



Education Service Centers (ESCs) Providing Vital Support for Districts

Formation

Texas created regional education service centers (ESCs) through statute in 1967. Chapter 8 of the Texas Education Code (TEC) requires that ESCs be located throughout the state, so each school district has the opportunity to be served by and to participate with an ESC on a voluntary basis. ESCs are established by the legislature for the purpose of: (1) Assisting schools in improving student performance; (2) Enabling schools to operate more efficiently and economically; and, (3) Implementing initiatives assigned by the legislature or the commissioner (TEC 8.002).

Governance

Each ESC has a board of directors elected by school board members from within the region (TAC 53.1001) tasked with overseeing the ESC, approving an annual budget, and hiring an executive director with the approval of the Commissioner of Education (Commissioner). ESCs are non-regulatory (TEC 8.054).

Accountability and Oversight

ESCs have multiple levels of accountability and oversight. The Commissioner has broad oversight and has established performance standards that establish certain measures the ESC is expected to meet (TAC 53.1021). Each ESC is also required to perform an annual financial audit, conduct an annual client satisfaction survey of school districts and charter schools; as well as complete a cost-savings for schools analysis for the Legislature each biennium (TEC 8.003).

Funding and Fund Balance

ESCs are primarily funded by revenue generated locally through school districts and charter schools purchasing ESC services. Legislative appropriations, \$12.5 million per year, comprise approximately 2.1% of all combined ESC funds. These funds are critical to offset the cost to schools and allow them to receive necessary services at the highest quality and lowest price. Since 2003, State Appropriations for ESCs have decreased by 40% (General Appropriations Act, 2003-2013).

ESCs are non-regulatory agencies and have no taxing authority. This requires ESCs to incur significant capital outlay expenditures and maintain/renovate facilities on a pay-as-you-go basis. ESCs must also have appropriate reserves to develop new services requested by schools and to help implement state initiatives.

Services Offered

School districts and charter schools are not required to utilize any service provided by an ESC. They may choose any service from any ESC, or choose to utilize no services (TEC 8.001). Additionally, the Texas Education Code states that ESCs are to be non-regulatory (TEC 8.054).

State Initiatives

Either through legislative action or designation by TEA, ESCs are often charged with implementing a variety of state initiatives designed to improve student performance, school accountability, assessed content areas, Texas literacy programs, the Texas Student Data System (TSDS), and many other state-wide projects. In some cases, funds appropriated by the Legislature or Agency are not sufficient to fully implement the assigned initiative, and ESCs have to rely on locally-generated funds to support Texas schools.

Client Satisfaction

For 2013, the 20 ESCs combined scored a 4.78 on a 5 point scale. Respondents were asked to describe their level of satisfaction on a variety of ESC services such as those designed to help schools operate efficiently and economically, support for Bilingual and ESL Education, and support in foundational academic areas. For most items, 96% of respondents expressed that they were very satisfied or satisfied with their ESC (2013 Client Satisfaction Survey of ESC Services).

Cost Savings

One of the ESCs core functions is to help schools operate more efficiently and economically. Each biennium the ESCs are required to produce a report of the cost savings experienced by schools who utilize ESC services. The 2014 Report of Cost Savings found that the average Texas school district saves over \$500,000 per year by utilizing ESC services (SB 1, 83rd Legislative Session, Rider 38).

Business Partnerships

ESCs partner with private entities to assist schools in purchasing items and services. Combined, the 20 ESCs partner with over 9,600 vendors for a total of over \$984 million worth of goods and services (Rider 38 Report on Cost Savings). This maximization of economies of scale allow schools to have greater access to goods and services than they would on an individual basis.

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