Transition Planning for Students in Alternative Education Programs

A Report By:

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Introduction

Approximately 60% of Texas public school students will be suspended or expelled at some point in their educational careers.[1] A significant number of these students may also be placed in a disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP) as a result of school code of conduct violations.[2] During the 2022-23 school year alone, approximately 108,255 Texas students were sent to DAEP.[3] These students often do not receive the same level of academic instruction and rigor as they would at their home campuses. As a result, they are at an increased risk of repeating a grade in school.[4] Further, they are twice as likely to drop out of school and three times more likely to end up in the criminal justice system than students who have not been placed in a DAEP.[5] This grim outcome is further magnified when the student also has a disability, since these students are more than twice as likely to be suspended as other students.[6]

While the majority of students placed in DAEPs return to their community schools, they face many challenges with successfully reintegrating, which often cause long-term, negative consequences. It is, therefore, critical that school districts take steps to appropriately facilitate the reentry of students returning to their community schools from DAEPs. By law, students transitioning back to their home campus from a DAEP, juvenile justice alternative education program (JJAEP), or juvenile justice facility must be provided with a transition plan.[7] However, many districts are not developing these plans, thereby increasing the likelihood that these youth will experience negative education outcomes.

A clear illustration of how inadequate transition planning can negatively impact a student is exemplified by the case of D.D., a 16-year-old, 9th grade student who receives 504 services due to a disability. Following a disciplinary incident on the school campus, D.D. was sent to a DAEP for 30 days. Upon completing this placement, the student's parent met with the Assistant Principal (AP) and another school staff member, without prior knowledge of the meeting's purpose. During the meeting, the AP informed the parent that the student would need to check in with school administration weekly, but provided no further details. The other staff member reviewed the student's 504 plan, with no request for the parent’s feedback or any indication that they were developing a transition plan for D.D. Notably, there was no dialogue or collaboration concerning the student's needs for academic support such as tutoring or credit recovery, mental health services or community-based resources, or the potential challenges of returning to their home campus. The parent found the meeting unhelpful, perceiving it as merely procedural. Apart from the weekly check-ins with the Assistant Principal, no additional support measures were offered. Consequently, given the absence of genuine transitional planning, it is unsurprising that D.D. quickly faced disciplinary issues again after returning to his home campus.

D.D. is among the over 5 million students enrolled in Texas public schools.[8] With such a substantial student population, it is crucial for each district to establish an accessible system for

tracking and planning the transitions of students to and from disciplinary placements. An effective data collection and disciplinary placement monitoring system would allow districts to more timely address the needs of students as they return to their home campuses and enhance their long-term success. However, few school districts are adequately tracking transitions or engaging in appropriate alternative program transition planning. Had D.D. been provided with a well-structured transition plan, he might have avoided further disciplinary issues. This underscores the importance of all Texas school districts and charter schools improving their data tracking, retention, and sharing practices, as well as implementing transition planning processes for the benefit of students moving between their home schools and DAEPs.

How the Issue Was Identified

The Harris County School Reentry Workgroup (The Workgroup), a consortium of community-based organizations seeking to remove barriers to school reentry for youth returning to school from disciplinary and juvenile justice programs, sought to examine the movement of students to and from disciplinary placements. Our goal was to determine whether students are being properly transitioned to their home campuses and make recommendations for improving the transition process. The Workgroup identified the vast lack of appropriate transition planning among Texas public school districts after reviewing data from public information requests sent to approximately 130 public school districts in Texas. The data set analyzed consists of 90 responses from districts spanning across the state. The request asked school districts to provide information in the following six categories:

- Number of students who left DAEP and JJAEP but did not reenroll into a school district campus;
- Number of students enrolled at a school district campus after leaving DAEP and JJAEP;
- Number of transition plans developed in the school district;
- Number of transition reviews held to monitor the progress of students who transitioned to a school district campus after attending DAEP and JJAEP;
- Number of students who initiated enrollment at a school district campus from DAEP and JJAEP but enrollment was not completed; and
- Number of students who initiated enrollment at DAEP and JJAEP from a school district campus but enrollment was not completed.

