

1-1 By: Chisum, et al. (Senate Sponsor - Estes) H.B. No. 1287
1-2 (In the Senate - Received from the House May 10, 2007;
1-3 May 17, 2007, read first time and referred to Committee on
1-4 Education; May 21, 2007, rereferred to Committee on International
1-5 Relations and Trade; May 21, 2007, reported favorably by the
1-6 following vote: Yeas 4, Nays 0; May 21, 2007, sent to printer.)

1-7 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
1-8 AN ACT

1-9 relating to public school elective courses providing academic study
1-10 of the Bible.

1-11 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

1-12 SECTION 1. Subchapter A, Chapter 28, Education Code, is
1-13 amended by adding Section 28.011 to read as follows:

1-14 Sec. 28.011. ELECTIVE COURSES ON THE BIBLE'S HEBREW
1-15 SCRIPTURES (OLD TESTAMENT) AND NEW TESTAMENT AND THEIR IMPACT ON
1-16 THE HISTORY AND LITERATURE OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION. (a) A school
1-17 district may offer to students in grade nine or above:

1-18 (1) an elective course on the Hebrew Scriptures (Old
1-19 Testament) and its impact and an elective course on the New
1-20 Testament and its impact; or

1-21 (2) an elective course that combines the courses
1-22 described by Subdivision (1).

1-23 (b) The purpose of a course under this section is to:

1-24 (1) teach students knowledge of biblical content,
1-25 characters, poetry, and narratives that are prerequisites to
1-26 understanding contemporary society and culture, including
1-27 literature, art, music, mores, oratory, and public policy; and

1-28 (2) familiarize students with, as applicable:

1-29 (A) the contents of the Hebrew Scriptures or New
1-30 Testament;

1-31 (B) the history of the Hebrew Scriptures or New
1-32 Testament;

1-33 (C) the literary style and structure of the
1-34 Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament; and

1-35 (D) the influence of the Hebrew Scriptures or New
1-36 Testament on law, history, government, literature, art, music,
1-37 customs, morals, values, and culture.

1-38 (c) A student may not be required to use a specific
1-39 translation as the sole text of the Hebrew Scriptures or New
1-40 Testament and may use as the basic textbook a different translation
1-41 of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament from that chosen by the
1-42 board of trustees of the student's school district or the student's
1-43 teacher.

1-44 (d) A course offered under this section shall follow
1-45 applicable law and all federal and state guidelines in maintaining
1-46 religious neutrality and accommodating the diverse religious
1-47 views, traditions, and perspectives of students in their school
1-48 district. A course under this section shall not endorse, favor, or
1-49 promote, or disfavor or show hostility toward, any particular
1-50 religion or nonreligious faith or religious perspective. Nothing in
1-51 this statute is intended to violate any provision of the United
1-52 States Constitution or federal law, the Texas Constitution or any
1-53 state law, or any rules or guidelines provided by the United States
1-54 Department of Education or the Texas Education Agency.

1-55 (e) Before adopting rules identifying the essential
1-56 knowledge and skills of a course offered under this section, the
1-57 State Board of Education shall submit the proposed essential
1-58 knowledge and skills to the attorney general. The attorney general
1-59 shall review the proposed essential knowledge and skills to ensure
1-60 that the course complies with the First Amendment to the United
1-61 States Constitution, and the board may not adopt rules identifying
1-62 the essential knowledge and skills of a course offered under this
1-63 section without the attorney general's approval under this
1-64 subsection.

2-1 (f) A teacher of a course offered under this section must
2-2 hold a minimum of a High School Composite Certification in language
2-3 arts, social studies, or history with, where practical, a minor in
2-4 religion or biblical studies. A teacher selected to teach a course
2-5 under this section shall successfully complete staff development
2-6 training outlined in Section 21.459. A course under this section
2-7 may only be taught by a teacher who has successfully completed
2-8 training under Section 21.459.

