of expunging records has been challenging due to the amount of paper records at numerous campuses. Several courts reported that expunging FTAS records has been challenging because all records and sentences relating to the FTAS must be expunged. Doing so requires coordination and communication with other agencies. For example, the courts must notify the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) of every student that received a driver license suspension as a result of an FTAS conviction. However, communication errors between the courts and DPS have caused issues for students seeking to have these suspensions removed.

**COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE AGE**

School districts did not report any issues with the extension of the compulsory age of attendance from ages 18 to 19. One court reported that extending the age of attendance to age 19 makes it challenging for parents to ensure students attend school, because students of that age may view themselves as independent from their parents. However, parents are still responsible for their actions with respect to school attendance.

**UNEXCUSED ABSENCES**

Districts did not report any issues or provide feedback regarding the removal of the option to refer students to truancy court after three unexcused absences in a four-week period.

**TRUANCY PREVENTION**

Districts are developing and implementing truancy prevention measures. Most of the districts interviewed stated that they were waiting for TEA to publish minimum standards for truancy prevention measures. These districts reported that they will revise their processes when the standards are published. According to interviews, larger districts have experienced challenges implementing truancy prevention measures on students’ third unexcused absences in a four-week period. This situation is challenging because large school districts may have numerous students that have reached this threshold; but the districts have limited staff and resources to provide interventions for all of these students. One large district stated that schools now have more responsibility to address the social issues that underlie excessive absences, but without any additional resources. For example, a common challenge to implementing truancy prevention plans that districts cited was influencing campus staff to set time to meet with students and families. Some districts stated that failure to implement truancy prevention measures due to staffs’ time constraints has prevented districts from sending truant students to court because the districts have not performed the required documented interventions.

Despite these challenges, several districts and one court interviewed reported that truancy prevention measures foster more communication and better relationships with families and communities. These districts stated that they have used the statutory changes as an opportunity to change the culture surrounding truancy and to build trust in the community. The districts are working to educate parents that truancy prevention is focused on providing students with resources to ensure they come to school, rather than prosecuting them.

#### **PARENT OFFENSES**

Districts did not provide feedback related to legislative changes. The changes include capping fines for PCN offenses to \$100 for a first offense and to \$100 for each subsequent offense up to a maximum of \$500.

#### **TARGETED REVIEW SUMMARY**

The following sections summarize the nine targeted review school districts' processes related to attendance and truancy management. This summary was developed with information obtained during the onsite reviews and follow-up interviews. Processes reviewed include attendance tracking and recording, implementing truancy prevention measures, referring students to truancy court, and providing incentives for regular attendance.

#### **ATTENDANCE TRACKING AND RECORDING**

Attendance tracking and recording begins with the classroom teacher. Each district that LBB staff reviewed uses an electronic system to record attendance. In some cases, the districts developed their own electronic systems, and in other cases, the districts purchased systems from vendors. Teachers in each district have access to the system to record student attendance.

Attendance reporting may vary by campus and district; however, in all districts reviewed, elementary teachers reported attendance in the morning to the attendance office. Most of the attendance systems have an automatic feature that calls the student's home to inform parents that the student is absent. At the high school and middle school levels, attendance is taken at every class period for course credit. This attendance is used to determine if students are meeting the attendance requirement of 90.0 percent to receive credit for academic work. Districts have established various credit recovery initiatives for students who fail to meet this requirement. These initiatives may include attending classes on Saturdays, before and after school, or during summer.

Each district has campus-level attendance staff responsible for generating attendance reports and reviewing the data for accuracy. This staff is responsible for resolving issues related to excused and unexcused absences. If an error shows in the attendance reporting, the teacher has an opportunity to correct the error by submitting documentation to support the correction. A reported absence automatically defaults to a status of unexcused in the electronic attendance recording system. However, when the student brings in a medical or parent's note for an absence, the attendance staff will change the student's attendance to an excused absence and maintain the documentation. The Texas Education Code, Section 25.087, requires schools to excuse a student's absence due to a medical appointment. Schools have the discretion to excuse an absence based on a parent's note. Schools also use discretion to establish how many parent-excused absences are accepted before requiring the student to furnish a medical note to excuse an absence. Across the nine districts reviewed, teachers and staff expressed concern regarding the number of parent notes that districts will accept to excuse absences. Most districts accepted parents' notes, and few districts limited the number of days that could lapse after an absence before the note would be considered unacceptable. Overall, teachers and staff expressed the belief that district policies toward parent notes should be stricter; specifically, staff stated that a firm limit should be set for the number of parent notes accepted to excuse absences.

After campus-level attendance staff complete the review of the attendance reports, the data is submitted to the district-level attendance or Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) coordinator (this title varies by district) to complete the data review and prepare the data for submission to TEA. The data review occurs periodically to ensure accuracy before submitting to TEA. The district staff is responsible for resolving any discrepancies in the data.

#### **TRUANCY PREVENTION MEASURES**

The Eighty-fourth Legislature, 2015, amended the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, to require school districts to initiate a truancy prevention program for students that have their third unexcused absences within a four-week period. Most school districts use a software program to monitor unexcused absences and document interventions. Districts use this software to determine when notifications and interventions should occur to improve attendance and to record the interventions that take place.

Typically, when a student has a third unexcused absence in a four-week period, campus administrators are notified by attendance clerks, or through the district's monitoring software program. The campus sends an attendance letter and places a phone call to the student's parents. Typically, attendance letters inform parents that, according to state law, it is the parent's duty to monitor the student's attendance and require the student to attend school. The letter requests that parents call the student's campus to schedule a conference with an assistant principal and to place the student on a truancy behavior contract. The truancy behavior contract is a document signed by the parents and the student to indicate that the student will attend school, and, in case the student must be absent, the parent will send a note to request to have the absence excused.

Many school districts employ truancy officers to make home visits to students with unexcused absences. Truancy officers educate parents and students on the importance of being present in school and the legal consequences of repeated absences. Truancy officers also work with families to determine the factors that contribute to student absences.

Other truancy interventions may include referring students to organizations, such as the Communities in Schools (CIS) of Texas program, to receive additional services that include counseling, help with basic needs, and parental education. Some school districts send students to school on Saturdays to make up classwork or to perform on-campus community service.

Several school districts perform interventions at the beginning of the school year to encourage students who have not enrolled to return to school. One district performs a door-to-door outreach effort in which district and community representatives visit the homes of middle school and high school students who have not returned to school and encourage them to return. These efforts also help to identify student needs that could prevent them from returning to school, such as a lack of school supplies, uniforms, or transportation. **Figure 4** shows the truancy prevention measures used by each of the nine targeted review school districts.

#### TRUANCY COURT

Most of the targeted review school districts did not refer students to truancy court during school year 2015–16, although some districts referred parents to truancy court for PCN offenses. The process for a school district filing on a parent or a student was typically the same across the districts

reviewed. Districts document interventions for students with excessive absences into their student records information systems. After a district has exhausted all available interventions, and a student continues to miss school after 10 unexcused absences in a six-month period, districts use intervention documentation from records systems to determine whether to refer a student or parent to truancy court. Some districts have worked with local district attorneys to create checklists of steps to take before referring students or parents to truancy court. Cases are heard in either justice of the peace or municipal courts. Judges typically order students found to be truant to complete tutoring or community service.

#### ATTENDANCE INCENTIVES

Districts promote attendance by offering attendance rewards to students and campuses with the best attendance during a specified period. Incentives include gift cards, student choice of dress day at schools that require uniforms, and allocation of funds in the budget for other student rewards.

#### DISTRICT STAFF RESPONSES TO FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

Although the ways in which districts implement attendance and truancy laws differs, school districts use similar strategies to address challenges in providing truancy interventions. District staff identified the following as strengths of their efforts to address attendance issues:

- attendance accounting and automated calling systems;
- dedicated attendance or truancy officers;
- communication with parents;
- attendance incentives; and
- CIS of Texas (in the districts that use this service); CIS partners with districts to bring resources, services, parents and volunteers into schools to ensure that students have the tools needed to stay in school and achieve after completing high school.

The areas that district staff said were lacking included:

- staff resources;
- consistency among the districts' campuses;
- parental involvement;
- parental understanding of state laws; and
- court support.

**FIGURE 4  
COMPARISON OF TARGETED REVIEW DISTRICTS' TRUANCY PREVENTION MEASURES  
SCHOOL YEAR 2015–16**

| MEASURE   | CORPUS   |         |           | ECTOR  |         |         |          |              |      |
|---|----------|---------|-----------|--------|---------|---------|----------|--------------|------|
|   | BURLESON | CHRISTI | DEL VALLE | COUNTY | EVERMAN | GARLAND | PASADENA | RAYMONDVILLE | ROMA |
| Phone calls to parents  | X        | X       | X         | X      | X       | X       | X        | X            | X    |
| Attendance warning letter to parents  | X        | X       | X         | X      | X       | X       | X        | X            | X    |
| Conferences with parents and students   |          | X       | X         | X      | X       | X       | X        | X            |      |
| Attendance contract with parents and students   |          | X       |           | X      |         |         | X        | X            |      |
| Home visits by truancy officer, case manager, or social worker                          | X        | X       | X         |        | X       | X       |          | X            | X    |
| District-organized family nights with social service agencies                           |          |         |           | X      |         |         |          |              |      |
| Referral to external support services for student and family                            |          | X       |           | X      |         |         | X        |              |      |
| Counseling  | X        |         |           |        | X       |         |          |              |      |
| In-school community service   |          |         |           |        |         |         | X        |              |      |
| Saturday classes to make up schoolwork  |          |         |           |        | X       |         |          | X            |      |
| Presentations to the community about attendance and truancy issues                      |          |         | X         |        |         |         |          |              |      |
| Outreach efforts to students that have not enrolled at the beginning of the school year |          | X       |           | X      |         |         |          |              |      |

SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board School Review Team, March 2016.

