

SUBJECT: Requiring instruction on informed American patriotism in public schools

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 12 ayes — Dutton, Lozano, Allen, Allison, K. Bell, Buckley,
M. González, Huberty, K. King, Meza, Talarico, VanDeaver

0 nays

1 absent — Bernal

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, May 4 — 30-0

WITNESSES: No public hearing.

BACKGROUND: Education Code sec. 4.001 states the mission and objectives of the Texas public education system. Sec. 28.002 establishes the required curriculum that schools must offer.

Some have suggested that public schools should be required to teach additional information about the history and foundations of American government, including informed patriotism, to better develop students' civic knowledge and prevent an erosion of pride in America.

DIGEST: SB 2026 would require the State Board of Education (SBOE) and each school district to require the teaching of informed American patriotism in the adoption of instructional materials for kindergarten through grade 12, including the founding documents of the United States.

Informed American patriotism would be defined in the bill and include "a reasoned appreciation, gained through the study of historical primary sources, of why America has been, is now, and continues to be the destination of choice for those around the world who yearn to live in freedom."

The bill would revise a statement that a primary purpose of the public

school curriculum is to prepare informed, rather than active, citizens who understand the importance of patriotism and can function productively in a free enterprise society with appreciation for the fundamental democratic principles, rather than the basic democratic values, of our state and national heritage.

In adopting the curriculum, SBOE would have to adopt essential knowledge and skills that developed each student's civic knowledge, including an understanding of:

- the fundamental moral, political, and intellectual foundations of the American experiment in self-government;
- the history, qualities, traditions, and features of civic engagement in the United States;
- the structure, function, and processes of government institutions at the federal, state, and local levels; and
- the founding documents of the United States, including the entirety of the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, the Federalist Papers, including Essays 10 and 51, excerpts from Alexis de Tocqueville's "Democracy in America," the transcript of the first Lincoln-Douglas debate, the writings of the founding fathers, Frederick Douglass's speeches "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro" and "What the Black Man Wants," and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech "I Have a Dream."

A school district or open-enrollment charter school would have to use those documents as part of the instructional materials.

The bill would add to the objectives of public education a requirement that educators cultivate in students an informed American patriotism and lead students in a close study of the founding documents of the United States and Texas. The purpose of the objective would be to:

- increase students' knowledge of the deepest and noblest purposes of the United States and Texas;
- enhance students' intellectual independence so that they may

become thoughtful, informed citizens who have an appreciation for the fundamental democratic principles of our state and national heritage; and

- guide students toward understanding and productively functioning in a free enterprise society.

The bill would apply beginning with the 2021-2022 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, 2021.

NOTES:

The House companion bill, HR 4509 by Bonnen, was considered by the House Public Education Committee in a public hearing on April 20, finally passed by the House on May 14, and reported favorably by the Senate Education Committee on May 24.