

- SUBJECT:** Requiring a high school elective course on U.S. founding principles
- COMMITTEE:** Public Education — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 12 ayes — Dutton, Allen, Allison, K. Bell, Bernal, Buckley, M. González, Huberty, K. King, Meza, Talarico, VanDeaver
- 0 nays
- 1 absent — Lozano
- WITNESSES:** For — Thomas Lindsay, Texas Public Policy Foundation; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Eddie Conger, International Leadership of Texas Public Charter Schools; Mia McCord, Texas Conservative Coalition (TCC); Jonathan Saenz, Texas Values; Mary Castle, Jonathan Covey, and Gregory McCarthy, Texas Values Action; Karen Marshall; Mike Meroney)
- Against — Starlee Coleman, Texas Public Charter School Association; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Chloe Latham Sikes, IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association); Hillary Lilly, San Antonio ISD; and six individuals)
- On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Eric Marin and Monica Martinez, Texas Education Agency; Annemarie Donnelly; Thomas Parkinson)
- DIGEST:** HB 1776 would require each school district and open-enrollment charter school that offered a high school program to provide a one-half credit elective course on the founding principles of the United States. The course would have to focus on the principles underlying the U.S. form of government, the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, the Federalist Papers, and the writings of the Founding Fathers of the United States.
- School district boards of trustees and charter schools would have to permit and encourage the posting in a classroom or school building of a copy of

the founding documents of the United States, including the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, the Federalist Papers, and the writings of the Founding Fathers of the United States.

The 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, 2021.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 1776 would help provide Texas public school students with an understanding of the nation's founding principles, which have contributed to making America exceptional and allowed liberty to flourish. A fundamental knowledge of foundational principles, such as the separation of powers and how laws are made, is essential to the ability of citizens to fully participate in democracy. Today, however, too many native-born Americans cannot pass the citizenship test that is successfully completed by most immigrants seeking to become naturalized citizens.

The bill would encourage schools to post copies of founding documents like the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution to increase student's awareness of the nation's history and government.

While some say the bill would make it harder for certain schools to focus on programs such as African-American studies or Mexican-American studies, a half-credit course on U.S. founding principles still would leave time for other courses of study.

**CRITICS
SAY:**

By mandating a new elective course on the founding principles of the United States, HB 1776 could infringe on the autonomy of schools to create specialized programs of study that help keep students engaged. Schools should have the flexibility to tailor programs as they deem appropriate. Some may prefer to offer programs on the history and experience of specific groups such as African-American studies or Mexican-American studies, and the bill could reduce the amount of time available for such programs.