

# **Significant Loss in Daily Attendance Rate for the El Paso Independent School District for School Year 2016- 2017: A Root Cause Analysis**

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# Significant Loss in Daily Attendance Rate: A Root Cause Analysis

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF DAILY STUDENT ATTENDANCE

In order for students to succeed in any program of study, it is a forgone conclusion that they must be an active participant in the program of study itself, beginning with actually being present, whether in person or virtually through technological means, to benefit from the instruction and opportunities for practice provided through said program of study. Attendance is, in fact, so important to school success that a campaign was formed nationwide to encourage daily school attendance. According to the Absences Add Up website <http://absencesaddup.org/campaign-partners/>, “This campaign is part of *Every Student, Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism*. In support of the My Brother’s Keeper (MBK), the U.S. Departments of Education (ED), Health and Human Services (HHS), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Justice (DOJ) launched this initiative to support coordinated community action to address the underlying causes of local chronic absenteeism affecting millions of children in our Nation’s public schools each year. The goal of this effort is to create a diverse coalition of local stakeholders to work together to engage and support students who are chronically absent, so that youth and family outcomes of entire communities can be dramatically improved.”

## STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

There has been a sharp significant reduction in Student Daily Attendance Rate for 2016-2017 in the El Paso Independent School District as evidenced by Chart 1 below:

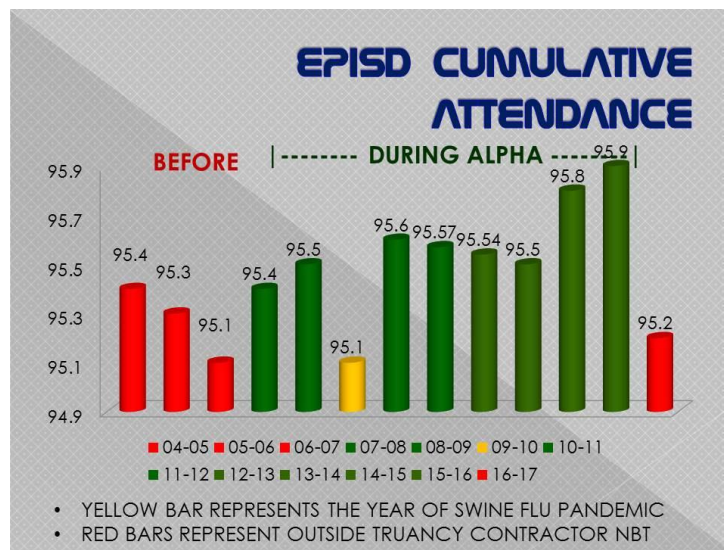


CHART 1 DATA SOURCE: EPISD TEAMS SYSTEM END OF YEAR ATTENDANCE DATA

## **RECENT CHANGES IN ATTENDANCE LAWS AND POLICY**

### **CHANGES IN COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE LAW IMPLEMENTED IN SEPTEMBER OF 2015**

In 2015, a large push was made in the state of Texas, through organizations such as Texas Appleseed, to decriminalize truancy throughout the state. This was in response to abuses of compulsory attendance laws which resulted in investigations of Civil Rights Violations in Tarrant County and other parts of the state. As a result, the provisions of Texas Education 25.085 changed significantly in this non-exhaustive list of ways:

1. It is no longer possible to charge a student criminally for Failure to Attend School. It is now a Civil Court submission for a possible finding of “Truant Conduct” with very little in the way of a court fine or punitive action structure.
2. Although the offense of Parent Contributing to Non-Attendance is still a Criminal one, the potential fine is reduced to a stratified fining structure beginning with \$100 on first offense and increasing in \$100 increments upon each subsequent offense until a maximum fine of \$500 per offense is reached. The offense count resets at the end of each academic school year.
3. A 45 Day Plan of Attendance Improvement is now required upon a student reaching three (3) unexcused absences in a four (4) week period. This Intervention Plan approach puts the responsibility of attendance increase and student impact back upon school personnel where it actually has always belonged.
4. A Written Notice of Absence must be sent to parents/guardians upon three (3) absences in a four (4) week period notifying parents of the 45 Day Plan Requirement and potential submission of a Civil Case of Truant Conduct against student or a Criminal Case of Contributing to Non-Attendance filed against the parent.

### **EL PASO ISD CHANGES IN ATTENDANCE FOR CREDIT POLICY FOR 2016-2017 SCHOOL YEAR**

#### **El Paso ISD District of Innovation Plan Waives TEC 25.092 (90% Rule)**

In 2015, the Texas State Legislature, in its 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session, passed House Bill 1842 under the justification that Public School Districts in Texas should have the same flexibility to waive state education laws that Charter Schools in Texas have. In essence, this law allows Texas Public School Districts to “charterize” themselves. This law requires that the school district develop a plan for cursory approval by the Commissioner of Education, called a District of Innovation Plan which justifies waiving parts of the Texas Education Code for the benefit of student achievement.

The El Paso ISD District of Innovation Plan, adopted formally on May 17, 2016, formally waived the entirety of TEC 25.092. Below is a publicly-available excerpt from the El Paso ISD Plan:

***In order to provide engaging and challenging learning to all students, the District needs relief from Texas Education Code Section 25.092, which inhibits the goals of the Plan by not allowing the District to issue class credit or a final grade for a class if a student is not in attendance an arbitrary percentage of the time that a class is offered. In other words, the law currently requires the District to award class credit to students based on "seat time" rather than based on content mastery. Exemption from this requirement will provide educational advantages to students of the District by promoting active learning through innovation in the methods, locations, and times instruction may be delivered to students, thereby accommodating students with legitimate scheduling conflicts, reducing dropouts, and increasing the number of qualifying graduates.***

***One of the overarching goals in the Strategic Plan within the focus area of providing engaging and challenging learning is to implement tools, resources, and training that support blended and personalized learning for both students and teachers. Blended learning, where instruction is delivered through a combination of time in class and time spent learning online, is one example where exemption from Section 25.092 will likely foster greater innovation to promote active learning and improve student outcomes. In addition, exemption from this requirement will allow the District not to penalize students who miss class due to legitimate school activities and will promote student engagement, as well as social and emotional development, by encouraging more students to participate in such activities.***

***Relief from Section 25.092 does not in any way impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League ("UIL") rules. Moreover, opting out of Section 25.092 in no way limits or modifies a teacher's right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28.0214, nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28.0216.***

## **ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS**

### **Was The Drop In Student Daily Attendance Caused By An Increase In “Truancy” As Has Been Suggested?**

According to El Paso ISD publicly available attendance data, 2016-2017 saw a sudden, year-long increase in absences using most, if not all, Absence Codes including Excused AND Unexcused absence codes. There is no statistical smoking gun that would indicate that the loss in attendance was caused by Truancy. There does appear to be, however, a need for increased training concerning operational definitions for the word TRUANCY and the phenomenon of UNEXCUSED ABSENCE.

