

**Update to The Arc of Texas Membership  
80<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature: Special Education Initiatives  
March 19, 2007**

**The Special Education Initiatives highlighted below will help ensure that students with disabilities receive a "free appropriate public education" as required by federal law since 1975. New federal regulations require that schools use educational methodologies and practices that are based on peer-reviewed research. These same regulations also require all school personnel working with students with disabilities to have the skills and knowledge of scientifically-based instructional practices needed to ensure success in the classroom. Texas must respond by assuring that our teachers, paraprofessionals, therapists and others who work with students with disabilities get the necessary training and support.**

In 2006, the Governor-appointed Texas Council on Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders issued its annual state plan. Council members, concerned about how schools would implement the requirements for the use of scientifically-based practices with students with autism, called for major reforms in the state's provision of special education services. The Special Education Initiatives described below also incorporate many of their recommendations. Their specific recommendations are noted by the relevant bill.

**State Improvement Grant**, The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has the opportunity to apply for a federal Office of Special Education Programs State Improvement Grant to provide professional development for educators that could provide approximately 6 million dollars over a 5 years period. Texas is the only state that has not applied for these funds. These funds can help pay for the training and information dissemination initiatives outlined in the bills below.  
Texas Autism Council recommendation I.2

**SB. 1049 by Zaffirini**, will provide a clearinghouse of information on research-based programs and best practices in the instruction of students with Autism and Autism-related disorders. It also requires TEA to assure the provision of technical assistance to school districts so they can implement research-based programs. Both teachers and parents say that teachers do not have adequate access to the information and help they need to assure student success.  
(Autism Council Recommendation 1.2)

**SB 1490 by Watson**, will require TEA to update and maintain a parent-friendly guide to the special education process. The current ARD Guide is more than 5 years old and does not include updates in federal laws and regulations. This guide helps parents understand the special education process so they can participate as partners with the school district in developing and implementing their child's individual education program.

**SB 873 by Van De Putte**, will provide a wage increase for education support staff in public schools. This wage increase includes paraprofessionals who are crucial in providing consistent and effective supports and accommodations to students in special education programs to ensure the student is progressing in the state curriculum.

**SB 603 by Van De Putte**, will require regular education teachers to receive staff development on research-based instruction for students with disabilities. The vast majority of the 500,000 students with disabilities in Texas receive some or all of their instruction in the regular classroom. Training for regular education teachers is key to the success of these students. Texas Autism Council recommendation I.4

**SB 840 by Lucio**, will require TEA to develop professional development institutes for public school teachers and paraprofessionals regarding education of students with disabilities. These intensive training institutes will include instruction on research-based methods and behavior management and are modeled after the highly successful math and reading institutes that provide incentives for teachers to attend during the summer. Teachers who attend these institutes can provide training to other teachers in their district. Texas Autism Council recommendation I.4

**SB 1686 by Watson** will require that the students Admission Review and Dismissal (ARD) Committee consider and discuss the qualifications and experience of personnel working with special education students. Parents and teachers will have the opportunity to express their opinions and request the ARD committee consider the need for teacher and paraprofessional training. Texas Autism Council recommendation I.4

**SB 673 by Zaffirini**, will allow a student receiving special education services to participate in a graduation ceremony after the fourth year of high school. This will allow students who have worked hard to participate in the graduation ceremony with their peers and continue to receive appropriate instruction based on their individualized education program (IEP).

**SB 1625 by Watson/HB 439 by Hochberg** will require, on the request of a regular education teacher who has a child with disabilities in their class, training on research-based practices to meet the academic and behavioral needs of the student and as necessary timely assistance from appropriately trained personnel to ensure the student's needs are met in the classroom. It also requires the establishment of an Internet website to provide resources for teachers who teach students with special health needs. The vast majority of the 500,000 students with disabilities in Texas receive some or all of their instruction in a regular classroom. Training, assistance, and access to information is necessary for these

teachers and students to be successful. Texas Autism Council recommendation I.4

**SB 1491 by Watson/HB 1140 by Hochberg**, will establish in law a grant program to assist school districts in covering the excess costs required to educate some students with disabilities who have significant needs. These funds may be used for staff development Through a TEA budget rider federal funds are currently used to provide for student costs that exceed 3 times the average per pupil expenditure per year. A majority of these funds were used for students with Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorders.

**SB 1342 by Gallegos**, will establish a State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC) Autism Spectrum Disorders specialist certificate for public school teachers. This certificate will require teachers to demonstrate the knowledge and skills required to implement research based instruction and behavior management techniques for students with Autism Spectrum disorders. Teachers who receive this certification can provide training to other teachers in their district. Texas Autism Council recommendation I.3

**SB 1585 by Gallegos/HB 1984 by Thompson**, will create a statewide Autism Spectrum Disorders resource program. The resource program will collect and disseminate information and research, conduct training and provide support for families Texas Autism Council recommendation I.1

**SB 419 by Lucio**, will require health benefit plan coverage for children ages 3-5 with Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorders. Most parents who are financially able will supplement therapies provided at school with private therapy. Research supports early intervention and intensive therapy for young children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Many of these children who receive these early intensive therapies may require less extensive services when they enroll in school. Texas Autism Council recommendation V.5