

TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Keena Miller
Phone: 512-462-5328, cell: 512-658-4444
Email: Keena.miller@tsd.state.tx.us



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Texas School for the Deaf Re-Caps Hearing with the Texas Legislative Senate Finance Committee

Austin, Texas – February 9, 2015 – In its first hearing today in front of the state’s Senate Finance Committee, the Texas School for the Deaf (TSD), school parents and Deaf community members submitted testimony supporting the school’s Legislative Appropriations Request for the current biennium.

In addition to its base, TSD this session is requesting exceptional funding for enhancements in career and technical education to expand its career and college readiness programs – specifically in culinary arts and building trades – both in direct response to demands of students seeking these skills, as well as demands for specialized skillsets being called for to fill jobs in the market today.

Additionally, many of the school’s transportation vehicles are aging with excessive mileage and are in dire need of replacement.

And most critically, TSD presented an exceptional request for extra specialized support staff, including adding one occupational therapist for a total of two serving the entire campus population, and an additional Hispanic-family liaison to serve the growing number of Latino, Spanish-only speaking families seeking support and guidance from the school and its statewide outreach support programs and services.

While there to present funding needs for 2016-'17, TSD also was prepared with testimony in response to information provided previously to this same committee by the Texas Facilities Commission (TFC) claiming the school had neglected its facilities and mishandled appropriations allocated to maintenance repairs in the past.

Prepared to review these prior concerns with the committee again, TSD was certainly surprised when questions were raised mentioning sale of the school’s current property.

In the late 1990’s, the decision to consolidate TSD’s then two campuses was made with the goal to design one centralized campus, bringing all age groups and all centralized services together. (TSD’s second campus East Austin sat on 44 acres with 15 buildings.)

In partnership with state leaders and the TFC, TSD spent the next 10+ years under new construction - which resulted in 458,000 square feet of new buildings on the school’s original site where TSD was established in 1856 - with the sole purpose to streamline operations, maximize efficiencies and reduce redundancies.

As the school’s initial phase of construction is now more than 20 years old, repairs and upgrades are inevitably surfacing.

Additionally, the school has in fact experienced a number of emergency situations in recent years, which consumed funds originally intended for planned repair and renovation.



Historically until 2014, TSD held responsibility for its own maintenance.

Though with the implementation of Senate Bill 1457 in just this last legislative session, all TSD maintenance functions – including the school’s 12 full-time maintenance staff as well as approximately \$5.9 million in operating costs and repair and rehabilitation dollars, was handed to the TFC along with maintenance responsibility for the TSD campus.

The last of two facilities studies commissioned by TSD in 2006 and 2012 and conducted by Parsons Engineering Corporation, identified roughly \$39.5 million in repairs, prioritized by highest need.

Currently, all of TSD’s maintenance funds and responsibilities now lie with TFC, as well as any plans for future maintenance projects needed, and others to be identified and prioritized at the TSD campus.

In 2013, TSD’s final year of responsibility for its own facility maintenance operations, the school spent approximately \$712K.

TSD Superintendent, Claire Bugen, along with supporters, expressed dismay when talk turned to the sale of the current TSD property in today’s hearing.

“I ask the legislative leadership to give this serious thought, Bugen says. TSD is considered by most as more than just a school. Schools like TSD develop emotional, social and cognitive abilities which are crucial for deaf and hard of hearing children to realize their human potential and identity.”

Established in 1856, the school is a part of our state’s long history, where former students consider it to be their childhood home-away-from-home, and sacred ground as the birthplace of their language, culture and heritage.

“We feel confident there are other sources of income this committee can identify to bring in additional revenue to the state’s budget, without sacrificing the home that has produced thousands of productive members of our society, and is critical for the development of deaf community leadership in our nation,” Bugen adds.

Parents, students and Deaf community members from all over the nation are already responding to the unsettling proposition of losing their home.

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ABOUT THE TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF (TSD)

The Texas School for the Deaf is the oldest continuously operating public school in Texas. Educating students of Texas who are deaf and hard of hearing since 1856, TSD also provides outreach and educational resources for students, their families and professionals in the field throughout the state of Texas. With educational excellence and a strong belief in a culture and community at TSD, students form a unique identity based on their individual strengths and talents. TSD is an environment where students learn, grow, and belong. For more information about the Texas School for the Deaf, visit <http://www.tsd.state.tx.us/>.