When considering the external resources that districts could access, districts said a greater effort in accessing the media would assist districts to educate parents and the community regarding the importance of attending school and the consequences for not attending school. Districts noted that several external factors hinder progress in reducing truancy, including:

- mobile students and population;
- poor parenting skills;
- students' economically disadvantaged status;
- inaccurate contact information for students and parents;

- high homeless rates among the student population; and
- poor transportation infrastructure.

The following sections describe how each district reviewed implements state requirements related to compulsory attendance and truancy.



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# BURLESON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

## ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY

For school year 2014–15, Burleson Independent School District's (ISD) attendance rate was 96.2 percent, which was higher than the state rate of 95.7 percent. Burleson ISD reported 132 truant students through the state's Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). Burleson ISD has 17 instructional campuses, which include 10 elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools. One of the high schools is an alternative campus that contains a credit recovery program and a disciplinary alternative education program. Another one of the high schools is an early college high school. For school year 2014–15, the district's total number of students was 10,957. During this year, the student population was 70.8 percent White, 19.7 percent Hispanic, and 5.2 percent African American. Approximately 36.1 percent of the students were identified as economically disadvantaged, and 40.6 percent were identified as at risk.

Burleson ISD's executive director of human resources and student services oversees attendance and truancy management for the district. The district has a data services director and a PEIMS coordinator. The district also has a director of student engagement. The district's high schools each have a registrar, a PEIMS clerk, and three attendance clerks. Middle schools have staff who serve as registrars and PEIMS clerks, and one or two attendance clerks, depending on the campus. Elementary schools have staff who serve as the registrar, the PEIMS clerk, and the attendance clerk. Campus principals are responsible for determining when to file truancy complaints with the appropriate county court. Campus attendance clerks assist with reports and documentation necessary for filing the complaints. The district PEIMS staff also monitors attendance at the campuses.

### **ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY MANAGEMENT**

Texas school districts manage attendance and truancy through several processes. These processes include attendance tracking and recording, implementing truancy prevention measures, referring students to truancy court, and providing incentives for regular attendance.

### **ATTENDANCE TRACKING AND RECORDING**

Burleson ISD uses the Skyward, Inc., Student records management system to manage and track student attendance. Attendance tracking begins with the classroom teacher at each campus. The district has set 9:45 AM as the official attendance time for all campuses. The official attendance time for afternoon-only programs is 12:45 PM. Middle school and high school teachers report attendance during every class period to determine course credit.

Burleson ISD uses the Parentlink system to send telephone calls and emails to the parents of absent students. Multiple calls are sent throughout the day by this system, and the calls prompt parents to contact the school to explain why the student is absent. Some campuses have attendance clerks who also call parents.

A parent note, phone call, or doctor's note may be used to excuse a student's absence. Excuses typically are accepted up to three days after the absence, but they may be accepted at campus discretion after that point.

### **TRUANCY PREVENTION MEASURES**

Effective September 1, 2015, the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, requires school districts to initiate a truancy prevention program for students that reach their third unexcused absence within a four-week period. The executive director of human resources and student services has developed a truancy prevention plan that the district uses at all 16 campuses.

The district's automated system calls parents every time a student is absent. Attendance or PEIMS staff runs reports on absences every week. After a student accrues three unexcused absences within four weeks, the district notifies parents (typically via email) and warns parents of the consequences of continued truancy. At the high school, assistant principals check the weekly lists for students with more than five absences. For these students, assistant principals make phone calls and send letters home to parents. Other interventions may occur based on the campus policy and the student's needs, including additional counseling and meetings with parents.

The director of student engagement educates parents and students about the importance of being present in school and the legal consequences of repeated absences. The director of student engagement is also responsible for resolving proof-of-residency issues for the district. Assistant principals call on the director of student engagement to visit the homes of chronically absent students. Students may also see a school counselor to try to resolve any issues that might be contributing to their absenteeism.

Pursuant to the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, school districts may not refer students to truancy court if the school determines that the student's truancy is the result of pregnancy; being in the state foster care program; homelessness; or being the principal income earner for the student's family. In Burleson ISD, the homeless liaison for the district, Child Protective Services, and principals and assistant principals identify students in these nonreferral categories.

According to district staff, one of the biggest challenges to implementing the new truancy laws has been consistently following the district's recently adopted truancy plan. Before the changes in state law, the district's truancy prevention measures consisted primarily of automated phone calls and letters home to parents. The district's revised truancy prevention measures require increased communication and face-to-face interactions between assistant principals, students, and parents. For example, assistant principals must set up conferences with students and parents, make phone calls to parents, and set up counseling and mentoring for students with excessive absences. Although these interventions help build relationships with parents and students, they also require more time from assistant principals that are performing other duties. However, the district cannot refer students or parents to court without documentation that truancy prevention measures were performed. District staff stated that the establishment of a state-funded position focused on truancy and dropout prevention at each high school campus could improve the district's attendance and truancy management.

### **TRUANCY COURTS**

Burleson ISD files truant conduct petitions in either Johnson County or Tarrant County, depending on the location of the campus the student attends. Historically, most cases have been filed with the Johnson County Justice of the Peace, Precinct 2. The Johnson County judge typically has assigned counseling for issues that are related to the student's poor

attendance (for example, drug use or family issues). The judge also sometimes required the student to wear an ankle monitor.

As of March 2016, Burleson ISD had filed few petitions on students for truant conduct during school year 2015–16. The status of these cases is pending, as the Johnson County court has not yet issued remedial orders. According to court staff, the court has not had the opportunity to observe how the changes in the truancy laws will affect the court's processes. Court staff stated that the changes in the truancy laws affect the school districts more than the courts, because the new laws changed how schools file truancy petitions. Court staff also stated that the changes have been confusing and overwhelming for school administrators, because the new laws do not provide schools with much direction on how to change their processes.

Pursuant to the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, Article 45.0541, the Johnson County Justice of the Peace Court, Precinct 2, has ordered Failure to Attend School convictions, complaints, and other related documents in the possession of law enforcement agencies and school districts to be expunged from students' records. According to district staff, Burleson ISD has complied with this order by expunging records in its student records management system.

### **ATTENDANCE INCENTIVES**

Many elementary school and middle school campuses offer incentives to encourage students to attend school. The incentives for regular attendance include parties, nonuniform dress code days, tickets to professional sports games, and other tangible rewards.

### **AVERAGE DAILY FUNDING**

For school year 2014–15, Burleson ISD's average funding per student was \$6,859, which equals approximately \$38 per school day. Because of the way that school finance formulas respond to a marginal increase or decrease in student attendance, this amount reflects an estimate of the average daily cost of truancy for this district. The amount of funding generated per day by an individual student might be greater or less based on specific student characteristics. This cost was calculated using the district's school year 2014–15 Texas Education Agency Summary of Finances as of April 2016.

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# CORPUS CHRISTI INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

## ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY

For school year 2014–15, Corpus Christi Independent School District's (ISD) attendance rate was 94.5 percent, which was lower than the state rate of 95.7 percent. In school year 2014–15, Corpus Christi ISD reported 818 truant students through the state's Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). The district has 60 instructional campuses, which include 37 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, eight high schools, and three special campuses. For school year 2014–15, the district's total number of students was 38,675. During this year, the student body was 79.4 percent Hispanic, 13.8 percent White, and 4.0 percent African American. Approximately 66.6 percent of the students were identified as economically disadvantaged, and 56.3 percent were identified as at risk.

Corpus Christi ISD has a centralized, systematic process to identify students who are at risk of having excessive absences. The district is divided into six vertical learning communities (VLC). Each VLC consists of a high school, with the middle schools and elementary schools that feed into it. The director of student support services is the designated truancy prevention facilitator for the district and assigns an attendance officer to each VLC. Attendance officers are located at each of the high school campuses, and each attendance officer is assigned to one of the four justices of the peace in Nueces County Precincts 1 and 2. Attendance officers meet with students and parents daily. The attendance officers also conduct home visits when they cannot contact parents.

### **ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY MANAGEMENT**

Texas school districts manage attendance and truancy through several processes. These processes include attendance tracking and recording, implementing truancy prevention measures, referring students to truancy court, and providing incentives for regular attendance.

### **ATTENDANCE TRACKING AND RECORDING**

Corpus Christi ISD tracks attendance using the eSchoolPLUS software system. The attendance recording process begins with the classroom teacher. Elementary teachers record attendance once a day. The elementary school day begins at 8:00 AM and ends at 3:02 PM. If a student fails to arrive or arrives after 8:15 AM, the student is recorded absent. The

secondary school day begins at 9:00 AM and ends at 4:02 PM. Attendance is recorded each period at the secondary level to determine course credit. If a student fails to arrive to class or arrives after the first 15 minutes of class, the student is recorded absent for that period.