**TRUANCY** is defined rather tightly as an absence caused by a student who knowingly refuses to go to school for no good reason.

**UNEXCUSED ABSENCES** occur for an extremely wide variety of reasons which **DO NOT** necessarily include **TRUANCY**.

#### **CASE EXAMPLE OF AN UNEXCUSED ABSENCE THAT IS NOT CONSIDERED TRUANCY**

A military service member receives three weeks (15 days) of pre-deployment leave and wishes to take her family to visit their home of record prior to deployment. The military service member files a Leave Request with the campus principal in order to have the student absences excused. The campus principal, following established EPISD practices, grants five (5) days of EXCUSED ABSENCES and informs the parents that all other absences will be considered UNEXCUSED. Because of the loss of the 90% rule, the student will receive credit for classes as long as the student maintains at least a 70% class (standard of mastery in El Paso ISD), irrespective of the number of absences the student actually accrues during the semester. The parent makes the informed decision to keep the student out of school for the remaining 10 days even though they will be unexcused. The student now has 10 UNEXCUSED but NOT TRUANCY days on their record.

## **Was The Drop Caused By The Change in Compulsory Attendance Laws At The State Level?**

Although a drop was registered by many districts that did not anticipate the change in the law implemented in September of 2015, this was not the case in El Paso ISD. In fact, a shift to a campus administration based Early Intervention System was spearheaded by the EPISD's Alpha Team and the Department for Student Retention and Truancy Prevention as early as 2014. This included a variety of intervention strategies and levels which resulted in an overall increase in EPISD Attendance Rate for 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 as evidenced by Chart 1.

**FINDING:** The Attendance Rate for 2015-2016, the year of implementation of the changes in Compulsory Attendance Law, was the HIGHEST ATTENDANCE RATE IN AT LEAST THE LAST 20 YEARS IN EL PASO ISD. This was due to the districtwide emphasis on parent notification and student intervention which also resulted in a drop from over 2000 Justice of the Peace cases filed in 2014-2015 to just under 200 cases filed in 2015-2016.

**CONCLUSION:** The drop in Student Daily Attendance Rate in El Paso ISD was NOT caused entirely by the changes in Texas Compulsory Education and Attendance Laws. **SEE SIDE BY SIDE TABLE A FOR COMPARISON IN STUDENT INTERVENTIONS DUE TO CHANGES IN TRUANCY LAWS.**

## **So What DID Cause The Sudden And Dramatic Drop In Student Daily Attendance Rate For 2016-2017?**

The most significant change in El Paso ISD Attendance Policy that took place in 2016-2017 was the District of Innovation Plan Waiver of Texas Education Code Chapter 25.092 Attendance For Credit, colloquially known as the 90% Rule.

**FINDING:** It appears the loss of the System of Student Interventions caused by the vacuum left after TEC Ch. 25.092 was waived caused a community-wide perception that Daily Student Attendance is no longer important in the El Paso Independent School District.

**DAILY STUDENT ATTENDANCE CULTURE CHANGE:** Because of the waiver of the 90% Rule, it became widely known through the community that if a student maintains a 70 in class, the student would now receive credit for classes regardless of the number of absences the student had actually accrued in class.

It appears that the waiver of the 90% Rule began with the best of intentions. In fact, prior to the waiver, students were forced, due to inconsistent and sometimes draconian enforcement of El Paso ISD's Board Policy FEC, to perform credit recovery activities because of absences caused by school based activities such as tutoring, counseling, major sports and competitions and significant illness. This was never the intent of the law itself but was the result of conservative definitions put in play by the Texas Education Agency's interpretation of TEC Ch. 25.092.

**CONCLUSION:** Unfortunately the El Paso ISD's decision to waive TEC 25.092 in its entirety, rather than simply adjusting the requirements of the law, coupled with the complete and total vacuum on the Early Student Intervention side of the house had the very real effect of devaluing daily student attendance.

**SEE SIDE BY SIDE TABLE B FOR PRE AND POST WAIVER STUDENT INTERVENTION PROCESS COMPARISON.**

## SIDE BY SIDE COMPARISON

### EPISD CHANGES IN 2015-2017 EARLY STUDENT INTERVENTIONS

#### **COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE CHANGES**

| BEFORE TRUANCY LAW CHANGED  | AFTER TRUANCY LAW CHANGED   |
|---|---|
|   |   |
| NOTICE OF ABSENCE ON 3 UNEXCUSED DAYS OR PARTS OF DAYS ONLY (ONLY ONCE FOR THE SCHOOL YEAR) | NOTICE OF ABSENCE ON 3 UNEXCUSED DAYS OR PARTS OF DAYS ONLY (ONLY ONE PER YEAR) |
| FILING IN JP COURT ON 3 IN A 4 WEEK(PERMISS)  | START 45 DAY PLAN AFTER NOTICE OF ABSENCE RECEIVED BY PARENT                    |
| FILING IN JP COURT ON 10 IN 6 MONTH   | STUDENT CASE IS CIVIL CASE WITH NO FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCE                        |
| STUDENT/PARENT INTERVENTION COURT ORDERED   | PARENT CASE IS CRIMINAL CASE. POTENTIAL FINE IS \$100 ON FIRST OFFENSE.         |
| POSSIBLE \$500 FINE ON STUDENT AND/OR PARENT  | CASE FILING AT DISCRETION OF ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY                        |
| POSSIBLE TO RE-FILE MORE THAN ONCE PER YEAR   |   |

