



Texarkana ISD Virtual Academy

TEA/TxVSN approved School in Texas beginning 2011-2012 school year

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Texarkana ISD and I would like to thank the committee and Senator Leticia Van de Putte for holding a hearing that specifically examines the study of virtual schools in Texas. Thank you for reviewing the benefits of virtual schools, related successes in other states, and needed changes to remove barriers to virtual schools.

When Texarkana ISD wrote the application for consideration of approval to become one of the three chosen Texas Public Virtual Schools in Texas, the decision to start small (with an enrollment of 105 students today) and grow with each school year seemed the rational and prudent way to begin a new educational venue.

Benefits of Virtual Schools in Texas:

1. Students who benefit from the Texarkana ISD Virtual Academy are:
 - a. Students who struggle in a traditional brick and mortar school setting
 - b. Students with special educational needs
 - c. Students in need of remedial attention
 - d. Gifted students able to learn at an accelerated pace, and
 - e. Students who, for health reasons, would benefit from virtual school instruction.
2. Additional benefits include the opportunity to interact with students throughout the state of Texas through virtual classrooms and on site educational field trips throughout the state with the highly qualified teachers and other students who are learning and excited about the 21st century skills offered to them.

Barriers to address:

1. Enrollment barrier: Texas Education Code 30 A.002 (b) now limits a parent/student from enrollment. To be eligible to enroll in a Texas Public School Virtual School like Texarkana ISD Virtual Academy, a student must have been enrolled in any Texas public school in the previous school year. During the 2011-2012 school year, we received this notification after school had been in session and more than 50% of the enrollment came from students who had not been in a Texas public school the previous year. Fortunately, the Commissioner of Education and TEA were able to “grandfather” all 2011-2012 enrolled students so Texarkana ISD could receive funding. Beginning with this school year, Texarkana ISD Virtual Academy received over 600 inquiries from families wanting to enroll their children in our school. The law needs to be changed to allow virtual schools the opportunity to grow and offer the best Virtual education to the children of Texas. Parents who choose to educate their children in this learning environment are Texas tax payers and community members. It becomes an equity and discrimination issue when a parent is told their child cannot enroll in a Texas Public Virtual Academy; however, they can take their child to a brick and mortar public school and enroll.
2. Testing: All students enrolled in virtual schools have the same accountability measures required by the state such as STAAR; however, school districts throughout the state last year refused to help administer the test to enrolled students of schools such as TxxVA. Many school districts agreed to help; however, the ones who refused students were very adamant and contacted TEA numerous times. Many school districts were unaware there were Texas Public Virtual schools approved and it was a matter of information and understanding the new concept of learning. Most virtual school students cannot travel to Texarkana to test and Texarkana ISD Virtual Academy teachers are not able to go to the homes of all the students enrolled and administer the required state assessment. The solution to this barrier would be to allow students in Virtual schools the opportunity to take the test online through a testing center on local junior college campuses or allow students to test in their local school district residence area.
3. Funding: Consideration should be given to fund based on enrollment throughout the school year, not solely based on successful completion. Parents who enroll their student at the beginning of the school year and due to an economic crisis requires the parent must go to work and move the child to brick and mortar instead of remaining with the virtual school. The school district where the child enrolls begins to receive ADA funding based on enrollment; however, the Virtual

School doesn't receive any funding for the days the student was enrolled. This causes the school district with a virtual school to lose funding and ultimately become over budget after spending money on curriculum, technology and teachers salaries.

It is a great honor to be able to address this prestigious committee today. I prayerfully ask that you examine the need to reduce the barriers to allow schools like Texarkana ISD Virtual Academy the opportunity to continue to serve the children of the great state of Texas with a 21st century learning opportunity that will make every Texan proud.