The district has an automated phone system, School Messenger, which calls parents to notify them when their students are absent. In addition, the district's student management system enables parents to log in and electronically monitor attendance. The software enables parents to see the number of absences, when the student was absent, and whether the absences are excused or unexcused.

A parent must call the school, provide a written note, or provide a doctor's note to change an absence from unexcused to excused. If a student is absent for more than three sequential days, the student is required to bring a doctor's note to excuse the absences. The district has not established a deadline for students to provide documentation to change an absence's status from unexcused to excused. However, school staff reserves the right to refuse an absentee's note or require a note from a doctor. All parents' and doctors' notes that campuses receive are electronically scanned by campus staff and digitally stored using DocEscan software.

### **TRUANCY PREVENTION MEASURES**

Effective September 1, 2015, the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, requires school districts to initiate a truancy prevention program for students that reach their third unexcused absences within a four-week period.

Corpus Christi ISD uses a district-developed software program to monitor truancy and document interventions. Each evening, the district software is populated with the information that has been entered into eSchoolPLUS during the day. The district software has two modules, one to track truancy and one to track discipline. The truancy module is used to determine when notifications and interventions should occur to improve attendance and to track and record the interventions that take place.

When a student has been absent without excuse for three days or parts of days, the district software sends an electronic alert to staff, and an attendance letter is sent to the student's

home. The letter informs parents that, according to state law, it is the parent's duty to monitor the student's attendance and require the student to attend school. It also informs parents that they are subject to prosecution if the student fails to attend. The letter requests that parents call the student's campus within three days to schedule a conference with an assistant principal and to place the student on a truancy behavior contract. The truancy behavior contract is signed by the parents and the student. The contract indicates the student will attend school, and, in case the student must be absent, the parent will send a note to request to have the absence excused. According to district staff, the truancy behavior contracts seem to be improving attendance. The contracts help build relationships between schools, students, and parents because they require in-person conversations.

Other acceptable truancy interventions include telephone calls to parents, conferences with assistant principals, and meetings with judges. Students may also be referred to other organizations, such as the Communities in Schools of Texas program, to receive additional services that include counseling, help with basic needs, and parental education. As another preventive measure, judges hold attendance letter meetings with parents at which they discuss the importance of attendance and the potential consequences if a student continues to miss school. These meetings are held every six weeks.

Before the changes in state law, the district's policy had required campuses to perform three truancy prevention measures aimed at improving attendance before filing a truancy complaint on a student. Beginning in school year 2015–16, the district requires that one of the truancy prevention measures be a truancy behavior contract.

A Keeping Every Youth in School (KEYS) walk is conducted at the beginning of each school year. The KEYS walk is a communitywide effort to encourage youth to return to school. One week before the KEYS walk, volunteers set up a phone bank to call the contacts of all out-of-school youth to gather information about whether they have enrolled in another district and if they are attending school. During the KEYS walk, district and community representatives visit the homes of middle school and high school students who have not returned to school and encourage them to return. The walk volunteers also help identify student needs that might prevent students from returning to school, such as a lack of school supplies, uniforms, or transportation.

Pursuant to the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, school districts may not refer students to truancy court if the school determines that the student's truancy is the result of pregnancy; being in the state foster care program; homelessness; or being the principal income earner for the student's family. In Corpus Christi ISD, students that are within these categories are identified at the campus level. The district's homeless liaison, pregnancy counselors, truancy officers, and campuses work to determine if absences are caused by those issues.

Corpus Christi ISD has a credit recovery high school, which enables students in grades nine to 12, up to age 21, to receive credit in an alternative setting. The campus applies each year to operate the credit recovery high school in accordance with the Optional Flexible School Day Program through the Texas Education Agency. This program enables districts to provide alternative hours and days of attendance to certain students, including those who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out, and those who did not receive credit for a class due to too many absences from that class. If a student is absent from this high school, the teacher and office staff call the student's home to determine why the student is not at school.

### **TRUANCY COURTS**

If a student's attendance does not improve after being placed on a contract, the district will petition on the student and file on the parent. Truancy complaints are filed only against the parent if the student is younger than age 12. From ages 12 to 17, complaints are filed against both the student and the parent. The filing process is monitored by student support services staff for accuracy. Complaints are only filed after the required three interventions have occurred. The district files complaints with four justices of the peace in Precincts 1 and 2. Each court has a periodic assistant district attorney day to review all the truancy petitions that the district has submitted for that week to determine if the petitions should be dismissed. The courts typically issue remedial orders for students found to be truant to complete community service, tutoring, or basic life skills programs.

District administrators have attended several stakeholder meetings with city and county staff in response to the changes in the truancy laws. Through these meetings, the stakeholders have standardized the information that districts have to submit in truancy petitions. According to several judges, truancy filings against students have decreased significantly during school year 2015–16 due to the decriminalization of

truancy by the Eighty-fourth Legislature, 2015. However, although truancy filings against students have decreased, filings against parents for Parent Contributing to Nonattendance charges have remained at the same rate. At the time of the review, the courts reported that a decrease in truancy cases has not affected court staffing. However, some judges expressed that the decriminalization of truancy has weakened the court's ability to enforce compulsory attendance laws.

Corpus Christi ISD developed a software system, Judge Data View, that enables judges to access relevant information about a student for a truancy filing. Judges can access information regarding student entry, withdrawal, attendance, and course schedule, and the names of a student's teachers. However, this system does not show student discipline information. This system provides judges access to the student's records if the information is required during court hearings.

Attendance officers attend truancy hearings as district representatives. The officers receive copies of all court orders and submit them to the Office of Student Support Services. The director of student support services makes any necessary changes or corrections in the truancy module of the district software. All truancy information is reviewed for accuracy and entered in PEIMS at the end of the school year by the director of student support services.

Pursuant to the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, Article 45.0541, all four of the justice of the peace courts have ordered Failure to Attend School convictions, complaints, and other related documents in the possession of law enforcement agencies and school districts to be expunged from students' records. According to district staff, electronic records have been expunged. The district has also begun expunging paper records. However, this process has been time-consuming due to the large number of campuses in the district.

#### **ATTENDANCE INCENTIVES**

Campuses offer a variety of incentives to encourage attendance, including nonuniform dress code days, drawings to win school supplies, and pizza parties. The district recognizes students at graduation who have perfect attendance records.

#### **AVERAGE DAILY FUNDING**

For school year 2014–15, Corpus Christi ISD's average funding per student was \$7,459, which equals approximately \$41 per school day. Because of the way that school finance formulas respond to a marginal increase or decrease in student attendance, this amount reflects an estimate of the average daily cost of truancy for this district. The amount of funding generated per day by an individual student might be greater or less based on specific student characteristics. This cost was calculated using the district's school year 2014–15 Texas Education Agency Summary of Finances as of April 2016.



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# DEL VALLE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

## ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY

For school year 2014–15, Del Valle Independent School District's (ISD) attendance rate in school year was 95.0 percent, which was slightly lower than the state average of 95.7 percent. Del Valle ISD reported to Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) fewer than five truant students in school year 2014–15, resulting in the data being unavailable for external reporting. The district has 15 instructional campuses, which include eight elementary schools, three middle schools, one high school, one alternative education high school, one disciplinary alternative education school, and one child development center. For school year 2014–15, the district's total number of students was 11,648. During this year, the student population was 82.9 percent Hispanic, 9.5 percent African American, and 5.9 percent White. Approximately 88.6 percent of the students were identified as economically disadvantaged, and 70.1 percent were identified as at risk.

Del Valle ISD has established a Student Support Office that provides support to the district's campuses for addressing attendance and truancy issues. This office is led by the coordinator for at-risk student services. The coordinator directs all student attendance, dropout prevention, dropout recovery, residency, homelessness, foster care, and interdistrict and intradistrict transfer procedures and programs for Del Valle ISD. In addition to the coordinator, two at-risk officers are assigned to the elementary school and middle school campuses, and three student support specialists are assigned to the high school and alternative education campuses. These officers serve as caseworkers for the students assigned to them.

The Student Support Office team provides services for students after the campus has provided several interventions to get the student on track to regular attendance. This support staff assists campuses in educating parents about the consequences of lack of attendance. The Student Support Office team is a resource and liaison between the school, parents, county courts, and community members and agencies concerning student attendance and truancy-related problems and issues. The support staff's mission is to provide a holistic approach to student attendance and truancy issues by working with students and families. The support staff is responsible for filing complaints with the justice of the peace

court and attending court hearings for Del Valle ISD students.

### **ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY MANAGEMENT**

Texas school districts manage attendance and truancy through several processes. These processes include attendance tracking and recording, implementing truancy prevention measures, referring students to truancy court, and providing incentives for regular attendance.

### **ATTENDANCE TRACKING AND RECORDING**

Del Valle ISD uses the Skyward, Inc., system to manage and track student attendance. Attendance tracking begins with the classroom teacher at each campus. Across the district, student attendance is reported during the 10:00 AM hour, which is considered the average daily attendance (ADA) reporting period. The actual time attendance is recorded during this hour varies based on directions from the campus leadership. Elementary school teachers submit attendance at approximately 10:10 AM. Middle school and high school teachers report attendance during every class period. If the student is in class at any time during that period, the student is recorded as being present. If the student is not in the class during that period, even if the teacher has seen the student earlier, the student is recorded as absent for documentation purposes to ensure that the student attends at least 90.0 percent of the days a class is offered to receive course credit. Attendance is posted electronically through the attendance reporting and data collection system.

