

Testimony to Senate Education Committee on Senate Interim Charge #1 (ESC)

July 17, 2012

Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education

Honorable Kel Seliger and members of the Senate Committee on Education, my name is John Fuerst, Assistant Director of Special Education for a large urban district in Texas. I am testifying on behalf of TCASE, the Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education. TCASE is a professional association comprised of nearly 1,200 members who administer and support special education programs throughout the state of Texas. TCASE and I thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding Education Service Centers (ESCs) as they provide critical, timely, cost effective services to local districts and charters resulting in increased student achievement and district compliance. Some of those services include facilitation of regular, topic specific network teams addressing behavior, transition, inclusion and disproportionality. ESCs also provide evidence based professional development, resources and tools in the many areas including STAAR, assistive technology, autism, behavior, bilingualism and transition. In addition, ESCs provide onsite technical assistance in many areas including compliance, funding, data analysis and program reviews. ESCs also offer alternative certification programs and grant writing assistance.

TCASE supports the continuation of ESCs for several reasons.

- ESCs provide districts technical assistance at free or reduced costs. ESCs analyze critical district performance and monitoring data in comparison to state and federal standards then provide tools, trainings and on-site technical assistance to assist districts in meeting performance and monitoring data.

For example, one large district's special education evaluation timeline data was significantly below the federal 100% standard. After the ESC conducted research for the district and provided onsite technical assistance, all at no cost to the district, that district's evaluation timeline data increased to above 95% resulting in **students and families receiving special education services more rapidly.**

- ESCs provide timely, evidence based professional development to districts at free or greatly reduced costs.

For example, in one large urban district, the ESC provided low cost, web based training to every special education teacher in the district in writing measurable goals for students with disabilities. Prior to the ESC training, a random sampling of IEPs revealed fewer than 10% had clear present levels of performance for IEP goals development. After the initial round of ESC training, over half sampled IEPs had clear, present levels of performance for IEP goals development. Clear present levels of performance drive the development of measurable IEP goals and are a critical step in **student achievement** for the development of appropriate instruction and tracking student progress.

Another example includes the professional development provided by ESCs in the areas of autism, transition and assistive technology at significantly reduced rates from the cost for a district to hire consultants or send staff to out of area trainings.

- ESCs are able to provide students in small districts direct services in critical need and shortage areas such as orientation and mobility services for students with visual impairments and school psychology services.
- ESCs serve as the primary information and guidance provider to districts regarding information from the Texas Education Agency. For example, ESCs keep districts abreast of critical funding information such as timing of funds distribution, changes in allowable costs and maintenance of effort.

TCASE believes Education Service Centers provide critical, timely, cost effective services to local districts and charters that increase student achievement and district compliance and therefore should continue to function as the key resource for district support.

If TCASE can answer any questions or provide any resources, please feel free to contact our Director of Governmental Relations, Janna Lilly, at 512-474-4492.