

SUBJECT: Incorporating positive character traits in the Texas education curriculum

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 11 ayes — Huberty, Bernal, Allison, Ashby, K. Bell, M. González, K. King, Meyer, Sanford, Talarico, VanDeaver

0 nays

1 absent — Allen

1 present not voting — Dutton

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: John Enyeart, Archdiocese of San Antonio; Christine Broughal, Texans for Special Education Reform; Michael Barba and Rebecca Visosky, Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops; Jan Friese, Texas Counseling Association; Linda Litzinger, Texas Parent to Parent; Mary Castle, Texas Values; Ingrid Meyer)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Stacye Anderson; Beth Maynard; Deborah Nelms; Ruth York)

On — Steve Swanson; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Monica Martinez, Texas Education Agency; Craig Schiebel)

BACKGROUND: Education Code sec. 29.906 allows school districts to create character education programs. Such programs must stress certain positive character traits, use integrated teaching strategies, and be age appropriate. Schools that choose to develop these programs must do so in consultation with a committee created by the district that consists of parents of district students, educators, and other community members.

The Texas Education Agency is required to maintain a list of character education programs that school districts in the state have implemented and may accept money from the federal government and private sources to assist districts to implement these programs.

DIGEST: HB 1026 would require the State Board of Education (SBOE) to integrate positive character traits into the essential knowledge and skills (TEKS) adopted for kindergarten through the 12th grade, as appropriate.

SBOE would have to create a report identifying the manner in which the positive character traits currently required for inclusion in optional character education programs, along with the trait of gratitude, had been integrated into the curriculum. This report would be made publicly available on the board's website.

Each school district and open-enrollment charter school would be required to adopt a character education program that included the positive character traits the SBOE integrated into TEKS. Each school district and open-enrollment charter school would have to submit the adopted program to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) annually.

TEA would be required to designate any school that demonstrated a correlation between its character education program, an increase in student attendance, and a decrease in disciplinary problems, and met certain other criteria as a Character Plus School. The agency would have to use the services of a center for education research established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and data from school district reports to designate Character Plus Schools.

SBOE could adopt rules as necessary to implement the provisions of the bill. HB 1026 would apply beginning with the 2019-2020 school year.

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, 2019.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 1026 would strengthen the foundation of character for Texas students by incorporating positive character traits into the essential knowledge and skills taught in public school. This would improve the long-term success of Texas students.

Incorporating character education into the state's required curriculum would set students up for success as they faced challenges in school and in life. Studies have found that schools that provided character education programs experienced higher standardized test scores in reading and math, lower absenteeism, and fewer suspensions. Because of its positive practical effects on students' education, character education would be consistent with the mission of the public school system.

The bill would not infringe on parental rights because the public school system already is tasked with providing for the well-being and development of Texas students. The bill simply takes advantage of an opportunity to instill commonly accepted Texas values in students.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

HB 1026 would require Texas schools to incorporate subjective character education into the curriculum, inappropriately involving the public education system in an area better left to parents and straying from the mission of the state's public education system. Schools should focus their resources on educating students and allow parents to guide the moral development of their children.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the bill would have a negative impact of about \$491,000 on general revenue related funds through fiscal 2020-21.