

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## HB 2132

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As of March 17, 2009

**Title:** An act relating to instruction in civics.

**Brief Description:** Regarding instruction in civics.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Quall, Anderson, Carlyle, Dammeier, Probst, Sullivan, Johnson, Hudgins, Kelley, Chase, Wood and Santos.

**Brief History:** Passed House: 2/27/09, 94-0.

**Committee Activity:** Early Learning & K-12 Education: 3/16/09.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

**Staff:** Brandon Roché (786-7405)

**Background:** The State Board of Education (SBE) is charged with adopting minimum high school graduation requirements. In 2006 the Legislature directed the SBE to define the purpose of a meaningful high school diploma. Part of the SBE's definition was that a diploma should "declare that a student is ready for success in postsecondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship, and is equipped with the skills to be a lifelong learner."

The current Social Studies requirement is as follows:

- one credit in United States history and government, including study of the Constitution;
- one credit in contemporary world history, geography, and problems; and
- one-half credit in Washington State history and government, including study of the state Constitution.

**Summary of Bill:** The purpose of a high school diploma is to declare that a student is ready for success in post-secondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship, and is equipped with the skills to be a lifelong learner.

If the State Board of Education increases graduation requirements in Social Studies, at least one-half credit of the requirement must be in civics. The extra half credit, if added, must include:

- federal, state, and local government organization and procedures;
- rights and responsibilities of citizens addressed in the state and federal Constitutions;

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- current issues addressed at each level of government; and
- electoral issues, including elections, ballot measures, initiatives, and referenda.

**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.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: This was brought forth by the League of Women Voters. I used to teach history and civics in high schools. I'm always appalled at the lack of civic understanding in high schools. For example, their inability to name the three top officeholders in the state. This bill says that if we go to core 24, the extra half year of social studies must be in civics. When people look to government to find out what to do, there is an atrophy in understanding how our system works. People need to understand what brought our government to this point. This is a good way to put a little more time in the requirements and make them understand how our system works. This recognizes the current funding situation by its conditional imposition only when there is funding for core 24. We believe democratic government depends on informed and active participation in the democratic process. Many of the high school kids I've talked to had very little knowledge of local and county government. We support this bill. The board appreciates the inclusion of the purpose of the diploma in the bill. However, the content elements in the bill may already be identified in current curriculum.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Representative Quall, prime sponsor; Representative Anderson, sponsor; Bill Williams, Washington State PTA; Catherine Ahl, League of Women Voters of Washington; Brad Burnham, Washington State Board of Education.