

## HB 185 (Gonzalez)

*Relating to the inclusion of chronically absent students as students at risk of dropping out of school and the collection and reporting of data regarding those students.*



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### Scope of the Problem

Even before the pandemic, Texas had a problem with chronic absenteeism in its schools. Chronic absenteeism negatively impacts a student's ability to learn and decreases the likelihood that s/he will graduate on time, which hinders Texas's ability to meet the goals laid out in the 60x30TX strategic plan. **Texas does not currently define chronic absenteeism.** Texas needs to create a definition of chronic absenteeism in Texas statute.

Statewide, **chronic absenteeism averaged at 15.2% in 2021-2022 school** and varies dramatically by region. More than 760,000 students missed at least one-tenth of their instruction in 2021. The Corpus Christi and Midland regions have some of the highest rates of chronic absenteeism. The El Paso and Edinburg areas have some of the lowest rates. Similarly, different populations are more impacted than others. Pregnant students have the highest rates of chronic absenteeism (almost 54%). Disaggregated by race and ethnicity, Black and Latino students are both above the state average (22 and 17 % respectively). The overall average rate of chronic absenteeism for special education students is 20%. **Chronic absenteeism increased three percentage points from the 2020-2021 school year to 2021-2022 school year.**

**Chronic absenteeism is an early warning sign that a student may need help.** A student who is chronically absent in any year is more likely to drop out of school. For high school students, lack of attendance is a better indicator of dropping out than test scores. Texans need better data to better support these students.

### Policy Recommendations

The Texas House of Representatives and Speaker Dade Phelan prioritized the study of chronic absenteeism in the 2022 interim. Policy recommendations are clear. Texas needs better data about chronic absenteeism in public schools and public charter schools. With better data, we can address the causes of chronic absenteeism.

- Define chronic absenteeism in the Texas Education Code as a student who misses **10%** or more of instructional time within an academic year for any reason.
- Add chronic absenteeism to the "at risk" category to better support students who are chronically absent and therefore at risk of dropping out.
- Require that TEA report chronic absenteeism to increase transparency and better target student supports.

#### FOR QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS PLEASE CONTACT:

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