

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5637

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As Reported by Senate Committee On:  
Early Learning & K-12 Education, February 18, 2025

**Title:** An act relating to promoting student access to information about media literacy and civic education.

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

**Sponsors:** Senator Fortunato.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/11/25, 2/18/25 [DPS, w/oRec].

**Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill**

- Adds required content about civics and media literacy to the mandatory high school civics course.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5637 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Wellman, Chair; Nobles, Vice Chair, K-12; Wilson, C., Vice Chair, Early Learning; Harris, Ranking Member; Cortes, Hansen, Krishnadasan and McCune.

**Minority Report:** That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Dozier.

**Staff:** Elena Becker (786-7493)

**Background:** Civic Education. Under state law, high schools must provide a mandatory

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

course in civics for each high school student. The content of this course must include, but is not limited to:

- federal, state, tribal, and local government organization and procedures;
- rights and responsibilities of citizens under the state and federal constitutions;
- current issues addressed at each level of government;
- electoral issues such as elections, ballot measures, initiatives, and referenda;
- the study and completion of the civics component of the federally administered naturalization test; and
- the importance in a free society of living basic values and character traits such as diligence, integrity, and personal responsibility.

**Summary of Bill (First Substitute):** The mandatory civics course curricular requirements are expanded to include content related to:

- the process of voter registration;
- checks and balances between the branches of government;
- media literacy, as it relates to elections, civic engagement, and decision making, including how to combat the digital spread of misinformation;
- tools and methods for initiating change in public policy and institutions; and
- factors that influence political participation and representation, such as redistricting, gerrymandering, and reapportionment.

"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) is directed to collaborate with nonprofits to identify and make available nonpartisan materials relating to medial literacy, political participation, and institutional change. These materials may be used by school districts to meet these requirements, and OSPI is directed to review the materials at least every five years.

**EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE (First Substitute):**

- Specifies that the media literacy course content pertains to elections, civic engagement, and decision making.
- Requires the materials and resources provided by OSPI be nonpartisan.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill:** *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: We want our children to be educated in how their government works, and to interact with us here in Olympia. Many people don't know their state senators, or know the difference between federal and state senators.

Many students have minimal knowledge of government before taking civics or AP U.S. Government. Many students get their information from social media, which amplifies preexisting ideologies. It is important for students to distinguish between true and false information, know how to vote, and be engaged with government.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Phil Fortunato, Prime Sponsor; Sana Hoque; Manasa Kancharla; Anoushka Oka; Noah Hanculak; Abby Sirois; Adi Hurvitz; Kate Fluegel; Sylvia Falwer, Washington State Youth Advisory Council; Colton Hong, Legislative Youth Advisory Council; Sabina Kolovyansky, Washington Legislative Youth Advisory Council.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.