



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Grading, attendance irregularities found at UHS**

**WACO, Texas** –Internal and external investigations found discrepancies in reporting grades and attendance -at University High School.

The investigations found some UHS seniors graduated in June despite not meeting state requirements. Three administrators have been on paid leave since the early stages of the investigations.

The discovered irregularities involved proper procedures not being followed in making up credit for excessive absences or unacceptable course work; an Individual Graduation Committee (IGC) lowering the standard for end of course work that would be acceptable to graduate; and whether students were properly administered state-allowed opportunities to re-test

The District first received notice of some “fatal errors” in computerized grade/attendance reports Friday, June 3, 2016, one day before University High School’s graduation ceremony. A subsequent internal investigation revealed additional possible discrepancies, and on June 21 Waco ISD self-reported the problems and its investigation to the Texas Education Agency.

Six days later the Board of Trustees hired the law firm of Walsh, Gallegos, Trevino, Russo and Kyle (Walsh-Gallegos) to conduct an independent investigation on processes and procedures at the University HS campus. Last Tuesday, October 18, that firm turned over its findings to the Waco ISD Board of Trustees, Superintendent Dr. Bonny Cain and District administrators.

Walsh-Gallegos reviewed interviews of 31 campus employees conducted by Waco ISD’s Internal Investigator, plus educational records of 149 UHS students. The external investigators then talked to 24 more District employees by phone, and spoke to 10 employees in person. They then reviewed information on STAAR End-of-Course testing, attendance, testing procedures, and laws and policies regarding attendance-based and substantive credit recovery.

Among the findings by Walsh - Gallegos:

- Irregularities in the Individual Graduation Committee process:
  - English 1 & 2 IGC's did not have the UHS dept. chair on the committee, and the person who led that IGC did not have a secondary English teaching certificate
  - The standards for passing the English projects were lowered and projects were then re-graded
  - At least three students who failed or did not take three End of Course tests (the maximum the state allows is two) participated and graduated through the IGC process (individual projects)
  - Three students who engaged in plagiarism were allowed to re-do portions of their English projects and received the necessary grades to graduate
  
- Irregularities in the End of Course Testing Opportunities
  - Some students required by law to have the opportunity to re-test were told they did not need to take the test, or could complete an IGC project instead
  - Some students present on campus were coded as "absent" on their testing instrument and coded as "present" in the District attendance system, indicating they did not re-test as required by TEA and specifically directed by the superintendent.
  
- Credit Recovery (excessive absences)
  - An assistant principal said she was told by an administrator that no student would fail to graduate due to attendance
  - The UHS Attendance Committee did not address seniors' spring attendance issues until May 27, 2016, eight days before graduation
  - Documentation regarding attendance-based credit appeals was disorganized and inadequate
  - Some students went from a failing grade to passing after only a few hours of work in Top Lab credit recovery
  
- Credit Recovery (previously failed course work)
  - Some students went from a failing grade to a passing grade after only a few hours work in the online credit recovery curriculum offered at UHS

**According to Texas Education Code guidelines, no student formally certified as a graduate at commencement June 4 will lose that diploma or status.**

The internal investigation in this case will continue, and Waco ISD administration and Trustees will review recommendations from the external investigators to ensure the integrity of the policies and procedures at District campuses.

Among those are steps to ensure a culture of communication and openness between campus and District testing coordinators; designate a District-level coordinator to oversee the ICG process, including development, regulation and changing of passing standards, re-testing and credit recovery.

Many of the law firm's suggestions have already been in place in District guidelines, policies and procedures but will be revisited.

In an effort to be open and transparent, Waco ISD released a 16-page excerpt of the external investigator's Factual Summary Report. Some of that report, plus other documents will not be released at this time because of attorney-client privilege, student privacy laws, or privacy laws regarding employee performance. The District is asking for a ruling from the state Attorney General whether some of those documents can be made public.

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