



CARROLL

Independent School District

CISD Parent's Advocacy Work Leads to Texas Law on Learning Disability Accommodations

Southlake, TX - During the 88th legislative session earlier this year, the Texas State Legislature passed HB 1225, which provides accommodations for students taking the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) tests. This bill, which received overwhelming support from both chambers of the legislature, allows for students to request administration of the STAAR test on paper rather than the computer.

For Nancy Hollis, 2022 - 2023 Carroll ISD (CISD) Carroll Leadership Academy for Supporting Success (CLASS) member, this legislation is a step in the right direction for a cause near to her heart.

Nancy, along with other CLASS parents, CISD administrators, and board members, attended meetings with local legislators last year in Austin in order to advocate for district needs. These included asking the legislature to increase the basic allotment in order to help districts keep up with inflation, but for Nancy, she was also on a personal mission: to help legislators understand the need for STAAR testing accommodations for dyslexic students.

A parent of two CISD students with dyslexia, Nancy is well-educated on how the learning disability affects her daughters' ability to learn, but also, simple ways schools can provide opportunities for these students to learn in a way their brains can best grasp the material.

While meeting with legislators, she showed them a technique called "overlay," which uses various transparent, colored overlays to place over words being read on paper. The colors can help make text clearer than a typical black text on a white background. As Nancy pointed out, this can't be done on a computer screen. Not only that, but scrolling back and forth to material on the computer can be difficult for those with learning disabilities.

She also showed legislators a graphic, which shows various animals lined up for a test. The test: climbing a tree, which clearly the fish cannot do. She referenced the popular quote, "Everybody is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid." This, said Nancy, is the basis for why she advocates.

“It’s not, ‘I can’t read; it’s just that my brain is processing things in a different way,’” she said of students with dyslexia. “These kids get beat down because they perform poorly on the STAAR test, but it’s not about how well they know the material; it’s the mode in which they are taking the test. Each kid is different. If I see the STAAR test as just a measurement of what kids have learned, I’m not seeing the whole picture. The test has more value if we can just test what they’ve learned and not how well they can use the computer.”

Thanks to parents like Nancy, the state recognized the necessity of leveling the playing field for all students, including those with disabilities or unique learning needs. HB 1225 represents a significant step towards achieving this goal.

Key provisions of HB 1225:

- It allows school districts to administer required assessment instruments in paper format upon request.
- Any student can request a paper-based assessment if their parent, guardian, or teacher in the applicable subject area makes the request.
- The number of students who can be administered paper-based assessments may not exceed three percent of the total district enrollment.
- If more requests are received than the maximum allowed, they will be accepted in the order received.
- This limitation does not apply to students for whom the administration of a paper-based assessment has already been deemed necessary by their admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee.

Requests for fall assessments must be submitted by September 15, and requests for spring assessments must be submitted by December 1 of the school year. Parents should email their campus principal or assistant principal to make this request.

As for Nancy, she plans to continue advocating for students like her daughters. “This is the first step in the right direction and I’m very excited about that, but there’s more to do. This is the tip of the iceberg,” she said. “Every teacher should have learning differences as part of their continuing education every year.”

Instead of being fearful of her daughters’ diagnosis, Nancy chose to look at it as a gift. “We need our special ed students to make the world go round, because they show us a different way to look at the world,” she said. “I went from ‘Oh my gosh, I’ve got a dyslexic kiddo to... how cool, I have a dyslexic kiddo!’”

Nancy said that CISD has been amazing for her children with learning disabilities. She has been happy to see them succeeding in the areas where they are gifted and is thankful for the opportunities available to them. She hopes that through her advocacy work, the Texas legislature will put more policies into place to make the educational world more accommodating for students with dyslexia and other learning differences.