

## **What is the Supplemental Special Education Services (SSES) Program?**

Supplemental Special Education Services (SSES) are \$1,500 one-time on-line grants for parents/caregivers of eligible students served by special education. Families of eligible students can use the on-line accounts to obtain educational materials and resources and/or services such as additional speech therapy or other specific services.

## **What is Senate Bill 1716?**

Senate Bill 1716 of the 87<sup>th</sup> Regular Texas Legislature built upon the existing SSES program by expanding eligibility requirements to provide these benefits to more students with disabilities in Texas. The Commissioner's Rule required by SB 1716 will be available in the Texas Registrar no later than December 21, 2021, and will go into effect immediately.

## **What are the eligibility requirements?**

The SSES Program has expanded eligibility criteria to ALL students who are served by special education.

To be eligible for the SSES program, students must be:

- enrolled in a Texas public school;
- enrolled in PreK - 12th grade; and
- a student with a disability served by special education.

## **What is the application process?**

SSES grants to families of eligible students are available on a first come, first served basis. Please note that TEA cannot access the funds appropriated by the legislature for this program until January 2022, therefore many newly eligible families will not be able to receive their account, or have their application processed until that time.

## **What happens when TEA runs out of funds for the program?**

Once all available funds have been awarded a waitlist will be established. If more funds are made available to TEA, more accounts will be made available for families of eligible students. Families will be notified that they have been placed on a waitlist.

## **Are there prioritization considerations for eligible students?**

Yes, there is a prioritization given to some students that receive free or reduced lunch. While priority is given to these students, this program is available to all students served by special education. [SB 1716 sec. 29.044\(b\)](#)

## **Now that the eligibility requirements have expanded, will families need to apply again?**

No, families that meet the new eligibility criteria who had an application that was previously denied will not need to apply again.

Families that previously applied, were denied, and now are eligible under the new criteria have already received an email from TEA as well as an award letter from ClassWallet (the SSES Marketplace vendor) with information on how to access their accounts. Please note that the application system will not allow families to submit another application if they have already applied.

## **How can families apply?**

Families can go to [SSES.TEA.TEXAS.GOV](https://SSES.TEA.TEXAS.GOV) and click the "Apply Today" button to begin the application. As stated above, the application system will not allow families to submit another application if they have already applied.

## **How do families look up their Unique ID (UID) for the application?**

Families will need their student's Social Security Number (SSN) or S-Number (S#), whichever was used when the child was registered, to be able to look up their student's 10-digit Unique ID (UID). TEA will not provide the UID for privacy reasons. More information on the UID can be found [here](#).

## **Can families receive the SSES grant more than once?**

No, families can only receive one SSES grant per eligible student. Currently, **this is a one-time grant** for eligible families of students served through special education.

## **What requirements exist for ARD committees related to Senate Bill 1716?**

"At the student's next admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee meeting, the ARD committee shall determine if a student has been awarded an SSES account. At this meeting, upon learning that a student has been awarded an account, the ARD committee shall provide" (19 TAC §102.1601(i)(2)):

1. "information about types of goods and services that are available to the eligible student" (19 TAC §102.1601(i)(2)(A)); and
2. "instructions and resources on accessing the online accounts" (19 TAC §102.1601(i)(2)(B)).

TEA has provided a [flow chart document](#) for the ARD Committees to use to determine if a student has been awarded an SSES account. Additional LEA resources can be found here: [tea.texas.gov/SSESResources](http://tea.texas.gov/SSESResources). Public outreach materials can also be [found here](#).

## **Must LEAs inform parents of the SSES Program?**

"Yes, Senate Bill 1716 states that 'School districts and open-enrollment charter schools shall notify parents and guardians of students served by special education of the SSES program and how to apply' (19 TAC §102.1601(i)(1)).

LEAs must notify families of the SSES program if they haven't already done so. LEAs should do so in the manner most accessible to their families.

