

The \$310,000 Warning Sign Texas Schools Keep Missing in the Absenteeism Fight

New data from Texas principals shows tardiness outpacing every behavior challenge, as SB 991 raises the cost of missing early warning signs.

TX, UNITED STATES, October 23, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- New data from Minga, the Student Behavior & Engagement Platform used by 2,500+ schools nationwide, shows tardiness has become the top student behavior challenge among Texas principals and a direct predictor of the chronic absenteeism now carrying a legal and financial cost under Texas Senate Bill 991.

Texas public schools are heading into 2026-27 under real pressure. Enrollment dropped by more than 76,000 students in 2025-26, the largest non-pandemic decline in recorded state history. Under SB 991, chronic absenteeism now triggers mandatory intervention, and the state's basic allotment of \$6,215 per student is tied directly to whether students are in their seats. For a campus of 1,000 students, the difference between 90% and 95% attendance is a funding gap of roughly \$310,000 a year.

At the TASSP Summer Workshop 2026, Minga surveyed Texas secondary school principals on their biggest behavior challenges. Tardiness ranked first, and attendance ranked second, with more than double the responses in every other category combined. Hallway loitering followed closely behind. The pattern isn't unique to Texas: across four national conferences in 2026, attendance and tardiness led the conversation everywhere. But SB 991 has turned attendance from a cultural priority into a legal obligation.

"Tardies and hallway loitering are not just daily frustrations," said Jason Richards, CEO of Minga. "They are leading indicators of absenteeism. Texas principals are not managing crises. They are managing quiet departures, students drifting one period at a time, until the data finally catches up." The warning signs are already visible. They just aren't in the absence data yet.

The problem is not the students. It is the system. In a national survey of school leaders, the top answer for their biggest tardy challenge, cited by 37% of respondents, was the absence of a consistent tardy policy. Different rules in different classrooms, applied differently by different teachers. When students learn that being late carries no real consequence, the drift toward chronic absenteeism follows, and under SB 991 that drift now carries a compliance cost. Nearly half of Texas principals in the TASSP survey described their approach as prevention-focused, but prevention only works if it is consistent, and consistency requires systems, not spreadsheets.

Chris Bryant, Principal at Midland Lee High School in Texas, saw that gap firsthand. Before Minga, his school tracked tardies in a Google Sheet, and administrators weren't notified until a student hit three tardies to a single teacher. "We were missing that student accountability piece. It just became an overwhelming daily headache," Bryant said. Since putting a consistent policy in place: "We had zero tardies after lunch, which is a big deal at a school with an open campus lunch program. Students pushed back at first, but now they've bought in, because they're also earning recognition for good behavior."

It's not just a Texas problem. Further west, Oklahoma principals are watching the same thing unfold. Dr. Kathy Knowles, Head Principal at Mustang High School in Oklahoma, leads a campus of 4,000 students. Getting hallways and tardies under control was the first priority. "The teachers were happy. We were happy. Kids were getting to class," Knowles said of the initial shift. Adding recognition on top: "I have been shocked by how excited these kids are to earn points and rewards. It has changed our culture."

Under SB 991, Texas principals need to know which students are trending toward chronic absenteeism before they get there. The data from TASSP 2026 suggests most schools already know where to look: the students arriving late, drifting into hallways, missing one period at a time. The schools that act on those signals are the ones that keep their students, their funding, and their community.

ABOUT MINGA

Minga is an educational partner and unified platform designed to help K-12 schools streamline their operations. Used by over 2,500 schools nationwide, Minga provides the foundation for a better school culture by protecting instructional time and fostering student belonging. For more information, visit minga.io.

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