

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2132

As Passed House:
February 27, 2009

Title: An act relating to instruction in civics.

Brief Description: Regarding instruction in civics.

Sponsors: Representatives Quall, Anderson, Carlyle, Dammeier, Probst, Sullivan, Johnson, Hudgins, Kelley, Chase, Wood and Santos.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/17/09, 2/18/09 [DP].

Floor Activity

Passed House: 2/27/09, 94-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- States that the purpose of a high school diploma is to declare that a student is ready for success in post-secondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship, and is equipped with the skills to be a lifelong learner.
- Requires that if the State Board of Education increases graduation requirements in Social Studies, at least one-half credit of the requirement must be in civics.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; Probst, Vice Chair; Priest, Ranking Minority Member; Hope, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Cox, Dammeier, Hunt, Johnson, Liias, Maxwell, Orwall, Santos and Sullivan.

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383)

Background:

The State Board of Education (SBE) is charged with adopting minimum high school graduation requirements. In 2006 the Legislature directed the SBE to define the purpose of a

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meaningful high school diploma. Part of the SBE's definition was that a diploma should "declare that a student is ready for success in postsecondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship, and is equipped with the skills to be a lifelong learner." As part of its work, the SBE also recommended increasing high school graduation requirements from 19 to 24 credits. The SBE is continuing work on this proposal, and it has not yet been adopted.

One aspect of the recommendation is to increase requirements in Social Studies from 2.5 to 3.0 credits. The current Social Studies requirement is as follows:

- one credit in United States history and government, including study of the Constitution;
- one credit in contemporary world history, geography, and problems; and
- one-half credit in Washington State history and government, including study of the state Constitution.

The Social Studies credits are also expected to align with the state Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) in civics, economics, geography, and history. Beginning in the 2008 - 09 school year, school districts must require students in 11th or 12th grade to complete a classroom-based assessment in civics.

Summary of Bill:

The purpose of a high school diploma is to declare that a student is ready for success in post-secondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship, and is equipped with the skills to be a lifelong learner. If, after the effective date of the bill, the SBE increases the number of Social Studies credits required for high school graduation, at least one-half credit must be coursework in civics. The content of the civics requirement includes federal, state, and local government organizations and procedures; rights and responsibilities of citizens addressed in the state and federal Constitutions; current issues addressed at each level of government; and electoral issues.

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.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) It was disappointing that some schools did not offer students the opportunity to watch the Presidential Inauguration. This was a historic moment. These are the moments that count in our nation. Math and science are important, but it is appalling how few students can identify the three top female elected officials in our state. Think about the Bill of Rights and the amendments to the Constitution. Students need to be literate in these areas and should be required to take an additional class in civics. If you look at history, the fundamental purpose of the system of public education was to educate the populace so that they would be informed voters. Many students were aware of the recent Presidential election, but only marginally aware that there were state officials on the ballot, and

completely unaware of city or county officials or issues. This is not an unfunded mandate; it would occur only if the SBE adopts an additional Social Studies half credit requirement. It is a vital role for the public education system to teach civics to children. Required content in civics is already included in the state EALRs and grade level expectations, as well as other current laws.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Quall, prime sponsor; Catherine Ahl, League of Women Voters of Washington; Kim Howard, Washington State Parent Teacher Association; Christie Perkins, Washington State Special Education Coalition; and Brad Burnham, State Board of Education.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.