**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*“At the state and local level, the practices that led to the [U.S. Department of Education] monitoring*

*letter will end.”- Governor Greg Abbott*

The state of Texas provides special education related services to approximately 500,000 students. However, only 41 percent of these students are approaching grade level knowledge and skills in reading and math, compared to 75 percent of all Texas students who are approaching grade level. As the United States Supreme Court recently proclaimed in *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE-1*, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) demands that a child with a disability who requires special education and related services be offered an appropriately ambitious educational program that

is “reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child’s circumstances.” Our goal for Texas is to ensure that special education provides support to our students with disabilities on an individualized basis, because legally and morally our students deserve access to the same programs that could lead to academic success. To work toward this goal, the TEA has developed this Strategic Plan for Special Education.

This strategic plan outlines a system that supports ongoing efforts to achieve strong outcomes for all students with disabilities. The system represents a balanced approach between compliance with federal regulations and a results-driven focus on student outcomes. TEA will focus on leveraging grants and contracts on a statewide and regional basis with non-profits, education service centers, higher

education partners, and others to support improved capacity, but local education agencies will do most of the heavy lifting. This strategic plan also includes specific activities to address correction requirements outlined in the January 11, 2018 letter from the United States Department of Education (USED). There has always been, and will continue to be, a need for strong advocacy from parents for their children. This strategic plan aims to support special education because it is a means of meeting student needs for the benefit of society and an important part of an integrated education system.

As it exists today, the strategic plan has been formed by significant stakeholder feedback. This includes over 7,000 survey responses, over 4,000 emails and comments, over 100 focus groups and meetings, and over 150 one-on-one interviews from a host of special education stakeholders, including students, their parents, teachers, administrators, advocates, and others. In addition, this feedback process has been continual, with TEA hosting in-person meetings and public comment periods to solicit feedback on the revised version of the plan. This strategic plan will evolve over time as part of a process of continuous improvement. Further, this strategic plan focuses on the agency’s responsibilities related to special education in the state, especially as it relates to monitoring, supportive tools, and professional development. There are minimal additional requirements for a local school system outside of what has always been the expectation as outlined in IDEA and state statute. TEA recognizes that many school

systems have operated within the legal and statutory guidelines. Those that have not done so may see a moderate to significant increase in workload as they adjust their practices to meet the requirements set out in law.

Lastly, TEA cannot legally commit additional funds outside of those that are appropriated by the Texas Legislature and the US Congress. A sizeable amount of stakeholder feedback was related to funding. While that feedback may warrant additional action, any recommendations for action are most appropriately heard by state and federal legislators. This strategic plan has been designed so that it can be sustained with existing appropriations. In this plan, TEA has committed all available IDEA resources to this Strategic Plan, and will further commit to spending any additional appropriated funds to executing on this plan and additional opportunities for LEA support. Working together, we will significantly improve outcomes for our students with disabilities