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The blue glass-cleaning liquid attaches itself to its new home, skimming down the length of the grime-covered surface before being hurriedly wiped away with a single, well-assured swipe.

Not even the remnants of dirt are left, no dusty imprints of hands or the slick of grease from a forehead. All that remains is the steady reflection of a teenager depending on this sort of menial work in order to graduate.

"They called me in today and said I wasn't going to graduate," senior Cassie Kelsey said. "I was like, 'Oh, okay. What can I do?'"

As of the 2012-2013 school year, Texas was tied with Wisconsin for the nation's third highest graduation rate, according to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics.

Eighty-eight percent of Texas high school students graduate within four years. But as June 6 nears, a few seniors are still struggling to earn or recover class credit, while others are trying to make up hours of class that they missed.

At PHS, makeup hours, credit recovery and Panther Express are some of the alternative paths students take to complete high school. While these paths may be controversial, they represent some seniors' last hope to graduate.

### Makeup Hours

Kelsey, who in early May still had to complete 38 hours of both unexcused and excused absences, makes up most of her hours by clean-

ing after school—spraying and wiping down windows and occasionally sweeping hallways.

House Bill 5, which was passed by Texas lawmakers in 2013, requires that all K-12 public school students in Texas attend at least 90 percent of their classes in order to receive credit.

As a result, students who accrue more than four unexcused absences in a semester must make up one hour for every additional class period missed.

"We have students right now that owe about 400 hours," student records specialist Cathy Martinez said in early May. "We have one [student] who just competed 216 hours."

At PHS, students have three options for completing makeup hours: custodial work, Saturday school and before- or after-school tutorials.

One incentive of custodial work is that two hours of credit are earned for every one hour of work. However, some question the relevance of making up instructional hours missed by cleaning around the school.

"It's a joke," credit recovery teacher Ron Bautista said. "If you're going to have a makeup program for absences, make it worthwhile. We have students who are supposed to be sweeping or dusting, and they're walking up and down the hallway. When you say you're making up time and you're not getting anything done for the school, it's irritating."

Senior Aleksa Yandrisovitz chose to make up her hours through tutorials rather than custodial work.

"You don't get anything out of it," Yandrisovitz said of custodial work. "The school does, though. That's why they make you do it. I just don't see the purpose if you're cleaning up the

**"We have students right now that owe about 400 [makeup] hours. We have one [student] who just competed 216 hours." — student records specialist Cathy Martinez**

school instead of learning what you missed." All excessive absences—whether excused or unexcused—must be made up, which is why Yandrisovitz had to complete makeup hours despite missing school for medical reasons.

"I have a lot of medical problems, but it didn't matter," Yandrisovitz said. "I understand if someone is skipping, but I have doctors' notes. I even have notes explaining everything that was happening. They were like, 'You're still going to have to do makeup hours.'"

Even school-related absences—such as field trips and athletic and academic competitions—must be made up.

"I think we need to try a lot harder to minimize the missing of classes even for school-related events because the bottom line is if your butt's not in the chair, you're not learning," AP calculus teacher Dixie Ross said. "Maybe we need to consider having more of our extra-curricular activities outside of the school day. That might mean evening games, that might mean Saturday games, [and] that might mean occasional Sunday games."

### Credit Recovery

Senior Passionnae Sims was in credit recovery earlier this month because she still needed her Algebra 2 credit to graduate.

"I had personal stuff going on," Sims said. "[But] honestly, it helps me because it's more hands-on rather than being in a classroom with a bunch of people. It's easier for you to understand what's actually going on instead of the class being loud and distracting."

Credit recovery is a computer-based instructional program that allows students to gain credit for courses—or portions of courses—failed. The school's two credit recovery labs are open before, during and after school, as well as during the summer. The program is offered for on-level core classes, as well as electives such as Spanish and health. It is not of-

fered for AP courses and electives not required for graduation.

April and May tend to be the busiest months for credit recovery teachers Stephanie Neille and Bautista. At the beginning of May, according to Neille, 179 seniors—nearly one-third of the senior class—were enrolled in at least one credit recovery class.

The deadline for seniors to graduate with their class was May 15, but Neille keeps the credit recovery lab open through June 30.

"It's very stressful this time of the year," Neille said. "Not only are the seniors recovering previous courses, but they're also failing current courses. This program is their last hope before they consider dropping out of school."

Neille said the program has grown and that the school may soon need a third credit recovery lab.

"[Freshmen are] failing, but we move them forward," Neille said. "So they're 10th graders, but they really don't have enough credits to be 10th graders. So they have to go back eventually and recover all those 9th-grade classes. Each year, if they're failing, they're just digging a bigger hole for themselves."

Students fail classes for a number of reasons, which is why Ross believes credit recovery is an important resource, even if some students take advantage of the safety net.

"There are people who take advantage of almost anything we put out there, but then you have students who are really doing what they are supposed to do, and they are showing that they truly have mastered the material of that course," Ross said. "So it all comes down to the individual student's integrity. I think that credit recovery does provide a good option for students who maybe had a bad nine weeks. There's lots of things that happen in people's lives that keep them from doing what they should, so it's nice that we do have a second chance. I think people do deserve a second chance."

"I think credit recovery is important for those who truly have given effort," an anonymous teacher told the Panther Prowler in a 2012 interview. "But I also think that our students have been taught that you can redo and redo and redo. And that's not life. You don't get a redo."

### Panther Express

Like credit recovery, Panther Express is a computer-based instructional program. The program started two years ago and is available for students who are at high risk of dropping out.

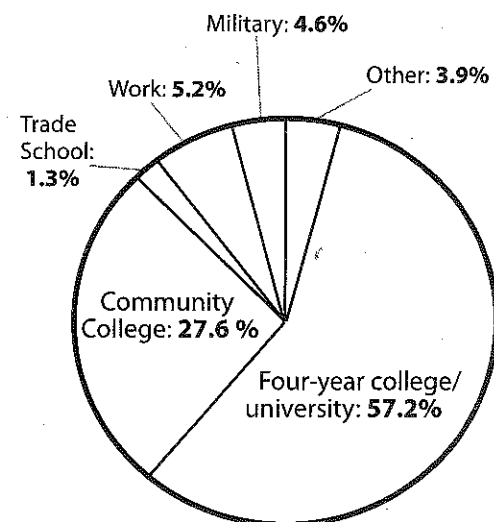
"[Some] of them are supporting their family and they have to work," Neille said. "Some may be unaccompanied youth, and some may be expecting mothers or expecting fathers."

Students enrolled in Panther Express complete all coursework on the computer and have access to the lab Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to noon and 5-9 p.m.

Sixteen seniors have completed Panther Express this year, Neille said.

"I just had a student who needed 11 credits, and she started Panther Express in August and finished in March with all 11 credits," Neille said. "I have had a Panther Express student who started in August and finished in December. I help them set a goal, and then they set their own goal as to when they want to be out."

—Additional reporting by Kennedy Huff



### Seniors' plans for after high school

\*134 seniors surveyed