

White Settlement ISD Attendance Handbook

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Purpose

The purpose of the White Settlement Independent School District Attendance Handbook is to create a uniform guide for student attendance and the tracking of attendance in the district. The Handbook is intended to serve as a resource for the campus administrators and staff that track and address attendance concerns. The Handbook explains the legal requirements for attendance, the components of attendance, and the Commissioner's requirements regarding truancy prevention measures. In addition, the Handbook discussed chronic absenteeism and the indicators that can predict chronic absenteeism. Finally, the Handbook will provide resources to assist with the barriers to student attendance. Students are present, absent or out of placement.

Legal Requirements

Compulsory Attendance - Section 25.085 (a) - (c) of the Texas Education Code outlines the requirements for compulsory school attendance in Texas. The requirements are further outlined in WSISD policy *FEA(Legal)*. Compulsory attendance applies to the following:

- A child who is at least 6 years of age and not yet 19 years of age.
- A person who voluntarily enrolls in or attends school after turning 19 years of age is also required to attend school each day.
- A child younger than six that has previously enrolled in first grade.
- A child that has enrolled in Pre-K or Kindergarten.
- A person that voluntarily enrolls in school or voluntarily attends school after the person's 19th birthday.

Excused Absences – the District shall excuse a student from attendance for the following reasons:

- Religious Holidays
- Court Appearances
- U.S. Citizenship/Naturalization Oath
- Serving as an election clerk – up to 2 days per year
- Department of Family and Protective Services
- Higher Education Visits – up to 2 days junior year and up to 2 days senior year
- Temporary absence for health care appointment – documented – must be in class part of the day
- Any temporary absence deemed acceptable by the campus Principal

Notice to Parents - At the beginning of each school year campuses shall issue a notice to parents explaining the legal requirements for children to attend school and the possible consequences for truancy. The letter at a minimum will include: if a student misses more than 10 days or parts of days in a 6 month period then the student and/or parent may be subject to prosecution and that parents shall be notified if a student is absent 3 days or parts of days in a four week period. There will also be resources to assist family members if there are situations that are preventing attendance.

Truancy Prevention Measures - If a student fails to attend school without excuse for three or more days or parts of days within a four week period, the District shall initiate truancy prevention measures.

Truancy Court – If a student fails to attend school for ten or more days or parts of days within a six month period, the District shall within ten days of the tenth absence refer the student to a truancy court.

Attendance Records – The superintendent, principals, and teachers are responsible to maintain accurate attendance records.

Power of Attorney - See board policy FD - Admissions

The district will only accept 3 parent notes for each semester each school year.

Aspects of Attendance

Average Daily Attendance

Attendance for all grades shall be determined by the absences recorded at the official attendance-taking time during the campus's instructional day, unless the board adopts a policy, or delegates to the superintendent the authority to establish procedures for recording absences in an alternative hour, or unless the students for which attendance is being taken are enrolled in and participating in a commissioner-approved alternative attendance accounting program.

Exceptions: A student not actually on campus when attendance is taken may be considered in attendance for ADA purposes if the student meets one of the following conditions:

- Participating in a board approved activity under the direction of school staff,
- Participating in a mentorship approved by district personnel to serve as one or more advanced measures to complete the Advanced/Distinguished Achievement Program,
- Observing religious holidays,
- Attending a required court appearance,
- Appearing at a governmental office to complete paperwork required with an application for U.S. citizenship,
- Participating in a U.S. naturalization oath ceremony,
- Serving as an election clerk,
- Is in the conservatorship of DFPS and is participating in court ordered activities,
- Documented appointment with a health care professional (student must be at school part of the day),
- Visiting an institution of higher education,
- In attendance at a drop-out recovery education program,
- Sounding “Taps” at a military honors funeral,
- Absence is permitted by other conditions related to off-campus instruction, or
- Military deployment issues.