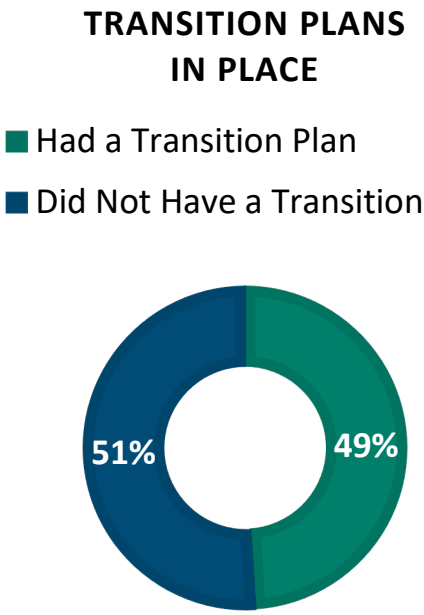
From the 90 districts that provided responses, 51% of them are likely not developing transition plans for students returning from DAEPs and JJAEPs. Among those that are developing transition plans, only 33% are conducting reviews to monitor students' progress. Additionally, 30% of the districts providing data indicated they were not tracking the number of students who returned to their campuses after leaving a disciplinary alternative education placement. Thus, it is unknown whether these students actually returned to their home campus,

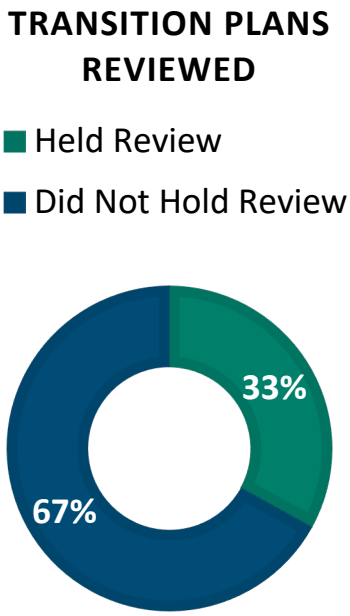
transferred to another school, or simply dropped out of school. This suggests that statewide data regarding the number of students dropping out of school is likely inaccurate because it doesn't account for those students who did not return from the DAEP. Sadly, the actual number may be even higher than we know. While it is positive to see numerous districts have some form of tracking in place, there is still much work to be done.

*…**statewide data** regarding the number of students dropping out of school is likely inaccurate because it **doesn't account for those students who did not return from the DAEP**.*

Charts: Transition Plans

The charts below illustrate how school districts that responded to our public information requests are implementing transition plans for students returning from DAEPs and JJAEPs.





The issues exposed in this report are applicable to both small and large school districts in the state. Regrettably, some of the largest school districts in Texas, including Houston ISD, Dallas ISD, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, Northside ISD, Fort Worth ISD, Austin ISD, and Katy ISD, either do not track all of the data requested, or do not have it available in a readily accessible format. These districts account for approximately 800,000 Texas students who are not aided in transitioning to their home campuses from a disciplinary placement.[9] Such statistics demand attention, particularly if we are truly committed to addressing and reducing the dropout rate in Texas.

*...some of the **largest school districts** in Texas...either **do not track all of the data** requested, or **do not have it available** in a readily accessible format.*

The Legal Requirements

Pursuant to Texas Education Code §37.023, a transition plan should be created no later than five instructional days after the student's release from an alternative education program to a regular classroom. A best practice is to hold a meeting to create the plan to allow for true collaboration in discussing how to aid each student with the transition back to their home campus. This plan must include assistance and recommendations from various individuals, including the school counselor, licensed clinical social workers, teachers, campus behavior coordinators, and other appropriate school district personnel. Campus administrators should also meet with the student's parent or guardian to obtain their insight into the student's current mental and emotional state, as well as ascertain what supports and services are, or may be, most effective in supporting the student through the reintegration process. The plan must include recommendations for the best educational placement and the parent of the student must also be given information on the process of requesting an evaluation for special education services.

