



# Input on investment in special education

Regarding recently passed legislation and potential improvements

**June 1, 2026**

The **Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)** offers the following input on the interim charge related to investment in special education:

## **Service Intensity Tiers**

First, we would like to thank Chairman Buckley and the committee for your leadership in shifting to service intensity tiers for special education in HB 2. While it is still early in the implementation process, this change represents a thoughtful step toward aligning funding more closely with the actual needs of students receiving special education services. We are optimistic that, once fully realized, this approach will have a meaningful and positive impact on districts' support for with various levels of need. **We urge the Legislature to allow additional time for full implementation before making further changes or judgments about the effectiveness of the method of distribution, as well as to be prepared to increase funding as the new distribution method generates better information about the cost of services.** It is critical that the state and districts get this right to ensure students receive appropriate services and districts are not unintentionally penalized during the transition.

## **Increased Evaluations**

It is difficult to reconcile the current trend of declining statewide enrollment with the sharp increase in special education evaluations, particularly those driven through the TEFA system. While it is important to ensure access to evaluations for students in all settings, including students attending private settings, whether voucher-funded or not, the current structure places a significant burden on school districts. The temporary \$1,000 allotment provided to school districts for TEFA evaluations falls well short of the actual cost, which can range into the thousands depending on the scope of services required, including assessment by licensed specialists such as educational diagnosticians, speech-language pathologists, and psychologists. This gap forces districts to absorb additional costs locally while also stretching already-limited staff capacity. Even this inadequate reimbursement is set to expire, which will further exacerbate the issue. As evaluation demands increase, staff time is diverted away from the currently enrolled students already waiting for evaluations and services, creating further delays in support. In a recent survey covering these topics, ATPE members overwhelmingly

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said that ISDs should not be required to provide special education evaluations for students seeking the higher-value TEFA voucher tied to special education identification. **Given the funding and logistical challenges involved with placing this mandate on districts, ATPE recommends the state create a framework for TEFA referrals to receive third-party evaluations outside of the public school system.** This change could help ensure timely, high-quality assessments for all students without overburdening district personnel or resources, as well as allow school staff to remain focused on serving the students enrolled in their classrooms.

## **Special Education Training and Support**

Texas classrooms increasingly serve larger numbers of students receiving special education services. In the same survey referenced above, ATPE members reported seeing significant increases in the amount of special education referrals during the 2025-26 school year. Most of these students will be taught in general education settings, and many teachers report feeling unprepared to meet the growing range of academic, behavioral, and social needs present in their classrooms. As the special education demands on educators grows, they often lack adequate training, planning time, classroom support personnel, and access to the specialized resources necessary to support students effectively in an inclusive environment. While not the majority, a significant number of educators, particularly those who identified as not holding special education certification, found both the quantity and quality of training they have received in educating students with special education to be lacking.

ATPE's recent member survey also made clear that educators feel that both they and the special education students they serve are being set up to fail when inclusion placements are not handled with intention. While inclusion provides important benefits for students, successful implementation requires thoughtful planning, gradual transitions, and close collaboration between special education and general education staff. As one teacher explained: "One of the most important issues impacting the education of students eligible for special education services is the lack of consistent and intentional inclusion when students are transitioning from life skills or self-contained units into general education settings. Too often, mainstreaming is treated as an 'event' rather than a gradual, supported process. Students may have the desire and potential to participate in general education classrooms, but without structured opportunities, appropriate accommodations, and collaboration between special education and general education staff, the transition can be difficult and uneven. When inclusion is not fully supported, students miss out on meaningful peer interactions, grade-level exposure, and the chance to generalize skills in authentic settings. Strengthening co-teaching models, providing ongoing supports, and intentionally planning for gradual inclusion can help ensure students are truly given equitable access to the general education environment where they can grow and succeed." **Based on the current challenges, ATPE recommends increased investment in high-quality, ongoing training for all classroom teachers to ensure they are equipped to effectively meet the diverse needs of students receiving special education services. We would also recommend providing dedicated funding to support the hiring of more paraprofessionals, ensuring teachers have the in-class support necessary to deliver meaningful instruction and accommodations to all students.**

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Texas has made meaningful strides in recent years toward strengthening its special education system, and ATPE looks forward to continuing to partner with this committee to ensure both students and educators receive the supports they need. Moving TEFA referrals to a third-party evaluation system and investing in additional training and classroom supports, including increased access to paraprofessionals, would represent an important next step. These efforts will help ensure that all students receive a high-quality education responsive to their individual needs while also supporting the educators who serve them every day.

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