
Education Committee

SB 5637

Brief Description: Promoting student access to information about media literacy and civic education.

Sponsors: Senator Fortunato.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Adds specified content to a mandatory one-half credit stand-alone high school civics course.
- Directs the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to collaborate with nonprofits to identify, and post on its website, materials and resources for use in the civics course.

Hearing Date: 3/24/25

Staff: Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

Background:

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. 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.

At a minimum, the content of the civics course must include: federal, state, tribal, and local government organization and procedures; rights and responsibilities of citizens addressed in the Washington and United States Constitutions; current issues addressed at each level of government; electoral issues, including elections, ballot measures, initiatives, and referenda; the study and completion of the civics component of the federally administered naturalization test

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required of persons seeking to become naturalized United States citizens; and the importance in a free society of living the basic values and character traits specified by the Legislature as essential to individual liberty, fulfillment, and happiness.

In 2020 the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction was required to collaborate with the Washington State Association of County Auditors and a nonprofit charitable organization engaged in voter outreach and increasing voter participation to identify, and post on its website, civics materials and resources for use in stand-alone civics courses.

Summary of Bill:

Beginning with the effective date of the bill, the content of the stand-alone civics course must also include the three branches of government and the system of checks and balances between them.

Beginning in the 2026-27 school year, the content of the stand-alone civics course must include: the process of voter registration; media literacy, including how to engage critically with online information and combat the digital spread of misinformation; tools and methods for initiating change in public policy and institutions; and factors that influence political participation, policy, and representation. "Media literacy" is defined as 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.

By September 1, 2025, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must collaborate with specified nonprofits to identify, and post on its website, materials and resources, including preexisting resources from the Washington Open Educational Resources hub, for use in stand-alone civics course content required beginning in the 2026-27 school year. The OSPI must review the materials and resources at least every five years.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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