



## **Bexar County Commissioners Court**

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### **Uniform Truancy Program approved by Commissioners Court**

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 on Tuesday took the next step in solidifying that program by approving an amendment to the County's Master Interlocal Agreement with the City of San Antonio.

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.

"Truancy has been called a gateway crime in that a great majority of inmates in adult jails report their first appearance before a judge was as a juvenile on truancy charges," County Judge Nelson Wolff said. "If we can keep these kids in school and address the reasons they are truant before they ever acquire a charge, then we have a better chance of keeping them out of jail as adults."

Under the amendment, 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. 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.

“It’s good to see the justices of the peace and school districts coming together on this issue,” Commissioner Paul Elizondo said. “We’ve put together a good plan, let’s make it work. Keeping kids in school is the goal that we have to keep our eyes on.”

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 Julian Castro and Judge 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.

The San Antonio City Council is expected to vote on the agreement amendment in May.

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