
Education Committee

HB 1807

Brief Description: Addressing the protection of quality civic education and academic discourse.

Sponsors: Representatives Walsh, Chase, Sutherland, Ybarra, Dufault, Graham and Young.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires each public school to annually provide to each student in kindergarten through grade eight (K-8) a mandatory stand-alone, age-appropriate, year-long course in civic education that supports students' functional understanding of nine topics, and specifies additional requirements related to discussing civic education topics.
- Directs the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to make publicly available, a list of K-8 civic education curricula.
- Prohibits certain public education employees from being required to participate in any form of training, certification, or continuing education that involves specified propositions or assertions.

Hearing Date: 1/25/22

Staff: Megan Wargacki

Background:

Civics Course for High School Students. Each school district that operates a high school must provide a mandatory one-half credit course in civics for each high school student. The course must stand-alone and not be embedded in another social studies course, unless the course offers students the opportunity to earn both high school and postsecondary credit. Credit awarded to students who complete the mandatory civics course must be applied to graduation requirements in social studies. The content of the civics course must include:

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1. federal, state, tribal, and local government organization and procedures;
2. rights and responsibilities of citizens addressed in the Washington and United States Constitutions;
3. current issues addressed at each level of government;
4. electoral issues, including elections, ballot measures, initiatives, and referenda;
5. the study and completion of the civics component of the federally administered naturalization test required of persons seeking to become naturalized United States citizens; and
6. the importance in a free society of living the legislatively described basic values and character traits.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction was directed to identify and post on its website civics materials and resources for use in the high school civics course.

Basic Values and Character Traits. In 1994, the Legislature recognized that certain basic values and character traits are essential to individual liberty, fulfillment, and happiness. The Legislature indicated that these values and traits are not intended to be assessed or be standards for graduation. These values and traits include the importance of: honesty, integrity, and trust; respect for self and others; responsibility for personal actions and commitments; self-discipline and moderation; diligence and a positive work ethic; respect for law and authority; healthy and positive behavior; and family as the basis of society.

Summary of Bill:

Civics Course for Students in Kindergarten through Grade 8. Beginning with the 2022-23 school year, each public school must annually provide to each kindergarten through eighth grade (K-8) student a mandatory stand-alone, year-long course in civic education. The course, which must be age appropriate, must support public school students' functional understanding of the following topics:

1. the fundamental moral, political, and intellectual foundations of the American experiment in self-government and Washington's role in that noble experiment;
2. the history, qualities, traditions, and features of civic engagement in the United States and in Washington, consistent with the legislatively described values and character traits;
3. the history of indigenous peoples of Washington and the Pacific Northwest region;
4. the structure, function, and processes of government institutions at the federal, state, and local levels;
5. specified founding and historical documents of the United States, at a minimum;
6. the history of white supremacy and the ways in which these systems of belief sowed division, caused harm, and were combatted through peaceful protest, civic engagement, and the American courts;
7. the history and importance of the American civil rights movement, including specified minimum documents;
8. historical documents related to the civic accomplishments of marginalized populations, including specified documents; and

9. the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction must develop, and annually update, and post on its website, a list of K-8 civic education curricula.

A state agency, school district, or public school may not accept private funding for the purpose of developing, purchasing, or selecting K-8 civic education materials or providing teacher training or professional development for the K-8 civics course.

Discussion of Civics Related Topics. For the K-8 and high school civics courses, a public school teacher, administrator, other employee, or contractor, or employee of a state educational agency:

1. may not be compelled to discuss a particular current event or currently controversial topic in public policy or social affairs;
2. who chooses to discuss a current event or currently controversial topic must, to the best of their ability, explore the topic from diverse and contending perspectives without giving deference to any one perspective; and
3. may not require, make part of a course, nor award a grade or course credit for a student's political activism, lobbying, or efforts to persuade members of the legislative or executive branch at the federal, state, or local level to take specific actions by direct communication.

A state agency, school district, or public school may not implement, interpret, or enforce any rules of student code of conduct in a manner that would result in the punishment of a student for discussing the topics or concepts described in a K-8 or high school civics course.

Training Prohibitions. No public school teacher, administrator, other employee, or contractor, nor employee of a state educational agency, may be required to participate in any form of training, certification, or continuing education that involves the nine propositions or assertions, for example: one race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex; the United States is fundamentally or "structurally" racist or sexist; an individual, by virtue of their race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive; or an individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of their race or sex.

Severability Clause. If any provision of this act or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of the act or the application of the provision to other persons or circumstances is not affected.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 18, 2022.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.