Del Valle ISD employs attendance staff at both the campus level and the district level. Each campus has either a PEIMS clerk or registrar and attendance clerk that prepares attendance reports. Any attendance pattern issues are reported to the support services staff. When a student is absent and brings a note to school, the clerks accept the note and determines if the absence is excused or unexcused. After the teacher enters the data in the system, all corrections are made by the clerk. The teacher submits the correction form and the reason for the change to the attendance clerk. Typically, if it is later than 5:00 PM, the teacher will send an email for any errors. Tardy corrections are made by the campus attendance clerk or by the teacher. The clerk collects

the sign-in records from other areas such as the in-school suspension (ISS) and nursing station to account for students that may have been reported absent from their regular classrooms. The disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP) reports the daily attendance for students assigned to that program.

At the district level, Del Valle ISD employs PEIMS and attendance office staff. PEIMS data maintenance is compiled by the director of PEIMS, who reports to the chief technology officer. The PEIMS coordinator and the PEIMS clerk report to the director of PEIMS. The PEIMS staff conducts an attendance audit with the submitted PEIMS data and the individual campus attendance reports every six-week period during the school year. If any discrepancies exist, the staff investigates to resolve the issues. After all campuses have balanced and completed the six-week attendance reports, the district PEIMS coordinator prepares the District Summary Report for the superintendent and the assistant superintendent of finance and operations.

### **TRUANCY PREVENTION MEASURES**

Effective September 1, 2015, the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, requires school districts to initiate a truancy prevention program for students that reach their third unexcused absences within a four-week period. According to district staff, Del Valle ISD truancy prevention measures begin with notifications to parents. At the end of each day, the district's automated calling system calls parents of students that were absent for all or part of the day. The system informs the parents that the student was absent and asks the parents to contact the school. Teachers will also contact the parents if they notice a pattern of absences.

Campus staff review the data reports from the student attendance tracking system and send warning letters to parents after students reach three absences within a four-week period. District practice is for attendance warning letters to be mailed to parents at the third, fifth, eighth, and tenth unexcused absences. In addition to sending warning letters to the parents, the campus provides interventions such as meeting with students and calling and meeting with parents. The campus staff also notifies the support staff, at-risk officer, or student support specialist assigned to the campus regarding students' attendance and truancy status. The support staff continue to work with families and student and make home visits to determine the contributing factors to attendance issues.

District and campus staff record attendance notes in Skyward to document truancy prevention measures provided for each student. The district has also worked with the county prosecutor to develop a truancy prevention measure (TPM) form that identifies measures that would be acceptable to meet the requirements for referring students to truancy court. According to district staff, the TPM form provides guidance for campuses and may need to be adjusted after the Texas Education Agency (TEA) develops and releases its minimum standards for truancy prevention measures.

Another aspect of Del Valle ISD's truancy prevention efforts has been an increased emphasis on community outreach. District staff work to educate the community about the importance of attending school. Staff make presentations and regularly hold family nights to explain the truancy laws and to connect families with resources. According to district staff, the goal of these outreach efforts is not only to educate parents on the importance of attending school, but to forge better relationships with families.

### **TRUANCY COURTS**

In school year 2015–16, due to the changes in the truancy laws during the Eighty-fourth Legislature, 2015, Del Valle ISD did not refer any students to truancy court. According to district staff, the district concentrated its efforts on engaging staff, students, and parents to change the culture surrounding truancy prevention from one focused on prosecution to one focused on addressing the underlying causes of unexcused absences.

Before school year 2015–16, the process for sending students to truancy court began after the campus-level staff exhausted student attendance interventions. The campus staff contacted the student support services staff to begin working with the student and family and begin the process to file a complaint with the court. The at-risk officer continued to work with the family to determine what was contributing to the lack of attendance. If student attendance continued to be a problem, the officer prepared the necessary paperwork to file a complaint with the court. After the complaint had been filed, the district support staff continued to work to resolve the attendance issues.

Del Valle ISD's truancy cases are heard in the Travis County Justice of the Peace Court, Precinct 4. According to the support staff, the judge has been very involved in the truancy process. During the time lapse between filing and the court hearing, the campus sent the parents an update on the student's attendance, grades, and discipline issues. Cases

were often placed on deferred disposition to give the family and student time to work on improving the attendance issues. If the student's attendance improved, the case was dismissed.

### **ATTENDANCE INCENTIVES**

The district support staff rewards efforts to increase attendance with competitions for the elementary schools, middle schools, high school, and the alternative education campus. One campus at each elementary school and middle school is rewarded every grading period with a trophy cup to display on campus that shows the school's attendance achievement. The high school and alternative education campuses are rewarded by grade level. This award rotates each grading period. At the end of the school year, the campus or grade level with the highest attendance rate keeps the trophy cup. The trophy cup is presented in a school assembly.

### **AVERAGE DAILY FUNDING**

For school year 2014–15, Del Valle ISD's average funding per student was \$7,813, which equals approximately \$43 per school day. Because of the way that school finance formulas respond to a marginal increase or decrease in student attendance, this amount reflects an estimate of the average daily cost of truancy for this district. The amount of funding generated per day by an individual student might be greater or less based on specific student characteristics. This cost was calculated using the district's school year 2014–15 Texas Education Agency Summary of Finances as of April 2016.



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# ECTOR COUNTY INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

## ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY

For school year 2014–15, Ector County Independent School District's (ISD) attendance rate was 94.3 percent, which was lower than the state rate of 95.7 percent for that year. The district reported 470 truant students through the state's Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) for school year 2014–15. Ector County ISD has 34 instructional campuses, which include 25 elementary schools, six junior high schools, and three high schools. For school year 2014–15, the district's total number of students was 31,900. During this year, the student population was 73.7 percent Hispanic, 20.1 percent White, and 3.8 percent African American. Approximately 48.1 percent of the students were identified as economically disadvantaged, and 61.9 percent were identified as at risk.

During the past several years, Ector County ISD's population has increased due to the district's proximity to the Wolfcamp oil and gas hydraulic fracturing shale play in the Permian Basin region. The demand for housing has outpaced the supply of available homes, and lack of housing and homelessness are growing issues for the district. Large populations of shale play workers and their families reside in "man camps," temporary housing communities targeted at oilfield workers, that have grown to an estimated 50,000 people. This population increase has also led to overcrowding in schools. Focus group participants said many students are bused to schools far from their homes because schools more centrally located are full. Some students travel up to two hours each way to reach their campuses.

Ector County ISD employs PEIMS staff and attendance office staff. The district tracks student truancy reporting and court filings through the office of the district's Community Outreach Center (COC). COC employs four social workers who provide social services to students and parents to address underlying issues that contribute to truancy. The lead social worker of COC is the designated truancy prevention facilitator for the district. COC also tracks truancy reports from all campuses, files truancy cases with a municipal truancy court, and prepares documentation on cases for the court. Each campus has an attendance clerk who reports to the assistant principal. Additionally, 11 student assistance services crisis counselors are assigned to the secondary schools, and 4 are assigned to the elementary school.

### **ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY MANAGEMENT**

Texas school districts manage attendance and truancy through several processes. These processes include attendance tracking and recording, implementing truancy prevention measures, referring students to truancy court, and providing incentives for regular attendance.

#### **ATTENDANCE TRACKING AND RECORDING**

In Ector County ISD, all daily attendance tracking is performed by teachers and attendance clerks at the campus level. Each campus maintains its own attendance records. Elementary schools begin at 7:45 AM, and attendance is recorded at 9:30 AM. At secondary campuses, attendance is recorded each class period. A student is recorded as absent 15 minutes after the tardy bell. If a student misses three class periods, the student is recorded as absent for the day.

After teachers record attendance, the campus attendance clerks are responsible for changing unexcused absences to excused absences. The absence typically will be excused if the parent calls the school to explain the absence within five days or the student brings a doctor's note. However, the campus principal has final discretion regarding whether an absence is excused. Clerks call parents, monitor student attendance, and compile a report each week to identify students who have had excessive unexcused absences.

The district uses Parent Link, an automated calling system that calls parents' homes every class period that a child is marked as absent. The district also uses TxConnect, an online site that enables parents to review student attendance, tardy occurrences, grades, and behavioral citations. The district advertises the site through television commercials, conducts workshops on using the site, and makes a computer lab available to parents to access the site.

#### **TRUANCY PREVENTION MEASURES**

Effective September 1, 2015, the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, requires school districts to initiate a truancy prevention program for students that reach their third unexcused absences within a four-week period. In Ector County ISD, the truancy prevention measures begin with the attendance clerks, who call parents when a student accrues three unexcused absences. The attendance clerks

document in an electronic student management system that they attempted to call the parents and indicate whether or not they spoke to the parents. In addition, at three unexcused absences, COC mails a letter to the student's home address to inform students and their parents of the consequences of repeated unexcused absences. At three unexcused absences, COC invites parents to attend evening attendance meetings with representatives from social service agencies. The purpose of these meetings is to educate the parents about attendance and truancy issues, and to connect the parents with social services agencies that may be able to assist them. At five unexcused absences, the teachers make phone calls to the parents and document the calls in the student management system.

After seven unexcused absences, COC asks the campus principal, assistant principal, counselor or committee to place the student on a contract. When a student is placed on a contract, campus staff meet with the parent and the student to try to determine the reason for the student's absences and to develop strategies to reduce the student's truancy. Counselors or other external social service resources, such as Communities in Schools of Texas, which provides students with counseling and other support services, may be included in the meeting to help address the student's situation. The campus and COC monitor the student's attendance while on the contract.

