

Testimony to Senate Education Committee on Senate Interim Charge #1 (SSA)
July 17, 2012
Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education

Honorable Kel Seliger and members of the Senate Committee on Education, my name is Lynse Pawelek, Director for the Atascosa-McMullen Cooperative and I am testifying on behalf of TCASE, the Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education. TCASE and I thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning. TCASE is a professional association comprised of nearly 1,200 members who administer and support special education programs throughout the state of Texas. TCASE supports the continuation of districts' flexibility in the use of shared services arrangements. Shared service arrangements (SSAs) often provide small districts with limited numbers of students with disabilities a cost effective framework for ensuring those students are provided the necessary and required services.

Background: LEAs often find it advantageous to share personnel or services, particularly when a school district cannot justify the cost of employing a specialized staff member on a full time basis, but a group of school districts can justify a portion of the salary or service.

TEC §29.007 states that local education agencies (LEAs) may enter into a written contract to jointly operate their special education programs. Additionally, 19 TAC §89.1075(e) states that LEAs that jointly operate their special education programs as a SSA, in accordance with TEC §29.007, shall do so in accordance with procedures developed by the TEA.

Special education SSAs are governed by specific requirements found in the Texas Education Code (TEC) and Texas Administrative Code (TAC). Basic special education SSAs are pre-established entities that retain their configuration from year to year unless affirmative action is taken by member LEAs to adjust the configuration. Additionally, special education SSAs are required to be governed by a written SSA contract which must be approved by the commissioner of education. Funds to which the cooperating LEAs are entitled may be allocated to the LEAs jointly as SSA units or SSA funds in accordance with the SSA agreement. (TEC, §29.007) Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Part B (IDEA-B) funds are allocated to SSAs jointly through the fiscal agent LEA.

Currently there are over 120 special education SSAs operating in Texas serving over 500 independent school districts.

TCASE supports the continuation of districts' flexibility in the use of (SSAs) for several reasons.

- Related services are a critical part of a student's IEP. Special education SSAs provide a **cost effective delivery system to students** needing services in staffing critical shortage areas such as speech therapy, occupational and physical therapy. For example: An SSA can hire full time staff such as diagnosticians or therapists to serve a larger group of students versus each small district paying higher contract service costs for fewer services.

- SSAs can provide a means for greater continuity of services and professional development for staff. Professional development provided by the Education Service Centers particularly provides timely, **cost effective supports for districts and students**. For example SSAs have received training from the ESCs on developing standards based IEPs. Those training costs are shared and multiple staff from SSA districts receives consistent training resulting in greater continuity and consistency in service delivery for students with disabilities.
- Special education SSAs also provide shared staff such as diagnosticians, school psychologists and therapists with broader opportunities for experiencing the implementation of research based instruction in a variety of classrooms across the member districts. This results in the pollination of high yield, research based strategies across multiple, member districts **at no additional cost**.
- Some smaller districts are able to provide the needed services to students independently without being a part of an SSA. Those districts have found **cost effective strategies** for service delivery unique to their student and staff population. These same districts, however still may need the future flexibility to enter into an SSA for a specific, low incidence student need such as a student needing Braille or sign language services.

TCASE supports the continuation of districts' flexibility in the use of shared services arrangements. TCASE believes shared service arrangements often provide small districts a cost effective framework for ensuring students with disabilities are provided needed services.

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