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et al.

H.B. No. 1287

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to public school elective courses providing academic study
of the Bible.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Subchapter A, Chapter 28, Education Code, is
amended by adding Section 28.011 to read as follows:

Sec. 28.011. ELECTIVE COURSES ON THE BIBLE'S HEBREW
SCRIPTURES (OLD TESTAMENT) AND NEW TESTAMENT AND THEIR IMPACT ON
THE HISTORY AND LITERATURE OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION. (a) A school
district may offer to students in grade nine or above:

(1) an elective course on the Hebrew Scriptures (Old
Testament) and its impact and an elective course on the New
Testament and its impact; or

(2) an elective course that combines the courses
described by Subdivision (1).

(b) The purpose of a course under this section is to:

(1) teach students knowledge of biblical content,
characters, poetry, and narratives that are prerequisites to
understanding contemporary society and culture, including
literature, art, music, mores, oratory, and public policy; and

(2) familiarize students with, as applicable:

(A) the contents of the Hebrew Scriptures or New
Testament;

(B) the history of the Hebrew Scriptures or New

1 Testament;

2 (C) the literary style and structure of the
3 Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament; and

4 (D) the influence of the Hebrew Scriptures or New
5 Testament on law, history, government, literature, art, music,
6 customs, morals, values, and culture.

7 (c) A student may not be required to use a specific
8 translation as the sole text of the Hebrew Scriptures or New
9 Testament and may use as the basic textbook a different translation
10 of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament from that chosen by the
11 board of trustees of the student's school district or the student's
12 teacher.

13 (d) A course offered under this section shall follow
14 applicable law and all federal and state guidelines in maintaining
15 religious neutrality and accommodating the diverse religious
16 views, traditions, and perspectives of students in their school
17 district. A course under this section shall not endorse, favor, or
18 promote, or disfavor or show hostility toward, any particular
19 religion or nonreligious faith or religious perspective. Nothing in
20 this statute is intended to violate any provision of the United
21 States Constitution or federal law, the Texas Constitution or any
22 state law, or any rules or guidelines provided by the United States
23 Department of Education or the Texas Education Agency.

24 (e) Before adopting rules identifying the essential
25 knowledge and skills of a course offered under this section, the
26 State Board of Education shall submit the proposed essential
27 knowledge and skills to the attorney general. The attorney general

1 shall review the proposed essential knowledge and skills to ensure
2 that the course complies with the First Amendment to the United
3 States Constitution, and the board may not adopt rules identifying
4 the essential knowledge and skills of a course offered under this
5 section without the attorney general's approval under this
6 subsection.

7 (f) A teacher of a course offered under this section must
8 hold a minimum of a High School Composite Certification in language
9 arts, social studies, or history with, where practical, a minor in
10 religion or biblical studies. A teacher selected to teach a course
11 under this section shall successfully complete staff development
12 training outlined in Section 21.459. A course under this section
13 may only be taught by a teacher who has successfully completed
14 training under Section 21.459.

15 (g) For the purpose of a student earning credit for high
16 school graduation, a school district shall grant one-half academic
17 elective credit for satisfactory completion of a course on the
18 Hebrew Scriptures, one-half academic elective credit for
19 satisfactory completion of a course on the New Testament, and
20 one-half academic elective credit for satisfactory completion of a
21 combined course on both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New
22 Testament. This subsection applies only to a course that is taught
23 in strict compliance with this section.

24 (h) If, for a particular semester, fewer than 15 students at
25 a school district campus register to enroll in a course required by
26 this section, the district is not required to offer the course at
27 that campus for that semester.

1 (i) This section does not prohibit the board of trustees of
2 a school district from offering an elective course based on the
3 books of a religion other than Christianity. In determining whether
4 to offer such a course, the board may consider various factors,
5 including student and parent demand for such a course and the impact
6 such books have had on history and culture.

7 (j) This section does not prohibit a school district from
8 offering a course, other than the course authorized by this
9 section, in the academic study of the Hebrew Scriptures, the New
10 Testament, or both for local credit or for state elective credit
11 towards high school graduation.

12 SECTION 2. Subchapter J, Chapter 21, Education Code, is
13 amended by adding Section 21.459 to read as follows:

14 Sec. 21.459. BIBLE COURSE TRAINING. (a) The commissioner
15 shall develop and make available training materials and other
16 teacher training resources for a school district to use in
17 assisting teachers of elective Bible courses in developing:

18 (1) expertise in the appropriate Bible course
19 curriculum;

20 (2) understanding of applicable supreme court rulings
21 and current constitutional law regarding how Bible courses are to
22 be taught in public schools objectively as a part of a secular
23 program of education;

24 (3) understanding of how to present the Bible in an
25 objective, academic manner that neither promotes nor disparages
26 religion, nor is taught from a particular sectarian point of view;

27 (4) proficiency in instructional approaches that

1 present course material in a manner that respects all faiths and
2 religious traditions, while favoring none; and

3 (5) expertise in how to avoid devotional content or
4 proselytizing in the classroom.

5 (b) The commissioner shall develop materials and resources
6 under this section in consultation with appropriate faculty members
7 at institutions of higher education.

8 (c) The commissioner shall make the training materials and
9 other teacher training resources required under Subsection (a)
10 available to Bible course teachers through access to in-service
11 training.

12 (d) The commissioner shall use funds appropriated for the
13 purpose to administer this section.

14 SECTION 3. Section 28.002(a), Education Code, is amended to
15 read as follows:

16 (a) Each school district that offers kindergarten through
17 grade 12 shall offer, as a required curriculum:

18 (1) a foundation curriculum that includes:

19 (A) English language arts;

20 (B) mathematics;

21 (C) science; and

22 (D) social studies, consisting of Texas, United
23 States, and world history, government, and geography; and

24 (2) an enrichment curriculum that includes:

25 (A) to the extent possible, languages other than
26 English;

27 (B) health, with emphasis on the importance of

1 proper nutrition and exercise;

2 (C) physical education;

3 (D) fine arts;

4 (E) economics, with emphasis on the free
5 enterprise system and its benefits;

6 (F) career and technology education; ~~and~~

7 (G) technology applications; and

8 (H) religious literature, including the Hebrew
9 Scriptures (Old Testament) and New Testament, and its impact on
10 history and literature.

11 SECTION 4. The provisions of this Act pertaining to a school
12 district do not take effect until the 2009-2010 school year.

13 SECTION 5. This Act takes effect immediately if it receives
14 a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as
15 provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this
16 Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this
17 Act takes effect September 1, 2007.