TEA has provided optional resources such as a sample letter and one-page overview that LEAs could choose to inform their families. LEA resources can be found here: [tea.texas.gov/SSESResources](http://tea.texas.gov/SSESResources). Public outreach materials can also be [found here](#).

## **What can families purchase online with their SSES funds?**

Families can purchase supplemental special education instructional materials and educational services through the marketplace. These are approved online vendors and approved service providers. Items purchased must directly benefit the student and must be for the eligible student only. Purchases can only be made online with an online account, the SSES program does not give funds directly to parents in the form of a debit card or check, and no reimbursements can be given.

Every purchase must be approved to ensure its appropriateness for educational use. Families must sign and agree to follow [the purchasing guidelines](#) in order to access their accounts.

## **What is the activation requirement?**

In order to access their SSES funds, families must activate their account within 30 days of receipt.

This means account holders must:

1. Log into their online marketplace account, AND
2. Sign the SSES program parental acknowledgment affidavit provided upon signing in within 30-days of receiving an SSES account.

Families must also begin spending down their funds within the first 6-month of account creation. This does not mean families must spend *all* account funds within the first 6 months, but they must spend at least *some* of their funds.

## **What are the account restrictions?**

SSES accounts can be suspended, closed, or funds can be reclaimed if families do not adhere to the Parental Acknowledgement and Agreement affidavit. For instance, if families:

- Attempt to purchase materials or services that are not educational in nature or they are in violation of the purchasing guidelines;
- Do not complete the 30-day account activation requirement;
- Do not begin spending down their funds within the first 6-month of account creation; or
- Have a student that no longer meets the eligibility criteria.
  - This could mean that the student is dismissed from special education, they moved out of state, or the student is no longer enrolled in a public school.

Within each area of the potential for account restrictions, families are communicated with by email and text messaging about the potential for account suspensions and reclaiming of funds. Families are also given the opportunity to appeal a decision of an account restriction by filling out a form, the form is available by request only.

## **Can ARD Committees use SSES as a determination while developing the student's IEP?**

No, Senate Bill 1716 states that “the ARD Committees shall develop a student’s IEP without consideration of any supplemental special education services that may be provided under the program” (SB 1716 sec. 29.048(a)). A student’s ARD committee must develop each student’s IEP, including whether any compensatory services resulting from an inability of an LEA to fully implement an IEP during periods of at-home learning are appropriate, without consideration of any supplemental special education services that may be provided by the SSES program.

## **Does the SSES Program count as compensatory services?**

No, supplemental services available to families through the SSES program are **not** compensatory services. Compensatory services are generally defined as educational services a student with a disability served by special education is eligible for in order to address the impact of learning or skills lost in situations where the student’s school did not provide all of the services required by the IEP.

Supplemental services through SSES are available to support and bolster services a child is already receiving in school. Consistent with state and federal requirements, the ARD committee must determine whether a student needs appropriate compensatory services.

Additional information regarding compensatory services is also available on the [TEA Recent Guidance section of the Special Education web page](#).

## **How will an ESC be involved?**

SB 1716 requires “one or more regional education service centers to administer the program”. As such, TEA is awarding Region Educational Service Center 10 with a grant to support the SSES program.

Under this grant, Region 10 will:

- Assist families throughout the application process.
- Select a vendor to support the development of the SSES Marketplace.
- Create and promote a variety of resources for families and LEAs.
- Maintain online accounts for families.
- Review potential new service providers and vendors.

## **Additional Resources:**

- To apply for the SSES Program, visit the SSES site: [sSES.tea.texas.gov](https://sSES.tea.texas.gov)
- Additional information regarding the [SSES program is available by visiting the SSES Frequently Asked Questions web page.](#)
- Outreach materials and resources for LEAs can be found [here](#).
- Contact us by email at [SSEShelp@region10.org](mailto:SSEShelp@region10.org) or call SPEDTex at [1-855-773-3839](tel:1-855-773-3839).