



Austin Independent School District

1111 W. 6th Street ~ Austin TX 78703 ~ 512-414-1700 ~ 512-414-1486 (Fax)

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Education July 17, 2012

Good morning, Chairman Seliger and members of the Committee. I am Mel Waxler, Chief of Staff for the Austin Independent School District.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide the Committee with information regarding the types of services Region XIII provides AISD, and how our District staff, the community and our students benefit from our collaboration.

School districts have been struggling to make ends meet with rising accountability standards, a growing population of at-risk students, increased operating costs, and reduced funding. The Austin Independent School District lost about \$35.6 million in state funding, nearly \$64 million in federal stimulus funding, and \$20 million in state grants in Fiscal Year 2012. Faced with these drastic cuts, our District had to implement a reduction in force that resulted in the elimination of 1,153 positions, and, in addition, implemented other cost-cutting measures.

Unfortunately, AISD employees have had to share the burden of reduced funding - paying more for health care, and having to do more with less. The district has instituted efficiencies, leveraging resources wherever possible. Some of the programs that Region XIII provides AISD help not only with efficiency in these tight economic times, but also go a long way in helping our teachers and administrators fulfill our primary and most important function – providing the best education for our students.

One of the most important and valuable partnerships between AISD and Region XIII is the Educator Certification Program. These certification programs help AISD “grow our own” talent and provide our employees and other Austin professionals, the opportunity to teach in AISD and obtain the necessary certifications to become principals.

One of the unique certification programs, **Austin ISD Teacher Academy**, provides professionals from different non-education fields an alternative to the traditional college route to certification. It is a rigorous, field-based program that integrates theory with practice and allows teacher-interns to make valuable contributions to Austin ISD schools as they build strategies for success in the classroom.

The Program offers:

- a long and established history of recruiting, training and supporting first year teachers;
- evening and weekend classes to accommodate individuals currently employed;
- structured and sustained support provided throughout the first year of teaching;
- training by nationally recognized program and highly recruited staff; and
- excellence in training teachers as recognized by the US Department of Education.

When Austin ISD selects participants into its program, they are also given a hired, unassigned contract to teach in Austin ISD. During the pre-service part of the program, interns interview with Austin campuses to find their assignment within the system.

For the 2012-13 school year, Austin ISD Teacher Academy trained 48 candidates for AISD; 6 of those individuals were teacher assistants in the district. Training degreed employees in our district creates an additional pipeline to staff in critical areas.

Another certification program, the **Principal Certification Network**, provides opportunities for AISD teachers to obtain the necessary credentials to become principals. This is a 15 month program for teachers who already have their master's degree who are interested in attaining this certification. This program is part of a leadership pipeline to develop internal leadership capacity. Region XIII provides the training as well as site visits & support for both cohort members & their mentors.

To be eligible for the Principal Certification Network, a teacher must have:

- A valid Texas teacher certificate
- 2 years teaching experience

- A graduate degree with a GPA of 3.0 or higher, and
- 3 years leadership experience

We estimate that AISD saves a total of \$480,000 on an annual basis because of the alternative teacher certification programs Region XIII provides. In addition, AISD averages sending about 3,000 employees to various workshops held at Region XIII, at an average savings per participant in professional development workshops of about \$140, for an annual savings to AISD of around \$520,000.

One more program I'd like to highlight is the Transition to Teaching- Language Leaders Program, a collaboration with 9 area school districts to place Bilingual, Bilingual Special Education and Languages Other Than English (LOTE) teachers in high needs schools throughout these districts.

District partners in this program include: Austin ISD, Elgin ISD, Gonzales ISD, Llano ISD, Luling ISD, Manor ISD, Marble Falls ISD, Nixon-Smiley ISD, and San Marcos Consolidated ISD.

The Transition to Teaching program from the United States Department of Education supports the recruitment and retention of highly qualified mid-career professionals, degreed para-professionals and recent college graduates who have not majored in education to teach in high-need schools and districts.

As part of the Transition to Teaching grant, Region XIII assures that these teachers are able to incorporate specific techniques for helping students to acquire a second language in order to meet the districts' needs for teachers to serve the growing population of English language learners and for high quality foreign language instructors. Interns are taught research-based, effective practices to enhance students' language acquisition. In addition, interns are instructed in incorporating project-based and technology-based learning into their instructional practices to better prepare students to meet the challenges of post-secondary education.

As Dr. Smith has indicated, there are many other valuable services Region XIII provides AISD. Our Guidance and Registrar Department reports that Region XIII provides outstanding professional development on a variety of topics that are important for counselors and registrars to have.

Our Associate Superintendent for Academics reports that:

One of the greatest services provided by Region XIII is the Curriculum Council meetings which provide us with the most current, up-to-the-date information, as well as the time to collaborate with peers from surrounding school districts. In addition, every time I've called on the service center staff, they've responded quickly with the needed information and support. The Region XIII staff members are truly our educational partners as we collaborate to meet the needs of our diverse students.

Our Office of Accountability and Assessment says the following:

From my perspective, Region XIII staff provide valuable PEIMS support services. They are knowledgeable, provide regular updates on changes to the reporting requirements, and are effective liaisons between district and TEA staff.

For example, Austin ISD recently had a question about the best way to report one of our Special Education students, and our question involved multiple TEA divisions (Special Education, PEIMS and Foundation School Funding). I called and explained the situation to John Shaffer at Region XIII, who brokered the solution among TEA staff and provided a written response within the day.

Given the current staffing level in TEA's PEIMS division, I honestly don't know how they alone could possibly respond to the many reporting issues that arise from all of the districts across the state, particularly as we prepare to transition to the new Texas Student Data System (TSDS) that is scheduled to begin replacing the current PEIMS system in 2013-2014.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information about this valuable collaboration. I would be happy to answer any questions.