According to district staff, campuses vary in their approaches to contracts. Some campuses implement and monitor contracts consistently, and some campuses do not issue as many contracts or monitor contracts as closely. This variance is due to the fact that placing students on contracts requires principals and counselors to meet with students and families. Many campus administrators are challenged for time to hold the meetings. Additionally, it can be difficult to persuade the families to come to the schools to meet with administrators. According to district staff, the inconsistent application of contracts across all campuses presents a challenge to enforcing truancy laws, because the district can only refer students to court if the student has been placed on a contract.

Another aspect of the district's truancy prevention efforts is identification of dropouts. At the beginning of the year, Ector County ISD identifies those students who were enrolled the previous year but have not enrolled for the current year. COC sends these students warning letters, and COC social workers attempt to contact the student by phone or through neighborhood walks. Many students and parents contact COC after receiving these letters to clarify their

situations (for example, the family moved to another district, or the student is now home-schooled). If the student still does not return to school, the district will file a truancy complaint. The hearings for these cases are held at the district administration building. Campus officials are present so that students can enroll in school. Social workers are also present to provide students with school supplies and other basic items. Students may also be offered alternative options, such as a credit recovery program. COC's support services may include giving the students supplies and other necessary items, offering social work services, or providing flexible options to complete credits.

Pursuant to the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, school districts may not refer students to truancy court if the school determines that the student's truancy is the result of pregnancy; being in the state foster care program; homelessness; or being the principal income earner for the student's family. In Ector County ISD, staff indicate on the contract whether the student is in any of these categories. Staff also include that information in the narrative section of the contract form.

#### **TRUANCY COURTS**

If the student's attendance continues to be a problem after the student has been placed on a contract, has received campus-level interventions, and has received assistance from COC (if necessary), a COC social worker will file a truancy complaint with Odessa Municipal Court. According to interviews with district staff and the court, filing a truancy case with the court is a last-resort measure. Ector County ISD does not refer students to court; the district files Parent Contributing to Nonattendance charges against the student's parent, and only if the student has been placed on a contract. COC prepares documentation for the court that shows all of the actions the district has taken to improve the student's attendance. The documentation is stored in Eduphoria, a document management software program, and it includes a copy of the contract and documentation from the attendance clerk, social workers, and the principal. If proper documentation has not been submitted, the court dismisses the case without hearing it.

According to court staff, truancy case filings have decreased significantly in school year 2015–16. The court previously heard approximately 3,000 cases a year. For school year 2015–16, cases have decreased to about 600. The decrease is because the district has not referred any students to truancy court during school year 2015–16. According to court staff,

the increased age of compulsory attendance to age 19, and the reclassification of truancy from a criminal offense to a civil offense, have presented a challenge to ensuring that students attend school. Court staff say that students feel that truancy no longer has consequences. Additionally, parents are now responsible for the attendance of students that may consider themselves to be independent of their parents.

#### **ATTENDANCE INCENTIVES**

Campuses offer a variety of incentives to encourage attendance, including displaying an attendance flag, nonuniform dress code days for campuses that require uniforms, and drawings to win school supplies.

#### **AVERAGE DAILY FUNDING**

For school year 2014–15, Ector County ISD’s average funding per student was \$7,063, which equals approximately \$39 per school day. Because of the way that school finance formulas respond to a marginal increase or decrease in student attendance, this amount reflects an estimate of the average daily cost of truancy for this district. The amount of funding generated per day by an individual student might be greater or less based on specific student characteristics. This cost was calculated using the district’s school year 2014–15 Texas Education Agency Summary of Finances as of April 2016.



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# EVERMAN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

## ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY

For school year 2014–15, Everman Independent School District's (ISD) attendance rate was 95.2 percent, which was slightly lower than the state rate of 95.7 percent. Everman ISD did not report any truancy incidents or students through the state's Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) for school year 2014–15. Everman ISD has 10 instructional campuses, which include five elementary schools, one intermediate school, one grade six campus, one junior high school, and two high schools. For school year 2014–15, the district's total number of students was 5,528. During this year, the student population was 53.7 percent Hispanic, 39.0 percent African American, and 4.8 percent White. Approximately 82.9 percent of the students were identified as economically disadvantaged, and 17.1 percent were identified as at risk.

Everman ISD's director of truancy and safety compliance is the district's designated truancy prevention facilitator. The director of truancy and safety compliance provides assistance to campus staff to interpret and enforce compulsory attendance laws and resolve truancy, excessive absences, and tardiness problems. This position also serves as the district homeless liaison. Attendance and truancy issues are overseen by the assistant superintendent of operations and student services.

### ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY MANAGEMENT

Texas school districts manage attendance and truancy through several processes. These processes include attendance tracking and recording, implementing truancy prevention measures, referring students to truancy court, and calculating the effects of student attendance on average daily attendance-related (ADA) funding.

#### ATTENDANCE TRACKING AND RECORDING

Everman ISD uses the Texas Enterprise Information System (TxEIS) student information system to track student attendance. Each campus teacher has access to the student information system to report student attendance. Across the district, student attendance is reported during the 10:00 AM hour, which is considered the ADA reporting period. If a student is absent after 10:00 AM when the official attendance is recorded, the student is reported as absent. If a student is

at school for part of the day and submits a medical note, the medical excuse is not recorded as an absence. If a student missed the entire day and submits a medical note the following day, the absence is excused.

Multiple tardy occurrences do not result in an unexcused absence. However, after five occurrences, students have to make up the time for being tardy. The consequences may be lunch detention or after-school detention.

The district has a PEIMS coordinator who is responsible for reporting district attendance data. Each campus has staff responsible for attendance at the campus level. This staff could be the registrar and attendance clerk or a campus secretary. After the teachers enter attendance data in the TxEIS system, any corrections must be made by the campus attendance staff responsible for attendance reporting.

The attendance staff checks for teachers who have not posted attendance and enter any substitute teacher's attendance because substitutes are not given access to the tracking system. If teachers do not enter attendance, the staff contacts the teachers to inform them that it is time to post the attendance. If teachers are not posting on time, the attendance staff provide a report of those teachers to the principals. The attendance staff input attendance notes from students in the system from previous absences. All absences default to a status of unexcused, and when the notes are added to the system, the status changes to excused. Acceptable excused notes include a doctor's note or a parent note for illness or family emergencies. Three consecutive absence days require a doctor's note to be excused. In some of the interviews with campus staff, the review team learned that written parent notes (including emails and faxes) have to be submitted the next day or at least during the same week. According to district administration, this requirement may vary based on the campus leadership.

When changes need to be made to attendance records, teachers email the attendance clerk with the reason why the change is being made. The reason could be that a student may have been in another room for resource intervention or testing. In a case such as this, the teacher will request that the student be marked present.

**TRUANCY PREVENTION MEASURES**

Effective September 1, 2015, the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, requires school districts to initiate a truancy prevention program for students that reach their third unexcused absences within a four-week period. The student information system automatically calls absent students' homes at various times during the day. A report is generated that shows the results of each call, (i.e., no answer, disconnect, or left a message). The campus attendance staff generates and mails warning letters to the parents after three, five, seven, nine, and 10 unexcused absences. Teachers contact students with attendance issues by phone during the teachers' daily planning class periods. Everman ISD has developed a checklist of truancy prevention measures that the district undertakes for each student before referring the student to truancy court. Some of the measures include phone contact with parents, home visits, warning letters sent to parents, student-parent conferences, Saturday classes, and group counseling.

During parent-student attendance conferences, campus administrators, parents, and students discuss issues related to student absences and identify how the district can help the student improve attendance. Students can be placed on a student attendance contract, which establishes attendance conditions. Failure to comply with the terms of the contract may result in a referral to truancy court. After 10 absences, if the district is working with the student on an attendance contract and the student's attendance is improving, the district will continue to work with the student.

The director of truancy and safety compliance assists families with issues that could prevent the student from attending school, such as transportation issues or homelessness. During onsite review interviews, staff said the director of truancy and safety compliance has been valuable for the district but does not have enough time to devote to this role because of other duties. Whenever the campuses contact the director of truancy and safety compliance to locate students or communicate with parents on attendance issues, the director may conduct home visits.

Additionally, the City of Everman established a city ordinance for a daytime curfew because a significant number of students were on the streets during school hours. Since the curfew has been established, if a student is out of school or the student's home is without a parent from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM, the student is stopped by law enforcement and questioned. If the student is in violation of the city ordinance, the student's parent may be issued a Class C misdemeanor ticket. The

district reports that attendance increased after this ordinance was in effect.

Pursuant to the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, school districts may not refer students to truancy court if the school determines that the student's truancy is the result of pregnancy; being in the state foster care program; homelessness; or being the principal income earner for the student's family. Everman ISD uses the student information system to determine whether a student is in these categories. For students within these categories, the district provides counseling and opportunities to make up absences through Saturday classes.

According to district staff, the changes in the truancy laws have resulted in schools doing more to let parents know how attendance affects students' readiness for state assessments. The laws have placed more responsibility on the schools to communicate with parents. District staff indicated that additional resources for parent trainings on truancy would be helpful for truancy prevention.