**TABLE A**



## SIDE BY SIDE COMPARISON

### EPISD CHANGES IN 2015-2017 EARLY STUDENT INTERVENTIONS

#### **ATTENDANCE FOR CREDIT (90% RULE) CHANGES**

| WITH 90% RULE   | WITHOUT 90% RULE  |
|---|---|
| APPLIES TO ALL ABSENCES, EXCUSED OR UNEXCUSED   | NO POLICY ADDRESSES COMBINATION ABSENCES.   |
| WARNING OF LOSS OF CREDIT SENT FOR EVERY CLASS POTENTIALLY LOSING CREDIT TO ATTENDANCE (MULTIPLE LETTERS POSSIBLE EACH SEMESTER.) | INTERVENTIONS, IF ANY, IMPLEMENTED AT CAMPUS DISCRETION. NO INTERVENTIONS ARE REQUIRED BY POLICY      |
| EARLY INTERVENTION TEAM MEETS WITH STUDENT AND PARENT TO ATTEMPT TO PREVENT CREDIT LOSS (PRINCIPAL'S PLAN)                        | NO WRITTEN NOTICE OF POTENTIAL CREDIT LOSS  |
| MAKE UP WORK IS DOCUMENTED  | NO MONITORING   |
| ACADEMIC PLAN IS DEVELOPED ACCORDING TO STUDENT NEED  | IF STUDENT HAS AT LEAST A 70% IN CLASS, STUDENT GETS CREDIT NO MATTER HOW MANY ABSENCES ACCRUED.      |
| MONITORING OF THE PLAN TAKES PLACE THROUGHOUT SEMESTER  | NO THREAT OF POSSIBLE CREDIT LOSS OR ANY OTHER CONSEQUENCES FOR EXCUSED/UNEXCUSED ABSENCE COMBINATION |
| STUDENT AND PARENT ACCOUNTABLE FOR DOCUMENTATION OF COMPLETION  |   |
| LOSS OF CREDIT LETTERS SENTS FOR EVERY CLASS FOR WHICH CREDIT IS LOST DUE TO ATTENDANCE   |   |
| PRINCIPAL'S PLAN COMMITTEE OR ATTENDANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETS TO EVALUATE CREDIT REINSTATEMENT                                  |   |

**TABLE B**

# **EPISD ATTENDANCE POLICY CHANGES FROM 2015-2016 TO 2016-2017**

## **Qualitative Data – Attendance Survey Taken In January of 2017**

### **RESPONSES FROM CAMPUS ADMINISTRATORS CONCERNING ATTENDANCE RATE (ISSUES IDENTIFIED AND SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES) Compiled by Alpha Team and Alpha Director Mark Mendoza**

#### **Statement of Problem and Survey Questions**

For the 2016-2017 school year, Alpha Initiative and the Department for Student Retention and Truancy Prevention have identified a steadily declining attendance rate that is outside of the normal parameters for the school district as evidenced by the longitudinal districtwide attendance data presented in periodic Alpha Attendance Reports. In analyzing daily attendance data while compiling this report over the last school year, Alpha Director has identified three distinct attendance patterns:

- 1 INCREASE IN ATTENDANCE RATE OVER LAST YEAR – A small number of campuses have managed an increase in Year To Date attendance when compared to last school year.
- 2 SMALL DECREASE IN ATTENDANCE RATE OVER LAST YEAR – A number of campuses have decreased attendance Year To Date attendance rate but have kept the decrease to .5% or less.
- 3 LARGE DECREASE IN ATTENDANCE RATE OVER LAST YEAR – A number of campuses have decreased Year To Date attendance rate by .5% or more as compared to last year.

Alpha Team has queried all campuses to find out campus perspective concerning the following questions:

1. If you have an ATTENDANCE INCREASE or a DECREASE of less than .5%, what successful strategies have you put into play at your campus to garner these results?
2. If you have an ATTENDANCE DECREASE of any kind, to what would you attribute the DECREASE?

NOTE: In order to ensure candid responses, participants who responded will be identified by campus level and geographical area only. Individual respondents will not be identified. In cases where personnel identified themselves or their campus, identification was removed and school names were replaced with (Our School).

## Qualitative Responses from Campus Administrators

**Northeast Middle School Administrator:** “The reason we are declining in our attendance rate is because our parents are much more lenient in allowing their children to stay home unnecessarily. When we speak to students and parents during our outreach events, they will typically cite two major changes in the consequences for missing school (no loss of credit for failing to meet 90% rule, as well as changes in truancy court). Our parents and students are informed. In order to combat this, we need to provide incentives, engaged learning environments, and consistent follow-up with our at-risk students. If you notice in the data, this decline is not an isolated incident. It is occurring everywhere. Thank you as always for your reports... We use them as part of our weekly updates to help us combat this campus-wide.”

**Northeast High School Administrator:** “I contribute the drop to a number of reasons to include:

1. The removal of the 90% rule as a result of the District of Innovation status.
2. The changes in the laws in regards to court filings.
3. The district calendar that keeps us in school until Dec. 23.
4. Not being able to send students that are on transfer back to their home school until they reapply the following year.

I believe these factors played the biggest role in our numbers decreasing. I definitely don't think it is from lack of effort by staff. As you know we work tirelessly to get our kids in.”

**Northeast High School Administrator:** “I believe the lack of the 90% Rule is the main reason for the decline. Also, our average number of students absent this year and last year is a bit less than 70 a day. However, last year we had a larger student population. This year, most of our students with attendance issues are students who have been at (Our School) for a one to three years, so same students but smaller total student body. Thus, the attendance rate is lower this year. Lastly, some of our military families are not receptive to and/or knowledgeable of state and campus attendance rules/procedures. This causes issues with overall absenteeism and unexcused absences.”

**Northeast Elementary School Administrator:** “Many of our absences are due to more deployments as opposed to last year. Also, absences are in in our SPED PPCD.”

