## SENATE, No. 854

# STATE OF NEW JERSEY

### 219th LEGISLATURE

PRE-FILED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE 2020 SESSION

Sponsored by:

Senator SHIRLEY K. TURNER
District 15 (Hunterdon and Mercer)
Senator THOMAS H. KEAN, JR.

**District 21 (Morris, Somerset and Union)** 

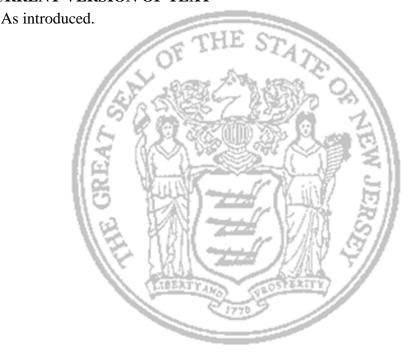
Co-Sponsored by:

**Senator Rice** 

#### **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 and provides annual center funding.

#### **CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT**



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 2/13/2020)

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.

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

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- 1. (New section) The Legislature finds and declares that:
- a. New Jersey law requires school districts to provide a twoyear 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.

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- 39 2. Section 1 of P.L.1987, c.425 (C.18A:35-2.1) is amended to 40 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.

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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) A minimum of \$300,000 shall annually be appropriated to the New Jersey Center for Civic Education at Rutgers, the State University. The purpose of the appropriation shall be to enable the center to 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.

5. This act shall take effect immediately.

#### **STATEMENT**

The bill amends current law that requires the State Department of Education to prepare curriculum guidelines for the teaching of civics for use by local school boards in implementing the two-year high school course of study in the history of the United States required under N.J.S.18A:35-1 and N.J.S.18A:35-2. The bill now directs the New Jersey Center for Civic Education at Rutgers, The State University to prepare curriculum guidelines and provide professional development for high school social studies teachers in fulfilling the requirement of integrating civics, economics, and the history of New Jersey into the United States history course.

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 2022-2023 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 that a minimum of \$300,000 be appropriated annually to the New Jersey Center for Civic Education at Rutgers, the State University. The purpose of the appropriation will be to enable the center to 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 required high school course in the history of the United States and to enhance the teaching of civics in middle school required pursuant to the bill.

This bill is named in honor of Mrs. Laura Wooten, a great New Jerseyan who contributed a lifetime of civic service. Mrs. Wooten was born on Dec. 19, 1920, in Goldsboro, North Carolina and was the longest serving poll volunteer in the nation. Mrs. Wooten graduated from Princeton High School in 1939, was an elder of the First Baptist Church of Princeton, and joined Princeton University as a part time staff member after retiring from Princeton Medical Center at the age of 72. Mrs. Wooten passed away on March 24, 2019 at the age of 98.