

SUBJECT: Excused absence for high school seniors visiting colleges and universities

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 10 ayes — Eissler, Hochberg, Allen, Aycock, Farias, Jackson, Olivo,
Patrick, Shelton, Weber

0 nays

1 absent — Dutton

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Portia Bosse, Texas State Teachers Association; David Duty, Texas Association of Community Schools; Monty Exter, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Lindsay Gustafson, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Casey McCreary, Texas Association of School Administrators; Don Rogers, Texas Rural Education Association; Julie Shields, Texas Association of School Boards)

Against — None

BACKGROUND: Education Code, sec. 25.087 lists the specific circumstances under which students may be excused from school:

- observation of a religious holiday, including any travel required;
- a required appearance in court, including any travel required;
- sounding "Taps" at a military honors funeral for a deceased veteran; and
- a temporary absence for a health appointment, provided the student returns to school afterward.

DIGEST: HB 2542 would allow high school seniors to be excused from school for up to two days to visit a college or university when considering applying to colleges.

School districts would be responsible for determining when these absences would be excuse, and would have to establish a procedure to verify that the student had visited a college or university.

School districts could not punish an excused student, and the student would be allowed a reasonable amount of time to make up any work. The student would be counted as if he or she attended school on those days for the purpose of calculating the school district's average daily attendance.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2009, and would apply beginning with the 2009-2010 school year.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 2542 would recognize that high school students often face difficulties when choosing a college or university. Visiting college campuses allows students and their parents to make more informed decisions. A recent study of Austin-area high school students showed that high school seniors who visited college campuses were 50 percent more likely to enroll in college directly after graduation, with first-generation college students 76 percent more likely. There is also evidence that direct-to-college enrollment improves completion rates. However, many students do not visit college campuses out of fear of missing school and having those absences count against their record. By granting a reasonable number of excused absences, HB 2542 would alleviate those concerns and encourage greater higher education attainment among Texas high school students.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Many high school students begin the college investigation and application process earlier than their senior year. High school juniors also should be allowed excused absences to visit colleges and universities.

NOTES:

The author intends to offer a floor amendment to allow high school juniors to be excused from school to visit college campuses.