



# TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY

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Robert Scott  
Commissioner

**IMPORTANT  
MONITORING  
INFORMATION**

January 8, 2008

101-909

Mr. Allen Provost, Vice President, Board of Trustees  
North Forest Independent School District  
P.O. Box 23278  
Houston, Texas 77228-3278

Dear Mr. Provost:

This is in response to your letter of December 7, 2007, in which you express concerns regarding a report issued to the North Forest Independent School District (ISD) by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) subsequent to an on-site visit conducted to examine the origins of the district's continuing low performance and program effectiveness concerns in the special education program area. As you are aware, the North Forest ISD was selected for participation in the 2006-2007 special education monitoring process due to longitudinal patterns of performance concerns in the special education program area that had been displayed for a number of years. As such, an on-site visit to the North Forest ISD was conducted in February 2007, and the related report of findings referenced in your letter was issued in October 2007.

As you are aware, the TEA is charged under both federal and state requirements with establishing systems of general supervision and oversight to monitor the extent to which districts offer programs that are not only in compliance with federal and state law, but also effective for the students who are served. As such, the TEA has established a system of Performance-Based Monitoring (PBM) in which certain student performance and program effectiveness indicators are monitored each year for all districts in the state. The results of these Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System (PBMAS) indicators are reviewed and analyzed annually to determine whether additional agency intervention is necessary to address patterns of concern as reflected in the data. Graduated interventions, which are targeted to specific areas of performance concern, are implemented as districts engage in PBM improvement activities. The PBM system also emphasizes a continuous improvement model in which districts are encouraged to take proactive steps to address program improvement, with progress monitored by the TEA. In regard to the North Forest ISD, the district's performance on the PBMAS indicators has resulted in the district's participation in high stages of graduated PBM intervention since the 2004-2005 school year. Because significant performance and effectiveness concerns continued to be displayed on the PBMAS indicators, an on-site visit was scheduled by the TEA for the 2006-2007 school year.

Prior to the 2006-2007 on-site visit, TEA staff reviewed relevant data, including PBMAS reports, Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports, and documents submitted by the district to the TEA in previous monitoring years. During the visit, TEA staff reviewed the district's data development and analysis processes and its development and implementation of the required continuous improvement plan. The on-site visit included focus group discussions and individual interviews with district personnel, classroom observations, document reviews, and student data reviews.

The *Preliminary On-Site Findings* report issued to the district as a result of the visit included a summary of the data reviewed prior to and during the visit and reflected a broad range of information gathered from the district and its staff members. The report contained quantifiable student performance and program effectiveness data and included in-depth information gathered directly from district instructional and administrative staff. Additionally, the report acknowledged circumstances in which the district had established processes in an effort to address areas in need of improvement. The report also suggested areas in need of further review by district staff in order for definitive conclusions to be drawn, identified areas acknowledged by the district as in need of improvement, reviewed specific issues and/or trends identified, detailed the sources of data that were reviewed, and described the additional actions required of the district to support the continued analysis of data and development of an effective plan designed to address continuous improvement.

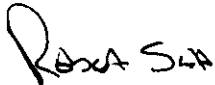
Therefore, we respectfully disagree with the characterization of the report as "more critical than instructive in its overall approach" and as "painting the worst possible picture of the NFISD Special Education Department's staff and district personnel." Additionally, the TEA respectfully disagrees with the assertion that "there was a negative change in tenor of the findings of the TEA visiting team" between the time of the visit and the issuance of the report. As noted above, the issues of concern addressed in the report, such as the participation of students with disabilities in state-mandated assessments, the placement of students with disabilities in more restrictive settings, and the representation of African American students in the special education program, are substantive in nature and generally have been longstanding in the district. Thus, they are not considered by the TEA to be "incidental findings that are not reflective of the comprehensive improvements that have been put into place." While we acknowledge certain technical issues with the report related to page numbering and a date reference, we believe the report to be sound in its content and conclusions given its reliance on both quantifiable data and information provided directly by district staff. Additionally, the North Forest ISD was given the opportunity to review and respond to the preliminary findings and required actions contained in the report before the report was determined to be final. As such, a *Receipt of Report* form indicating agreement with the content of the report was signed by the district's interim superintendent on November 27, 2007, and received by the TEA on December 5, 2007.

As expressed in your letter, I very much appreciate your commitment to the success of the students of the North Forest ISD. I, too, maintain a firm commitment to the students, parents, educators, and citizens of the North Forest ISD community, and the actions taken by the TEA will continue to be focused on a system that supports these shared goals. That said, I believe that positive progress toward the accomplishment of our shared goals will be promoted by the implementation of the recommendations made to

the North Forest ISD, in combination with the expertise and support to be provided by the academic conservator as the improvement process proceeds. I, along with other TEA staff members, look forward to the continued opportunity to work collaboratively with the personnel of the North Forest ISD as we move forward in the continuous improvement process.

Thank you for your ongoing support of the students of the North Forest ISD. If you have additional questions regarding the issues referenced in this letter or the information contained in the on-site report, you may contact Judy Struve or Margaret Mays in the Division of Program Monitoring and Interventions at (512) 463-9414.

Sincerely,



Robert Scott  
Commissioner of Education

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cc: Dr. Tobie Ross, President, North Forest ISD Board of Trustees  
Mr. William Jones, Interim Superintendent, North Forest ISD  
Ruth Watson, Special Education Director, North Forest ISD  
Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, U.S. House of Representatives  
Senator Rodney Ellis, Texas Senate  
Senator John Whitmire, Texas Senate  
Senator Mario Gallegos, Texas Senate  
Representative Senfronia Thompson, Texas House of Representatives  
Representative Harold Dutton, Texas House of Representatives  
Bill McKinney, Executive Director, Region 4 Education Service Center  
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