



Texas Association of Community Schools

1011 San Jacinto Blvd., Ste. 204 Austin, TX 78701-1924
512-440-8227 • FAX: 512-442-6705 • tacsnet.org

June 23, 2022

Dear Members of the Texas Commission on Special Education Funding,

The Texas Association of Community Schools (TACS) is an organization that works primarily for and with the small and mid-sized school districts of our state. Our membership is open to all school districts with one traditional high school or those with an ADA of 12,000 students or fewer. We appreciate this opportunity to speak of our members' concerns regarding funding for the needs of the special education students in our state's schools.

Of primary concern to our members is the idea being discussed of sending state money to private schools, whether that money is used to educate all of their students or is specifically earmarked for special education services. Our members are equally concerned with the practice of the state directly funding parents of special education students with the fiscal resources to privately engage services and/or therapies for their child. Anyone who has worked in public education for any time knows that special education has been significantly underfunded in Texas for decades. The federal Department of Education has sanctioned TEA with corrective actions because of state policies that have been enacted in the past. TACS and its members worry that a voucher program for special education services to private institutions, vendors, or parents will only reduce the state's maintenance of financial support to its public schools and bring even more federal oversight. State funding must be distributed to the local school districts to bring about improved student outcomes.

Additionally, TACS and its members support funding special education based on each child's special education intensity rather than on time spent in special education settings. Of course, we all understand and appreciate that a transition period could be necessary to successfully evolve to this new funding strategy.

The state of Texas is facing a shortage of teachers, and it is most evident in the availability of certified special education teachers. This is not news to you. While the shortages affect school districts across the state, the lack of special education educators is particularly critical in our small and mid-sized schools. State help with increased salaries for these teachers would be most helpful.

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Tommy Hooker
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BARRY HAENISCH
Executive Director
DR. CRYSTAL DOCKERY
Deputy Executive Director
KAYLA KHANG
Administrative Assistant

DIAMOND CORPORATE PARTNERS

Association Insurance Management (AIM)
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Leon | Alcalá, Attorneys at Law

LEGAL COUNSEL

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JFinally, help with the cost of initial special education evaluations is needed. Often private practitioners are called upon to provide the evaluation of a student recommended for special education. Many people think that the cost for that service is the same for large schools and smaller school. They forget, however, that the practitioner is most often located in the city. For his/her services, the evaluator charges the more remote district an hourly rate for travel to and from the testing site plus mileage in addition to the cost of the evaluation. Recognition by this commission that smaller districts in remote areas often pay more for evaluation services than other districts is a must. Funding for the evaluations for students who do not qualify for special education services, at least in part, is also a necessary addition for our school districts.

Thank you for your time and attention to this pressing need in our state.

Sincerely,

Barry Haenisch
Executive Director
Texas Association of Community Schools