Attendance for Promotion/Credits **FEC (Legal) and FEC (Local)**

90% Rule - In order to receive credit or a final grade for a class, a student is required to attend class 90 percent of the days class is offered. This requirement is in effect regardless of whether the absences are excused (Excused and Unexcused Absences) with exception to a religious holiday (see FEA).

75%-90% Principal's Plans - For students in attendance for less than 90 percent of the required days and more than 75 percent of the required days, credit may be given if the student completes a plan approved by the campus principal that provides the student to meet the instructional requirements of the class. If a student fails to complete the required plan, the student and the student's parent may requested a review of extenuating circumstances from the Attendance Review Committee (ARC). However, a student under the jurisdiction of a court in a criminal or juvenile justice proceeding may not receive credit or a final grade without the consent of the judge presiding over the student's case

Below 75% - ARC – Student's that fall below 75 percent of the required days may make a formal written request to the Attendance Review Committee for review of extenuating circumstances. All requests for the ARC to view records must be submitted no later than 30 days after the last day of class. **FEC (Local)**

A board shall appoint one or more attendance committees to hear petitions for class credit or a final grade by students who have not met the 90 percent rule and have not earned class credit or a final grade by completing a principal's plan. Classroom teachers shall comprise a majority of the attendance committee. (Education Code 25:092)

Attendance Enforcement (Truancy) **FED (Legal)**

If a student fails to attend school without excuse on ten or more days or parts of days within a six month period in the same school year, the District shall within ten days of the student's tenth absence refer the student to truancy court. The District may file a complaint against the student's parents. The District may delay the referral to court while the District is applying truancy prevention measures and has determined that the truancy prevention measures are succeeding. FED (LEGAL) and Family Code 65.003(a).

The District is prohibited from referring a student to truancy court if the school determines that the absences are a result of the following (Education Code 25:0915):

- Pregnancy,
- Being in a state foster program,
- Homelessness,
- Severe or life-threatening illness or related treatment or
- Being the principal income earner for the student's family.

If a student fails to attend school without excuse on three or more days or parts of days within a four-week period but does not fail to attend school for the time described by Education Code 25.0951(a), the district shall initiate truancy prevention measures on the student.

See also FD - Admissions in special care for students listed above.

Attendance Make-Up

The District may establish ways for students to make-up work to regain credit or to receive a final grade. The make-up requirements do not require a certain amount of time in educational settings to be equal to the time missed during regular school hours. Consideration of circumstances that caused the student's absences should be given when determining make-up time. The make-up should focus on whether the student has met the instructional requirements for the course or class. Schools should be prepared with various options that give the student an opportunity to make-up or to regain credit or to receive a final grade.

Truancy Prevention Measures

If a student fails to attend school without excuse on three or more days or parts of days within a four-week period but does not fail to attend school for the time described below, the district shall initiate truancy prevention measures on the student. [See FED] Education Code 25.0915(a-4)

The District shall take one or more of the following actions as truancy prevention measures:

- Identifying the root cause of the student's unexcused absences and actions to address each cause;
- Maintaining ongoing communication with students and parents on the actions to be taken to improve attendance;
- Establishing reasonable timelines for completion of the truancy prevention measure; and
- Establishing procedures to notify the admission, review, and dismissal committee or the Section 504 committee of attendance issues relating to a student with a disability and ensure that the committee considers whether the student's attendance issues warrant an evaluation, a reevaluation, and/or modifications to the student's individualized education program or Section 504 plan, as appropriate.
- Notify Special Education Services if the student has an IEP for special education services.
- Impose a behavior management plan signed by the student, parent or guardian, and school employee. The plan shall include a description of the behavior that is required or prohibited and the period for the plan to be implemented, not to exceed 45 school days, or the penalties for additional absences, including disciplinary action or referral to truancy court, or
- Refer the student to:
 - Counseling,
 - Mediation,
 - Mentoring,
 - Community Based Services, or
 - Other services aimed at addressing the student's truancy.

