

Truancy **Matagorda ISD**

Philosophical Statement

It is the belief of the Matagorda Independent School District that school truancy is a symptom, not a problem. We must rely on our teachers and administrators to determine the true problem manifesting into school truancy or school phobia. Only then can we direct our attention to successful prevention and intervention strategies that will help the pupil be successful in school. Our partnership begins with the partnership between school officials, teachers, parents and students. Only when this partnership needs support a referral to the appropriate court will be considered. We know when non-attendance is becoming a behavior pattern, the earlier in a student's school career that action is taken, the better chance to assure intervention success.

Introduction

According to research, pupils are absent from school for a variety of reasons, including sometimes-willful truancy. In situations of truancy, the problems causing absenteeism are often: poverty, neglect, lack of parental support or understanding of the importance of education, peer influence or difficulties, and boredom to name a few. We find that students are engaged and regularly attend school when: class is interesting, instruction is participatory, parents "insist" on attendance, the teacher makes class special, teachers care and have high expectations, teachers enforce classroom rules, and teachers mark attendance promptly.

It is the role of the Matagorda Independent School District to ensure that we do not have students in violation of the Texas Education Code's Compulsory School Attendance law. It is always the decision of the superintendent when to make a court referral. We will try to concentrate efforts on prevention first and foremost. Attendance policies will be defined, distributed, explained and enforced consistently within the district. Our policy clearly states the consequences the students may face relative to lack of regular daily attendance (up to and including loss of credit).

Early and Regular Intervention

Parents/guardians will be notified in writing after 5, 10, and 15 absences occur. On the 10th notification, a conference will be set to review the absences and attendance policies and laws, watch a slide show on truancy which can be found at www.truancy.org, review "best practices for parents" handout, and sign an attendance contract. Depending on the needs of the student, the homeroom teacher may be asked to attend.

Following this meeting, should the student or parent violate, or be unwilling to follow the attendance contract, the superintendent will decide on court intervention. Again, we would hope that a reasonable time frame is provided for the student to change their behavior. We want to be sure to allow ample time for action by the student and parent to be in compliance with state law and the agreed upon contract expectations.

Court Intervention

If the superintendent feels a court petition is the best next step, the court will be provided a statement certifying that truancy prevention measures were administered and were not successful. Matagorda Independent School District will have available pertinent documentation such as contact logs, interventions made on behalf of the referred student, documentation regarding parent/guardian attitudes regarding truancy and school success, attendance contract, etc.

Review Policies and Student Code of Conduct

In order to set clear expectations regarding the connection between school attendance and school success, district policies and codes of conduct clearly articulate the consequences of non-attendance. In effort to be successful in truancy prevention teachers and administrators will regularly discuss these expectations throughout the year.

Promote Ongoing Communication with Parents and Community

Matagorda Independent School District will annually publish the main components of the Compulsory Attendance Act, the legal consequences, as well as a brief overview of our process in the enrollment packet, reference it in the Student Code of Conduct and provide a link to it on the district website. School officials may partner with law enforcement (often DARE Officers) to encourage attendance and discuss truancy prevention. Officers are in a good position to discuss the effects of truancy in terms of violence, crime, and other community statistics.

Truancy Response

- Saturday School - (to allow for the student to make-up time and work missed -- a type of 'second chance')
- Rewards for good attendance - (these vary and can be given by anyone at Matagorda Independent School District.
- In-School Suspension - (rather than out-of-school) for violation of attendance contract and to earn back credit
- Court Intervention - (to be determined by the superintendent)