



TEXAS CENTER *for* DISABILITY STUDIES

Testimony on SB 1000
Senate Education Committee
March 27, 2007

SB 1000 establishes a mechanism for parents of students with autism or autism spectrum disorders to transfer their student within a district, between districts, or to a private school. The transfer of funding through any mechanism will weaken the public school system, making it difficult to adequately support the education of all students.

While it is clear that students with autism and autism spectrum disorders require specific instructional strategies to be successful, and also that there is a huge need for improvement in services for students with autism, a focus on training and professional development in research-based instructional strategies will greatly benefit these students as well as other students with disabilities in public school districts. When students, and the funding that supports them, transfers to other public and private schools, the real issue is not addressed, that of improving educational practices so that the academic and functional performance of students with disabilities is improved. There are also specific concerns regarding transfers to private schools, as there is no requirement there to comply with laws such as IDEA, No Child Left Behind, or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act; thus, important protections are lost when students leave the public school system. Additionally, while a private school might offer a specialized program for students with a specific disability, such as autism, the program may not be fully funded by the amount of district funding that transfers with the student, leading to inequities in education.

Providing resources for training of teachers, paraprofessionals, and other school personnel can effectively increase the capacity of schools so that these students will be successful. It is critical that all students receive appropriate instruction in the public schools and that resources are not depleted. The implementation of models such as those used to increase the effectiveness of reading instruction could be used to improve instructional strategies for students with autism and autism spectrum disorders.

Depleting resources from public schools is not the answer to effective education for students with autism, or any other disability. Increasing the capacity of the schools through training in research-based instructional strategies for school personnel is a more effective strategy. This will not only improve educational practices and outcomes for students with autism and autism spectrum disorders, but for all other students in the