

Houston Independent School District School Board Composition Criteria Community Feedback

In 2017, the Houston ISD (HISD) Board of Trustees invited Texas Education Agency (TEA) representatives to participate in board meeting to discuss House Bill (HB) 1842. During that meeting, HISD board members requested that TEA representatives make themselves available for community inquiries regarding the potential implications of HB 1842. Over the past two years, at the invitation of community members, TEA representatives have attended more than 50 community meetings for the purpose of answering questions and listening to community concerns. During those meetings, TEA received extensive feedback as to the mix of people who should serve on an appointed school board, should one become necessary.

What follows is a summary of the themes that emerged from those listening sessions. It should be noted that not every idea shared in the community feedback is included below. Community feedback from one session frequently contradicted community feedback in another session -- and was often contradictory within the same session. Instead, the intention was to identify frequently repeated themes from the community feedback.

FEEDBACK OVERVIEW

Throughout the listening sessions, several characteristics were identified as requisites for being a member of the Board of Managers (BOM). Overall, the composition should reflect the diversity of Houston ISD — not only racially and ethnically, but also in terms of age, gender, orientation, and educational background, with the common denominator of putting children first. Comments highlighted that BOM members should be capable of making decisions in the best interest of students that are grounded in data and have the necessary skills to problem solve. Opinions were split in terms of whether members should need to live within or outside of the district's boundaries. A clear trend that arose from the feedback is that members of the board should not seek to advance their political career, nor should they be conducting current business with the Houston ISD.

DIVERSITY

Demographic Diversity

The most frequent concern shared by community members was that the composition of a school board be as demographically diverse as the ISD and City of Houston. The expectation is that, given that the overwhelming majority of HISD students are Hispanic or African-American, ethnic and racial diversity should be evident in the school board as well. This sentiment was also expressed regarding gender, and, to a lesser degree, age, socio-economic background, and educational background.

Experiential Diversity

The next most common area of concern was that parent voices be represented. There was also discussion suggesting that, while parents should be represented on a school board, that this should not be mandatory for all school board members.

Expertise Diversity

After concerns about parent voice, the next most common area of concern was that educator voices be represented. There was a strong consensus that, while educators should be represented on a school board, that this should not be mandatory for all school board members. Beyond educational expertise,

the following areas of expertise were commonly mentioned: legal, financial, business, managerial, and mental health.

Geographic Diversity

The final area of diversity garnering strong interest was concerning the need to have school board members who live throughout Houston ISD rather than board members who predominantly live in any one area.

AFFINITY

No Employment Conflicts of Interest

A significant level of frustration with real or perceived conflicts of interest permeated much of the community feedback. The community expressed intolerance for any school board member who was a vendor of HISD, worked for a vendor of HISD, or had a spouse or children who were vendors for HISD. In addition, community feedback indicated nervousness about potential board members who worked for or served on the board of organizations seen as being in competition or conflict with HISD.

Loyalty & Desire to Serve Houston

Community feedback expressed interest in preferencing school board members who are committed to HISD, who consider Houston home, and are ready to give back to the community -- whether they were born in Houston or moved to Houston at a later point in time. In addition, preference was expressed for individuals who are not only taxpayers, but also who are HISD alums or former/current HISD parents, and who have lived in HISD boundaries for at least a year.

Not Using Houston ISD as a Step

There was a strong sense in the community that anyone merely attempting to use Houston ISD as a political stepping stool not be considered. This concern applied equally to both existing / former elected officials and to previously unsuccessful / aspiring elected officials. Ideal applicants should see serving the students of Houston ISD as the highest public servant office to which one could aspire.

COMPETENCY

Board Experience

There was a reasonable amount of expectation that most school board members should not be learning about governing board service for the first time through this role. The most common sentiment along these lines was that this was not the time nor place for on the job training about what governing is.

Community Leadership Experience

While expressed in a variety of ways, another theme that emerged was that viable school board members should have demonstrated effectiveness as serving the community in a variety of ways prior to coming to the school board. Ideal applicants will have served their community - whether as part of faith-based work, focused on educational supports, or otherwise - prior to service in this capacity.

Temperament to Work as a Team

A consistent thread of expectation was that school board members be able to work collaboratively. It is assumed that this role will be a stressful one and that the ideal applicant can manage that stress in a manner that still allows them to effectively work with their colleagues.