



PUBLIC POLICY AND LAW CENTER

Get the Dropout Numbers Right: Require Written Documentation for Home Schooled Students

While Texas has been recognized nationally for its leadership in creating an exceptional student-tracking system, Texas Education Agency (TEA) policy allows students to register as "home schooled" without tangible evidence that the student has left public school to actually continue their education at home. Removing these students from the cohort without official written documentation from the student's parent allows for misuse of this leaver code. Such misuse can inflate the graduation rate and hide the dropout problem. In order for the dropout rate to be lowered or eliminated entirely, members of the Texas Legislature and all concerned Texans need to know the exact magnitude of the problem.

Proposed Policy Reform: Children at Risk proposes that the Texas Legislature instruct the Texas Education Agency to amend the leaver code to require school administrators to obtain a written, signed statement from the parent/guardian before removing a student from the public school system to be homeschooled. The parent/guardian and an authorized representative of the school should sign this document simultaneously at the time of the removal of the student from public school.

Rationale: Children at Risk is committed to seeing Texas accurately track its students to have a more precise accounting of graduation and dropout rates. Amending this leaver code to prevent misuse is a step toward that goal. Currently, TEA policy allows school districts to document the removal of a student to be homeschooled after an oral conversation with a parent/guardian. Parents are not required to submit a written document stating their intention to remove a student from the public school system.

Scope of the Problem: Nearly one-quarter of all students who leave the Texas public school system are reported to have left to be homeschooled. Since 2003, the number of high school students reported as leaving to be homeschooled has more than doubled in Texas, while the national rate of homeschoolers has increased by less than 50%. In an audit of one school district, the district did not have adequate documentation for the removal of 109 of the 276 reported home school leavers.

Children at Risk is aware of and sensitive to the needs of parents who choose to home school their children. **Nothing in this proposal will limit the ability of parents to choose home schooling and to control their children's educations.** In fact, Children at Risk believes that closing the home schooling loophole will actually increase the stature of home schooling by removing the current cloud of uncertainty concerning dropout rates.

How much will the bill cost? Children at Risk believes that this proposal can be implemented at no cost to the state.

For Questions or comments please contact:

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Increase Time on Task and Increase Learning: Extend Learning Time for Texas Students

While it may not be popular with kids, the research is clear: more time learning equals improved academic achievement and enhanced student learning. “Extended learning time: schools can add time to the existing school days, add days to the school year, or provide after-school programs and summer school sessions.

Proposed Policy Reform: Children at Risk urges the Texas Legislature to pass a resolution recognizing the educational benefits of extended learning time, particularly for low-income students. Current progress must not be diminished and a strong foundation supporting extended learning time must be set. By adding time, the entire school day can be restructured to provide a better education for all children and enable them to compete in the global economy of the 21st Century.

Rationale: Studies have proven that more time spent in the classroom, particularly with the longer school day, translates into more time for student engagement and a deeper level of study. Low-income and minority students benefit most from extended learning time because lower-income students are less likely than their more affluent peers to have educational resources outside of school.

Research shows that extended learning time can foster higher achievement in five key ways: increasing time on tasks, broadening and deepening coverage of curriculum, providing more opportunities for experiential learning, strengthening ability to work with diverse ability levels simultaneously, and deepening adult-child relationships.

Scope of the Problem: In 2009, 34% of Texas 4th graders and 27% of 8th graders tested below basic reading levels. Moreover, low-income children achieve approximately 23% below their more affluent peers. Extended learning time opens the possibility of a wider range of study and exposure to subjects such as history, science, music, and art. Adding time to the school year would serve as an opportunity for our children to boost academic performance, to close achievement gaps, and to take advantage of expanded enrichment in order to compete in a globalized market.

How much will the bill cost? Because Children at Risk is proposing a non-binding resolution in support of extended learning time, this proposal has no cost to the state.

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