

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5772

As of February 21, 2003

Title: An act relating to the compulsory study of the United States Constitution and the Declaration of Independence and other foundational historical documents of importance to United States citizens.

Brief Description: Regarding the compulsory study of the state and federal constitutions and the declaration of independence.

Sponsors: Senators Benton, Morton, Stevens, Roach, Mulliken, Horn, Oke and Kline.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Education: 2/25/03.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Staff: Susan Mielke (786-7422)

Background: Current law specifies the following social studies-related course work and activities: The study of the U.S. and State Constitutions is required for graduation from public or private high schools, and each public school must observe Temperance and Good Citizenship Day and Veteran's Day. Additionally, the Essential Academic Learning Requirements, which represent the specific academic skills and knowledge which students should have, includes civics.

Summary of Bill: December 15 is established as the "Bill of Rights Day." Each school district must provide students and school employees an opportunity to reflect upon the Bill of Rights. On or around December 15, the Bill of Rights must be read aloud in all public schools. Additionally, on or around December 15, students in grades kindergarten through 12 must receive at least one day of instruction in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, including the Bill of Rights. Students must be encouraged to memorize the preamble of the U.S. Constitution.

A prerequisite to graduation from public and private high schools is the thorough study and demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, including the Bill of Rights, and other foundational historical documents of importance to U.S. citizens. "Study" includes teacher instruction regarding the relationship of the Declaration of Independence to the U.S. and Washington State Constitutions, including how it provided an outline for both constitutions, and teaching the heritage and meaning of the following statement from the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." School districts are responsible for providing books that explain the meaning of these historical documents and must display the documents.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 13, 2003.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.