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TESTIMONY
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
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SB 840 by Lucio

The Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities (TCDD) is established by federal law in the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act and consists of a 27 member board, appointed by the Governor, 60% of whom are individuals with developmental disabilities or family members of individuals with disabilities. Other council members represent various state agencies that provide services to people with significant disabilities. The Council's purpose in law is to encourage policy change so that people with disabilities have opportunities to be fully included in their communities and exercise control over their own lives. We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on SB 840, relating to professional development institutes for public school teachers and paraprofessionals regarding education of students with disabilities.

SB 840 by Senator Lucio addresses the education needs of students with disabilities. TCDD believes that students with disabilities must be provided with individualized, appropriate instruction, research-based positive behavioral interventions and supports, and other necessary services in the least restrictive environment. To provide educational services in this manner, teachers and paraprofessionals working with students with disabilities must have access to the training and professional development that will afford them the knowledge to better serve students with disabilities. TCDD has recognized the importance of providing professional development and education opportunities to staff who work with students with disabilities and has funded a number of grant projects to train educators on many areas to improve special education services in Texas. The results of these grant projects are a good example of outcomes that could be expected when SB 840 is implemented.

As stipulated by Section (b)(3), a professional development institute must address the appropriate management of behaviors related to a student's disability. When training is provided to teachers on proper behavior management, negative indicators (such as PEIMS office referrals) decrease. TCDD currently funds behavior management training for school personnel in three regions of the state. These "Positive Behavior Support" projects have resulted in significant improvements for students with disabilities. In one area, the grantee reported a 24.4% reduction in PEIMS office referrals across the 22 campuses participating in the training. Additionally, placements to Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs were reduced by over 53.4%. Clearly, the outcomes of this project demonstrate the type of improvements to special education programs when training and education is provided to school personnel.

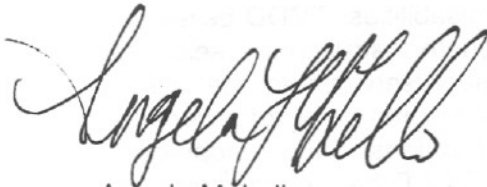
TCDD has also funded demonstration projects that examine best practices for providing inclusive education to students with disabilities. Once again, this staff training resulted in significant improvements to educational services for students with disabilities. Based on these outcomes, TCDD believes that training for teacher and support staff improves special education services.

SB 840 authorizes a stipend to cover the cost of attending a professional development which ensures that these training opportunities are accessible to each teacher and staff person. For many individuals, the cost of attending educational conferences and trainings may be prohibitive, and without financial

assistance, the individual may not be able to attend the education and training being offered. The need for stipend assistance to attend educational conferences and trainings is evidenced by the number of individuals receiving support from TCDD Stipend Grants each year. TCDD provides funding to sponsoring organizations of DD-related conferences and workshops to offer stipends to individuals who attend those events. Approximately 500-700 individuals attend conferences and workshops each year with support provided by these TCDD grants. We therefore believe that the provision in Section (c) of SB 840, authorizing a stipend to attend training, is a crucial piece of this bill. TCDD recognizes that this provision would eliminate a barrier that would otherwise prohibit some educational professionals from receiving the training necessary to better serve students with disabilities.

SB 840 contains several provisions that would positively impact the lives of students with disabilities and improve the special education services they receive. TCDD recognizes these improvements as necessary steps to achieve community integration for all people with developmental disabilities in Texas. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like to discuss this issue further. We are also available as a resource to you and your office on this matter and other issues affecting people with developmental disabilities.

Respectfully submitted,



Angela M. Lello
Public Policy Director

Encl: TCDD Education Position Statement



Education Position Statement

All people with disabilities in Texas should have the opportunity to achieve their maximum potential for independence, productivity and integration into the community. Education is a lifelong learning process which is vital to attaining a full and complete life. The postsecondary results of an appropriate public school education for students with disabilities should be evidenced by employment, enrollment in postsecondary school, or both within one year of leaving high school.

The Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities believes that all students regardless of individual needs must be provided with individualized appropriate instruction, research-based positive behavioral interventions and supports, access to the general curriculum, and related services in the least restrictive environment. Related services include but are not limited to adaptive, assistive technology; modifications; and supplementary aides. Related services must be designed to ensure students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The delivery of individually appropriate instruction and related services must be provided by qualified teachers and service providers with administrative support and opportunities for continued/ongoing professional development in all areas of identified need. It is the position of the Council, as well as the policy of the state, that all children should be treated with dignity and respect when addressing behavioral and disciplinary needs of students.

The Council believes that students who may access publicly funded education through charter schools or schools accepting voucher payments must be accorded the same education as noted above. The Council believes that schools that accept state money to educate students must accept any student with a developmental disability who may apply for admission to that school, abide by federal and state education laws that protect the rights of students with disabilities, abide by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act that requires any entity receiving federal funds to include people with disabilities in its program, and accept any student at the state rate of payment asking for no additional tuition or fees beyond the normal fees required by the student's independent school district. If these criteria are not met, then the Council adamantly opposes publicly funded school vouchers and charter schools. The Council is opposed to any initiative that would deplete funds from the public education system and ultimately from funds available for the education of students with disabilities.

The Council believes that full inclusion should be approached as a value and underlying philosophy by which we educate all students. We believe that successful inclusion requires that teacher education programs prepare all educators and administrators to work with the full range of students in inclusive settings. Special education is not a separate educational system, but rather a service provided to people with specific needs within the general educational system. Professional preparation programs should emphasize the shared responsibility of all educators and administrators for all students.

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The Council believes that full inclusion requires the ongoing, shared responsibility of students, parents, guardians, educators, administrators and the community at large.

It is therefore the position of the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities that all students have a right to learn, play and work with students their own age, with and without disabilities, in the same schools, classrooms and other educational programs attended by their brothers, sisters and neighbors, and that schools, classrooms and programs must be both physically and programmatically accessible to all students.

Reviewed November 3, 2006