**Westside Elementary School Administrator:** ““EVERY PERIOD COUNTS”

- It begins in the classroom with the teachers contacting parents when students are absent
- Teacher will notify with detail to Principal, Assistant Principal and PEIMS Clerk
- Documentation is crucial
- Attendance form created
- Parent Meetings are set up to provide assistance for parents
- Excessive Absence Reports are run
- NOA's are mailed
- 45 Day Plans are created
- PBS there are awards, incentives, motivation, golden ticket
- Communication with parents is crucial
- Across the Board Team effort
- Teachers, Administrators, PEIMS Clerk
- Daily Calls to Parents

**Westside Elementary Administrator:** “One of the main issues that (Our School) saw this past fall semester, was the increase of absences before the Christmas break. Many students did not attend school between the days of December 19, 2016 to December 23, 2016. Many parents were told that the absences were going to be unexcused, but did not care because they all said they already had plan of going out of town for those days. They were very upset that the district had made the holidays break so close to Christmas. We are currently doing a lot of 45 day plans due to all the 3 or more unexcused absences that were accrued during the last week of school in December. When conferencing with those parents, they understood that attendance is very important but that they had no choice before the winter break due to their previous plans of travel over the holidays. (Our School) is working diligent to get the students attendance rate higher than last year.”

**Westside High School Administrator:** “I think that students and parents know that attendance is not required to get credit for courses, so they are taking more opportunities to do other things during the school day. Many of our absences are excused, which supports that idea.

Also, there are a few students that have an enormous number of absences and those bring the campus's overall attendance rate down. At (Our School) we haven't had to work too hard to have a high attendance rate, but as the demographics change, we need to add interventions.”

**Westside Elementary Attendance Clerk:** “I think at my school that the Parents don't see anything happening to them (Parents) even though I'm telling them and asking for Dr. notes based on 6T and 7T. With the 90% rule, they were actually listening and were afraid of being sent to Court and getting the notices. (Our Administrator) has been calling and e-mailing herself and still doesn't get responses. A month or two ago, she set up meetings and no one came.”

**Northeast Elementary Administrator:** “Even though our drop was very minimal, I would like to state that the district calendar hurt us with having Christmas break start on 12/23. This longer time period in December affected us because parents were used to being out one week earlier. I had more parent requests in December for family leaves and military situations that contributed to this drop. There are pros and cons to this calendar because with late release for Christmas break came a later return back to routine time. With that said, I feel this was part of the problem not just with students but with employees as well. District needs to look at the calendar with more scrutiny and avoid a late Christmas break release in the future.”

**Central/East Elementary Administrator:** “Teachers graph attendance. We hold weekly competitions. The class with 100% attendance for the week gets a popcorn party...we make sure you can smell the popcorn in the hallways.”

Westside Elementary Administrator: “Telephone Calls to Parents by Assistant Principal and PEIMS Clerk, NOA's (Notices of Absence) mailed out, 45 Day Plans, Home Visits, Incentives are provided with the assistance of their PTA for students Pizza Parties, Popcorn,etc.for students with perfect attendance, no tardies and early pick ups. IN ADDITION ALPHA Residence Verifications when NOA's were returned and ALPHA Home Visits”

**Central Middle School Administrator:** “In my humble opinion there are two main factors:

First, court is really no longer a threat. The majority of our attendance (middle school level) is now excused. We rarely reach the threshold for filing any more. In the rare instance we do, once a 45 day plan is put in place the attendance either improves or parents are more vigilant about excusing absences.

Second, the end of the 90% rule. The process as we had it in place was too time consuming and tedious, but the mere fact that students could lose credit whether the absences were excused or not was a major reason attendance was higher last year.”

**Central Alternative School Administrator:** “A decline in attendance this year for (Our School) can be attributed to the following:

1. Average enrollment for both campuses is significantly less for both campuses compared to last year. Consequently, absences have had a greater adverse effect, percentage wise, on our overall attendance rates.

2. Many of our students had serious attendance issues at their home campuses prior to enrolling at (Our School). In fact, many of these students were sent based on their poor attendance (SDAFs for these students indicate action codes of “Insubordination” for excessive absences).

3. Most of our middle school students reside in the northeast and had a far easier time getting to school before the merger—when (Our School) was located at the (Former Site) campus. As it stands now, if a (Our School) student misses the bus, it is far more difficult to find a way to get downtown as opposed to the (Former Site) location.

4. Finally, we have had several high school students simply stop coming to school for weeks on end despite the concerted efforts of our intake/transition administrator, social workers and Alpha team members.

5. Several students have been admitted to UBH during the course of the school year which also affects our attendance rates.”

**Central Elementary Administrator:** “We were higher than last year’s attendance up until January 2017. The reason for the decrease is Military leave the week of December 19, 2016. Families travel by car for the most part and started pulling their children from school heavily on Dec 21, 2016. Poor planning of the EPISD Calendar regarding the holiday break.”

**Northeast Elementary Administrator:** “(Our School) had an influx of leave requests during the week of December 19-23rd because the EPISD calendar did not coincide with the military leave. Fort Bliss permitted leave during that week and many parents chose to take leave regardless of whether or not the absences were approved.”

**Northeast Elementary Administrator:** “Due to high absences on Dec. 22nd-23rd with parents not sending students to school and stating the family would be going out of town, we had over 70 absences. Parent complained that school was letting out too late, therefore, several parents were not sending their child.”

**Westside Elementary PEIMS Clerk:** “Our case of low attendance was because parents had OT (Out of Town) trips plus we have had lots of stomach, fever problems.”

**Central Elementary Administrator:** “(Our School) has had a slight decrease from last year. We were at 96.62% last year and are now at a 96.59%, which is a .03 decrease. I am working closely with our PEIMS clerk as well as our teachers to address attendance concerns. Notice of Absences are sent out weekly. Our PEIMS clerk is also vigilant to request resident checks when we get NOAs returned. We are meeting with parents to put them on 45 day plans. Our Social Worker frequently makes home visits to parents who we are unable to reach to discuss attendance concerns.