**TRUANCY COURTS**

When severe cases of truancy occur and the student and family are not responding, the district will refer students to truancy court. At this point, the director of truancy and safety compliance gathers the intervention documentation, attendance record, and other supporting documentation and files a complaint with the court. District staff will attend court hearings only if requested, because the district staff resources are limited.

Everman ISD's truancy cases are filed in Tarrant County Justice of the Peace Court, Precinct 8. The court and the district collaborate to keep the students in school. The judge tries to understand each student's situation and tailors court outcomes by case to improve attendance. According to the district, the judge often orders students found to have engaged in truant conduct to perform community service. State law authorizes judges to charge \$50 in court costs to parents. The Tarrant County judge typically does not charge court costs to parents unless the judge finds them negligent. The courts conclude truancy hearings in March of each school year. Pursuant to the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, Article 45.0541, the Tarrant County Justice of the Peace Court, Precinct 8, has ordered Failure to Attend School (FTAS) convictions, complaints, and other related documents in the possession of law enforcement agencies and school districts to be expunged from students' records. According to Everman ISD, the district has responded to this

order by clearing out FTAS records in the student information system.

### **ATTENDANCE INCENTIVES**

Everman ISD provides attendance incentives to students and campuses. Some campuses hold attendance competitions to encourage students to come to school. Students may receive rewards for attending school, including perfect attendance awards and certificates, and prizes including bicycles, tablet computers, and free food. Some schools have attendance pep rallies. The high school assists students with childcare, if needed, so that students who are parents can attend school.

### **AVERAGE DAILY FUNDING**

For school year 2014–15, Everman ISD’s average funding per student was \$8,280, which equals approximately \$46 per school day. Because of the way that school finance formulas respond to a marginal increase or decrease in student attendance, this amount reflects an estimate of the average daily cost of truancy for this district. The amount of funding generated per day by an individual student might be greater or less based on specific student characteristics. This cost was calculated using the district’s school year 2014–15 Texas Education Agency Summary of Finances as of April 2016.



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# **GARLAND INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

## **ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY**

For school year 2014–15, Garland Independent School District’s attendance rate was 96.1 percent, which was higher than the state average of 95.7 percent. For school year 2014–15, Garland ISD reported 877 truant students through the state’s Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). Garland ISD has 71 instructional campuses, including two prekindergarten schools, 47 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, eight high schools, and two education centers. For school year 2014–15, the district’s total number of students was 57,323. During this year, the student population was 49.0 percent Hispanic, 21.5 percent White, 17.1 percent African American, and 8.3 percent Asian. Approximately 60.6 percent of the students were identified as economically disadvantaged, and 56.4 percent were identified as at-risk students.

Garland ISD has campus-level attendance offices and a district-level office that monitor attendance. Each campus has an attendance clerk who monitors attendance, and a campus administrator who handles truancy. The district also has three case managers who work in the district’s Student Services Department. Each case manager has a specialization, such as truancy, homeless students, or foster care, although some overlap occurs among the three specialties. Case managers’ job duties entail meeting with students and their families, assessing their unique needs, and connecting them to social services in the area to try to alleviate problems that interfere with their ability to attend school. The Student Services Department monitors the campuses and meets with campus administrators twice a semester. The Student Services Department also holds trainings for campus staff that deal with attendance and truancy.

### **ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY MANAGEMENT**

Texas school districts manage attendance and truancy through several processes. These processes include attendance tracking and recording, implementing truancy prevention measures, referring students to truancy court, and providing incentives for regular attendance.

#### **ATTENDANCE TRACKING AND RECORDING**

Garland ISD uses the Skyward, Inc., student management system to manage and track student attendance. At the

elementary schools, the teachers take attendance electronically in the Skyward system at 10:00 AM, which is considered the average daily attendance (ADA) reporting period, and submit it to the attendance office. At the high school and middle school campuses, the teachers take attendance each period electronically, and this data is automatically compiled by the student management system and can be accessed by the attendance office. Parent and doctor notes are accepted at the campus’s attendance office.

Attendance clerks monitor attendance by generating a report periodically and noting students with unexcused absences. Staff call homes, send letters, or schedule meetings with the students.

At the campus level, all attendance information is entered electronically by the teachers. Electronic attendance information is verified by the campus-level PEIMS clerk (usually the same person as the attendance clerk), and the information is then accessed in the student management system by the district-level PEIMS coordinator. District-level attendance staff attends court, records dispositions for cases, and enters the dispositions into the district’s attendance system, which is later submitted to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) by the PEIMS coordinator.

#### **TRUANCY PREVENTION MEASURES**

Effective September 1, 2015, the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, requires school districts to initiate a truancy prevention program for students that reach their third unexcused absences within a four-week period. In Garland ISD, when a student reaches three unexcused absences, campuses mail a warning letter to parents. At five or six unexcused absences, the campus initiates a plan to meet with the student, parents, and counselors to determine why the student is not coming to school. The district’s case managers conduct home visits to determine why the student is not in school. Campus and district staff document all interventions in the student management system.

Campuses generate daily reports through the student management system to identify students with 10 unexcused absences. Unless extenuating circumstances exist, the campus submits documentation of the interventions attempted and

the attendance report to the Student Services Department and recommends filing with the court. The Student Services Department reviews the information and documentation to determine whether to refer the student to truancy court.

Pursuant to the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, school districts may not refer students to truancy court if the school determines that the student's truancy is the result of pregnancy; being in the state foster care program; homelessness; or being the principal income earner for the student's family. In Garland ISD, the Student Services department is responsible for entering information for students that are in these categories into the student management system. Caseworkers serve students that are homeless or in foster care, and the records for those students are housed in the Student Services Department. Caseworkers are informed about pregnant students and students who are principal income earners for their families through meetings with campus administrators. For these students, caseworkers and social workers will jointly conduct home visits to determine the resources that are lacking to prevent regular attendance. In addition, groups of social work students from Texas Woman's University and Texas A&M University–Commerce volunteer as social work interns for Garland ISD. The interns meet with students who need assistance in areas such as financial management and transportation.

District staff reported that the changes in the truancy laws passed by the Eighty-fourth Legislature, 2015, have presented several challenges to the management of truancy in Garland ISD. According to district staff, the changes to the truancy laws have removed the district's ability to enforce compulsory attendance and have caused delays in the adjudication of truant students. District staff report that the district is required to take a larger role in supporting students' social issues, but without any additional resources. The Student Services Department has six staff to support approximately 50,000 students. The size of the student population makes it very difficult for the district to provide interventions for every student that reaches three unexcused absences. Previously, the district filed truancy charges on students and, within three weeks, the student appeared before a judge. Because the truancy laws now require additional steps to be taken before sending students to court, three months to five months could pass before a student attends a truancy hearing. According to district staff, by the time the Student Services Department receives truancy cases, the student has already dropped out or withdrawn from school. For students that have not dropped out, it is often the case that students have

missed 90 school days by the time their cases are referred to truancy court.

### **TRUANCY COURTS**

All independent school districts in Dallas County, including Garland ISD, use a dedicated court for truancy cases. The judge presiding over this court handles all Dallas County Truancy Court cases. Garland ISD attendance staff appears in court to testify that the attendance records submitted by the district are accurate. According to district staff, the district referred very few students to truancy court in school year 2015–16. The cases that are sent to court primarily are Parent Contributing to Nonattendance cases. For students that are referred to truancy court, the judge typically issues orders to complete tutorial hours or community service. According to court staff, the changes in the truancy laws have affected the court in several ways. First, the process time to hear cases is longer, because all cases must be reviewed by the truancy prosecutor to determine that all elements are present before filing the case with the court. Second, students have to be served by a deputy constable.

Pursuant to the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, Article 45.0541, the Dallas County Truancy Court has ordered Failure to Attend School (FTAS) convictions, complaints, and other related documents in the possession of law enforcement agencies and school districts to be expunged from students' records. According to district staff, Garland ISD has complied with this order by expunging electronic records in the student information system and all paper records. According to court staff, court records have been expunged. Court staff reported that the process was burdensome because the law is very general, which means that the court had to expunge every record it had related to FTAS convictions. In addition, the court had to identify every case with disabilities and notify all appropriate agencies, such as the Department of Public Safety in the cases of suspended driver licenses.

### **ATTENDANCE INCENTIVES**

According to district staff, another aspect of Garland ISD's attendance incentive efforts is to offer special programs for at-risk students to connect them with their schools. These programs include welding, automobile, electronics, and boxing. These programs are intended to interest students in coming to school, and some of the programs provide vocational training for students to potentially pursue careers upon graduation.

**AVERAGE DAILY FUNDING**

For school year 2014–15, Garland ISD’s average funding per student was \$7,542, which equals approximately \$42 per school day. Because of the way that school finance formulas respond to a marginal increase or decrease in student attendance, this amount reflects an estimate of the average daily cost of truancy for this district. The amount of funding generated per day by an individual student might be greater or less based on specific student characteristics. This cost was calculated using the district’s school year 2014–15 Texas Education Agency Summary of Finances as of April 2016.



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# PASADENA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

## ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY

For school year 2014–15, Pasadena Independent School District's (ISD) attendance rate was 95.3 percent, which was lower than the state rate of 95.7 percent. Pasadena ISD reported 1,114 truant students through the state's Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) for school year 2014–15. Pasadena ISD has 67 instructional campuses, including 36 elementary schools, 11 middle schools, 10 intermediate schools, six high schools, and four alternative schools. For school year 2014–15, the district's total number of students was 55,395. During this year, the student population was 82.4 percent Hispanic, 7.0 percent African American, and 6.7 percent White. Approximately 76.9 percent of the students were identified as economically disadvantaged, and 60.1 percent were identified as at-risk students.

