
Education Committee

HB 1706

Brief Description: Requiring students to pass a civics test as a prerequisite to graduation from high school.

Sponsors: Representatives Chandler, Santos, Hargrove, Kagi, Van Werven, Condotta and Tarleton.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires that students, as a graduation prerequisite that takes effect in the 2017-18 school year, take and pass the civics component of the federally-administered naturalization test required of persons seeking to become naturalized United States citizens.
- Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to develop the test and adopt rules for its implementation.

Hearing Date: 3/14/17

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

Background:

Civics Education and Basic Education.

Civics education provisions are included within requirements governing the state's program of basic education. Goal number two of the four statutorily established basic education goals of school districts obligate districts to provide opportunities for every student to develop the knowledge and skills essential to know and apply the core concepts and principles of civics and history, including different cultures and participation in representative government.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) is responsible for developing the essential academic learning requirements (EALRs) that identify the knowledge and skills all public school students need to know and be able to do based on the four basic education learning goals. For social studies topics, the requirements are adopted by the SPI as the K-12 Social Studies

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Learning Standards, standards that include specific EALRs and grade level expectations that describe what students should know and be able to do in civics, economics, geography, history and social study skills. School districts do not ratify or formally adopt the standards, as curriculum choices are, with limited exceptions, determined locally.

Civics Education - Graduation Prerequisites.

Graduation credit requirements established by the State Board of Education (SBE) for the graduating class of 2016 onward require students to complete three credits of social studies. The three social studies credits must include one credit of United States History, one credit of Contemporary World History, a Geography and Problems class (or an equivalent course), one-half credit of civics, and one-half credit for a social studies elective course.

Legislation adopted in 2009 (HB 2132, enacted as ch. 223, Laws of 2009), specifies that the coursework for the one-half credit of civics must include:

- federal, state, and local government organization and procedures;
- rights and responsibilities of citizens addressed in the Washington state and United States Constitutions;
- current issues addressed at each level of government; and
- electoral issues, including elections, ballot measures, initiatives, and referenda.

In addition to the social studies and civics requirements, the study of the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the state of Washington are a graduation prerequisite for public and private high schools in the state. The SPI is directed to adopt rules for the implementation of this requirement.

Naturalization Test.

Persons seeking to become naturalized United States (U.S.) citizens must generally take and pass English and civics tests of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Office during their naturalization interview. The civics test consists of 100 possible questions, and citizenship applicants are required to answer up to 10 questions in English. To pass the test, an applicant must correctly answer at least six of the 10 questions. If an applicant fails either the English or the civics test, he or she will be provided with a second opportunity to retake the portion of the test that they did not pass.

Summary of Bill:

Beginning with the 2017-18 school year, each public and private high school must require as a prerequisite to graduation that students take and pass the civics component of the federally-administered naturalization test required of persons seeking to become naturalized U.S. citizens. The SPI is required to develop the test, and the test must consist of 50 questions selected from the 100 civics questions for the naturalization test that are available from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services Office. The SPI is required also to adopt rules for the implementation of the civics test requirement. The rules must provide that passing score is attained when a student answers at least 35 questions correctly (70 percent), and include provisions for retaking the test if a student does not attain a passing score.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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