2-9 (g) For the purpose of a student earning credit for high
2-10 school graduation, a school district shall grant one-half academic
2-11 elective credit for satisfactory completion of a course on the
2-12 Hebrew Scriptures, one-half academic elective credit for
2-13 satisfactory completion of a course on the New Testament, and
2-14 one-half academic elective credit for satisfactory completion of a
2-15 combined course on both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New
2-16 Testament. This subsection applies only to a course that is taught
2-17 in strict compliance with this section.

2-18 (h) If, for a particular semester, fewer than 15 students at
2-19 a school district campus register to enroll in a course required by
2-20 this section, the district is not required to offer the course at
2-21 that campus for that semester.

2-22 (i) This section does not prohibit the board of trustees of
2-23 a school district from offering an elective course based on the
2-24 books of a religion other than Christianity. In determining whether
2-25 to offer such a course, the board may consider various factors,
2-26 including student and parent demand for such a course and the impact
2-27 such books have had on history and culture.

2-28 (j) This section does not prohibit a school district from
2-29 offering a course, other than the course authorized by this
2-30 section, in the academic study of the Hebrew Scriptures, the New
2-31 Testament, or both for local credit or for state elective credit
2-32 towards high school graduation.

2-33 SECTION 2. Subchapter J, Chapter 21, Education Code, is
2-34 amended by adding Section 21.459 to read as follows:

2-35 Sec. 21.459. BIBLE COURSE TRAINING. (a) The commissioner
2-36 shall develop and make available training materials and other
2-37 teacher training resources for a school district to use in
2-38 assisting teachers of elective Bible courses in developing:

2-39 (1) expertise in the appropriate Bible course
2-40 curriculum;

2-41 (2) understanding of applicable supreme court rulings
2-42 and current constitutional law regarding how Bible courses are to
2-43 be taught in public schools objectively as a part of a secular
2-44 program of education;

2-45 (3) understanding of how to present the Bible in an
2-46 objective, academic manner that neither promotes nor disparages
2-47 religion, nor is taught from a particular sectarian point of view;

2-48 (4) proficiency in instructional approaches that
2-49 present course material in a manner that respects all faiths and
2-50 religious traditions, while favoring none; and

2-51 (5) expertise in how to avoid devotional content or
2-52 proselytizing in the classroom.

2-53 (b) The commissioner shall develop materials and resources
2-54 under this section in consultation with appropriate faculty members
2-55 at institutions of higher education.

2-56 (c) The commissioner shall make the training materials and
2-57 other teacher training resources required under Subsection (a)
2-58 available to Bible course teachers through access to in-service
2-59 training.

2-60 (d) The commissioner shall use funds appropriated for the
2-61 purpose to administer this section.

2-62 SECTION 3. Section 28.002(a), Education Code, is amended to
2-63 read as follows:

2-64 (a) Each school district that offers kindergarten through
2-65 grade 12 shall offer, as a required curriculum:

2-66 (1) a foundation curriculum that includes:

2-67 (A) English language arts;

2-68 (B) mathematics;

2-69 (C) science; and

3-1 (D) social studies, consisting of Texas, United
3-2 States, and world history, government, and geography; and
3-3 (2) an enrichment curriculum that includes:
3-4 (A) to the extent possible, languages other than
3-5 English;
3-6 (B) health, with emphasis on the importance of
3-7 proper nutrition and exercise;
3-8 (C) physical education;
3-9 (D) fine arts;
3-10 (E) economics, with emphasis on the free
3-11 enterprise system and its benefits;
3-12 (F) career and technology education; ~~and~~
3-13 (G) technology applications; and
3-14 (H) religious literature, including the Hebrew
3-15 Scriptures (Old Testament) and New Testament, and its impact on
3-16 history and literature.

3-17 SECTION 4. The provisions of this Act pertaining to a school
3-18 district do not take effect until the 2009-2010 school year.

3-19 SECTION 5. This Act takes effect immediately if it receives
3-20 a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as
3-21 provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this
3-22 Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this
3-23 Act takes effect September 1, 2007.

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