Pasadena ISD has established a Student Services Department that provides support to the district's campuses in the areas of enrollment, withdrawal, pupil accounting, out-of-district student transfers, and graduate transcripts, in addition to attendance and truancy issues. This department is led by the student services director. This director serves as a member of the administrative team in the Department of Accountability and Compliance. The department's mission includes planning, execution, and evaluation.

The district has two student services coordinators who serve as resources to campus principals and the student services director in matters of student attendance. The coordinators facilitate the district-level aspects of a Stay in School Program to ensure compliance with state attendance laws. The coordinators also track students who have excessive absences or truancy incidents to facilitate court filings within the deadlines set in statute. Coordinators monitor enrollment and attendance by preparing various reports used to conduct random attendance audits of campus documentation. They are responsible for the PEIMS reporting of truancy data for all campuses and represent the district in the two truancy courts during the months of June, July, and August.

### **ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY MANAGEMENT**

Texas school districts manage attendance and truancy through several processes. These processes include attendance tracking and recording, implementing truancy prevention

measures, referring students to truancy court, and providing incentives for regular attendance.

### **ATTENDANCE TRACKING AND RECORDING**

Pasadena ISD uses GradeSpeed, Inc., an electronic system to track student attendance. Attendance tracking begins with the classroom teacher at each campus. Across the district, student attendance is reported at 9:30 AM as the official average daily attendance (ADA) time. Attendance is recorded every class period for middle school, intermediate school, and high school students to track attendance for course credit purposes. The attendance tracking system updates attendance data in Chancery SMS, the district's student information system.

In school year 2015–16, the district implemented RaaWee K12 Solutions software, which is a truancy and dropout prevention system. The system gathers attendance information from the student information system and tracks students with unexcused absences. Attendance clerks, assistant principals, and counselors log into the system and view a list of the students with three or more unexcused absences. The truancy and dropout prevention system also provides campus staff with tools to implement truancy prevention measures, such as printable attendance contracts. According to district staff, the implementation of the system has improved the district's ability to manage truancy because the system has automated key tasks that previously were conducted manually. For example, district staff previously researched each students' information manually to determine if student absences were full days or partial days.

### **TRUANCY PREVENTION MEASURES**

Effective September 1, 2015, the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, requires school districts to initiate a truancy prevention program for students that reach their third unexcused absences within a four-week period. On the first day of school, the district educated students and parents about attendance and truancy issues by sending a letter home with the students. The letter defined the new truancy laws and described potential consequences for unexcused absences. When a student is tardy or absent, the district's automatic phone calling system, School Messenger, notifies

parents. The automatic calls are made at 4:30 p.m. each day; the system generates a report about the outcome of the calls (i.e., no answer or disconnected phone). Campuses have the ability to establish additional calls.

When a student has three unexcused absences within a four-week period, campus attendance clerks schedule a conference with the student. In addition, the Student Services Department sends a warning letter to the student's parents. At six unexcused absences, the student is placed on an attendance contract. The student's obligations for the contract may include a combination of improved attendance, credit recovery efforts, and community service. At nine unexcused absences, the district refers the student to the TRIAD Prevention Program. The TRIAD Prevention Program is a consortium of three Harris County agencies, including Protective Services for Children and Adults, the Juvenile Probation Department, and the Mental Health and Mental Retardation Authority, that coordinate their resources to serve at-risk youth. The program offers services to the entire family. After 12, 15, and 18 absences, campuses choose additional interventions for the student. Interventions include home visits, mentoring, counseling, and in-school community service.

Pursuant to the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, school districts may not refer students to truancy court if the school determines that the student's truancy is the result of pregnancy; being in the state foster care program; homelessness; or being the principal income earner for the student's family. In Pasadena ISD, this information is recorded in Chancery SMS, a web-based student information system. The Student Services Department reviews the documentation and ensures that students who are in these categories are not referred to truancy court.

According to district staff, attendance has dropped during school year 2015–16 due to the changes in the truancy laws enacted by the Eighty-fourth Legislature, 2015. Staff say that students believe they do not have to go to school because truancy was changed from a criminal offense to a civil offense. In addition, the district has struggled obtaining buy-in from the campuses regarding the implementation of the new state requirements related to truancy prevention measures. Campuses are hesitant to commit funding for truancy prevention until the Texas Education Agency publishes guidelines for the new requirements. Before the changes in the state law, campuses were able to refer students to truancy court when the student reached 10 unexcused absences. After the district referred the student to court, the

campus no longer had to address that student's attendance issues. Now campuses are required to provide interventions beginning with three unexcused absences. Staff say these new requirements have been difficult for campuses to manage. District staff are working to change the perspective of campus staff from focusing on sending students to truancy court to focusing on what taking steps to ensure that students come to school.

### **TRUANCY COURTS**

When a student reaches 20 unexcused absences and the district has exhausted all interventions, the district refers the student to truancy court. The truancy courts include the Harris County Justice of the Peace, Precinct 8, Place 1 and Place 2. According to district staff, the Harris County district attorney has made it mandatory for the district to have both placed the student on an attendance contract and referred the student to the TRIAD Prevention Program before referring the student to truancy court. To refer the student to court, the campus administrator compiles the student information data for court and faxes it to the student services coordinator. The student services coordinator compiles additional data for the case and continues to monitor the student attendance via the attendance accounting system. Two days before the court date, the student services coordinator compiles data regarding grades, attendance, and discipline. The student services coordinator attends the various court dockets and supplies information regarding each student and any additional data requested by the district attorney. At the time of the review, Pasadena ISD had referred several students to truancy court, and the outcomes of the cases were pending.

Pursuant to the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, Article 45.0541, the Harris County Justice of the Peace Court has ordered Failure to Attend School convictions, complaints, and other related documents in the possession of law enforcement agencies and school districts to be expunged from students' records. According to district staff, Pasadena ISD has complied with this order by expunging electronic records. The district is expunging paper records at every campus.

### **ATTENDANCE INCENTIVES**

Pasadena ISD provides several incentives to encourage regular attendance. The district has a \$300,000 budget for student attendance rewards. The district has used student attendance rewards to combat the trend of decreasing attendance during the last weeks of school. If campuses

increase their attendance from the previous year by 1.0 percent for the same period, each campus receives \$500 to use for student incentives and rewards. In addition, specific campus incentives address defined attendance rates during the last week of school. If the campus has 96.0 percent attendance during this period, it receives \$1,000; for 97.0 percent attendance, it receives \$1,500, and for 98.0 percent it receives \$2,000. If a campus has the highest percentage of attendance among its category of schools, it can receive a grand prize of \$5,000. The maximum a campus could win is \$7,500. During this period, the district promotes attendance on its website, social media pages, and in the district newsletter. Campuses also could use other incentives to increase their attendance.

### **AVERAGE DAILY FUNDING**

For school year 2014–15, Pasadena ISD's average funding per student was \$7,822, which equals approximately \$43 per school day. Because of the way that school finance formulas respond to a marginal increase or decrease in student attendance, this amount reflects an estimate of the average daily cost of truancy for this district. The amount of funding generated per day by an individual student might be greater or less based on specific student characteristics. This cost was calculated using the district's school year 2014–15 Texas Education Agency Summary of Finances as of April 2016.



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# RAYMONDVILLE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

## ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY

For school year 2014–15, Raymondville Independent School District's (ISD) attendance rate was 94.0 percent attendance rate, which was lower than the state rate of 95.7 percent. Raymondville ISD did not report any truancy incidents or students in the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) for school year 2014–15. Raymondville ISD has five instructional campuses, including two elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and one credit recovery school. For school year 2014–15, the district's total number of students was 2,107. During this year, the student population was 99.0 percent Hispanic, 0.8 percent White, and 0.2 percent African American. Approximately 88.1 percent of students were identified as economically disadvantaged, and 60.5 percent were identified as at-risk students.

Raymondville ISD has adopted standard policies and procedures that address attendance and truancy issues. The district employs PEIMS staff and attendance office staff. At the two elementary schools and the credit recovery campus, one position serves as an attendance clerk and PEIMS coordinator. At the middle school and high school, these duties are fulfilled by two separate positions. The district also employs truancy officers that provide assistance to campus personnel in interpreting and enforcing compulsory attendance laws and resolving truancy, excessive absences, and tardiness problems.

### ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY MANAGEMENT

Texas school districts manage attendance and truancy through several processes. These processes include attendance tracking and recording, implementing truancy prevention measures, referring students to truancy court, and providing incentives for regular attendance.

#### ATTENDANCE TRACKING AND RECORDING

Raymondville ISD uses the Skyward, Inc., system to manage and track student attendance. Each campus teacher has access to the student attendance tracking system to report student attendance. Across the district, student attendance is reported at 9:15 AM. Middle school and high school teachers report attendance during every class period for course credit purposes. By law, students must attend class 90.0 percent of

the total days that a class is in session to earn credit. According to school policy, a student is absent from class if the student is more than 20 minutes late to class. If students are less than 20 minutes late to class, they are considered tardy. The district has no rule for the number of tardy occurrences that equate to an absence.

