

**SB 773 Testimony of Dr. John Folks, Northside ISD**  
**Senate Business & Commerce Committee**  
**March 8, 2011**

Good morning. I'm Dr. John Folks, superintendent of Northside ISD in San Antonio. Thank you so much for the opportunity to submit my testimony to you today in favor of Senate Bill 773.

Northside ISD is the state's fourth largest school district with an enrollment of almost 95,000 students and a staff of more than 13,000. We are growing by about 3,000 students a year and open anywhere from two to five new schools each year. Currently, we have 119 schools and facilities scattered across 355 square miles in northwest San Antonio.

As you can imagine, communication between our schools and facilities, and with our parents, taxpayers and business vendors is critical to our operations. To put it simply, telecommunications services keeps all of our schools and facilities connected to each other and to the public. Fortunately, for more than a decade, school districts across the state of Texas have received significant telecommunications service discounts thanks to House Bill 2128, which was passed in 1995 and extended by Senate Bill 5 in 2006.

I fully support Senate Bill 773 because it would extend this greatly-needed and much-appreciated discount until 2024. With school districts facing potentially drastic budget cuts and layoffs, containing our costs has never been more important. The legislative discount, combined with reimbursements from the federally-funded eRate program, will continue to save Texas millions in taxpayer dollars.

In 2010, AT&T charged Northside ISD about \$1.7 million for VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) services, regular telephone service, long distance service, and network connectivity for all district facilities. Without the special pricing provided by the Legislature, our AT&T bill could have easily been three times higher – in the \$5 million range. Our eRate reimbursement brought the cost down even further to about \$695,000.

Even in a district of our size, every dollar counts. We depend on both the state and federal programs to keep the cost of our telecommunications affordable. We currently are in the last year of a five-year contract with AT&T, so if the discounts were not extended, it would affect our budget starting in July of 2012. Because our telecommunications services are so basic to our operations, we would have no choice but to cut another area of our budget in order to make ends meet.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 773. Thank you for your time today and for your commitment to the state of Texas.