



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO AND BEXAR COUNTY



MAYOR JULIÁN CASTRO
CITY OF SAN ANTONIO
P.O. Box 839966
SAN ANTONIO, TX 78283
(210) 207-7060

JUDGE NELSON W. WOLFF
101 WEST NUEVA ST., SUITE 1019
SAN ANTONIO, TX 78205-3482
(210) 335-1326

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Contact: Laura Jesse
210.335.0073/o

City, County come together to prevent truancy

County, city and school officials are coming together to cut back the rate of truancy in Bexar County through a Uniform Truancy Case Management Program. Commissioners Court approved the program in April and City Council is expected to consider approval of the program at the end of the month.

The program is the result of a months-long study conducted by the San Antonio/Bexar County Joint Commission on Truancy, a committee formed by legislation signed into law in June 2013 that required Mayor Julián Castro and County Judge Nelson Wolff to appoint a committee to recommend a uniform method of addressing truancy. Rep. Mike Villarreal and Sen. Leticia Van de Putte sponsored the legislation. Councilman Rey Saldaña served as chairman of the commission. Members of the Commission included judges, justices of the peace, school officials and civic leaders.

“I’m proud of the progress my colleagues and I have made early on in the Truancy Committee,” said Rep. Villarreal. By focusing on diversion and early intervention measures, we hope to prevent kids and parents from having to go to court. This committee represents an historic collaboration with school districts, the courts, elected officials and the community working together to get kids back on track.”

The point of the program is to provide a consistent way to file and handle truancy and other minor juvenile criminal cases throughout Bexar County, regardless of the school district. The program will emphasize use of diversion efforts to keep kids in school and out of the criminal justice system.

“Every young mind is important to the future of San Antonio,” Mayor Castro said. “Innovative programs like this will help ensure that no young person falls through the cracks.”

Under an amendment to the City and County Master Interlocal Agreement, the City will administer the truancy program — including diversion efforts through the schools — and adjudicate all truancy cases filed by public school districts and charter schools in Bexar County.

“Recognizing the need for a more simplified and unified process, our committee set out to create a system that not only makes the process of filing truancy cases more consistent, but also develops a partnership with the ‘court side’ and ‘school side’ of truancy in order to emphasize prevention and interventions over criminalization,” said Councilman Saldaña.

In addition to truancy cases, the City’s Municipal Court system will hear juvenile class C misdemeanor offenses, with the exception of traffic offenses and those juvenile cases for which the city does not have jurisdiction.

The County will transfer revenue generated by \$5 and \$2 fees for use by the City to fund the juvenile case management program. The County also will appoint a justice of the peace as the truancy program liaison; make available the County’s electronic case management system for truancy cases for use by the City and school districts, and continue to maintain the electronic filing system.

The US Department of Education reports that a student drops out of school in the United States every 26 seconds. In Texas one out of every four high school freshmen will not make it to graduation, a statistic that doubles in lower income areas. A study by Texas A&M University estimated the economic costs to taxpayers of one class of dropouts in 2012 could be as high as \$9.6 billion in lost wages and taxes, welfare payments and the cost of incarceration.

“I’m pleased to see the City, County and school districts working together to address this critical issue,” County Judge Nelson Wolff said. “Many inmates report truancy as their first interaction with the criminal justice system; through this program we will be able to address the reasons these students are truant before they ever acquire a charge. Then we will have a better chance of keeping them out of jail as adults.”

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