

House File 2031 - Introduced

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A BILL FOR

1 An Act relating to elective social studies courses emphasizing
2 religious scripture that school districts may offer and
3 teach.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF IOWA:

1 Section 1. Section 256.7, Code 2018, is amended by adding
2 the following new subsection:

3 NEW SUBSECTION. 33. Adopt rules establishing course
4 standards for elective social studies courses listed in
5 paragraph "a", any of which a school district may offer and
6 teach to students in grades nine through twelve subject to
7 the provisions of section 279.50A. The rules shall include
8 practitioner preparation and professional development
9 requirements for practitioners employed by a school district to
10 teach a course listed under paragraph "a".

11 a. (1) A course on the Hebrew Scriptures.

12 (2) A course on the New Testament of the Bible.

13 (3) A course on the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament
14 of the Bible.

15 b. A school district may offer and teach a course listed in
16 paragraph "a" for all of the following purposes:

17 (1) To provide students with knowledge of biblical content,
18 characters, poetry, and narratives that are prerequisites to
19 understanding contemporary society and culture, including but
20 not limited to literature, art, music, mores, oratory, and
21 public policy.

22 (2) To familiarize students with, as applicable, the
23 following:

24 (a) The contents of the Hebrew Scriptures or the New
25 Testament of the Bible.

26 (b) The history of the Hebrew Scriptures or the New
27 Testament of the Bible.

28 (c) The literary style and structure of the Hebrew
29 Scriptures or the New Testament of the Bible.

30 (d) The influence of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament
31 of the Bible on law, history, government, literature, art,
32 music, customs, morals, values, and culture.

33 c. In complying with this subsection, the state board shall
34 not violate any provision of law as defined in section 17A.2.

35 A course offered and taught in accordance with this section is

1 subject to federal and state guidelines regarding religious
2 neutrality and the diverse religious views, traditions, and the
3 perspectives of students enrolled in the school district shall
4 be recognized and accommodated. A course offered and taught
5 in accordance with this subsection shall not endorse, favor,
6 promote, or disfavor, or be hostile toward, any particular
7 religion, faith, or nonreligious perspective.

8 **Sec. 2. NEW SECTION. 279.50A Elective social studies**
9 **courses — religious scripture.**

10 1. If the board of directors of a school district considers
11 and approves, by majority vote of the membership of the school
12 board, a recommendation from the school improvement advisory
13 committee that an elective social studies course be offered and
14 taught in accordance with section 280.12, subsection 4, such a
15 course may be offered and taught in the school district.

16 2. A student enrolled in a course offered and taught
17 pursuant to section 256.7, subsection 33, and this section,
18 shall not be required to use a specific translation as the sole
19 text for the Hebrew Scriptures or the New Testament of the
20 Bible for the course, and may use instead a translation other
21 than the text chosen for the course by the teacher, the school
22 improvement advisory committee, the school district, or the
23 state board of education.

24 3. A school improvement advisory committee appointed in
25 accordance with section 280.12, or the principal of a school
26 offering an elective social studies course in accordance with
27 section 256.7, subsection 33, and this section, may authorize
28 the display of historic artifacts, monuments, symbols and
29 texts, including but not limited to religious materials, in
30 conjunction with the course if such display is appropriate to
31 the overall educational purpose of the course and is consistent
32 with the provisions of section 280.6.

33 4. In offering and teaching a course in accordance with
34 section 256.7, subsection 33, and this section, a school
35 district shall not knowingly violate any provision of law as

1 defined in section 17A.2. A course offered in accordance with
2 section 256.7, subsection 33, and this section, is subject to
3 federal and state guidelines regarding religious neutrality,
4 and the diverse religious views, traditions, and the course so
5 offered shall recognize and acknowledge the perspectives of
6 students enrolled in the school district. The course shall not
7 endorse, favor, promote, or disfavor, or be hostile toward, any
8 particular religion, faith, or nonreligious perspective.

9 Sec. 3. Section 280.12, Code 2018, is amended by adding the
10 following new subsection:

11 NEW SUBSECTION. 4. Consider a recommendation from the
12 school improvement advisory committee that an elective social
13 studies course which meets the requirements and purposes set
14 forth in section 256.7, subsection 33, be offered and taught in
15 the school district in accordance with section 279.50A.

16 EXPLANATION

17 The inclusion of this explanation does not constitute agreement with
18 the explanation's substance by the members of the general assembly.

19 This bill directs the state board of education to adopt
20 rules establishing course standards for elective social studies
21 courses on the Hebrew Scriptures or the New Testament of the
22 Bible. The bill authorizes a school district to offer and
23 teach such a course to students in grades 9 through 12 if the
24 district's school improvement advisory committee recommends,
25 and the board of directors of the school district approves, the
26 course.

27 The purpose of the course must be to provide students
28 with knowledge of biblical content, characters, poetry, and
29 narratives that are prerequisites to understanding contemporary
30 society and culture, and to familiarize students with the
31 contents, history, literary style and structure, and influence
32 of the Hebrew Scriptures or the New Testament of the Bible.

33 The state board's rules must include practitioner
34 preparation and professional development requirements for
35 practitioners employed by a school district to teach such a

1 course.

2 Under the bill, the state board and school districts are
3 prohibited from violating any provision of law in complying
4 with the provisions of the bill. A course offered under the
5 bill is subject to federal and state guidelines regarding
6 religious neutrality, and shall recognize and accommodate the
7 diverse religious views, traditions, and the perspectives of
8 students enrolled in the school district. Such a course shall
9 not endorse, favor, promote, or disfavor, or be hostile toward,
10 any particular religion, faith, or nonreligious perspective.

11 If a school improvement advisory committee recommends such a
12 course, the school board must consider the recommendation. To
13 offer and teach such a course, the school board must approve
14 the recommendation by majority vote of its membership.

15 A student enrolled in such a course shall not be required
16 to use a specific translation as the sole text for the Hebrew
17 Scriptures or the New Testament of the Bible.

18 A school improvement advisory committee or the principal of
19 a school offering such a course may authorize the display of
20 historic artifacts, monuments, symbols, and texts, including
21 but not limited to religious materials, in conjunction with
22 the course if such display is appropriate to the overall
23 educational purpose of the course and does not require a child
24 to read religious books contrary to the wishes of the child's
25 parent or guardian. Under current law, religious text books
26 such as the Bible, the Torah, and the Koran shall not be
27 excluded from any public school.