

# Concerns raised over chronic absenteeism



## Legislators can reform truancy laws while honoring the intent of decriminalization

Schools want to work collaboratively with legislators to find the right way to improve attendance while honoring the intent of the bipartisan effort in 2015 to decriminalize truancy. Schools do not want to return to the days when truancy ensnared so many students in criminal proceedings, but schools understand that more tools may be needed to improve attendance — especially after the rise of absenteeism seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. One suggestion is to consider whether it should be easier for schools to take legal action against parents whose students are chronically absent.



## It has become more difficult to enforce the state's compulsory attendance law

House Bill 2398, which became law in 2015, removed from the Education Code the crime of failing to comply with state attendance laws. The goal of that legislation was to stop using the criminal justice system to address truancy and instead provide more resources to schools to address the causes of truancy. Before the law went into effect, some 100,000 criminal truancy complaints were being brought against students per year, which raised concerns about feeding the school-to-prison pipeline for some students. Since that time, however, the COVID-19 pandemic created a major separation between schools and students. Many legislators are concerned that HB 2398 left schools without the tools they need to enforce attendance requirements.



## Additional state investments can help improve attendance

Legislators who are concerned about truancy can make investments that will help school districts improve attendance without pulling dollars away from budgets in other areas that are already stretched thin. For example, legislators could provide specific funding for efforts to hire more personnel who are focused on truancy and attendance. Additional funding could also help districts provide more effective interventions to address the barriers that are preventing students from attending school. The state could also invest in software that monitors absences and records reasons for absences so that all stakeholders have a common source of information. Finally, the state could invest in district-level truancy teams to assist campuses with home visits and parent meetings.

### KEY POINTS:

- 1 Legislators and educators have discussed ways to carefully revisit state truancy laws
- 2 Schools should have more tools to enforce attendance laws
- 3 Additional state funding could make district interventions more effective



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