Attendance clerks receive attendance information from the teachers. The clerks generate a daily attendance report that displays all students who are absent that day and the total attendance percentage. The attendance reports are provided to the campus principals and the superintendent. After a student is identified as absent, the attendance clerk calls parents or guardians immediately. Teachers are also required to make calls for any students absent at the 9:15 AM class period. Teachers make these calls during their daily planning class period. Absences are excused with either a doctor's note or a note from the parent. The district has no policy on how late notes can be submitted to excuse an absence. Attendance clerks indicated that they often receive notes months after a student was absent, especially after the district makes continued contact with the parents.

#### TRUANCY PREVENTION MEASURES

Effective September 1, 2015, the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, requires school districts to initiate a truancy prevention program for students that reach their third unexcused absences within a four-week period. For every absence, campuses make phone calls and send warning letters home to parents. After a student reaches two unexcused absences, the campus will refer the student to the district truancy officers. The truancy officers send letters to the parents asking them to contact the campus, and the officers make home visits to persuade the students to return to school. When a student reaches three unexcused absences in a four-week period, campus administrators meet with the student and the parents. They discuss the student's attendance and examine the reasons why the student has been absent. Campus administrators then place the parents and student on a written attendance plan. Students are provided the opportunity to attend Saturday classes to make up school work. If the student fails to follow the attendance plan, the

district will file a Parent Contributing to Nonattendance (PCN) charge on the student's parent.

Pursuant to the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, school districts may not refer students to truancy court if the school determines that the student's truancy is the result of pregnancy; being in the state foster care program; homelessness; or being the principal income earner for the student's family. In Raymondville ISD, this information is identified by the PEIMS clerk and the registrar through questionnaires.

### **TRUANCY COURTS**

Raymondville ISD files truancy cases with the Raymondville Municipal Court. The municipal court judge began presiding over truancy cases during school year 2015–16. Before school year 2015–16, the district filed truancy cases with the local justice of the peace courts. The relationship between the school district and these courts was poor, and the courts refused to hear truancy cases referred by the district. According to court staff, the municipal court judge has improved communication between the school district, district attorney, and the juvenile probation office, and the court has developed a positive and supportive relationship with the district.

During school year 2015–16, Raymondville ISD only filed PCN charges against the parents of truant students. The judge typically orders parents and students to attend counseling through the Strengthening Families program operated by the Willacy County Juvenile Probation Office. If parents or school administrators report the student's truancy is caused by drug abuse, the judge may order the parents and student to meet with a drug intervention specialist through the Behavioral Health Solutions of South Texas nonprofit services center. The judge has ordered parents from every case heard during school year 2015–16 to attend a second hearing so that the court can follow up on each case.

### **ATTENDANCE INCENTIVES**

The district encourages attendance with incentives for students to attend school. Students with perfect attendance are given Bearkat Bucks, a school-issued tender that students may redeem for prizes. Middle school students with perfect attendance are also permitted to use certain electronic devices, such as tablet computers and cell phones, during their study periods on Fridays.

### **AVERAGE DAILY FUNDING**

For school year 2014–15, Raymondville ISD's average funding per student was \$8,135, which equals approximately \$45 per school day. Because of the way that school finance formulas respond to a marginal increase or decrease in student attendance, this amount reflects an estimate of the average daily cost of truancy for this district. The amount of funding generated per day by an individual student might be greater or less based on specific student characteristics. This cost was calculated using the district's school year 2014–15 Texas Education Agency Summary of Finances as of April 2016.

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# ROMA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

## ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY

For school year 2014–15, Roma Independent School District's (ISD) attendance rate was 95.8 percent, which was slightly higher than the state rate of 95.7 percent. Roma ISD reported 93 truant students in the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) for school year 2014–15. Roma ISD has 10 instructional campuses, which include six elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school, and one instructional and guidance school. For school year 2014–15, the district's total number of students was 6,425. During this year, 100.0 percent of the student population was Hispanic. Approximately 85.0 percent of the students were identified as economically disadvantaged, and 78.1 percent were identified as at risk.

Due to its geographic location, Roma ISD faces several unique challenges in managing attendance and truancy. Roma ISD is located near an international bridge between Mexico and the U.S. According to interviews with district staff, the risk of violence in Mexico may affect attendance because it may prevent safe travel for students who visit family homes in neighboring Mexican towns and ranches on the weekends.

In addition, Roma ISD's attendance rate is affected by major holidays and community cultural practices throughout the academic year. Interviews with district officials and staff indicate that attendance rates are the lowest in the days leading up to holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, spring break, and Easter. According to district officials, parents and students use these days to travel to Mexico and other Central American countries to spend the holidays with their families. One contributing factor to this problem is that some parents and students are not aware of the state's compulsory attendance laws. During an interview with a focus group of students, none of the students in the focus group said they were familiar with the statute in the Texas Education Code regarding compulsory attendance.

Additionally, the district's proximity to the Eagle Ford oil and gas hydraulic fracturing shale play poses a unique challenge to Roma ISD enrollment. Situated 125 miles from Roma ISD, Eagle Ford offers high-paying jobs that provide incentives for some students to drop out of school and go to work.

Roma ISD has adopted standard policies and procedures that address attendance and truancy issues. At the district level, Roma ISD does not have an office dedicated to truancy issues. At the campus level, each school has an attendance clerk responsible for tracking and reporting attendance. Roma High School has two parent liaisons to assist with outreach to parents. The district also employs truancy officers that work to determine what is contributing to the attendance problems of truant students.

### **ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY MANAGEMENT**

Texas school districts manage attendance and truancy through several processes. These processes include attendance tracking and recording, implementing truancy prevention measures, and referring students to truancy court.

#### **ATTENDANCE TRACKING AND RECORDING**

Roma ISD uses the Texas Enterprise Information System (TxEIS) student information system to manage and track student attendance. Attendance tracking begins with the classroom teachers at each campus. On some campuses, the teachers input attendance information into the student information system. On other campuses, teachers forward manual attendance tracking forms to the campus attendance clerk, who inputs attendance into the student management system. Across the district, student attendance is reported at 10:00 AM, which is considered the average daily attendance (ADA) reporting period. Middle school and high school teachers report attendance during every class period to determine course credit. The elementary school has no policy in place for the number of tardy occurrences that make up the equivalent of an absence. At the middle schools and high school, three tardy occurrences are the equivalent of one absence.

After the teachers have reported attendance, each campus attendance clerk inputs attendance into the student information system. Students must provide an excuse from a doctor or a parent for the absence to be considered excused. Only unexcused absences are counted toward truancy. Students submit excuses in the main office of each campus at the start of the day before they enter their first class. The staff reviews attendance reports to monitor student absences and

sends letters to parents of absent students before a child reaches the truancy threshold, when the district is required to file a truancy complaint.

### **TRUANCY PREVENTION MEASURES**

Effective September 1, 2015, the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, requires school districts to initiate a truancy prevention program for students that reach their third unexcused absences within a four-week period. After campus staff exhaust available student attendance interventions, including phone calls and letters home to parents, truant students are referred to one of the truancy officers. The truancy officers first contact the student's parents. If the student continues to have unexcused absences, the truancy officer conducts home visits. Assistant principals at the campuses also sometimes conduct home visits. If a truant student is found outside of school, the truancy officers typically do not apprehend the student; however, an attempt is made to speak with the parents.

The truancy officer works with the family to determine what is contributing to the lack of attendance. If the student's attendance continues to be a problem, the officer prepares the documentation to make a referral to truancy court. Teachers may also submit truancy referral forms to the court.

In an effort to educate parents about compulsory attendance statutes, all student report cards at Roma ISD include a statement printed in English and in Spanish that reads, "Texas state law requires children under the age of 19 to attend school."

Pursuant to the Texas Education Code, Section 25.0915, school districts may not refer students to truancy court if the school determines that the student's truancy is the result of pregnancy; being in the state foster care program; homelessness; or being the principal income earner for the student's family.

### **TRUANCY COURTS**

Roma ISD established a partnership with the justice courts of Starr County to conduct truancy court. The district refers Truant Conduct and Parent Contributing to Nonattendance complaints to the county attorney's office. The county attorney decides whether or not to send the case to a justice court. During court, the judge reviews the student's attendance record, grades, and any other reports deemed necessary by the court. The judge provides the parents and students with literature, printed in English and Spanish,

containing information about the effects of truancy and the steps families can take to prevent truancy.

The judge brings a counselor to court who is an employee from the Behavioral Health Solutions of South Texas nonprofit services center (Rural Border Intervention program) located in Pharr. The program focuses on providing youth and adults who reside in remote rural border communities with services to prevent and intervene in substance abuse behaviors. The program also increases access to treatment services for substance abuse and mental health.

Pursuant to the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, Article 45.0541, the Starr County Justice of the Peace Court, Precinct 2, has ordered Failure to Attend School convictions, complaints, and other related documents in the possession of law enforcement agencies and school districts to be expunged from students' records.

### **AVERAGE DAILY FUNDING**

For school year 2014–15, Roma ISD's average funding per student was \$8,705, which equals approximately \$48 per school day. Because of the way that school finance formulas respond to a marginal increase or decrease in student attendance, this amount reflects an estimate of the average daily cost of truancy for this district. The amount of funding generated per day by an individual student might be greater or less based on specific student characteristics. This cost was calculated using the district's school year 2014–15 Texas Education Agency Summary of Finances as of April 2016.