

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6343

As of January 21, 2006

Title: An act relating to a mandatory high school civics requirement.

Brief Description: Requiring a high school course in civics.

Sponsors: Senators Kline, Kastama, Weinstein, Rasmussen, Fairley, Keiser, Thibaudeau, Pflug, Kohl-Welles, Roach and Benton.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education: 1/20/06.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING, K-12 & HIGHER EDUCATION

Staff: Susan Mielke (786-7422)

Background: The State Board of Education sets the minimum subject areas and credits required for high school graduation. The requirements include 2.5 credits in social studies, including one credit in United States history and government, which must include the study of the U.S. Constitution and one-half credit in Washington State history and government, which must include the study of the State Constitution. Additionally, school districts are encouraged to consider including information on the culture, history, and government of the American Indian peoples. A credit in civics is not currently required; however, courses in civics, economics, sociology, political science, international relations, or related courses may be used to complete the required credits.

The Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs), which represent the specific academic skills and knowledge which students should have, does include civics. By the end of the 2008-09 school year, school districts must have assessments or other strategies to assure that students have an opportunity to learn the EALRs in social studies. Beginning with the 2008-09 school year, school districts must annually submit an implementation verification report to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Summary of Bill: Beginning with the graduating class of 2010, students must complete at least one course in civics. The Superintendent of Public Instruction must develop specific guidelines to implement this requirement.

"Civics" is defined as "the social science that analyzes our state's and nation's democratic institutions and traditions including the rights and duties of citizens."

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: A requirement in civics is a big investment in time and resources of school districts and the office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, but it is a necessary one. Reflected in the messages from the public, often demonstrated by how they vote on initiatives, is a disconnect with how government works. Since the public is the "boss" of government it is important for them to be educated about the process and requisites of government. We have never required a civics course in high school. Unless we take actions such as this, we will not have people who are politically active.

Testimony Against: This idea goes too far when it creates a mandate. We suggest that the Washington Learns or the new State Board of Education should look at this in a more comprehensive way. Civics is not an actual class but is embedded within the curriculum of social studies classes. Please resist the urge to drive a certain curriculum through legislation. Instead, you should consider discussing this issue with your local school boards to ensure meaningful curriculum in the classroom.

Who Testified: PRO: Senator Adam Kline, prime sponsor.

CON: Don Rash, Association of School Principals; Leslie Goldstein, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Gary King, Washington Education Association.