



MY OPINION

BY C.E. RHODES

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Students, Show Up and Be Heard!

Fall is a wonderful time of the year. The Texas heat fades away and the start of football season brings hope of a championship for teams and their fans. In addition, parents are thrilled because their children return to school. This is also the time of the year that the Texas Young Lawyers Association seeks to educate students on various important issues.

TRUANCY GUIDE

As a child, my parents were very strict about school attendance. There was no playing “hooky” in our house. My parents believed that absenteeism was a missed opportunity to learn. Consequently, they ensured that I was at school each day. Many Texas students, however, do not attend school regularly, likely due to a myriad of reasons relating to their home environment. Whatever the reasons, children who fail to attend school or have excessive unexcused absences may find themselves — as well as their parents or guardian — in court subject to misdemeanor charges and fines. See Tex. Educ. Code Ann. §25.001 et seq.

The Texas Young Lawyers Association has created the *Truancy Guide*, a pamphlet that provides students and parents with an overview of the state’s truancy laws. With certain exceptions, all Texas children are required to attend school. Parents are responsible for their children’s attendance and may be held accountable. More specifically, if a child has excessive unexplained absences, charges may be brought against the parents (or guardians) and against the child, if the child is between the ages of 12 and 17. Prior to filing a truancy action, a school district must send a

written warning to parents, usually at the beginning of the school year, informing the parents that they are subject to prosecution if their child is absent from school for a certain number of days within a prescribed time period. Violations of Texas truancy laws can result in a maximum fine of \$500 plus court costs against the parent and student, respectively. Therefore, it is imperative that parents take their child’s absences from school very seriously.

Thanks to the Low-Income Texans Committee, especially **Rebekah Brooker** of Dallas, Judge **Amanda Torres** and **Shannon Steel White**, both of Corpus Christi, for their hard work on this project.

VOTE AMERICA!

Given that this is a presidential election year, many Texas citizens will head to the polls to vote next month. For many high school seniors, it will be their first time to exercise their right to vote. TYLA is doing its part to encourage high school seniors to register and vote by presenting *Vote America! Honor the Fight, Exercise the Right!*

Created by TYLA in 2008, *Vote America!* is a video project designed to educate students about the obstacles that so many had to overcome to ensure that every adult American — regardless of race, gender, religion, or socioeconomic background — has the right and opportunity to vote. TYLA also has updated its *VoTexas* Curriculum Guide, which can be implemented in social studies, government, or political science classes for middle and high school students. The curriculum covers several components of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) requirements and may be used

independently or in conjunction with the video, which may be viewed at tyla.org/voteamerica. The video and curriculum are also available from the TYLA office.

In September, TYLA presented *Vote America!* to more than 700 seniors at Memorial and Nikki Rowe high schools in McAllen. Partnering with the Advocacy Alliance Center of Texas (AACT), TYLA assisted in registering all eligible seniors for this year’s election and encouraged them to vote next month. AACT is a non-partisan group whose goal is to “cultivate long-term and structural changes in South Texas by creating meaningful civic participation.”

The presentations in McAllen would not have been possible without the efforts of **Jan Miller**, director of the State Bar Law-Related Education Department; **Mick West**, social studies coordinator and Project TEACH director for the McAllen Independent School District; the Hidalgo County Young Lawyers Association; **Rebecca Vela**, **Carlos Yzaguirre**, and **Benjamin Guerra** of McAllen; **JoAnne Garcia** of Pharr; the TYLA Law-Focused Education Committee and board members, especially **Shivali Sharma** of Texarkana; **Alfonso Cabañas**, **Sam Houston**, and **Priscilla Camacho** of San Antonio; **Rebekah Brooker** and **Lacy Durham** of Dallas; **Celina Lopez** of Houston; **Greg Siemankowski**, law school student liaison from Baylor Law School; and **Victor Villarreal** of Laredo.

Please join us in helping students understand that voting is a privilege and an important civic duty necessary to effect change and ensure that their voices are heard. ✪