Truancy prevention measures should address extenuating circumstances that lead to student absences.

Commissioner's Rules for Truancy Prevention Measures

The minimum standards for truancy prevention measures as established by the Commissioner of Education include:

- Efforts to identify the root cause of student unexcused absences and actions to address the cause,
- Maintaining ongoing communication with the student and parent,
- Establish timelines to complete the truancy prevention measures, and
- Establish procedures to notify ARD or 504 committees of attendance issues.

Best practices for truancy prevention measures:

- Develop attendance guidelines and make available to parents at the beginning of the school year,
- Create a culture of attendance,
- Create incentives for perfect and improved attendance,
- Educate students and parents on the positive impact of school attendance on success,
- Link families with relevant community programs and support,
- Develop partnerships with external partners for truancy intervention and prevention,
- Determine root causes of unexcused absences and review campus data to identify systemic issues that affect attendance,
- Use existing programs to provide student and parent support,
- Conduct a needs assessment and identify programs for students and parents,
- Continually look for new resources, and
- Ensure that school personnel meet to contribute to the needs assessment.

In determining services for students, the school district shall consider:

- Offering an optional flexible school day,
- Working with businesses that employ students to coordinate school and work schedules, and
- Offer before school, after school, and/or Saturday prevention or intervention programs.

Withdrawal of Students for Nonattendance

The District may initiate withdrawal of a student under the age of 19 for nonattendance under the following conditions:

- The student has been absent for ten consecutive days, **and**
- Repeated efforts to locate the student have failed.

If a student has been absent for ten consecutive days and the school knows the location of the child in the school district, the student cannot be withdrawn by the school. Students cannot be withdrawn for nonattendance on a day that the student is in attendance in school. A district may withdraw any student who ceases to be a resident. Daniels v. Morris, 746 F.2d 271 (5th Cir. 1984) (FD-Admissions Legal)

Any attempt to withdraw a student due to attendance, POA, or Open Enrollment must be discussed with the Assistant Superintendent's office, Mr. Chris Jenkins.

Students 19 and Over See FEC (Legal) and FEC (Local) and FD - Admissions (Legal)

A person who voluntarily enrolls in school or voluntarily attends school after the person's 19th birthday shall attend school each school day for the entire period the program of instruction is offered. A board may adopt a policy requiring the student who is under 21 years of age to attend school until the end of the school year.

After the third unexcused absence of a person who voluntarily enrolls, a district shall issue a warning letter to the person that states the person's enrollment may be revoked for the remainder of the school year if the person has more than five unexcused absences in a semester.

A district may revoke for the remainder of the school year the enrollment of a person who has more than five unexcused absences in a semester, except a school district may not revoke the enrollment of a person under this provision on a day on which the person is physically present at school.

A person whose enrollment is revoked for exceeding this limit may be considered an unauthorized person on school grounds for the purposes of Education Code 37.107 regarding trespassing.

As an alternative to revoking a person's enrollment, a school district may impose a behavior improvement plan described by Education Code 25.0915(a-1)(1).

Education Code 25.085(e)–(h)

Attendance Review Committees

Each campus will create an Attendance Review Committee. The committee will be composed of 5 people. The make-up of the committee will be as follows:

- 3 classroom teachers
- 1 administrator
- 1 counselor

The committee members can be selected by a method chosen by the campus principal and will serve for 1 year. Each year, the committee will be reestablished. There is no prohibition for committee members serving more than one consecutive term.

The Attendance Review Committee can hear petitions for class credit or final grade by students who have not met the 90% rule and have not completed a principal's plan. The committee can also hear petitions for students that drop below 75% in attendance.

A student, parent, or representative may request award of credit or a final grade by submitting a written petition to the committee. Petitions must be filed no later than 30 days after the last class day.

The committee shall review the student's entire attendance record and the reason for the absences and shall determine whether to award a final grade.