Once created and implemented, the transition plan may be regularly reviewed by the school staff to determine the student's progress towards academic and career goals. It is advantageous to hold regular reviews of the plan to determine what is and what is not working. Through this collaborative process, plan contributors are able to create the most effective plan for the student. Additionally, per Texas Education Code §29.081, school districts are required to track student performance levels and provide accelerated instruction to those at risk of dropping out. This provision specifically includes students who have been placed in an

alternative education program, and/or expelled.[10] The fact that the legislature has identified the need for districts to provide accelerated instruction to these students further affirms the need for transition planning and tracking of students going to and from DAEP, JJAEP, and juvenile justice facilities.

The Need for More Efficient Transition Planning

As previously noted, once a student is suspended or expelled, they are at a greater risk of dropping out of school or ending up in the criminal justice system. Students of color and those with disabilities face an even greater risk of these outcomes because they are disproportionately disciplined compared to their peers.[11] For example, students who are eligible for special education services experience 21% of out-of-school suspensions or referrals to alternative education programs though they comprise only 9% of the student body.[12] Moreover, Black students are suspended at a national rate of 3 times more than white students.[13] These staggering numbers further signify the need to better understand which students are being placed in disciplinary alternative programs to ensure they receive appropriate plans and are provided necessary supports. With no transition plan in place, it is not surprising that some students simply drop out of school and never return.

Having readily accessible data of the number of students transitioning between their home campus and a disciplinary setting, as well as consistently completing transition plans for these students, would position schools to address students' immediate needs and mitigate many of the challenges students encounter when they return to school from disciplinary placements. Additionally, a regular review of these plans ensures the plan's effectiveness and increases the student's likelihood of a successful transition. Schools could then adopt a proactive approach, anticipating and addressing the evolving challenges and needs of students returning from alternative education programs, rather than merely reacting to them as they arise.

Lastly, without an effective system for developing transition plans, parents are far less likely to receive information on the process to request special education services. An undiagnosed disability may be the driving force behind the student's behavior that was the basis for the disciplinary placement. Despite this fact, parents may not understand their legal rights to have the appropriate evaluations completed to determine if their child qualifies for special education services. Ensuring this information is provided during the transition planning process, as required by law, can lead to additional positive outcomes for youth experiencing DAEP placements.

Schools could then adopt a proactive approach**, anticipating and addressing the evolving challenges and needs of students returning from alternative education programs, **rather than merely reacting to them as they arise.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. Readily Accessible Data

Having readily accessible data is crucial for every school district, not only for tracking the movements and needs of at-risk students, but also to share with other districts and organizations in the community. When transition planning is effective, districts can readily share data to showcase successful strategies. Most importantly, with better data tracking, districts will be able to better safeguard students from increased risk of dropping out of school, or becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

2. Hold Transition Planning and Transition Review Meetings

It is highly recommended that Texas public school districts and charter schools hold transition meetings and conduct regular reviews of the plans developed to ensure they are meeting students' needs. A student's circumstances are constantly changing. By holding the initial transition meeting and the review meetings, the school has a greater ability to recognize those changes and respond in a proactive manner. Furthermore, face-to-face meetings facilitate effective collaboration among the student, parent, and school. When schools actively engage students by asking, "how can we plan for your success," rather than dictating actions, students are more likely to have buy-in to the plan and be positively influenced by their school experience.

3. Include Parents and Students in the Transition Planning Process

The most effective transition plans include the student and their caregiver. It is very challenging to develop a transition plan that will meet a student's needs without knowing their state of mind and what support they need from the school as they return. Additionally, if the process is not collaborative, students may have little to no buy-in to the plan, which makes it less likely to succeed. The proactive approach of engaging the student and their parent or guardian in the creation of the transition plan will help districts better anticipate and prepare for challenges, ultimately saving them time and resources.

