

SUBJECT: Requiring a referendum before a school district can change names

COMMITTEE: Public Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 8 ayes — Huberty, Bohac, Deshotel, Gooden, K. King, Koop, Meyer, VanDeaver

1 nay — Dutton

1 absent — Allen

1 present not voting — Bernal

WITNESSES: For — Adrienne Murry, Houston Concerned Citizens; William Edmundson; Janet McMasters

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Kara Belew and Von Byer, Texas Education Agency)

BACKGROUND: Education Code, sec. 11.160 allows the board of trustees of an independent school district by resolution to change the name of the school district.

DIGEST: CSHB 1152 would prohibit the board of trustees of a large school district in a certain populous county (Houston Independent School District) from changing the name of a school district or a campus before a majority of voters in a referendum election approved the name change.

A referendum could be placed on the ballot for any type of district election, including an election of district trustees, a bond election, or a special election. If a majority of voters approved the name change, the board by resolution would be allowed to change the name of the district or campus. The school board would be required to give notice of the name change of a district or school by sending to the Commissioner of

Education a copy of the resolution attested by the president and secretary of the board and a copy of the election results.

The district or school with the new name would be considered for all purposes a continuation of the district or campus as it was formerly named.

This bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2017.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 1152 would allow voters in the Houston Independent School District (ISD) to have their voices heard before it made a decision about district or campus names that could have major fiscal implications. School or district name changes require substantial tax dollars to fix equipment, signage, and stationery, and public input should be sought and considered before a district the size of Houston ISD makes a change of this magnitude.

Regardless of the reason the board might consider changing a school's name, it should be transparent and accountable. At one middle school in Houston ISD, a community poll revealed that 90 percent of respondents were opposed to a name change, and many believed a renaming committee that offered alternatives to changing the name was essentially ignored. Requiring a referendum for any change in a school's name would help ensure the school board made future decisions based on the will of the community.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Many recent name changes involving Houston schools were intended to address schools named for individuals tied to the Confederacy. Changing the names of those schools was not an arbitrary decision but one made to remove names that many people find offensive, which is a valid district decision that should not be subject to a referendum.

NOTES:

CSHB 1152 differs from the bill as filed in that the committee substitute would apply only to the Houston Independent School District.