
Education Committee

HB 2373

Brief Description: Requiring the teaching of the United States and Washington state Constitutions.

Sponsors: Representatives Delvin, Nixon, Mulliken, Anderson, Holmquist, Ahern, Casada, Morell, Sump and Campbell.

Hearing Date: 2/5/02

Staff: Susan Morrissey (786-7111).

Background:

By law, students must study the constitutions of the United States and the state of Washington in order to graduate from the public and private schools of the state. The State Board of Education (SBE), acting upon recommendations of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, is required to adopt rules to implement the requirement. The SBE has adopted a rule that requires secondary students to have one credit in American history and government and one-half credit in Washington state history and government in order to graduate from one of the state's public or approved private schools. The American history and government course must include study of the United States Constitution. The course on the history and government of the state must include study of the state constitution.

The Essential Academic Learning Requirements for social studies include a democracy benchmark for students in grades five, eight, and ten. The benchmark states, "The student understands and can explain the core values and principles of the U.S. democracy as set forth in foundational documents, including the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution." The specific knowledge required on the Constitution varies for each of the three grade levels.

At the beginning of each school day and at the opening of all school assemblies, schools must have flag exercises and students must be given the opportunity to salute the flag using the Pledge of Allegiance. Students who choose not say the pledge are required to maintain a respectful silence.

Summary of Bill:

Teachers have not provided any noticeable instruction on the Washington state Constitution.

Every public and private school library will stock printed copies of the Declaration of Independence, the constitutions of the United States and the state of Washington, and the federalist and anti-federalist papers. Every classroom will display the preamble and the first twelve sections of Article I of the state constitution.

School boards will provide books that explain the meaning and substance of the United States and Washington state Constitutions. The boards will also display copies of the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the two constitutions.

The way that the United States and Washington state Constitutions must be taught is described and some suggested source materials are named. Teachers must illustrate how the Declaration of Independence provides an outline for the state and national constitutions. Teachers must relate each section of the state constitution to the Declaration of Independence and the national constitution. Teachers must teach the heritage and meaning of selected statements from the Declaration of Independence, the Northwest Ordinance, and the state constitution. Suggested sources are described.

Students must be encouraged to memorize the preambles to the national and state constitutions and of Article 1, section 1 of the state constitution. Students must study George Washington's inaugural and farewell speeches. Students must be tested on the meanings of the constitutions and on some of the words contained in them.

Schools must display the preamble and first twelve sections of the state constitution in each classroom with a note stating, "For the complete text of the Washington state Constitution go to the school library."

When the Pledge of Allegiance is taught, teachers must instruct students on the relationship between the pledge and certain sections of the state constitution.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: 2/4/02.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.