



Jefferson Independent School District
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July 16, 2012

To: Honorable Members – Senate Education Committee
Texas Senate
Austin, Texas 78711

Greetings:

This letter is written to all concerned and is to serve as a recommendation for full and continued support for the Education Service Centers of Texas, specifically regarding ESC8 in Mt. Pleasant, Texas. The public school districts of Northeast Texas stand together in declaring the existence of ESC8 is absolutely essential to our past, current and future success. ***To effectively conduct day-to-day district operations, we must be able to partner with our neighbors, ESC 8.*** Jefferson ISD is located in Marion County, with a high percentage of poverty and over 400 miles of bus routes to cover. We are cutting at every corner and must have the assistance and expertise of a fully staffed service center to provide us with services we otherwise cannot afford. As ESC's face an uncertain future, keep in mind that total state funding only accounts for less than 15% of ESC funding which the state has control over via the Texas Education Agency and through legislation over ESC's and how they are overseen.

Be certain of these facts:

1. ESC's are held accountable through annual independent audits, annual legislative reports, annual regional performance hearings, party client satisfaction surveys, workshop evaluation systems and many other systems. Most importantly, school districts hold ESC's accountable through superintendent and other advisory councils.
2. ESC's provide services and support to small and large, rural, urban and suburban school districts across the state.
3. ESC's operate on a cost-recovery basis and are not large profit centers. **See attached statements.**

Did you know that because of the help and guidance we get from ESC 8, Jefferson ISD has worked to become:

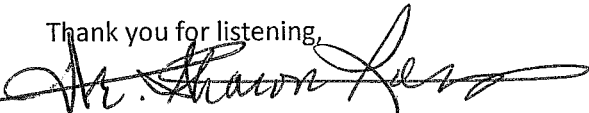
- Effective in all areas of school business. For the 4 years I've served as JISD Superintendent, ESC 8 has helped us become more effective in educating students of Marion County. In addition the staff is present and visible in our district. Marilyn was in our offices Thursday assisting our payroll specialists!

- Efficient in operations. TIPS is available to help us save on business proposals. ESC staff are called upon to assist in district offices to make procedures more efficient; thus saving district funds. Board training is offered close to home for those who cannot afford to travel long distances. Karen makes sure her staff comes to the rescue when we call for help!
- Energized by recognizing the efforts of all stakeholders such as recognizing districts and school board members at the annual Northeast Texas School Board Dinner. Dr. Glynn continues systemic planning training! Lacy is the spark plug of energizing others!
- Informed through regularly scheduled Regional Advisory Committee meetings, a joint conference with ESC 7, email, phone calls, etc... Tina sends us information **regularly**.
- Engaged in effective training to engage district faculty and staff. Superintendents are kept abreast of changes in education and effective, best practices through book studies and other avenues. Cynthia, Tommy and Sheila are all one phone call away on speed dial!
- United Forces working together to solve problems. Our contracts were actually reduced last year and remained the same in cost this year.

With great respect for the job and decisions ahead of you, I strongly encourage you to hear the voice of the scholar practitioners in the trenches. Every effort must be made to save the service centers. And for those of us who already drive a long distance for training, consolidation is not always the best answer either. We are seriously underfunded by billions of dollars and as stated in an article from Texas ISD.com Today's News, "Legislature has implemented major cuts to education funding but it hasn't cut funding for high-stakes testing. The state has already paid Pearson, an educational conglomerate based in London, \$151 million for the STAAR exams. If the state doesn't terminate the contract, by 2016 Texas will have paid Pearson a total of \$468 million". As the writer said, and I repeat: What a waste! We do understand accountability but cut the waste on added testing.

As for the future of ESC 8, it is their vision "to create a State-Wide Systemic Culture to sustain a high-performing learning community" and certainly they are doing just that. ESC 8 is not only a powerful entity and partner throughout Northeast Texas; their presence is currently impacting districts in other parts of the state. The Systemic Planning model is being used in other school districts in Texas. That is a fact. The facts are quite simple. We support and need ESC 8!

Thank you for listening,



Dr. Sharon Ross
Jefferson ISD Superintendent

ESC TALKING POINTS

Education Service Centers (ESCs) face an uncertain future after undergoing budget cuts during the 82nd Legislative Session of 40%. ESCs provide vital services and support to Texas public schools. Keep in mind that total state funding only accounts for less than 15% of ESC funding; however, the state has control via the Texas Education Agency and through legislation over ESCs and how they are overseen.

ESCs' mission is simple: provide service and support to school districts. ESCs provide a variety of services and products to school districts including: professional development, financial and student software, instructional materials, internet filtering, board training, teacher and administrator training, direct services such as staffing librarians, counselors, nurses and business managers, Head Start, Adult Basic Education, Early Childhood Intervention, auditing services, technical assistance, and more!

The 2011 legislative report required by Rider 39 in the 82nd Legislative Session found that "*prices of ESC products and services were generally lower than alternate providers, creating savings for school districts.*"

COMMON MYTHS & MISPERCEPTIONS:

ESCS HAVE NO ACCOUNTABILITY: ESCs are held accountable through annual independent audits, annual legislative reports, annual regional performance hearings, reporting PEIMS data (budget, personnel, shared services), annual 3rd-Party client satisfaction surveys, workshop evaluation systems, program advisory committees, on-line posting of check registers, performance based monitoring, annual evaluation by the Commissioner of Education, program audits and reviews from various agencies (Texas Education Agency, Texas Department of State Health Services, Department of Health and Human Services, Texas LEARNS, Texas Department of Agricultural, Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, etc), annual needs assessment and program review, and performance scorecard measures. Most importantly, school districts hold ESCs accountable through superintendent and other advisory councils.

ESCS ONLY SERVE A FEW SMALL, RURAL DISTRICTS: ESCs provide services and support to school districts across the state. All ESCs serve small, rural schools and also serve urban, suburban schools. Services provided to urban and suburban schools include braille textbooks, technology integration, working with underperforming campuses, etc. Urban-located ESCs also serve a number of small, rural schools: urban ESCs serve approximately 368 districts fewer than 5,000 students.

ESCS ARE LARGE PROFIT CENTERS: ESCs are not large profit centers. ESCs operate on a cost-recovery basis and keep fund balances in order to maintain and improve services to school districts. ESCs do not levy taxes or sell bonds, so fund balances are often used for building construction, maintenance, and facilities repairs. Any profit from a given year goes toward providing new or improved services for school districts the following year or for maintaining current services at the lowest possible price.

CONCLUSION:

I support the continued funding of Regional Education Service Centers (ESCs), which deliver critical support and services to Texas public school districts. Funding for the twenty ESCs that serve over 1,000 school districts across the state should be maintained at the current level (and increased as funding allows). ESCs are a vital part of the Texas public school system and offer numerous cost-saving services that benefit Texas public schoolchildren and save dollars for Texas taxpayers.