Students that have lost credit or have not received a final grade because of excessive absences may regain credit or a final grade by fulfilling the requirements established by the committee. The attendance review committee shall adhere to the following guidelines to determine attendance for award of credit or a final grade:

- If make-up work is completed satisfactorily, excused absences shall be considered days of attendance
- A transfer student or migrant student incurs absences only after his or her enrollment in the District
- The committee shall consider the acceptability and authenticity of documented reasons for absences
- The committee shall consider whether the absences were reasons out of the student's control
- The committee shall determine whether the student has completed assignments, mastered the essential knowledge and skills, and maintained passing grades in the course or subjects; and
- The student/parent shall be allowed to present information to the committee.

All committee decisions should be by consensus, when possible, and should always be made with the best interest of the student in mind.

If the committee chooses to impose conditions on students with excessive absences in order for the student to regain credit or be awarded a final grade, the following conditions may be utilized:

- Completing additional assignments, as specified by the committee or teacher;
- Attending tutorial sessions, including Saturday classes or before- and after school programs;
- Maintaining attendance standards for the rest of the semester;
- Taking an examination to earn credit;
- Attending a flexible school day program; or
- Attending summer school.

In all cases, the student must also earn a passing grade to receive credit.

All decisions concerning students losing credit or not being assigned a final grade must have approval from the campus principal. All parent notification concerning student loss of credit or not being awarded a final grade must come from the campus principal.

Truancy Conduct Prosecutor

Once the school determines to send a truant child (12 years to 18 years) to court, the school must submit the documents required by statute to the appropriate court clerk and the truancy conduct prosecutor. The following documents are required to submit a case to the truancy conduct prosecutor:

- A properly completed referral for truancy conduct on a student,
- Copy of the attendance warning letter sent by the school at the beginning of the school year,
- Copy of the 3-day warning letter signed by the parent or a statement as to how the school determined the letter was received by the parent,
 - If the letter was not received, documentation is needed as to additional steps the school made to notify the parent. (E-mail, notes on phone calls, notes on residency checks, etc.)
- A statement of what happened at the parent conference and if a 45-day plan was created, a copy of the plan,
- Copies of results of the implementation of the Truancy Prevention Measures (TPM),
- Current attendance of the student,
 - Attendance sheets should come with a key explaining the system
- Statement certifying that the school applied the TPM and that the TPM failed to meaningfully address the student's attendance. Statement should specify whether the student is eligible for or receives special education services,
- Name/s of person who conducted conferences and will testify in court, and
- Statement that the school has recently verified the address submitted with the paperwork. Address must be complete with zip code and should include a phone number.

The school can also choose to file on the parent for Parent Contributing to Non-Attendance. This is a criminal offense that is prosecuted by the truant conduct prosecutor. To file on a parent, the following documents are required:

- A properly completed and notarized parent contributing complaint, if filing on the parent, and
- Copies of the same documents required when filing on a student.

Truant Conduct Checklist

- All elements are met:
 - 12-18 years old
 - Required by law to attend school
 - Fails to attend 10 or more days/parts of days
 - Within a 6 month period
 - Same school year
 - Without excuse
- Statement certifying that:
 - School applied truancy prevention measures, AND
 - The prevention measures failed
- Specify if student is eligible or receives special education services
- Timely filed:
 - Within 10 school days after the 10th absence giving rise to truant conduct, OR
 - School delays or decides not to refer because:
 - TPM are being applied, AND
 - School determines that TPM are succeeding, AND
 - It is in the best interest of the child to delay or refrain from filing the referral
- No exceptions apply:
 - Truant conduct was not a result of:
 - Pregnancy
 - State foster program
 - Homelessness
 - Principle income earner for family
- Supporting documents:
 - List the dates of alleged absences
 - List the dates of meetings with parents
 - List all truancy prevention measures taken
- Did the school send annual notice of the law at the beginning of the school year?
- After 3 unexcused absences, did the school notify parent and request a meeting?
- Referral is not substantially defective.

