Dallas ISD currently serves more than 15,000 students through Special Education programs. Most of those students, who range in age from 3 to 21, are receiving accommodations for specific learning needs and autism, with significant percentages requiring support for severe and profound disabilities and speech-related impairments.

Students receiving special education services represent approximately 10 percent of our overall student population.

Dallas ISD is committed to its mission of educating all students, and when we discover barriers to achieving that goal, we immediately focus on taking corrective actions.

As part of a comprehensive internal review, this spring Dallas ISD discovered a backlog of about 2,000 unprocessed referrals to its Special Education department.

We are taking swift and decisive actions, which include temporarily reassigning staff and retaining contractors to work through this problem and assure that referrals and evaluations are conducted as quickly and thoroughly as possible. This number is being reduced on a daily basis.

Our goal is to have this process completed and the backlog eliminated by mid-September. We appreciate the understanding and cooperation of students, families, and campus leadership in helping us reach that goal.

One key step in improvement is our intent to reassign and increase staff to make sure that referrals and evaluations are conducted efficiently. Many of these are open and funded positions, and we expect incoming federal support to help in this area as well. We’ll also be working with principals, counselors, and teachers to provide additional guidance on the process, expectations, and timing for referrals.

We believe there are several reasons this backlog developed. Certainly, the challenges of COVID and remote learning played a part. A recent internal review of services discovered the need for improvements in monitoring, data analysis, staffing, structure and communications with program staff and our campus-based leadership. The district is aggressively working to make the changes necessary to improve our performance in each of these areas.

The need for departmental improvements has been previously identified, even before this backlog was discovered. We are confident we will have the resources, leadership, and structure to
implement and sustain improvements, while being flexible as the needs of our students and the district evolve. We anticipate that recently appropriated federal funding will support this effort as well.

- We have reported these issues to the TEA, together with our plans for corrective action. The agency appreciated our self-reporting of the problems, and the aggressive steps we have in place to correct those problems.

- We greatly appreciate the formation and work of several parent-led advocacy committees for Special Education programs in place throughout the district. Their understanding, continued partnership, and oversight will make this program better.