

## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 54**

**Bill Carpenter**

**Representing the Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education**

I want to thank Senator Zaffirini for bringing forward this important issue that strives to ensure quality services for visually impaired students.

We support SB 54 that ensures that a teacher certified to teach visually impaired students must attend and pass a preparation program that includes field experience.

Visually impaired students learn differently. This is not a revelation to any of us. But this is why it is critically important that qualified teachers are in place to appropriately serve these students wherever they may be enrolled.

Current provisions allow a person to receive certification as a teacher of the visually impaired through several methods. One is by taking an exam to demonstrate book knowledge regarding services for visually impaired students. This process has not resulted in a positive experience for either the student or the teacher. It is our experience that many teachers certified through the exam process are overwhelmed by the needs of the students, are not skilled at giving required testing and simply don't know how to design and implement appropriate lessons for visually impaired students. The result is inferior services for students and teachers who exit the field soon after starting.

College preparation programs at Stephen F. Austin State University and Texas Tech University both require extensive field experience along with the knowledge learned through instruction in the classroom. Our experience is that beginning teachers trained in this way enter classrooms with an understanding of students and their needs, are proficient in administering Functional Vision Evaluations and Learning Media Assessments and can design effective instruction for visually impaired students. They are successful.

## Specialized Skills Needed by Teachers of the Visually Impaired

- A good understanding of Braille, Nemeth (math) Braille code and how to teach students to read tactile graphics.
- Preparation of readable tactile graphics
- Knowledge of assistive technology requirements of students
- Knowledge of eye conditions and the implications of the visual impairment on educational access and student performance.
- The ability to provide support services and assistance to regular and special education teachers serving students with visual impairments.
- Be proficient in administering and interpreting required Functional Vision Evaluations and Learning Media Assessments.
- Be instructionally competent to enable flexibility in the use of teaching strategies that address the needs of students with no vision, low vision or deaf blindness.

Special education directors have told TCASE that well prepared teachers do a great job with students, parents, supporting fellow teachers, other staff and supporting programs.

We ask you to support quality services for students with visual impairments by passing SB 54.

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