

**March 25, 2025**

To: Senate Committee on Education K-16

Re: Senate Bill 991

Position: For

Honorable Chair Creighton and members of the Senate Education K-16 Committee,

EdTrust in Texas and the four organizations undersigned appreciate the opportunity to **submit written testimony in support of Senate Bill 991 (SB 991)**. As the Senate considers several data-driven strategies to improve student achievement, we commend you for recognizing consistent attendance as a prerequisite for maximizing the benefit of those strategies on academic progress.

Chronic absenteeism occurs when a student misses 10% or more of instructional time for any reason – excused or unexcused. Truancy is narrowly tied to unexcused absences and is currently defined in Texas code as missing 10 or more days without excuse within a six-month period during a school year.

Regardless of a student’s reason for missing school, a wealth of research demonstrates that chronic absenteeism poses a serious threat to student success at all grade levels, negatively impacting 3rd grade reading proficiency,<sup>i</sup> high school graduation,<sup>ii</sup> and postsecondary and workforce success.<sup>iii</sup> In fact, chronic absenteeism is the strongest predictor of dropping out of high school, more accurate than test scores.<sup>iv</sup>

**In Texas, chronic absenteeism has doubled since the pandemic, with 20% of all students missing at least 10% of instructional time.**<sup>v</sup> This alarming increase has impacted all regions and student groups, with rates of 25% for economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities who often lack the resources to make up for unfinished learning in school.

It has never been more necessary to improve attendance in Texas schools. SB 991 establishes essential building blocks to tackle this challenge by defining chronic absenteeism in statute, ensuring consistent reporting of chronic absenteeism and truancy data, and identifying chronically absent and truant students as “at risk” of dropping out.

## **I. SB 991 ENSHRINES A DEFINITION OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN STATE STATUTE**

Chronic absenteeism data was first publicly reported by the Texas Education Agency for the 2018-19 school year. SB 991 ensures this powerful indicator is enshrined in the Texas Education Code, defining chronic absenteeism as missing 10 percent or more of instructional time for any reason within a school year or any period of more than 30 days.

## **II. SB 991 ENSURES REPORTING OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AND TRUANCY DATA**

Chronic absenteeism and truancy data are essential tools to improve attendance. Average Daily Attendance (ADA) is based on how many students typically show up to school each day but masks when absences are adding up for individual students. Because chronic absenteeism and truancy reflect

attendance at the student level, they serve as early warning of disengagement to identify and intervene when a particular student is missing school.

Unfortunately, the reporting lag for chronic absenteeism data in Texas is currently 18 months. Data from the 2023-24 school year won't be publicly available until TAPR reports are released in November 2025. This makes Texas one of the slowest in the nation to compile and release this information.

More transparent and timely data is needed to inform strategic goals, resources, and interventions at the student, campus, and district level. SB 991 wisely requires the reporting of both chronic absenteeism and truancy data, providing local and state decision-makers with more complete information to distinguish between excused and unexcused absences and respond appropriately.

### III. SB 991 RECOGNIZES CHRONICALLY ABSENT AND TRUANT STUDENTS AS “AT RISK”

Research shows that a student who is chronically absent in any year between 8th and 12th grade is seven times more likely to drop out of school.<sup>vi</sup> Other studies have found attendance to be a better predictor of dropout than test scores. Adding these evidence-based indicators to the state's list of criteria for identifying students at-risk of dropping out of school will help ensure they receive additional support and interventions to improve both their academic and life outcomes.

Attendance is a solvable problem with several evidence-based interventions, but clear definitions and quality data are needed to better understand students' needs, engagement with school, and relationships between students, families, and school staff. **SB 991 provides a foundation for Texas schools to improve attendance and, as a result, student outcomes.**

Gratefully,  
Jonathan Feinstein  
State Director, The Education Trust in Texas

#### Supporting Organizations:



<sup>i</sup> Attendance Works. (2014). Attendance in the early grades: Why it matters for reading: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Attendance-in-the-Early-Grades.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Allensworth, E. & Easton, J. (2007). What matters for staying on track and graduating in Chicago public high schools: <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/what-matters-staying-track-and-graduating-chicago-public-schools>

<sup>iii</sup> Ginsburg, A., et al. (2014). Absences add up: How school attendance influences student success: [https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Absences-Add-Up\\_September-3rd-2014.pdf](https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Absences-Add-Up_September-3rd-2014.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Education Commission of the States (2017). Chronic Absenteeism: A key indicator of student success: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/accountability/academic-accountability/performance-reporting/chronic-absenteeism-a-key-indicator-of-student-success.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR) 2023

<sup>vi</sup> Utah Education Policy Center (2012). Research Brief: Chronic Absenteeism: [https://uepc.utah.edu/\\_resources/documents/chronicabsenteeismresearchbrief.pdf](https://uepc.utah.edu/_resources/documents/chronicabsenteeismresearchbrief.pdf)