We recognize students with perfect attendance each month by giving them a special dog tag for that month. Also, classes work as a team to spell out PERFECT ATTENDANCE. Each day the entire class is present they get to add a letter. Once the words are spelled out, they are recognized on the morning announcements and receive 5 extra minutes of recess.

We are working hard to improve our attendance rate on a daily basis.”

**Northeast Elementary Administrator:** “During the month of December we had several families request time to travel. This had a negative effect on attendance. It dropped from 96.6 the first quarter to 95.5 the second quarter. We are working with individual families on attendance through phone calls and conferences with administrators. We are also increasing efforts to celebrate good attendance by class and encourage great attendance through success rallies and announcements.”

**Northeast Elementary Administrator:** “Our attendance has been impacted this year I believe to be by several factors.

1. Several of our families are coded as homeless and while transportation is provided attendance is sometime unpredictable.
2. There are a lot of students who are out due to illness of themselves or family members. Parents are keeping children home when siblings are sick.
3. Students are arriving to school after attendance has been recorded.
4. Some students have been out for long-term illnesses.
5. Parents don't contact the campus when students are going to be out leading to an excessive number of unverified absences.
6. Several families are involved in custody issues and sometimes keep students with them at home.

All these concerns are being addressed by our attendance review committee on a weekly and monthly basis. Daily phone calls are made to all students who do not attend school. Incentives are still in place to regard students for great attendance.”

**Northeast Elementary Administrator:** “The attendance at (Our School) dropped just slightly at .21, but I believe there are several reasons for the decrease:

1. The holiday schedule for December- Several parents pulled students out early those last few days. We only had 85% in attendance on 12/23!
2. Although we monitor attendance, parents are learning that we can only encourage attendance, but that students will not be risking retention based on attendance.
3. We have had quite a few stomach bugs go through classes and almost wipe everyone out.”

**Westside Elementary Administrator:** “As we discussed, any increases in attendance, I've attributed to the following, (particularly in the case of (Our School)):

Timely updates to attendance codes by PEIMS clerk (updating absences to tardies, updated unexcused absences to excused based on daily review of phone calls and doctors notes received from parents)

Constant monitoring of attendance through the maintenance of a database created with the help of Alpha Outreach Specialist.

Prompt and efficient response from Alpha Outreach Specialist and truancy officers on eService requests

Guidance from Alpha Outreach Specialist on attendance matters

Conferences held with parents when students move from Tier 1 to Tier 2 level of attendance concerns (Note: This is a community that frequently communicates with and amongst one another, and therefore, I believe that as I have had conferences with parents, the word has spread that good attendance is monitored and valued.)”

**Northeast Elementary Administrator:** “This year, (Our School) was selected to implement a new early childhood program. We added 2 sections of an early childhood Pre-K for 3yr olds with 18 students in the morning section and 21 students in the afternoon. PreK has always been an issue when it comes to attendance, but these new sections has hurt our attendance tremendously. I monitor our attendance percentages weekly and from K-5 it averages 95% and above. Our PreK percentages, to include 4 yr old, 3 yr old, and both PPCD units, on the other hand average between 86-90%.”

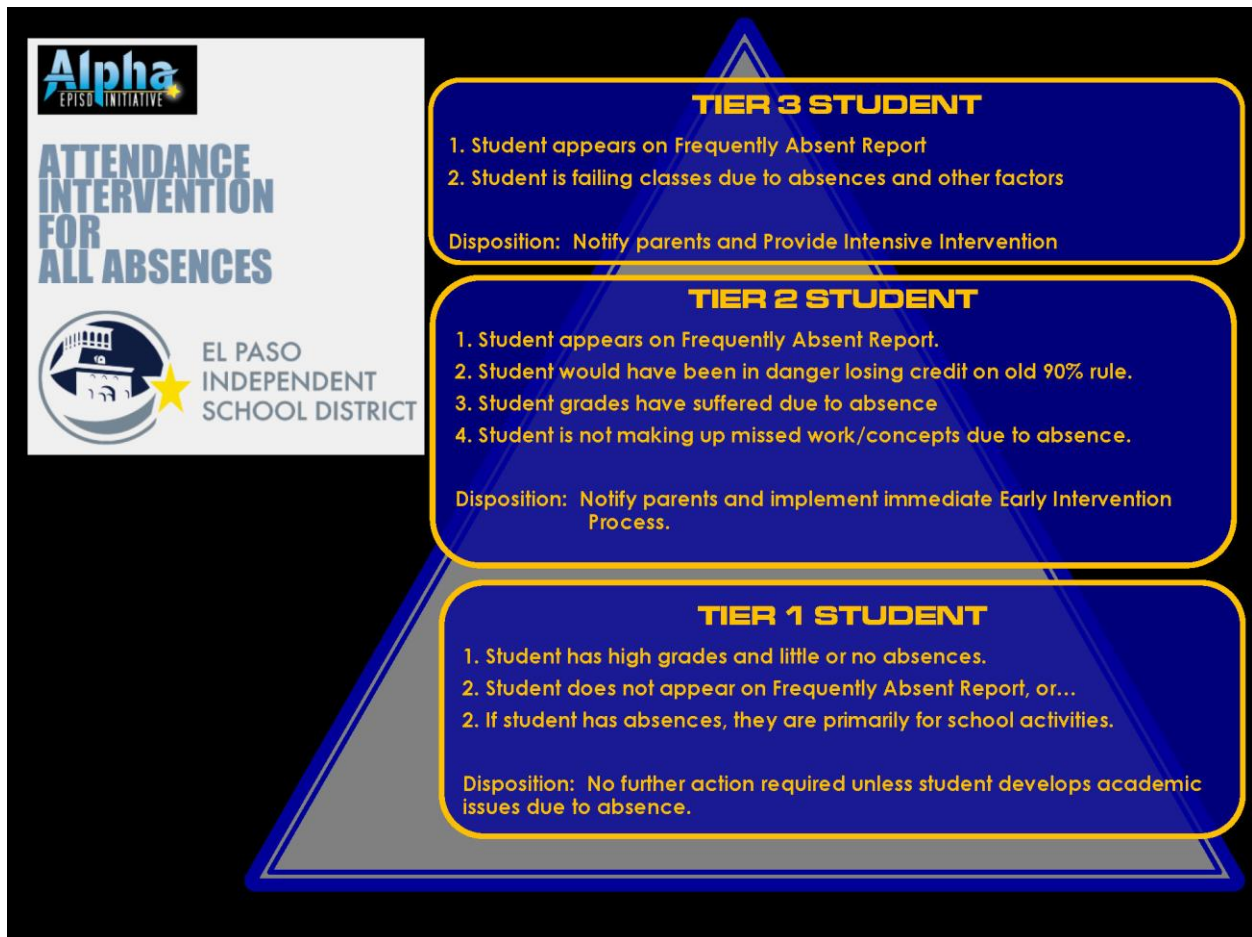
**Northeast Elementary Administrator:** “Our attendance is dropping because students are being picked up for medical appointments at different times of the day and they are being coded partial day absences after 10:00 am. On the average 6 students are picked up for appointments every day.”