4. Trainings on Best Practice

In analyzing the data provided by the participating districts, it is clear that schools need additional support in planning for the needs of students returning from alternative education programs. It is strongly advised that the districts pursue additional training and guidance to enhance the restructuring of their tracking systems. Districts should also provide enhanced training to registrars, counselors, and campus behavior coordinators, in particular, to ensure they understand students' right to enroll in their community schools and the legal requirements and best practices for successful transition planning. This support may be found by contacting General Counsel for the specific district as well as using the Education Service Center for the district's assigned region. In addition, the Workgroup is available to provide training to school district staff to ensure they understand and can properly implement procedures and best practices pertaining to student enrollment and transition planning.

We hope the information shared in this report is used bring about much needed changes to the way students returning from DAEPs are reintegrated into their community schools. We would be happy to discuss our concerns and recommendations. Please contact Supervising Attorney and Harris County School Reentry Workgroup Lead, Sarah Beebe, to schedule a meeting.

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[1] Council of State Governments Justice Center, Breaking Schools' Rules (2011, p.ix), https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/Breaking_Schools_Rules_Report_Final.pdf.

[2] Id.

[3] Texas Education Agency, Statewide Discipline Reports (last visited Jun. 28, 2024), https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/adhocrpt/Disciplinary_Data_Products/statewidediscipline.html.

[4] Ana Ramón, Why Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs Do More Harm Than Good, IDRA (Feb. 2020), https://www.idra.org/resource-center/why-disciplinary-alternative-education-programs-do-more-harm-than-good/.

[5] Kristian Lenderman & Jacqueline Hawkins. Out of the Classroom and Less Likely to Graduate: The Relationship Between Exclusionary Discipline and Four-Year Graduation Rates in Texas, Tex. Educ. Rev. 9(2), 6-20 (2021), http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/13913.

[6] Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, Reversing the Pipeline to Prison in Texas: How to Ensure Safe Schools AND Safe Students (2020). https://www.texascjc.org/system/files/publications/Reversing%20the%20Pipeline%20Report%202020.pdf.

[7] Texas Education Code § 37.023

[8] Texas Education Agency, Enrollment in Texas Public Schools 2022-23 (2023). https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/school-performance/accountability-research/enroll-2022-23.pdf.

[9] Ballotpedia, Largest school districts in the United States by enrollment (2023). https://ballotpedia.org/Largest_school_districts_in_the_United_States_by_enrollment.

[10] Texas Education Code § 29.081

[11] Texas School Discipline Lab, Implicit Bias Resources, Texas Appleseed (2016), https://www.texasdisciplinelab.org/resources/implicit-bias/.

[12] Texas Appleseed, Suspended Childhood: The State of School Discipline in Texas (2017), https://report.texasappleseed.org/suspended-childhood-updated/.

[13] U.S. Dep't of Educ. Office of Civil Rights, CIVIL RIGHTS DATA COLLECTION Data Snapshot: School Discipline (March 21, 2014), https://civilrightsdata.ed.gov/assets/downloads/2011-12_CRDC-School-Discipline-Snapshot.pdf.

Appendix A: Schools Contacted

The school districts in the table below were sent an emailed or faxed version of the public information request referenced in this report.

