

Items in the Proposed Bond Projects Specific to Students with Special Needs

The following information has been prepared for patrons of the district in preparation for the May 4th Public Forum focusing on items benefiting students with special needs. We hope this will help parents better understand the purpose and rationale for a Therapeutic Day Program facility and other projects being considered for the bond.

For more information and an opportunity to provide input, please attend the Public Forum on May 4, 2010, at 6:00 p.m., in the Board Room of Central Administration.

Background

- Special needs students who qualify for Special Education have broad, varied needs for supports and services necessary for a meaningful education.
- Eanes ISD is committed to educating students with special needs along with the general student population, to the extent that the special needs student benefits from this setting.
- Therapeutic Day Program services are tailored to the individual student and encompass special services beyond those provided to all EISD students.
- Other types of specialized services are provided to students who need a different curriculum or setting. For example, a blind/visually impaired or deaf/hearing-impaired student may require direct instruction and supports, such as Braille for reading, the use of a cane for independent mobility, and a tactile math system. A deaf or hearing-impaired student may need a sign language interpreter and instruction in signing. Occasionally, the district is not able to meet the specialized needs of these populations. When this happens, we can send students to the Texas School for the Deaf or the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired for all or part of their instructional arrangements. This placement is an out-of-district, self-contained special education setting.
- Other students need different but equally individualized educational services and structures to succeed in their educational program. Federal and state law mandates that all school districts must provide the necessary supports and services for these students, regardless of cost, and these services must be free to the student and family.
- All specialized items for this bond proposal are designed to meet unique educational needs and increase programs offered to students with special needs.

Approaches to Serving Students with Serious Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities in a Therapeutic Setting

Some Special Education students need a specialized environment in which all stimulation is controlled, and research-based interventions can be implemented without the limitations of a campus setting. Typical interventions and considerations at the home campus prior to considering a placement away from the home campus include:

- Extensive interventions are enacted at the home campus, including a specially designed classroom with no other students, and two to three adults in the room with the student at all times.
- Interactions with others on the campus are strictly controlled to protect the safety of all students.
- Access is controlled to glass windows in rooms and doors, exposed light fixtures, electrical outlets, sharp corners on cabinets and desks, and anything that can be used as a projectile. (This is not possible on most typical campuses, as these features cannot be modified throughout the school, and the special needs student cannot be allowed access to most of the building due to its inherent dangers.)
- In order to avoid physically restraining the student, additional environmental controls are required,

including surface modifications to cover concrete cinder block walls, protective padding (baseball catcher chest guard/leg shields) and other equipment to protect the staff from assault injury.

- A team approach is used for appropriate interventions. This team includes the parents, private medical providers, teachers, teaching assistants, campus administrators, district administrators, behavior specialists, the district's Psychologist, Licensed Specialists in School Psychology, and contract specialists.
- Mental health providers and community supports, such as Children's Integral Care (formerly MHMR), the Community Partnership for Children, and other interagency options are also accessed with parent consent.

Some students do not respond to intense campus interventions, even when implemented over a long period of time. Our district would consider such an option based on the following information:

- The level of student aggression under discussion is illustrated by an event at Tyler ISD during this school year that resulted in the death of a teacher at a high school campus.
- For some students with a combination of disabilities, aggressive behavior can be triggered by environmental factors, such as noise, movement in the hallways, minor changes in routine (fire drill, different bell schedule), or the presence of substitute teachers or staff.
- In some students, a high-stress environment such as a general education campus triggers internal stimuli such as hallucinations, delusional thinking, extreme anxiety or paranoia.
- In the absence of a local Therapeutic Day Program, options implemented in the past have included:
 - Shortened school day;
 - Adjusted schedule, beginning and ending the special needs student's school day late in order to avoid entering and exiting the school at the same time as other students;
 - Direct instruction in the student's home and community, with parent training;
 - Extended school day;
 - Continuation of educational placement throughout the summer; and
 - Contract services outside of the school setting.
- Teacher and staff turnover is highest in special needs assignments. This results in extensive training that must be repeated year after year, as new staff are put in place. The district provides the staff with informal individual and group counseling and support in these assignments.

When the accommodations and interventions listed above do not result in an improvement in the student's behavior, and the student is not making progress toward education goals, we must offer a full continuum of services, including a separate campus location tailored to the student's needs. Currently, the district has three options:

- Continue the interventions listed above on the campus;
- Contract with a therapeutic day school an hour away; or
- Place the student in a residential program away from the community and family.

An intermediate option before residential placement would be providing services in the district in a specialized setting with a team of highly trained professionals.

While the one-time cost of a facility for this purpose may seem prohibitive for the number of students served, the costs of the other options are significant.

- A placement for one student in the only available day treatment program costs \$56,000 per school year, plus the cost of transportation (approximately \$20,000).
- A residential placement averages \$120,000 to \$150,000 per year.
- Students placed in residential facilities at the secondary level may continue this placement for seven to ten years, if reintegration is not successful.

Parent Rights and Protections

Some community members say the district has abandoned the concept of inclusion, but providing an additional option for some students does not change the inclusive philosophy or services to other students.

Another concern expressed is that parents do not have a voice in these decisions, are not prepared to advocate for their child, and could be forced by school officials to accept this instructional placement. However, a collaborative process between education professionals and family is used to determine the educational services a child will receive. The decision is based on consensus, not on a vote by committee members.

- In the past year, the ARD committee discussions have resulted in disagreement in only two cases. Ultimately, both of these situations were resolved to everyone's satisfaction within the ARD committee process.
- Parents have extensive options to appeal the decisions of the ARD committee, including filing for mediation or a due process hearing with the state. EISD Board policy, state law and federal law provide avenues for the parent to pursue a remedy if they do not agree to the district's recommended program.

Eanes ISD strongly recommends a specialized facility to meet the needs of this unique group of students, and acknowledges that this placement should not be used for any student who has not received intensive services at their home campus. In fact, the goal of this type of placement is to return the student to his home campus as quickly as possible. Some students need brief interventions, while others require long-term services. These students deserve to be educated in an environment that supports their special needs, affording them a reasonable chance at success.

Other Bond Projects Included to Support the Special Needs Programs

Improvements and Alterations to Various Campuses

Eanes ISD is dedicated to serving each student with special needs on his/her home campus. This requires that:

- All campuses have specialized facilities, such as an accessible restroom with a shower close to a special education classroom, adapted kitchen facilities and small classrooms with safety modifications.
- On several campuses, we need more classrooms than are currently available. This includes rooms where only one student receives services because he/she cannot tolerate the interactions and stimulation of even one other student.
- The overall special education enrollment has stabilized at 8.5%, but we have a growing population of students with significant developmental disabilities, and our need for specialized classroom space has grown.
- Facility improvements are included in the bond proposal so students can be educated at their home campus.

Facility for the 19+ Program

The 19+ program, serving students ages 18-22, helps prepare them for adult living and community access when they are no longer eligible for public school services.

- The number of students is growing each year and will reach an enrollment of 24-28 students in the next three years.

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- The current facility is inadequate to meet the needs of these students due to the size and location of the portable building, lack of accessibility to a kitchen, and the condition of the current building.
- This facility is also considered a separate, self-contained campus.