

**Testimony Before the Senate Education Committee regarding Special Education
Wednesday, June 16, 2010**

Good Morning Madam Chair and Members of the Committee. I'm Dr. Tom Wilson, the Superintendent of *Life School of Dallas*. I founded Life School in 1998. Our school now has 3,800 enrollment and is a Recognized District.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss Best Practices and ideas for improvement in our public schools. Today, I will focus on how we can better meet the needs of kids in Special Education (SPED) – specifically in the area of Autism. The Autism Crisis is huge. One in every 150 kids have Autism.

Although our traditional or public charter schools are meeting the needs of some kids with Autism, others are falling through the cracks. The kids that are falling through the cracks need a customized approach.

On the Autistic spectrum, Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD), and Sensory Integration Dysfunction (SID), illustrate the problem. In both SPD and SID, sensory signals do not get organized into appropriate responses. The student with sensory issues finds it hard to process and act upon information received through the senses.

Most school settings are nightmares for the child suffering with sensory issues. Bright lights, buzzing fluorescents, and floor to ceiling charts and posters which typically adorn classrooms drive these children "over the edge." "Schools of choice" are needed with customized classrooms designed to soothe students with Autism so they can function academically and socially.

Most children with Autism yearn for friends and want to function in social situations; however, they are not wired to understand the nuances required to navigate through the complex world of human interaction. We can provide a place where they learn how to socialize so they may be placed in a hybrid SPED-mainstream educational structure.

Question: What if we could provide a "school of choice" for parents who cannot find a place for their child who is on the spectrum? Where a child can go to school in an atmosphere that celebrates who he is without the typical noises, decor, lighting, etc. – so that by the 6th or 7th grade they're able to enter a mainstream educational system?

The Texas Legislature should allow for new charters primarily serving students with Autism. The 81st Legislature SB 1830, which passed both houses but was lost on a point of order, could have provided new charters focusing on serving SPED and autistic students. We hope you can deliver such a bill to the governor's desk this session.

Even more importantly, updated accountability measures for this type of charter school should accurately match the deliberate mission. The specialized mission school would provide focused instruction, utilizing passionate educators and individualized education plans tailored specifically to meet the academic, social and emotional needs of the autistic population.

Thank you for your time today, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

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