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Senator Bettencourt's SB 1166, calling for Sunset Commission review of Harris County Department of Education, approved by Texas Senate
Senator Bettencourt says, "SB 1166 provides a path for transparency and accountability for HCDE"

AUSTIN – The Texas Senate today passed Senate Bill 1166, by Senator Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston), that will require the Sunset Commission to review (without the authority to abolish) the Harris County Department of Education (HCDE) as if it were a state agency. The review would be conducted by September, 2019. **"Senate Bill 1166 provides a path for transparency and accountability for the Harris County Department of Education,"** Senator Bettencourt said.

Over the past decade, questions have been raised concerning the proper management of HCDE and its continued existence. SB 1166 will require the Texas Sunset Commission take a full in-depth look at the Harris County Department of Education's mission, functions, efficiencies, and overall effectiveness. Senator Sylvia Garcia (D-Houston), co-author of SB 1166, confirmed, **"This bill calls for a standard Sunset review that every state agency undergoes every 12 years."**

Taxpayers and board members testified in support of the bill at the Senate Education Committee hearing last week. The committee unanimously approved SB 1166 on a vote of 11-0.

"It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see that HCDE and Sunset were made for each other," one taxpayer stated during her testimony. **"I don't understand why I have to pay education twice – once for the schools and once for HCDE."**

Harris County Department of Education and the Dallas County Schools are the only remaining county school districts remaining in Texas. Since 1978, the State of Texas stopped funding county school trustees. For funding, HCDE is allowed to collect a local property tax called an "equalization tax" as well as fees for services. Senators and witnesses questioned HCDE's involvement with businesses across the nation through its choice partners, with customers from Hawaii to Maine. Questions also persisted about the apparent overlap of services provided between Region 4 Education Service Center (Region 4) and HCDE.

During the committee hearing, Senator Don Huffines (R-Dallas) championed SB 1166's call for legislative review of HCDE's activities. **"It's good transparency and good government,"** Senator Huffines said.

"Sunset review will answer the three main questions surrounding HCDE: redundancy, revenue and relevancy," Senator Bettencourt said. **"A full Sunset review will help provide guidance for administration officials to focus more on educational issues and move HCDE forward. SB 1166 is good for HCDE, it's good for the Legislature, and it's good for the taxpayers,"** Senator Bettencourt concluded.

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