School districts A through CL	School districts CO through G	School districts H through N	School districts P through Z
Abbott ISD	Comanche ISD	Harlingen ISD	Pasadena ISD
Alamo Heights ISD	Conroe ISD	Hempstead ISD	Pearland ISD
Albany ISD	Copperas Cove ISD	Hitchcock ISD	Plano ISD
Aldine ISD	Corpus Christi ISD	Houston ISD	Pleasanton ISD
Allen ISD	Cotulla ISD	Huffman ISD	Port Arthur ISD
Alvarado ISD	Crowley ISD	Humble ISD	Premont ISD
Alvin ISD	Cy-Fair ISD	Hurst-Euless-Bedford	Princeton ISD
Anahuac ISD	Daingerfield-Lone	Jim Hogg County ISD	Rice ISD
Aquilla ISD	Star ISD	Katy ISD	Richardson ISD
Austin ISD	Dayton ISD	Killeen ISD	Robstown ISD
Azle ISD	Dallas ISD	Klein ISD	Rockwall ISD
Baird ISD	Deer Park ISD	Lancaster ISD	Round Rock ISD
Bangs ISD	De Leon ISD	La Vega ISD	Royse City
Bay City ISD	Denison ISD	Lake Worth ISD	Runge ISD
Birdville ISD	Denton ISD	Lamesa ISD	Runge ISD
Blanco ISD	DeSoto ISD	La Porte ISD	San Augustine ISD
Bloomington ISD	Dickinson ISD	Leander ISD	San Benito ISD
Breckenridge ISD	Donna ISD	Lewisville ISD	Santa Fe ISD
Brooks County ISD	Dublin ISD	Little Elm ISD	Santa Rose ISD
Brownfield ISD	Duncanville ISD	Livingston ISD	Sherman ISD
Brownsville ISD	Edinburg ISD	Lufkin ISD	Spring ISD
Brownwood ISD	Evant ISD	Mabank ISD	Spring Branch ISD
Bruceville-Eddy ISD	Flour Bluff ISD	Magnolia ISD	Temple ISD
Burleson ISD	Fort Worth ISD	Marble Falls ISD	Terrell ISD
Carrizo Springs ISD	Friendswood ISD	Marshall ISD	Texas City ISD
Carrollton- Farmers	Frisco ISD	Mathis ISD	Tomball ISD
Branch ISD	Gainesville ISD	McKinney ISD	Tornillo ISD
Cedar Hill ISD	Glen Rose ISD	Medina Valley ISD	Waelder ISD
Chilton ISD	Grand Prairie ISD	Midway ISD	Waller ISD
Clear Creek ISD	Greenville ISD	Mineral Wells ISD	Weatherford ISD
Cleburne ISD		Montgomery ISD	Weslaco ISD
Cleveland ISD		New Caney ISD	West Oso ISD
		Northside ISD	Wichita ISD
		Northwest ISD	Winona ISD
			Yoakum ISD

Appendix B: School Responses

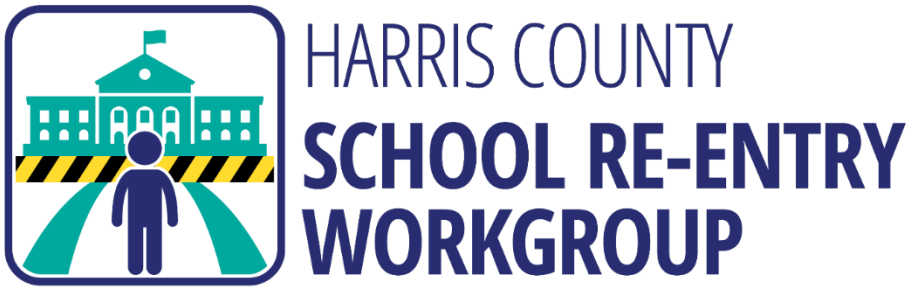
The table below includes the number of transition plans developed – or other information provided – by the 90 school districts that responded to the public information request referenced (PIR) in this report. School districts that did not provide the information that was requested are marked with "Not applicable."

School district and years	Number of transition plans developed (or other info)
Abbott ISD (21-23)	0
Alamo Heights ISD (19-23)	55
Aldine ISD (19-23)	Not applicable
Allen ISD (21-23)	62
Alvarado ISD (19-23)	Provided information about transition meetings (PIR requested information about meetings, not plans).
Alvin ISD (21-23)	Not applicable
Aquilla ISD	Not applicable
Arlington ISD (19-23)	448
Austin ISD (19-23)	Not applicable
Baird ISD (19-23)	59
Birdville ISD (19-23)	Not applicable
Boys Ranch ISD (19-23)	54
Bruceville-Eddy ISD (21-23)	35
Burleson ISD (22-23)	Not applicable
Carrollton- Farmers Branch ISD (21-23)	DAEP develops a plan in conjunction with the crisis counselor from the student's home campus for each student.
Clarksville ISD (19-23)	0
Cleburne ISD (21-23)	368
Cleveland ISD (22-23)	"See DAEP Enrollment guidance document" (nothing in the document provides a response)
Crowley ISD (21-23)	63
Conroe ISD (19-23)	43
Cotulla ISD (21-23)	67
Corpus Christi	Not applicable
Cypress Fairbanks ISD (21-23)	They do not currently collect, aggregate or report on the campus-based PTP's.
Dallas ISD (21-23)	Not applicable
Dayton ISD (21-23)	121 students (Wilson Junior High), 199 students (Dayton High School), 11 elementary students (Richter, Kimmie Brown, and Stephen F. Austin Elementary) (21-22), 127 students (Wilson Junior High), 150 students (Dayton High School), 7 elementary students (Richter, Kimmie Brown,

