SENATE, No. 237

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

PRE-FILED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE 2020 SESSION

Sponsored by:
Senator TROY SINGLETON
District 7 (Burlington)
Senator LINDA R. GREENSTEIN
District 14 (Mercer and Middlesex)

Co-Sponsored by:
Senators Thompson and Doherty

SYNOPSIS
Requires new civics instruction in middle and high schools; requires school districts to use DOE’s curriculum guidelines for civics; and requires DOE to provide funding to enhance civics instruction.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT
Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel.

(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 2/13/2020)
AN ACT concerning civics education in public schools, amending P.L.1987, c.425, and supplementing chapters 7C and 35 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

1. Section 1 of P.L.1987, c.425 (C.18A:35-2.1) is amended to read as follows:
   1. The State Department of Education shall prepare curriculum guidelines for the teaching of civics which [may] shall be used by local school boards in fulfilling the requirements established pursuant to N.J.S.18A:35-1 and N.J.S.18A:35-2.
   (cf: P.L.1987, c.425, s.1)

2. (New section) Beginning with the 2018-2019 grade nine class, the State Board of Education shall require that the local graduation requirements adopted by a board of education include, as part of the total credit requirement in social studies, at least one course in civics or United States government.

3. (New section) Beginning in the 2020-2021 school year, each board of education shall provide a course of study about the values and principles underlying the American system of constitutional democracy, the function and limitations of government, and the role of a citizen in a democratic society, which shall be taken by all pupils in an appropriate middle school grade. The board shall ensure that the course of study includes a minimum of two quarters of instruction, or the equivalent.

4. (New section) The Department of Education shall annually provide funds to the New Jersey Center for Civic and Law-Related Education at Rutgers, the State University. The purpose of the funding shall be to enable the center to provide a clearinghouse of materials, an online resource center, technical assistance, professional development and any other activities deemed appropriate by the department to enhance the teaching of the middle school civics course of study required pursuant to section 3 of this act.

5. This act shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

Under current State Board of Education regulations, high school

EXPLANATION – Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets [thus] in the above bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted in the law.

Matter underlined thus is new matter.
students are required to complete at least 15 credits in social studies, including satisfaction of a two-year course in United States history in accordance with N.J.S.18A:35-1 and 2; five credits in world history; and the integration of civics, economics, geography and global content in all course offerings. This bill directs the State board to require at least one course specifically in civics or United States government as part of the social studies credit requirement for high school graduation. The requirement would begin with the 2018-2019 grade nine class.

The bill also amends current law to require, rather than permit, school districts to use the Department of Education’s curriculum guidelines for civics in fulfilling the requirements established by N.J.S.18A:35-1 and 2 for a two-year course of study in United States history.

This bill requires the provision of civics instruction to middle school pupils in public schools. Current law requires a course of study in civics, geography, and the history of New Jersey to be provided to public school elementary students, but no similar requirement exists for middle school pupils. Under this bill, beginning in the 2020-2021 school year, each board of education is required to provide a course of study about the values and principles underlying the American system of constitutional democracy, the function and limitations of government, and the role of a citizen in a democratic society. The course is to be taken by all pupils in an appropriate middle school grade. The course of study must include a minimum of two quarters of instruction, or the equivalent.

The bill also directs the Department of Education to annually provide funds to the New Jersey Center for Civic and Law-Related Education at Rutgers, the State University. The purpose of the funding is to enable the center to provide a clearinghouse of materials, an online resource center, technical assistance, professional development and any other activities deemed appropriate by the department to enhance the teaching of the middle school civics course of study required by the bill.