



HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

HATTIE MAE WHITE EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT CENTER
4400 WEST 18th STREET • HOUSTON, TEXAS 77092-8501

March 26, 2007

The Honorable Florence Shapiro
Senate Committee on Education
P.O. Box 12068, Capitol Station
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Senator Shapiro:

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) has identified numerous problems with Senate Bill 1000. As you know, HISD is a district of choice (a student can basically apply to attend any school within HISD) and we have a long history of developing in-district charters to provide parents and students with choices in their educational experiences.

We have heard that a committee substitute will be offered. Our comments are responding to the version that has been filed.

SB 1000 allows a student to transfer between districts solely because of a diagnosis. HISD already has eligibility disputes driven, most likely, by eligibility for SSI benefits, as a student with autism is eligible for SSI benefits. This adds another incentive to get a child classified as eligible for services as a student with autism, which will mean the district will be involved in more legal disputes regarding a student's eligibility.

Additionally, the amount of money we get from the state does not generally cover the cost of providing services to students with autism. There are not that many private schools in the region that treat autistic children and we doubt that the "scholarship" that the state will provide will be enough of an incentive for private schools to accept many of these students. It is our belief that HISD's autistic population will increase, which will cost the district more money and increase the number of special education students. This will have an unintended consequence of making it more difficult for the district to meet NCLB's strict requirements on special education.

While the intent may be to afford a choice to a population that the legislators may feel is not well served, the unintended consequence may be to lessen incentives to school districts to develop effective, scientifically based programs to assist students with autism. Why should a district work to develop an effective program if the consequence is that anyone can transfer into the district to take advantage of it? Secondly, a district could avoid the difficulty and expense by

letting the student leave. This provides a strong disincentive to have a good educational program for students with autism. Furthermore, there is no language in SB 1000 that allows a district to serve the needs of autistic students within its district first.

The bill imposes a requirement on the district to identify and develop an IEP for the student and then gives the parent the choice of accepting the IEP or transferring to a private school or to another public school district. Additionally, the private school is specifically relieved of the requirement to implement an Individual Education Plan (IEP). We are unclear if the state can authorize the expenditure of federal funds for a disabled child in a manner that does not comply with the requirements of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

We will be more than willing to work with you on this bill and we hope our concerns are reflected in the committee substitute.

Should you have any questions and/or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at rflores4@houstonisd.org or 713.204.6202

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca Flores', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and extends across the width of the line.

Rebecca Flores
Director, Government Relations

cc: Members of the Senate Committee on Education
Dr. Abelardo Saavedra, Superintendent of Schools
Hans Graf
Carolyn Guess