

## Autism Society of Texas

300 E. Highland Mall Blvd, Ste 205  
Austin, TX 78752



### **Comments for House Committee on Public Education: Interim Charge Number 4 (Monitor State Auditor's Review)**

The [Autism Society of Texas \(AST\)](#) works to improve the quality of life for all Texans with autism by offering innovative, person-centered support to people impacted by autism and their families. Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects 1 in 54 Texans, as well as their parents, caregivers and friends. We offer assistance through a myriad of services and programs related to advocacy, recreation, education and support. We work in partnership with our community, seeking input from individuals with autism to advise our decision-making and offering comprehensive education and training so that communities may become more inclusive. We are providing comments today on issues that impact people with autism across Texas.

**Interim Charge Number 4:** Monitor the State Auditor's review of agencies and programs under the Committee's jurisdiction. The Chair shall seek input and periodic briefings on completed audits for the 2019 and 2020 fiscal years and bring forth pertinent issues for full committee consideration.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has not earned any trust from the disability community in relation to contracting and the spending of IDEA funds (regardless if the funds were discretionary or not). Specific contracts and continuing legal challenges such as the disastrous SPEDx contract and wrongful dismissal of the TEA employee who brought that contract to the Department of Education's (DOE) attention have been well documented in the SAO report, [Selected Contracts at the Texas Education Agency](#), August 2018, Report No. 18-044. SAO found that TEA bypassed processes designed to maintain integrity by failing to obtain other bids in the procurement of contracts audited. Controls were overridden by management and award outcomes were affected with both the SpedX and Tembo contracts.

We feel strongly that TEA has shown a propensity of wasting IDEA money on a variety of unneeded pet projects that should be spent on children with disabilities, while ignoring the pressing needs and the agreed upon activities to remediate the problems cited by TEA's response to DOE with the [Corrective Action Plan](#) issued on April 23, 2018. Also see [House Public Education- Interim Charge 3](#), submitted 9/30/20.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the disability community is extremely concerned that TEA now apparently has multiple no-bid contracts with software companies to provide online (remote or virtual)

## Autism Society of Texas

300 E. Highland Mall Blvd, Ste 205

Austin, TX 78752

applications for special education students for core services that

are typically delivered on a one-on-one basis. Virtual learning is difficult for children in general and it is even more difficult for a majority of children with disabilities, including autism. We are very concerned about the expense and the efficacy of these secretive and potentially unproven software solutions. Therefore, **we recommend that the legislature create an annual oversight process for TEA expenditures and contracts regarding special education (IDEA) funds with the State Auditor's office to ensure TEA is using funds that are meant to help students with disabilities in a legal and efficient manner.**

### Related article:

Texas Tribune, September 5, 2018: ["State audit finds serious flaws in Texas Education Agency contracting process"](#)

The Autism Society of Texas believes that the above recommendations will help Texans with autism live better and more meaningful lives. We appreciate the opportunity to provide this input.