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN DAILY STUDENT ATTENDANCE FOR EL PASO ISD

An increase in Daily Student Attendance can be accomplished within the span of 3-6 months utilizing the following best practices which were in play prior to the Waiver of the 90% Rule:

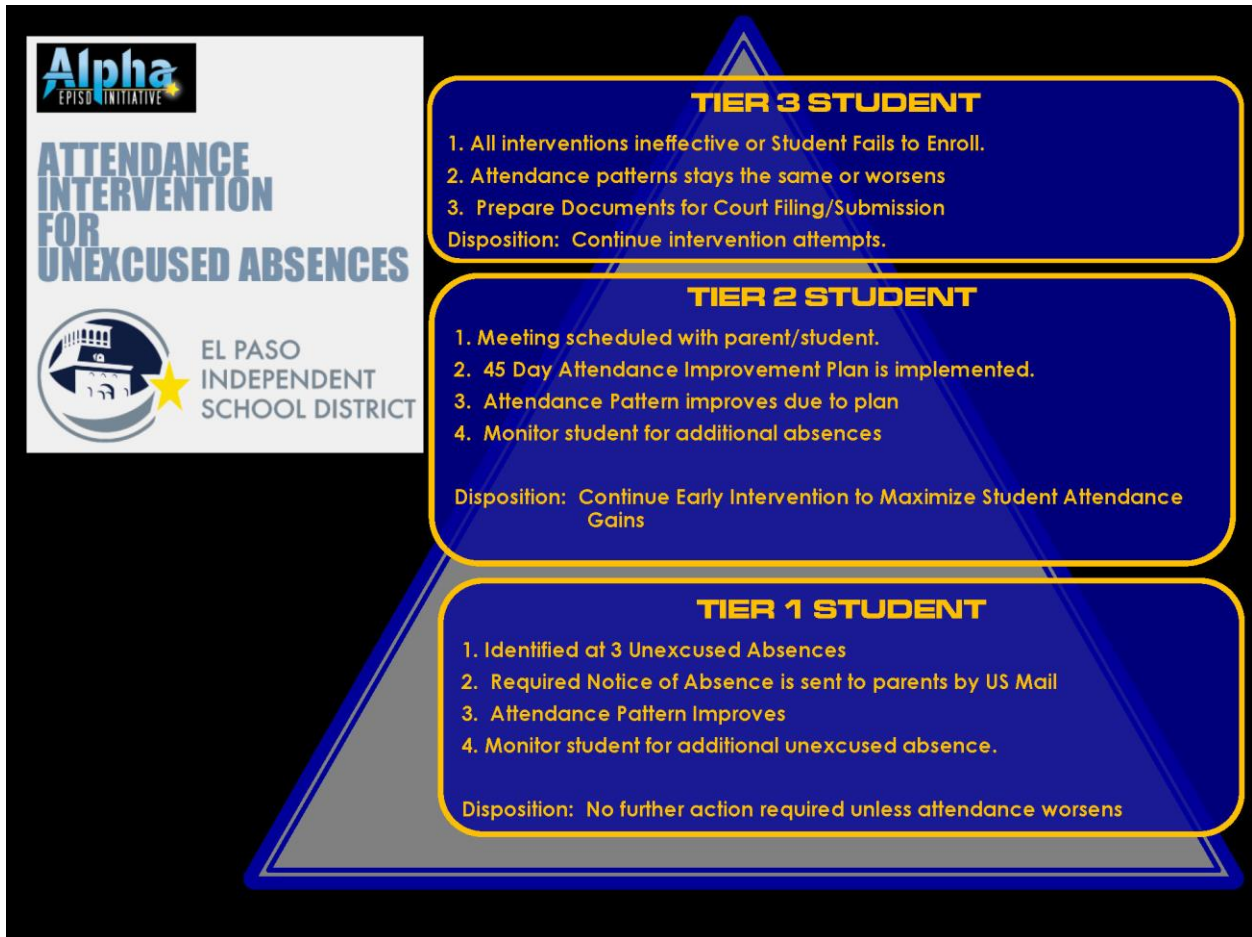
## BEST PRACTICE 1 – EARLY STUDENT IDENTIFICATION

### TIERING SYSTEM FOR STUDENT EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF FREQUENTLY ABSENT STUDENTS WITH COMBINATION OF EXCUSED AND UNEXCUSED ABSENCES



