

Education centers need to be more transparent

JAMES GOLSAN, FOR THE EXPRESS-NEWS : JANUARY 10, 2014 : Updated: January 10, 2014 5:23pm

Two issues dominated education headlines during the 83rd Texas Legislature.

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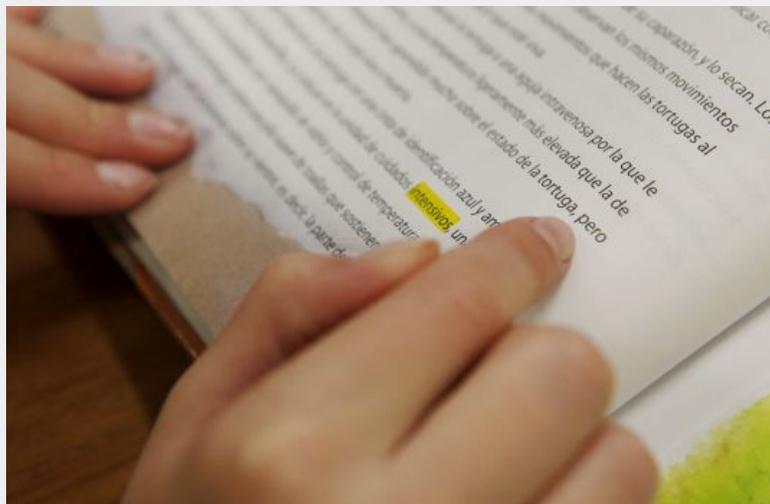


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Greater transparency is needed for Regional Education Service Centers, which play an important — but-under-recognized — role in Texas education, including involvement in developing curriculum.



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One was a major overhaul of the state's graduation and testing requirements in the form of **House Bill 5**. The other was a highly controversial curriculum used in several **Texas school** districts called CSCOPE.

While the content of CSCOPE alarmed many Texas parents and grass-roots activists, it was the lack of transparency in its development and diffusion that was most concerning.

Largely responsible for those issues were Texas' **Regional Education Service Centers**, a network of administrative hubs set up throughout the state. They represent a unique element in Texas' education system, as they are neither a state nor strictly local entity, and have a capacity to generate their own income through private contracts, which is not an

ability our traditional ISDs have.

Between their capacities to develop curriculum, the support services they provide to school districts, and their administrative role in major elements of Texas education such as the **Texas Virtual Schools Network** (as well as several major federal grant programs), RESCs have a significant day-to-day impact on the education of many Texas students. This array of functions is performed with limited accountability, either to the **Texas Education Agency**, or more importantly, to Texas parents.

What we need from our Regional Education Service Centers is more transparency. While the Legislature coped effectively with the concerns of Texas parents and activists surrounding CSCOPE, it is unfortunate that so much time and effort had to be dedicated to an issue that very likely might not have happened if parents had a clearer sense of what the centers were sending into our students' classrooms.

Therefore, RESCs should make completely clear to parents not only the services they provide, but also how those services are of benefit to schools under their auspices. A clear list of the programs and support services they offer, as well as how much money runs through those programs to the districts and what campuses are taking advantage of those programs, should be available on every RESC's website, no more than two clicks from their home page.

Doing that much will give parents a much clearer picture of how their Regional Education Service Center is involved in their child's classroom.

While "bottom up" accountability is always preferable to the state driven variety, the reality is that no entity in the state is in a position to tightly oversee the RESCs' activities other than the Texas Education Agency. Therefore, the RESCs should be required, on an annual basis, to report to the agency areas of weakness in the schools they serve, as well as a plan to address those deficiencies.

RESCs are tasked with distributing dollars to the school districts so that those districts can better address the needs of their students. Explicit reporting on how the RESCs are helping schools under their charge will go a long way toward helping the Texas Education Agency, as well as the public, understand how those dollars are of benefit to Texas students and the state's education system as a whole.

The money that gets spent on Texas education should, as much as possible, flow directly into Texas classrooms. Right now, the RESCs function as an intermediary between the state's public schools and a number of federal (as well as a few state) funding streams.

A clear understanding of how RESC money is benefitting our students — clear to both parents and the Texas Education Agency — will go a long way

toward ensuring that the dollars the RESCs do control are a help in Texas classrooms.

For better or worse, RESCs are a major part of the Texas education landscape. They should be held financially accountable to Texas taxpayers as well as the state.

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