

**Senate Finance Committee
Testimony of Claire Bugen, Superintendent
Texas School for the Deaf
February 9, 2015**

Chairman Nelson, Vice-Chair Hinojosa, members of the committee, my name is Claire Bugen and I am the Superintendent of the Texas School for the Deaf. I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the school's biennial budget request.

Joining me today is Gary Bego, TSD's Director of Finance and Support Operations, several members of our Governing Board and a great team of key program leaders from the school.

As some of you know, TSD is a state agency that provides public education to 100% special education population of students from across Texas who are deaf and hard of hearing, and who may have additional complex disabilities. Our school has been here in Austin on the same site since 1856 or 159 years if my math is correct.

The campus where our students live and attend school consists of 67 acres and 46 buildings. Our campus is busy 12 months a year with our school year and summer programs and the community at large enjoys use of our track, swim center, and auditorium. Additionally our facilities are leased for special community events, and have become extremely popular as base camps for movies.

TSD has a dual mission in statute:

- The first is to provide educational services on a day or residential basis in on-campus programs in Austin, and
- The second is to serve as a primary statewide resource center in partnership with state, regional and local agencies who work with deaf and hard of hearing students.

Last year we served 581 students on campus in our regular school year programs from Parent-Infant through post High School transitional programs and an additional 459 students in summer and short-term programs.

Through statewide outreach services, TSD provided technical assistance, training, consultation, online resources and distance learning opportunities for more than 2,000 parents, school districts and professionals across the state. 99% of our customers rated our technical assistance as excellent.

The strategies in our budget request are framed by three key themes characterizing what we do at TSD:

- 1. The need to make our students college and career ready**
- 2. The need to deliver federally mandated individualized educational programs designed to meet the unique needs of each student**
- 3. The requirement to provide these services at no cost to families in a safe and positive learning and living environment**

The **challenges** we are facing include, but are not limited to:

- Increased academic rigor required by HB 5, and increased accountability on STAAR testing
- Increased enrollment of students with additional disabilities, requiring more support staff and specialized services
- Additional demands on our school buses and vehicles that provide daily transportation for students to and from school, in addition to field trips, athletic travel, travel to work sites, etc.
- More statewide requests for assistance than can be met
- Teacher recruitment and retention issues as well as the need to generate better data for student accountability
- Deferred maintenance needs, creating a backlog of needed repairs on the campus

Our request for funding above base includes:

1. Additional Instructional and Support Staff

- An additional *Occupational Therapist and a Teacher Aide* to support the mandatory related services provided under the IEP to our students. (We currently have one OT serving the entire student population.)
- A *Transition Teacher, Teacher and Job Coach* for our growing Transitional program (Current students enrolled, aged 18-22 = 61)
- An *Academic Intervention Specialist and a Database Specialist* for our High School to support our accountability responsibilities under HB 5. This includes: monitoring credit plans, providing Accelerated Instruction for students who do not pass EOC assessments, PSAT, and SAT remediation efforts, grade monitoring, etc.
- A *Hispanic Family Support Specialist and an Outreach Specialist* to support our statewide services in two critical areas—0-3 Services and Support to Hispanic Families. All of our current 0-3 services are limited to campus-based programs and the need across the state is high. 0-3 is the critical time for language and communication intervention for our students. We currently have only one Hispanic Family support person for the entire campus
- *Two Custodians* to assume some of the TFC defined “non-maintenance” functions and
- *Communication Specialist* to support PR, publications, marketing, web and digital strategies, etc. at the school

2. Replacement of School Buses and Vans

- Requesting 2 buses, and 2 8-passenger vans
- Our buses endure a lot of wear and tear
- Current mileage on the 4 replacements is over 200K miles
- By 2016-17 will be 6 years beyond recommended replacement
- Also requesting two 8-passenger vans are to replace 15 passenger
- Federal ban on 15-passenger vans in schools—rollover risks
- Our vehicles are used for day student transportation to and from school for Austin and surrounding area students, athletic trips, school field trips in pre-school through High School, transportation to student work sites and various other extracurricular activities
- Obviously this is a safety issue as older vehicles are more prone to breakdowns

3. Career Pathway Expansion: Culinary Arts and Building Construction Trades

- Request to assist us in implementing HB 5 endorsements
- Some Career Technical Education areas need to be upgraded some CTE areas to become more rigorous and to allow for dual credit and certification programs in some of these areas
- Culinary expansion involves relocating and upgrading a traditional Home Economics classroom to a Culinary Arts Training Center
- Preliminary estimate done prior to TFC involvement \$494,000. TFC is now currently planning to do an assessment. Cost may change pending that.
- The Building Trades enhancement will be achieved by expanding our current Mill and Cabinet Making program to include two new classes that will allow us to offer an endorsement in this area.
 - Very cost effective method to do this is the purchase of 12 portable stations to focus on Blueprint reading, Concrete, Drywall, Electrical, Plumbing, etc.
 - \$60,000 cost includes tools and equipment for the workstations and curriculum. Another real benefit of this program is that the videos supporting the curriculum are close-captioned and the instructional materials are written on various grade levels.

Now, allow me to address issues raised by this committee and Texas Facilities Commission in last week's Senate Finance Hearing. I would like to direct your attention to the attached document, *Ten Year History of TSD Requests for Deferred Maintenance Dollars*, delineating TSD's history of requests for deferred maintenance for the past 5 biennia. You will note that this document contains the dollar amounts requested and received by the agency and appropriated by the Legislature since the 2004 – 2005 biennium. I want to assure you that the deferred maintenance dollars appropriated to the school could not be and were not spent on anything other than their original intent. When such concerns were first brought to the Governor's office by TFC this fall, TSD responded by providing the requested documentation and explanation.

With great admiration and respect, I continue to appreciate the work of Senate Finance's best efforts to support TSD's deferred maintenance, and our continuous work together developing a specific strategy in the school's budget for deferred maintenance. Over the last 10 years, TSD has received a total of \$10.7 million for deferred maintenance. \$5.2 million of this funding was transferred to the Texas Facilities Commission at the beginning of the 2014-2015 biennium. Projects associated with this funding are still in progress.

Ultimately last session's decision by Senator Duncan to completely separate deferred maintenance and day-to-day maintenance from the school resulted in the passage of SB 1457.

In the 18 months of collaborations between TFC and TSD, TFC's expenditures have come from funds transferred from TSD under SB 1457 which included TSD maintenance FTEs and operational and deferred maintenance dollars.

Though met with challenges throughout the transition, our impression was that we had settled into our current collaborative team approach, working together to do our best to implement the spirit of this new legislation.

Although we've experienced bumps along the way we have grown to work better together within the parameters of each agency's different systems, processes and procedures. Ultimately if we are not a team, we will not be able to achieve the legislative intent set out to do by separating these maintenance functions from the school.

Let me close by saying that we are grateful for the work of this committee and appreciate your consideration of TSD's exceptional items before you.

Now, I am happy to respond to any questions you might have. Thank you.