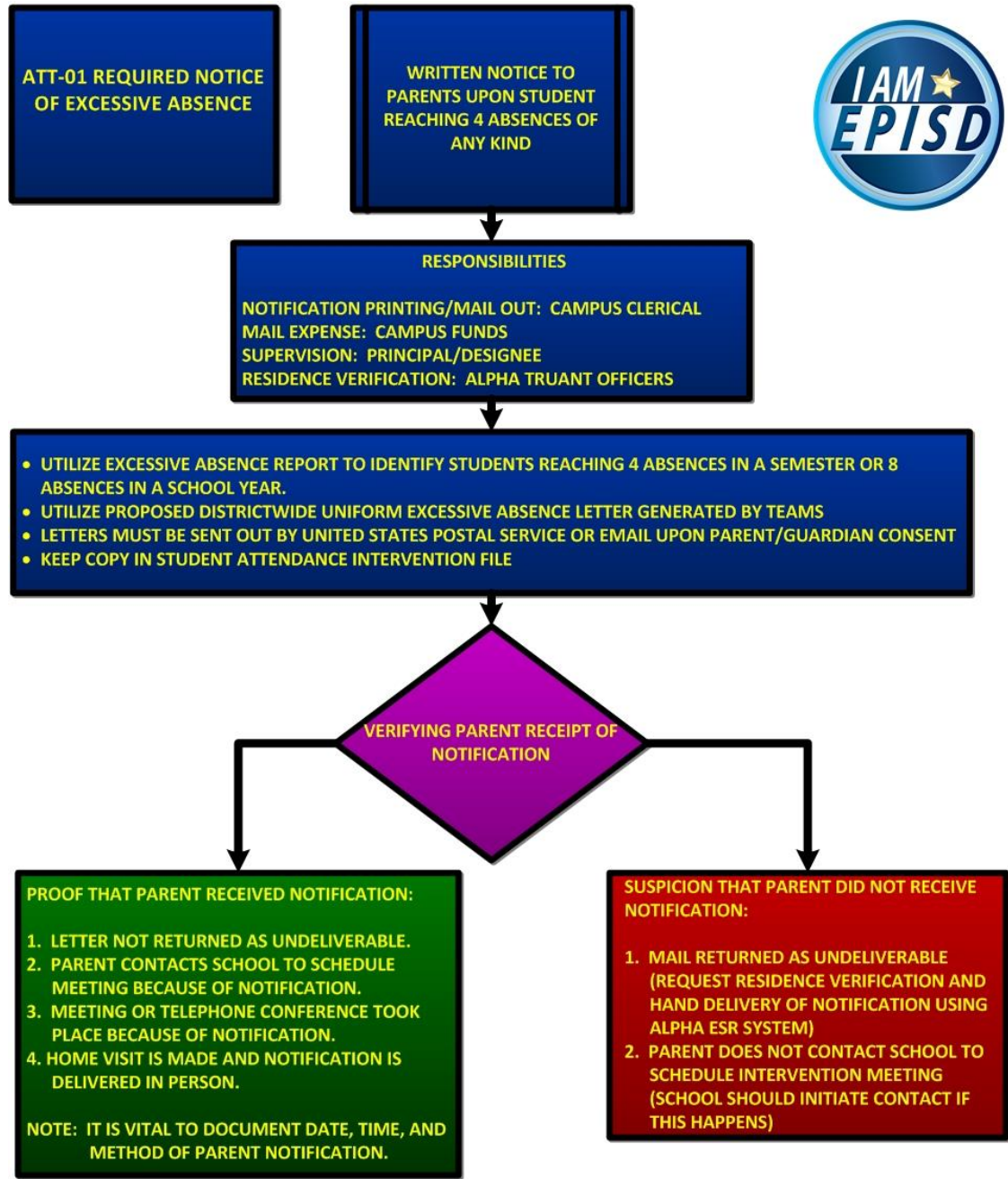


**TIERING SYSTEM FOR STUDENT EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF FREQUENTLY ABSENT STUDENTS WITH ONLY UNEXCUSED ABSENCES INCLUDING TRUANCY**



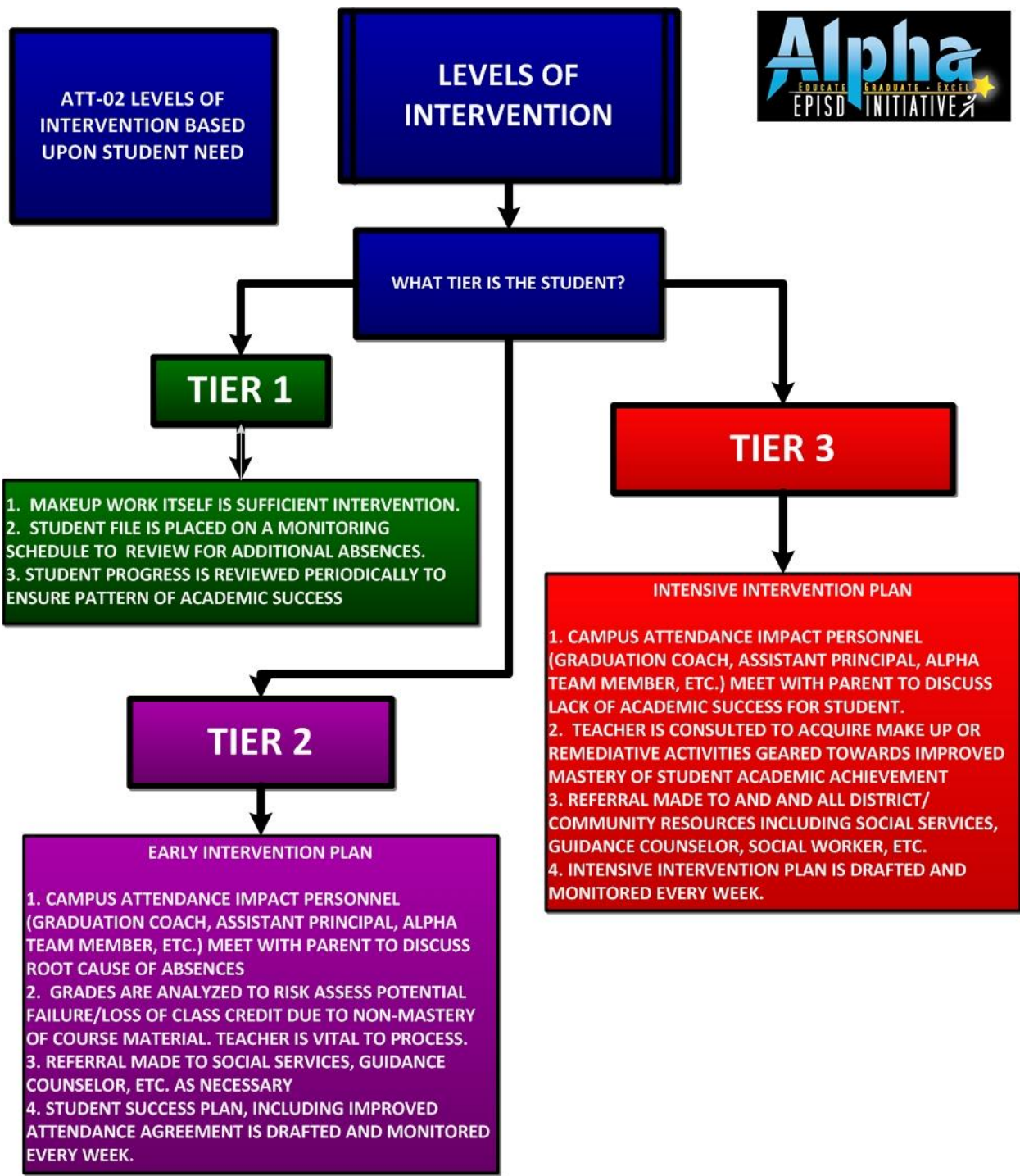
**IMPORTANT NOTE: STATE REQUIRED INTERVENTIONS FOR UNEXCUSED ABSENCES ARE ADDRESSED IN THE EPISD AND EL PASO COUNTYWIDE ANTI-TRUANCY MANUAL WHICH IS NOT A PART OF THIS DOCUMENT**

