

Houston Independent School District School Board Composition Criteria Community Feedback

In late 2019, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) ordered that a Board of Managers begin governing the Houston Independent School District (HISD). In January 2020, the HISD Board of Trustees filed a lawsuit to stop that order, and an injunction remained in place until March 2023. Throughout this process, representatives from TEA have sought community feedback. Starting in 2019 and continuing to this day, TEA representatives attended more than 50 community meetings for the purpose of answering questions and listening to community concerns. Community members often commented as to the type of people who should serve on a state-appointed Board of Managers.

What follows is a summary of what has emerged from the 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 of this summary is to identify frequently repeated themes from the community feedback.

DIVERSITY

Demographic Diversity

The most frequent concern shared by community members has been that the makeup 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 that garnered 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 level of frustration with real or perceived conflicts of interest permeated much of the community feedback. The community expressed the desire that school board members should not be a vendor of HISD, work for a vendor of HISD, or have 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 as an adult. 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

Some Board Experience

There were some who expressed a desire that 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 governance vs management.

Some Community Leadership Experience

While expressed in a variety of ways, another theme that emerged from the community feedback was that viable school board members should have demonstrated effectiveness at 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 mild but 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.