



TEXAS CENTER *for* DISABILITY STUDIES

Testimony on SB 840
Senate Education Committee
March 27, 2007

For education to be successful, it is critical that teachers and paraprofessionals receive appropriate training so that they have the necessary skills to effectively teach students in their classrooms. SB 840 clearly identifies three areas of critical concern: lack of disability-specific information, a need for research-based instructional strategies, and increased understanding of behavior as it relates to a student's disability and performance. SB 840 addresses this need through the creation of Professional Development Institutes that will provide training on research-based instructional services for students with disabilities, including autism spectrum disorders.

This training is needed for several reasons: The 2004 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) added a requirement that special education services be research-based, and that school personnel be supported through professional development to ensure that they have the "skills and knowledge necessary to improve the academic and functional performance" of students in their classrooms. In addition, No Child Left Behind requires that students be instructed by "highly qualified teachers" in their core subjects. And finally, too many students are in classrooms with teachers who have not received training about a child's specific disability, or are not prepared to improve student academic and functional performance. While there is some good training available in the state, it is simply not sufficient to meet the needs of our teachers and paraprofessionals.

The focus of SB 840 on the requirement for research-based instructional strategies is very positive, and will result in more effective teachers and more successful students. The inclusion of paraprofessionals in this bill is also important as they are very involved in the direct instruction and provision of supports to many students with disabilities. Because teachers and paraprofessionals will receive a stipend for their participation, it is likely that a high number of school personnel will take part, again having a positive impact on students. It is critical that these individuals receive training to increase their effectiveness and thus enhance the success of students with disabilities.

In closing, the impact of SB 840 on educational practices in the public schools is a positive step in addressing crucial concerns.