

# ADMISSIONS PROCESSES OF THE TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED AND THE TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

AN ISSUE BRIEF FROM LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD STAFF

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## OBJECTIVE

Texas operates a school for students who are blind or visually impaired and a school for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Each school has a unique admissions process.

## KEY FACTS

- ◆ Students are admitted to the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) only by referral from the local school district's Admission, Review, and Dismissal committee. TSBVI cannot accept direct referrals from parents.
- ◆ Students may be referred to the Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) by their local school districts or by their parents or legal guardians.

## BUDGETARY IMPACT

Appropriations to TSBVI for the 2016–17 biennium total \$47.6 million in All Funds, of which \$29.0 million (61.0 percent) is from General Revenue Funds, and 359.9 full-time-equivalent positions.

Appropriations to TSD for the 2016–17 biennium total \$55.2 million in All Funds, of which \$35.0 million (63.4 percent) is from General Revenue Funds, and 434.6 positions.

## STATUTORY REFERENCES

TSBVI: The Texas Education Code, Chapter 30, Subchapter B

TSD: The Texas Education Code, Chapter 30, Subchapter C, and Chapter 29, Subchapter I

Referral Processes for Both Schools: The Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Section 89.1085

Texas operates a school for students who are blind or visually impaired, and a school for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Both schools provide students with comprehensive educational services at their respective campuses in Austin on a day, residential, or short-term basis, and summer programs and extensive outreach services for students, school districts, families, and communities across the state.

The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) is a state agency that provides educational opportunities for students ages 21 or younger who are blind, deafblind, or visually impaired. During the 2014–15 regular school year, the school served 155 students on its Austin campus. As of 2016, Texas has approximately 9,844 students with visual impairments and 862 students with deafblindness, many of whom are served through TSBVI's outreach programs.

The Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) is a state agency that provides educational services to deaf or hard of hearing students ages 21 or younger. In the 2014–15 school year, TSD served 583 students in regular school year programs and 4,859 through Regional Day programs. Approximately 7,312 students in the state have hearing loss.

## ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The admission criteria for both TSBVI and TSD are established through state statute, in accordance with requirements of federal law. Pursuant to the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a student with a disability is entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The admission processes at each school are specified in administrative rule, based on the broad authority provided by the Texas Education Code to each school superintendent and the Texas Commissioner of Education. Although TSBVI and TSD were established to serve students with visual and hearing impairments, each school also serves students with multiple disabilities. However, the schools are not intended to serve students whose primary ongoing needs are associated with a severe or profound emotional, behavioral, or cognitive deficit or whose needs are better met in a home, hospital, or residential treatment facility.

Additionally, the Texas Education Code specifies that deaf students must be educated in an environment that respects their unique communication mode; with teachers who understand the nature of deafness and are proficient in the students' language or communication mode; surrounded by a significant number of peers who use the same language mode; and with the opportunity to be exposed to deaf or hard-of-hearing role models.

The schools do not decline enrollment for eligible students or use a waitlist, but they do occasionally defer enrollment while arrangements are made for individualized instruction, close supervision, and suitable accommodations that meet the standards set by the schools.

**REFERRALS AND ADMISSIONS**

**TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED**

If a school district (ISD) determines that it needs assistance in meeting FAPE requirements for a student eligible for TSBVI admission, the ISD may refer the student to TSBVI. Referrals for admission to TSBVI must be originated by the student’s local ISD in collaboration with the student’s guardians. Students are referred by the ISD through an Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee. The ARD committee is responsible for making educational decisions for students eligible for special education services; the committee is made up of parents or legal guardians and representatives from local ISDs.

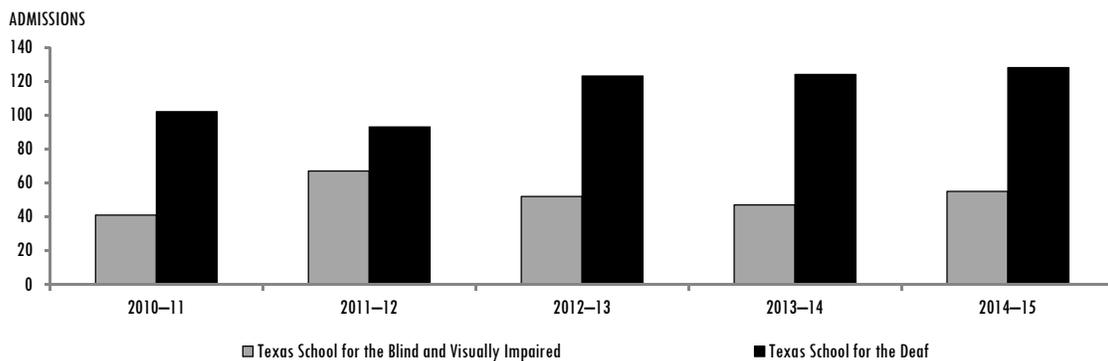
Upon receipt of a student referral from the local ISD’s ARD committee, the TSBVI requests an application for admission and additional documentation, such as the student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The TSBVI Referral Committee reviews each student application to determine eligibility and assess whether the ISD needs assistance in providing FAPE requirements. When a student is approved for admission, TSBVI begins a collaboration plan with the ISD and parents or guardians. If a student is determined ineligible for admission, the local ISD may seek resolution through the Commissioner of Education or through any due process hearing available in accordance with IDEA. The typical TSBVI student enrolls at an average age of 14 years old, based on the last five school years, and the typical length of enrollment is three years.

**TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF**

Students may also be referred to TSD by their local ISDs. However, a parental choice provision established in 1983 by the Legislature enables parents or legal guardians or adult students to select TSD as an option in lieu of services offered locally. Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) programs may refer children younger than age 3. Of the 570 new student enrollments from school years 2010–11 to 2014–15, 96.0 percent were the result of parents’ direct referrals. The average age at enrollment of TSD students during the past five years is 12.5 years old. Students typically stay through high school, or approximately five years.

After a student is referred by an ISD or parent, TSD staff review the application packet and may schedule an ARD meeting. The ARD committee consists of parents, TSD staff and representatives from the local school district. Staff assess the student, obtain a social and health history, and discuss placement. When a parent referral is made, the ARD meeting is conducted by TSD staff, and the home district is encouraged to participate. When the local ISD makes a referral on the student’s behalf, the ISD conducts the ARD meeting. If TSD determines a student is not eligible for admission, the parent or school district may seek resolution through the Commissioner of Education or through any due process established through IDEA.

**FIGURE 1  
TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED AND TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF NEW ADMISSIONS  
SCHOOL YEARS 2010–11 TO 2014–15**



NOTE: Figures show new admissions for the day school comprehensive program during the regular school year.  
SOURCES: Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired; Texas School for the Deaf.

**CONTACT**

Trevor Simmons Contact: [IssueBrief@lbb.state.tx.us](mailto:IssueBrief@lbb.state.tx.us)