**BEST PRACTICE 2 – WRITTEN NOTIFICATION TO PARENTS OF PATTERN OF EXCESSIVE ABSENCE**



**NOTE: THIS IS NOT THE LEGALLY REQUIRED ANTI-TRUANCY PLAN. PROCESS IS A COUNTYWIDE PROCESS ADDRESSED IN THE EPISD TRUANCY PREVENTION MANUAL**

**BEST PRACTICE 3 – EARLY AND INTENSIVE INTERVENTION**



## **BEST PRACTICE 4 – DISTRICTWIDE PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN**

A CHANGE IN ATTENDANCE CULTURE took place last school year in EPISD. The following things happened, as evidenced by the Qualitative Data yielded through the Alpha Attendance Survey presented earlier in this document:

1. Parents, in many cases, no longer made an effort to schedule medical appointments outside of the instructional school day because there was no longer a pressing need to do so.
2. Parents, in many cases, no longer called in reasons for absence as there was very little reason to do so due to lack of consequences.
3. Students became aware that the number of absences they accrued did not matter as long as they were minimally passing their classes.
4. There were no longer written notifications sent home for any EXCESSIVE ABSENCE other than Unexcused Absences.

In order to effect swift and noticeable change in public perception of Daily Student Attendance as the most important indicator of student success, the El Paso Independent School District must make an EXTREMELY PUBLIC AND CONSPICUOUS RE-EDUCATION EFFORT COMMUNITY-WIDE STRESSING THE IMPORTANCE OF COMING TO SCHOOL EVERY DAY.

| <b>DAILY STUDENT ATTENDANCE<br/>PUBLIC RELATIONS PLAN</b> |   |                 |                      |  |
|---|---|-----------------|----------------------|--|
| <b>STAT</b>   | <b>ACTIVITY</b>   | <b>PRIORITY</b> | <b>DEAD<br/>LINE</b> | <b>PERSON<br/>RESPONSIBLE</b>  |
| Hold  | Develop Public Service Announcements on First Day of School and the Importance of Daily School Attendance. Tagline: Miss School, Miss A Lifetime!             | HIGHEST         | TBA                  | EPISD Community Engagement<br>EPISD Alpha Initiative                       |
| Hold  | Social Media Blitz with bi-weekly publication of Campus Attendance Rates  | HIGHEST         | TBA                  | EPISD Community Engagement<br>EPISD Alpha Initiative                       |
| Hold  | Plan and Execute local First Day of School reminders (TV, cable, online, print media) and On Camera Interviews about why Daily School Attendance is Important | HIGH            | TBA                  | EPISD Community Engagement, EPISD Alpha Initiative and Local Media Sources |
| Hold  | Coordinate On Campus Notification Effort (Marquee messages, school messenger, posters, flyers, etc)   | HIGH            | TBA                  | AREA SUPERINTENDENTS   |



## **BEST PRACTICE 5 – REVIEW AND REVISE DISTRICT OF INNOVATION PLAN**

We are highly recommending that the El Paso ISD District of Innovation Committee revisit the portion of the District of Innovation Plan that waives TEC Ch. 25.092 in its entirety.

We further recommend the following:

1. Repeal the waiver of Loss of Credit due to Excessive Absence for All Absences.
2. Revise the Waiver to reflect a differentiation between School Related Absences such as Counseling, Testing, School Sponsored Trips, Extracurricular Activities and other absences related to student involvement in school and all other absences.
3. Reinstigate Potential Credit Loss for all absences not listed in Bullet 2 above.
4. Reinstate all Student Early Identification, Parent Notification and Early/Intensive Intervention Processes to provide academic and psychosocial support for students demonstrating Excessive Absence.

## **BEST PRACTICES 6 – REVISE SCHOOL CALENDAR TO MINIMIZE LOW ATTENDANCE DAYS**

For 2016-2016, the Instructional Calendar had a number of low attendance days built in. Those included:

1. School did not release for Winter Break until December 23, 2016 leaving very little travel time for families to visit family outside of El Paso or to vacation. Therefore the last three days before Winter Break had districtwide Student Attendance Averages is the 80-89% range or below.
2. A number of Half Days were scheduled. These half days have a traditionally low Student Attendance Rate causing an artificial reduction in overall attendance rate at the district level.
3. High School Final Examinations for the Spring Semester were administered a week early this school year. This has the effect of ending the instructional year a week early causing a good sized drop in Student Daily Attendance at the high school level for that week.
4. A number of Mid Week holidays were on the Instructional Calendar this year. Previously, the 90% rule encouraged attendance for the balance of days in these weeks but this year, students were more likely to be absent for multiple days. For example: A Teachers On Duty Without Students Day on an Thursday will very likely have the student take Friday off as well.