Campus Accountability

- Each campus will need to appoint staff members to track and manage student attendance. There should be the campus attendance clerk as well as a campus administrator monitoring attendance and addressing student attendance concerns.
- Each campus will need to monitor and ensure that all staff members are keeping accurate attendance records. Teachers that do not keep accurate records need to be documented.
- Each campus should select staff members to monitor the attendance of select groups of students. (Ex: Elementary/Homeroom Teacher, MS/Study Hall Teacher, HS/Third Period Teacher, etc.)
- Initial letters for attendance will go out at 3 absences in any four-week period. Follow-up letters should go out at 7 absences and then again at 10 absences.
- The school call system should continue to be utilized for daily absences.
- Students in danger of losing credit or not receiving a final grade should be referred to a counselor and the campus principal.
- Notification letters for attendance, whether for truancy or credit, should be signed by the campus principal.
- Each campus should develop and implement programs to recognize and reward perfect attendance and improved attendance.

Resources

Services for pregnant/parenting students

- School Personnel (Counselors, Social Workers, Nurses)
- PBIS Practices in Texas
 - <https://schoolmentalhealthtx.org/tools/best-practices/positive-behavior-interventions-and-supports-pbis/#:~:text=PBIS%20Ensures%20all%20students%20have%20access%20to%20effective%20delivered%20by%20school%20personnel%20throughout%20a%20campus>
- Texas Restorative Practices
 - <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/health-safety-discipline/restorative-discipline-practices-in-texas>
- Safe Haven of Tarrant County
 - www.safehaven.org
 - 817-536-5496
- Tarrant County Child Care Management Services (CCMS)
 - www.tarrantcountyccms.org
 - 817-831-6374
- Women, Infant, & Children (WIC)
 - <http://access.tarrantcounty.com/en/public-health/wic-program.html>
 - 817-321-5400
- Gladney Center for Adoptions
 - <http://www.adoptionsbygladney.com/>
 - 817-922-6000
- Pregnancy Help Center of Fort Worth
 - <http://www.phcfw.org/>
 - 817-560-2226

Services for Students Experiencing Homelessness

- School Personnel (School Social Workers, At-Risk Coordinator, Campus Counselors)
- District Nutrition Services (Free/Reduced Lunch, Snack packs)
- Texas Homeless Education Office
 - <https://www.theotx.org/>
 - 1-800-446-3142
- Kids Vision for Life Mobile Bus
 - <http://www.kidsvisionforlife.org/who-we-are/mobile-clinics/>
- Presbyterian Night Shelter
 - <http://www.journeyhome.org/>
 - 817-632-7400
- Salvation Army DFW
 - <http://www.salvationarmydfw.org/default.aspx>

- 817-344-1820
- Union Gospel Mission of Tarrant County
 - <https://www.ugm-tc.org/>
 - 817-339-2553
- Paw Pantry
 - Brewer High School
 - 817-367-1200

Services for Students in Foster Care

- School Personnel (District Foster Care Liaison, Social Workers, Campus Counselors)

Dropout Prevention Programs

- Small Group Counseling (Social Workers, Campus Counselors)
- Teen Lifeline
 - <http://teenlifeline.org/>
- Restorative Justice Circles (Campus Level)
- Character Education Classes
- Drug Education Program
- Recovery Resource Council
 - <https://recoverycouncil.org/>
- HOPE Squads (Each Campus)

Programs Outside of School

- White Settlement ISD Family Resource Center
 - 817-367-1257

Counseling Services

- School Personnel (Campus Counselors, School Social Workers, etc.)
- Gracefully Strong
 - <https://www.gracefullystrong.com/>
 - Empowering Girls with Inner Strength Self-worth Program
- Teen Life
 - <https://www.teenlife.ngo/supportgroups/>
 - 817-281-9900
- Recovery Resource Council
 - <https://recoverycouncil.org/about/>
 - 817-332-6329
- HOPE Squads
 - Each Campus
- Peer Assistance and Leadership (PAL)

