

By: Chisum

H.B. No. 1287

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to public school elective courses in the history and literature of the Old and New Testaments eras.

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 IN HISTORY AND LITERATURE OF OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS ERAS. (a) A school district shall offer to students in grades nine or above an elective course in the history and literature of the Old Testament era and an elective course in the history and literature of the New Testament era.

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

(1) accommodate the rights and desires of teachers who wish to teach and students who wish to study, as applicable, the Old or New Testament; and

(2) familiarize students with, as applicable:

(A) the contents of the Old or New Testament;

(B) the history recorded by the Old or New Testament;

(C) the literary style and structure of the Old or New Testament;

(D) the customs and cultures of the peoples and societies recorded in the Old or New Testament; and

(E) the influence of the Old or New Testament on

1 law, history, government, literature, art, music, customs, morals,  
2 values, and culture.

3 (c) Notwithstanding Sections 28.002(c) and 31.022,  
4 respectively, for a course under this section, the State Board of  
5 Education may not:

6 (1) identify the essential knowledge and skills; or

7 (2) adopt textbooks under Chapter 31.

8 (d) The book or collection of books commonly known as the  
9 Old Testament shall be used as the basic textbook for a course in  
10 the history and literature of the Old Testament era. The book or  
11 collection of books commonly known as the New Testament shall be  
12 used as the basic textbook for a course in the history and  
13 literature of the New Testament era. In addition to the basic  
14 textbooks, students may be assigned a range of reading materials  
15 for the courses, including selections from secular historical and  
16 cultural works and selections from religious and cultural  
17 traditions other than the Judeo-Christian tradition.

18 (e) A course under this section must familiarize students  
19 with, as applicable:

20 (1) the customs and cultures of the times and places  
21 referred to in the Old or New Testament;

22 (2) the methods and tools of writing during the period  
23 the Old or New Testament was written;

24 (3) the means by which the Old or New Testament book  
25 was preserved;

26 (4) the languages in which the Old or New Testament  
27 book was written and into which that book was translated; and

1           (5) the historical and cultural events that led to the  
2 translation of the Old or New Testament book into English.

3           (f) The board of trustees of a school district may recommend  
4 which version of the Old or New Testament may be used in a course  
5 offered by the district under this section, except that:

6           (1) the teacher of the course may not be required to  
7 adopt the board's recommendation and may use the recommended  
8 version or another version; and

9           (2) a student may not be required to use a specific  
10 version as the sole text of the Old or New Testament and may use as  
11 the basic textbook a different version of the Old or New Testament  
12 from that chosen by the board of trustees or the teacher.

13           (g) A course offered under this section:

14           (1) must be taught in an objective and nondevotional  
15 manner that does not attempt to indoctrinate students as to either  
16 the truth or falsity of the Judeo-Christian biblical materials or  
17 of texts from other religious or cultural traditions other than the  
18 Judeo-Christian tradition;

19           (2) may not include teaching of a religious doctrine  
20 or a sectarian interpretation of the Old or New Testament or of  
21 texts from other religious or cultural traditions other than the  
22 Judeo-Christian tradition; and

23           (3) may not disparage or encourage a commitment to a  
24 set of religious beliefs.

25           (h) The board of trustees of a school district shall  
26 determine the qualifications, assignment, and training of teachers  
27 of a course under this section, except that:

1           (1) the teacher must be certified as provided by  
2 Subchapter B, Chapter 21, unless an exception to that requirement  
3 exists under this title; and

4           (2) the board may not assign a person to teach a course  
5 under this section based in whole or in part on any religious test,  
6 profession of faith or lack of faith, prior or present religious  
7 affiliation or lack of affiliation, or criteria involving  
8 particular beliefs or lack of beliefs about the Old or New  
9 Testament.

10           (i) For the purpose of a student earning credit for high  
11 school graduation, a school district shall grant one-half academic  
12 elective credit for satisfactory completion of a course in the  
13 history and literature of the Old Testament era and one-half  
14 academic elective credit for satisfactory completion of a course in  
15 the history and literature of the New Testament era. This  
16 subsection applies only to a course that is taught in strict  
17 compliance with this section.

18           (j) The board of trustees of a school district may, as the  
19 board determines appropriate, monitor the content and teaching of a  
20 course offered under this section.

21           (k) This section does not limit the authority of the board  
22 of trustees of a school district to offer a course regarding the Old  
23 Testament or the New Testament that does not comply with this  
24 section, except that the district may not spend state funds  
25 distributed under this title in connection with a course that does  
26 not meet the requirements of this section.

27           (l) This section does not prohibit the board of trustees of

1 a school district from offering an elective course based on the  
2 books of a religion or society other than one with Judeo-Christian  
3 traditions. In determining whether to offer such a course, the  
4 board may consider various factors including student and parent  
5 demand for such a course and the impact such books have had on  
6 history and culture.

7 SECTION 2. Section 28.002(a), Education Code, is amended to  
8 read as follows:

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

11 (1) a foundation curriculum that includes:

12 (A) English language arts;

13 (B) mathematics;

14 (C) science; and

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

17 (2) an enrichment curriculum that includes:

18 (A) to the extent possible, languages other than  
19 English;

20 (B) health, with emphasis on the importance of  
21 proper nutrition and exercise;

22 (C) physical education;

23 (D) fine arts;

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

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

27 (G) technology applications; and

1                    (H) the history and literature of the Old and New  
2 Testaments eras as provided by Section 28.011.

3            SECTION 3. A school district shall offer a course in the  
4 history and literature of the Old Testament era and a course in the  
5 history and literature of the New Testament era that comply with  
6 Section 28.011, Education Code, as added by this Act, beginning  
7 with the 2007-2008 school year.

8            SECTION 4. This Act takes effect immediately if it receives  
9 a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as  
10 provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this  
11 Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this  
12 Act takes effect September 1, 2007.