
SENATE BILL 5637

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2025 Regular Session

By Senator Fortunato

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

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

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

10 (2) The legislature further finds:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

9 **Sec. 2.** RCW 28A.230.094 and 2020 c 208 s 9 are each amended to
10 read as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

33 (e) The study and completion of the civics component of the
34 federally administered naturalization test required of persons
35 seeking to become naturalized United States citizens; and

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

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

1 (a) The process of voter registration;

2 (b) Media literacy, including how to engage critically with
3 online information and combat the digital spread of misinformation;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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