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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5637**

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**State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senate Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senator Fortunato)

AN ACT Relating to promoting student access to information about media literacy and civic education; amending RCW 28A.230.094; and creating a new section.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The legislature finds that inadequate media literacy skills and limited civic knowledge have become an issue among the youth in Washington state, necessitating the deployment of media literacy and civic engagement resources in schools throughout the state.

(2) The legislature further finds:

(a) Many high school and middle school students struggle to distinguish between real news and fake news articles and do not verify suspicious information;

(b) The spread of realistic images or videos of people that have been altered to appear as somebody else, or "deepfakes," has fueled harmful online misinformation campaigns;

(c) Media literacy training educates students on how to properly distinguish between different news sources, information, bias, and more;

(d) Media literacy promotes informed engagement with media platforms and prevents polarization among community members;

(e) According to a survey of young adults nationwide by the institute for citizens and scholars, 33 percent of respondents indicated no intention to participate civically in 2024;

(f) In 2022, only 46 percent of Americans could name all three branches of government; and

(g) Civic engagement strengthens communities and supports democracy, and civic education helps students develop critical thinking and social skills that are vital to success.

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.230.094 and 2020 c 208 s 9 are each amended to read as follows:

(1)(a) ((~~Beginning with or before the 2020-21 school year, each~~)) Each school district that operates a high school must provide a mandatory one-half credit stand-alone course in civics for each high school student. Except as provided by (c) of this subsection, civics content and instruction embedded in other social studies courses do not satisfy the requirements of this subsection.

(b) Credit awarded to students who complete the civics course must be applied to course credit requirements in social studies that are required for high school graduation.

(c) Civics content and instruction required by this section may be embedded in social studies courses that offer students the opportunity to earn both high school and postsecondary credit.

(2) The content of the civics course must include, but is not limited to:

(a) Federal, state, tribal, and local government organization and procedures, including the three branches of government and the system of checks and balances between them;

(b) Rights and responsibilities of citizens addressed in the Washington state and United States Constitutions;

(c) Current issues addressed at each level of government;

(d) Electoral issues, including elections, ballot measures, initiatives, and referenda;

(e) 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

(f) The importance in a free society of living the basic values and character traits specified in RCW 28A.150.211.

(3) Beginning in the 2026-27 school year, the content of the civics course must also include:

(a) The process of voter registration;

(b) Media literacy as it relates to elections, civic engagement, and decision making, including how to engage critically with online information and combat the digital spread of misinformation;

(c) Tools and methods that individuals or groups may use to initiate change in public policy and institutions and how such tools may impact elections, policy, public opinion, and more; and

(d) Factors that influence political participation, policy, and representation, such as redistricting, gerrymandering, or reapportionment.

(4)(a) By September 1, 2020, the office of the superintendent of public instruction, in collaboration with the Washington state association of county auditors and a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization engaged in voter outreach and increasing voter participation, shall identify and make available civics materials and resources for use in courses under this section. The materials and resources must be posted on the office of the superintendent of public instruction's website.

(b)(i) By September 1, 2025, the office of the superintendent of public instruction, in collaboration with 501(c)(3) nonprofits engaged in media literacy education or civic education and engagement, shall identify and make available nonpartisan materials and resources for use in the content described in subsection (3) of this section, including preexisting resources from the Washington open educational resources hub. The materials and resources must be posted on the office of the superintendent of public instruction's website and may be used by school districts to modify their civics curriculum to meet the requirements of this section.

(ii) The office of the superintendent of public instruction shall review the materials and resources made available pursuant to this subsection (4)(b) at least every five years to ensure students continue to receive relevant media literacy education.

(5) For the purposes of this section, "media literacy" means the ability to decode media messages; assess the influence of media messages on thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; and access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication.

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