

## Discussion Points for Dr. Washington Senate Hearing-June 16, 2010

- Shekinah Learning Institute is divided into two districts, with 14 campuses located in the San Antonio, Dallas, Houston, and Del Rio areas. The student population for both districts is approximately 1850. Two new campuses will be opening this fall in Dallas and Brownsville. I founded Shekinah in 1998 and the charter schools have been in operation for 11.5 years.
- Prior to founding the charter schools, I served as a practitioner in the field, teaching special needs students in the mainstream and resource classrooms.
- Serving on the Governor's Continuing Advisory Committee for Special Education and the Texas Continuous Improvement Process, Steering Committee, as a committee member, I was able to advise on student unmet needs, performance targets and give input for improvement from a parental and practitioner point of views.
- We serve our special needs students in an Inclusion Program, which meets with the guidelines of *least restrictive environment* (FAPE/LRE)) and we offer a continuum of services based on student IEP; this allows each student access to the general curriculum. Parental involvement is high and teachers in the classroom are dual certified to better meet student special needs and curriculum requirements. "We *service* our students, not *program* them." Shekinah Learning Institute met AYP in both of their districts for the 2009-2010 school year.

### Student Progress/Success

Five percent of our special education student population meets the eligibility of Autism. Each of these students have been in attendance a minimum of 2 years and one has been with us for 6 years. Sixty-six percent of these students passed in reading on the TAKS A, 100% passed in Social Studies on the TAKS A, none took the TAK ALT, and students taking the TAKM

math continue to receive reinforcement and tutoring to increase the passing rates. All are a part of our Inclusion program with IEP support.

## **Shekinah Learning Institute Special Education Program** **Statistics**

**The special education population of Shekinah Learning Institute is 8% of the total student population (Approximately 148 students).**

**Students served in the district qualify in 7 of the 13 eligibility categories. (Percentages will not total 100 since some students qualify in more than one category)**

- ❖ Autism Spectrum Disorder (5%)
- ❖ Emotional Disturbance (5%)
- ❖ Mental Retardation (7%)
- ❖ Speech Impairment (31%)
- ❖ Specific Learning Disability (62%)
- ❖ Other Health Impairment (21%)
- ❖ Visually Impaired (1%)

**The district offers a continuum of services and ensures the students are served in the least restrictive environment.**

- ❖ (40) Mainstream (76% of students are serviced in the general education setting/access to general curriculum with non-handicapped peers )
- ❖ (41) Less than 21% Resource Room (14% of students are pulled out for support or an additional staff member pulled in to give assistance)
- ❖ (42) At least 20% but no more 50% Resource Room (1% of students)
- ❖ (00) No instructional arrangement etc. speech therapy (9% of students)

### **Strengths of the Shekinah Special Education Program/ Current Best Practices**

- ❖ **Inclusion and Transition:** Inclusion programming allows each student to access the general curriculum and to interact educationally and socially with non-handicap peers. Strong collaboration with ESCs, DARS, local school districts, and other community agencies. Communication with parents is ongoing and our special education teachers have a close relationship with their parents.

- ❖ Progress monitoring/Strong Parental Involvement/Qualified Staffing: Our schools are continuously monitoring the progress of the students every three weeks and parent are contacted if their child is not progressing adequately. Our teachers communicate constantly with the general education teachers on the student's progress. Documentation of student's progress is collected every three weeks and evaluated for program effectiveness. Teachers are dually certified to meet student needs and curriculum requirements.
- ❖ Continuum of services are continuously evolving: As student demographics change and vary in our charter schools, student services are monitored for compliance with IEP goals and parents are kept in the loop concerning progress and decisions based on service.

### **Improvements suggested for Special Need Students in Public School Settings**

- ❖ These students should be afforded the same opportunity as other students in public schools, a magnet or mission specific program to meet their needs, such as a charter school of choice. Charter schools that offer quality programs for these students should be able to replicate their success and share their practices with other academic communities.
- ❖ Opportunity for a multi-disciplinary team assessment, developed by stakeholders to monitor the true growth and progress of these students quantitatively and qualitatively over time.
- ❖ Parallel programming opportunities and partnerships with other public schools to expand collaborative activities, inclusive of private schools to better serve these students based on parent decision, not just ARD placement decisions.
- ❖ Opportunities to explore multiple use for technology support. Instruction should be supported for each special need student by use of technology systems and software. This will allow each student to be exposed and access up to date technology like their non-handicapped peers.