	and Stephen F. Austin Elementary) (22-23)
Denton ISD (21-23)	Not applicable
Deer Park ISD (21-23)	657
Dickinson ISD (19-23)	Not applicable
Donna ISD (21-23)	378
Duncanville ISD (21-23)	556 (2021-2022) DAEP, 513 (2022-2023) DAEP
Edinburg	0
El Paso ISD (19-23)	148
Flour Bluff	Not applicable
Fort Worth ISD (19-23)	Not applicable
Friendswood ISD (21-23)	18 (21-22) and 30 (22-23)
Gainesville ISD (19-23)	Not applicable
Glen Rose (21-23)	8 (21-22) and 8 (22-23)
Grand Prairie ISD	Not applicable
Greenville ISD (21-23)	0
Hempstead ISD (21-23)	130
Hitchcock ISD (21-23)	98
Houston ISD (19-23)	Not applicable
Huffman ISD (21-23)	174
Humble ISD	Not applicable
Hurst-Euless Bedford	Not applicable
Jasper ISD (19-23)	Not applicable
Jim Hogg ISD (21-23)	Provided information about transition meetings (PIR requested information about meetings, not plans).
Katy ISD (22-23)	Not applicable
Killeen ISD (19-23)	290
Klein ISD (21-23)	2742
Lamesa ISD (21-23)	49
La Porte ISD (21-23)	Not applicable
Leander ISD	Not applicable
Liberty-Eylau ISD (19-20)	128
Little Elm ISD (19-23)	103
Livingston ISD (19-23)	Not applicable
Mabank ISD (21-23)	“All of our campuses provide transition plans.”
Magnolia ISD (19-23)	261
Marshall ISD (19-23)	Not applicable
Mathis ISD (21-23)	26 (21-22), 54 (22-23)
McKinney ISD (19-23)	333
Medina Valley ISD (19-23)	177
Mineral Wells	Not applicable
Montgomery ISD (21-23)	Unknown
New Caney ISD (21-23)	978

Northside ISD (19-23)	Not applicable
Northwest ISD (21-23)	374 (21-22), 363 (22-23)
Pasadena ISD (21-23)	Not applicable
Plano ISD	Not applicable
Pleasanton ISD (19-23)	0
Port Arthur ISD (19-23)	0
Premont ISD (21-23)	81
Richardson ISD (19-23)	Not applicable
Rockwall ISD	Not applicable
Royse City ISD (21-23)	349
Runge ISD (19-23)	1
San Augustine ISD (21-23)	26 (21-22), 28 (22-23)
San Benito ISD (21-23)	343
Santa Fe ISD (21-23)	363
Santa Rosa ISD (19-23)	Not applicable
Sherman ISD	Not applicable
Spring ISD (21-23)	Not applicable
Temple ISD (21-23)	325 (21-22), 373 (22-23)
Tomball ISD (21-23)	149
Waelder ISD (21-23)	5 (Both years)
Waller ISD (21-23)	525
Weatherford ISD (21-23)	264 (21-22), 245 (22-23)
West Oso ISD (19-23)	86
Wichita Falls ISD (21-22)	15 (21-22), 15 (22-23)
Winona ISD (21-23)	25 (21-22), 27 (22-23)

Acknowledgements



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- Civic Heart Community Services
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- Disability Rights Texas
- Earl Carl Institute
- Harris County Juvenile Probation Department
- Harris County Public Defender's Office
- Houston Health Department
- Houston reVision
- Mental Health America of Greater Houston
- My Brother's Keeper
- The Forgotten Third Inc.