# Governor Abbott, TEA Open Grant Applications For Students With Cognitive Disabilities Impacted by COVID-19

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Governor Abbott and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) today launched an online application for the Supplementary Special Education Services (SSES) program, which allows eligible families of children with significant cognitive disabilities and complex educational needs to apply for a $1,500 online account to be used in the SSES marketplace. The goods and services in the marketplace can help families mitigate educational setbacks resulting from the extensive disruptions to education prompted by COVID-19. These services do not reduce or eliminate the responsibilities of schools to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to all students.

Under the program—which was established last fall with $30 million in funds by Governor Abbott and state leaders—at least 18,000 students with significant cognitive disabilities statewide will be in position to receive a one-time grant of up to $1,500 for the purchase of a broad range of educational resources and services. Priority will be given to Texas families receiving income assistance and to families that have documented financial needs.

"The SSES program provides crucial academic resources to students with cognitive disabilities and will help close the educational gap caused by the COVID-19 pandemic," said Governor Abbott. "I urge eligible Texans to apply for this funding so that the State of Texas can partner with them and provide more support to Texas students."

“I encourage eligible parents of special education students to apply for the Supplemental Special Education Service program grant. Helping children with cognitive disabilities has been a priority of mine for over thirty years and I am so glad we can offer this SSES grant at this time. Now, more than ever, we need to make sure that our special education students have additional resources to help with the disruptions brought about by the pandemic along with the additional challenges they face," said Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick.

"Now more than ever, we must work to identify innovative solutions to prevent our most vulnerable students from falling through the cracks, and the funding provided for the SSES grants will help tremendously in keeping these students on the right academic trajectory. The SSES program will go a long way to offset the unprecedented educational disruptions that COVID-19 has created for thousands of Texas students with unique learning needs, and I appreciate Governor Abbott’s leadership on the matter," said Speaker Dade Phelan.

"This program is yet another example of the innovative ways in which our state is working to close gaps in our system of public education. COVID-19 has created a host of new challenges for students, families, and teachers—but particularly for those students requiring special education services. These one-time grants will positively impact thousands of Texas families and help students to keep pace academically despite the ongoing disruptions tied to the pandemic. We encourage eligible families to apply quickly," said Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath.

Once approved for the program, families will be provided access to a ClassWallet-managed online portal and a digital spending account which they can use with providers that have been vetted and approved by TEA. The portal will provide information on available resources and services, allow families to make

purchases, and provide them with full account and balance information. The program will support students who were enrolled in Texas public schools during the 2019-20 school year and are currently enrolled for the 2020-21 school year.

The TEA is requesting that school systems across the state encourage eligible families of K-12 students identified with complex disabilities or significant cognitive disabilities to review eligibility requirements and complete the online application through the secure portal. Following the submission of an application, eligible families will receive an email to create their SSES marketplace account through ClassWallet to access the one-time $1,500 per eligible student grant.

Additional program information, resources, and the application can be found here. Any program and related eligibility questions should be directed to the SSES team: ssesinfo@tea.texas.gov.



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