

The Truth

Many of you know that I serve as President of the Harris County Department of Education Board of Trustees. I have served on this board for about 20 years, not because I wanted a political career, but because most of that time finding a responsible candidate for the position was not an easy task. HCDE provides many services for Harris County Independent School Districts, but I won't describe them here, as it would take too much time and space. One thing you should know is that HCDE levies a small tax of less than \$7.00 annually on a home appraised at \$100,000. That small tax allows HCDE to provide shared services that result in significant savings to school districts. For example, in my own local district, the savings are estimated to be more than \$4 million dollars.

The HCDE Board has 2 at-large positions on the Primary ballot. Michael Wolfe and R. W. Bray are vying for At-Large Place 5, and Don Sumners and Dianne Williams are running for At-Large Place 7. These candidates attend meetings, introduced themselves, and asked for your vote. There are some things that need clarification, and that is the purpose of this document.

Mr. Wolfe was previously elected to the HCDE board. During his 6-year term, he was contentious and disruptive. He did not communicate with the administration or the Board. He was ultimately censured by the Board for his irresponsible actions and statements. He stated he intended to dissolve HCDE. He ran for re-election and lost to a Democrat. His website recently stated HCDE should be eliminated and he would work to that end. He has not demonstrated any interest in supporting or providing educational opportunities for students and schools in Harris County. He frequently and knowingly misleads people regarding HCDE and the Board.

R. W. Bray said you could read about him on his website and that he respects HCDE and its efforts on behalf of students. He recognizes the value HCDE brings to the educational community and to Harris County. He is a business man, a financial manager, and an active member of the U. S. Air Force. He said he would bring additional conservative oversight to the HCDE Board.

Mr. Sumners has made two statements that are not correct. First, he claimed credit for the HCDE Board rejecting a tax increase. At that time, Mr. Sumners was Harris County Tax Assessor Collector. Mr. Sumners' statements were questionable and therefore, I did not consider them in my decision and I doubt many of the other board members did either. The Board determined that the tax rate already in effect (the Effective tax rate) was adequate to support the Board's approved budget. Thus, the decision was to reject the Administration's request for a tax increase. It is inappropriate for Mr. Sumners to claim credit for the Board's action. Second, Mr. Sumners stated that HCDE made some errors regarding a proposal called "Early to Rise". The proposal was presented to HCDE by a group formed from the Greater Houston Partnership, called Harris County School Readiness Corporation. They required a petition bearing the signatures of 75,000 voters. The petition asking for a 1% increase in taxing authority for early childhood education was presented to the County Judge with a request to add the petition language to the ballot. The HCDE Board only authorized the Superintendent to review the proposal. Neither HCDE Board, nor its staff took part in any way in securing the petition, nor did the Board act on the petition. The County Judge rejected the request to place the item on the ballot. Mr. Sumners was not

present at any of the meetings concerning the “Early to Rise” program. His perception of the proceedings and process is simply not valid.

You may recall that during his term as Harris County Tax Assessor Collector, Mr. Sumners failed to apply appropriate boundaries to two of the races for HCDE Trustee positions. Consequently, in order for HCDE to seat a valid board, there had to be a decision regarding the legality of the election. HCDE filed a case against the County naming Mr. Sumners and County Clerk, Stan Stanart, in their official capacities. The judge ultimately ruled that the election results caused no harm and the election was upheld. However, Mr. Sumners received criticism as a consequence and later lost his bid for re-election.

When his successor, Mike Sullivan, was elected, Mr. Sumners refused to provide an appropriate turnover period to facilitate the transition of leadership in the Tax Assessors office. I did not understand this behavior at that time. Having read about Mr. Sumners’ behavior (see the article here: <http://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/County-sees-tense-transitions-in-two-elected-posts-4125316.php>) combined with his current bid for election to the HCDE Board, I suspect Mr. Sumners may bear some desire for reciprocity toward HCDE. At the very least, one can surmise that Mr. Sumners has an ulterior motive or agenda.

Dianne Williams presents a background as a long-time educator and an activist for positive service. She has regularly attended HCDE board meetings. She took her time deciding to run for the Board until she felt she could bring her experience and suggested solutions to the needs of the Harris County’s educational community.

HCDE returns \$5 in service for every \$1 of taxpayer funds. I hope each of you will vote with a commitment to electing board members who will act in the best interest of Harris County’s students and school districts. My personal vote goes to R. W. Bray and Dianne Williams.

Respectfully,

Angie Chesnut

* Any views or opinions presented in this communication are solely those of the author in my individual capacity and expressly do not represent those of Harris County Department of Education or its Board of Trustees.