- Brewer High School
- Outside Referrals
 - ACH Child & Family Services
 - <http://achservices.org/>
 - 817-335-4673
 - The Art Station
 - <https://www.theartstation.org/>
 - 817-921-2401
 - Catholic Charities
 - <https://www.catholiccharitiesfortworth.org/>
 - 817-534-0814
 - Cook Children’s Behavioral Health System
 - <http://www.cookchildrens.org/behavioral-health/Pages/default.aspx>
 - 682-885-3917
 - The Parenting Center
 - <http://theparentingcenter.org/>
 - 817-332-6348
 - Mesa Springs
 - <http://www.mesasprings.com/>
 - 817-484-0406
 - The Women’s Center of Tarrant County
 - <http://www.womenscentertc.org/>
 - 817-548-1663
 - Safe Haven of Tarrant County
 - www.safehaven.org
 - 817-536-5496

Mental Health Services

- School Personnel (Campus Counselors, Social Workers)
- QPR Gatekeepers (Identify suicide ideation)
 - All Campuses
- Teen Life
 - <https://www.teenlife.ngo/supportgroups/>
 - 817-281-9900

Alcohol & Substance Abuse Prevention & Treatment Programs

- School Personnel (Social Workers)

- Mesa Springs
 - <http://www.mesasprings.com/>
 - 817-484-0406
- Catholic Charities of Fort Worth
 - <https://www.catholiccharitiesfortworth.org/>
 - 817-534-0814
- MHMR of Tarrant County
 - <http://www.mhmrtarrant.org/>
 - 817-569-4300
- Recovery Resource Council
 - <https://recoverycouncil.org/about/>
 - 817-332-6329
- Right Step
 - <https://www.rightstep.com/>
 - 844-675-1557
- Phoenix House
 - <https://www.phoenixhouse.org/>
 - 888-279-7062
- Sundance Behavioral Healthcare System
 - <http://www.sunbhc.com/>
 - 817-583-8080

Mentoring Programs & Services

- Teen Life
 - <https://www.teenlife.ngo/supportgroups/>
 - 817-281-9900
- Peer Assistance and Leadership (PAL)
 - Brewer High School

Child Welfare Services & Programs

- School Personnel (Counselors, Social Workers)
- Child Protective Services (CPS) – Texas Department of Family & Protective Services
 - https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Contact_Us/report_abuse.asp
 - 1-800-252-5400

Attendance Intervention Strategies

- Peer Accountability Partner
- Meeting with Campus Counselor and Campus Administrator for early intervention
- Incentives
 - Perfect Attendance
 - Improved Attendance
 - Send commendations to students and parents
- Restorative Justice Circles – using PALS students
- Home Visits
 - Not for all attendance issues
 - Prior to PD residency check
 - Goal of creating relationship with parent
- Attendance Awareness Month
 - September
 - Fliers, handouts, brochures, etc.
 - Announcements about importance of attendance
 - Special groups for students struggling with attendance
 - Incorporate attendance into Healthy Families Rally
- Early Identification Process
 - First month of school
 - Set up those identified with peer mentor and teacher
- Goal Setting
 - Social work based
 - Would include other aspects of school (graduation, etc.)

- Proactive steps
 - Get list of attendance problems from previous school year
 - Monitor these students beginning first or second week of school
- Attendance Graphs
 - Display goals in prominent locations
 - Compare time periods

Articles

<https://www.texastribune.org/2015/08/08/new-truancy-law-puts-pressure-schools/>

<http://www.attendanceworks.org/facts-stats-school-attendance/>

<http://new.every1graduates.org/the-importance-of-being-in-school/>

<http://baltimore-berc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/SeptemberAttendanceBriefJuly2014.pdf>

Links

<http://absencesaddup.org/>

<http://www.attendanceworks.org/>

These websites provide resources and tips to improve attendance for students, parents, teachers, and schools.