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SYNOPSIS
“Laura Wooten’s Law”: requires civics instruction in middle school; authorizes New Jersey Center for Civic Education to provide curricula, professional development and technical assistance for middle and high school civics.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT
Substitute as adopted by the Senate Education Committee.

(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 05/20/2021)
AN ACT concerning civics education in public schools and
designated as Laura Wooten’s Law, amending P.L.1987, c.425,
and supplementing chapter 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. (New section) The Legislature finds and declares that:
   a. New Jersey law requires school districts to provide a two-
      year course of United States history in high school, which is
      supposed to include curriculum on civics, economics, and the
      history of the State of New Jersey; however, most school districts’
curricula focus solely on a chronology of United States history in
meeting this statutory requirement;
   b. New Jersey law also requires school districts to adopt a
course of study about New Jersey history, geography, and
community civics in an elementary grade; however, there are no
social studies requirements for middle school;
   c. Civic literacy and engagement are essential to maintaining a
representative democracy;
   d. Unlike 40 other states, New Jersey does not require school
districts to provide a specific course in civics;
   e. By age 10, students possess the higher order thinking skills
necessary for a rigorous, reflective course in civics;
   f. Independent studies conclude that well-designed civics
education fosters an understanding and appreciation of democracy
and the skills needed for participation in a democratic society;
   g. Requiring students to complete a civics course in middle
school will ensure that all New Jersey students have the opportunity
to gain the knowledge and skills for active citizenship;
   h. Professional development for teachers is critical to ensure
effective classroom instruction; and
   i. The New Jersey Center for Civic Education at Rutgers, The
State University has substantial expertise and 30 years of
experience providing professional development, sample curricula,
and resources for New Jersey teachers.

2. 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] New Jersey Center for
Civic Education at Rutgers, The State University shall prepare
curriculum guidelines [for the teaching of civics which may be used
by] and provide professional development for high school social
studies teachers to help local school boards in fulfilling the

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.
requirements of integrating civics, economics, and the history of New Jersey as part of the required United States history course established pursuant to N.J.S.18A:35-1 and N.J.S.18A:35-2.
(cf: P.L.1987, c.425, s.1)

3. (New section) Beginning in the 2022-2023 school year, each board of education shall provide a course of study in civics, which shall be taken by all students in an appropriate middle school grade. The course shall address: 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 board shall ensure that the course of study includes a minimum of two quarters of instruction, or the equivalent.

4. (New section) The New Jersey Center for Civic Education at Rutgers, the State University shall provide a clearinghouse of materials, an online resource center, technical assistance, professional development and any other activities to encourage the integration of civics, economics, and New Jersey history in the teaching of United States history pursuant to N.J.S.18A:35-1 and N.J.S.18A:35-2 and to enhance the middle school civics course of study as required pursuant to section 3 of this act. The Legislature shall annually appropriate such sums as are necessary to effectuate the purposes of this act to the New Jersey Center for Civic Education at Rutgers, the State University.

5. This act shall take effect immediately.