



TSTA OPPOSES SSES EXPANSION

TSTA opposes HB 1926 because we believe it is an inefficient use of funds and does not provide accountability.

An inefficient use of funds

We know that Texas was found to be in violation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act for failing to provide FAPE and that they are still under corrective action for this violation. We have also learned from testimony provided to this committee that districts are short \$2B to adequately serve students with special educational needs.

Legislation that diverts money from schools to private entities is a bad idea at base, but in Texas especially it also interferes with the obligation to make good on the violation of law and the services from which so many students were deprived. *Once parents of each of Texas's 600,000 special education students affirms that their student is being adequately served in school, then it might make sense to discuss supplementary, luxury services for select students.*

If the funding is being appropriated for supplemental services falls short of this measure, then TSTA advocates that students will be most effectively served — and money most efficiently spent — if educators can help determine what is needed to move students toward their IEP learning goals. Ideally, this is money given directly to schools because it avoids a situation where only some students are served with products that may or may not advance learning.

If, however, money is passed through as a grant to be won as this legislation proposes, then it is imperative that the ARD committee, which of course is comprised of both parents and educators, be involved in collaborative decision making.

Educators are uniquely positioned to have a clearer understanding of how products will and won't serve the learning goals of a student's IEP, and parents would have a formalized opportunity to ask questions about each of the products in relation to the unique needs of their child and the goals set by the committee.

Does not provide proper accountability

The Texas Education Agency has been given broad authority to approve vendors, but also can choose not to establish vendor criteria for a category of supplemental instructional materials, in which case the student can purchase from any vendor.

The agency does not currently track individual expenditures, so there is no way to track what supplemental services or instructional materials are currently being purchased and from whom. Instead, the purchase tracks back to Class Wallet, which is a vendor the agency contracted with to develop and administer the portal.

A recent public information request shows just under \$30M going to Class Wallet, but there is no publicly available indication what materials or services Class Wallet is purchasing, or from whom. The applicants indicate a general category of item that they intend to purchase, and “technology and technology accessories” represent the majority of these purchases.

“Services,” which would include therapies or tutoring, account for just three percent.

There is no way for the public to know what the \$28M paid to Class Wallet was purchasing, or whether the majority of that sum which was used to purchase technology and technology materials was purchasing from other vendors or from Class Wallet itself.

We have concerns that this legislation will just perpetuate inefficient use of taxpayer dollars with minimal accountability at the expense of our neediest students.