

**Senate File 280 - Introduced**

SENATE FILE 280

BY GREEN

**A BILL FOR**

1 An Act relating to students who attend a course in religious  
2 instruction that is provided by a private organization,  
3 including by modifying provisions related to compulsory  
4 education and chronic absenteeism and allowing school  
5 districts, charter schools, and innovation zone schools to  
6 adopt policies related to awarding academic credit for the  
7 completion of a course in religious instruction.

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

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1 Section 1. Section 256E.7, subsection 2, Code 2025, is  
2 amended by adding the following new paragraph:

3 NEW PARAGRAPH. *Or.* Be subject to and comply with the  
4 requirements of section 279.87 related to the adoption of  
5 policies related to awarding students academic credit for the  
6 completion of a course in religious instruction in the same  
7 manner as a school district.

8 Sec. 2. Section 256F.4, subsection 2, Code 2025, is amended  
9 by adding the following new paragraph:

10 NEW PARAGRAPH. *r.* Be subject to and comply with the  
11 requirements of section 279.87 related to the adoption of  
12 policies related to awarding students academic credit for the  
13 completion of a course in religious instruction in the same  
14 manner as a school district.

15 Sec. 3. NEW SECTION. **279.87 Academic credit for completion**  
16 **of courses in religious instruction.**

17 1. The board of directors of a school district may adopt  
18 a policy related to awarding students academic credit for the  
19 completion of a course in religious instruction that is provided  
20 by a private organization pursuant to section 299.1D.

21 2. *a.* A policy adopted by the board of directors of a  
22 school district pursuant to subsection 1 must prohibit the  
23 school district from considering the religious content included  
24 in the course in religious instruction, and the denominational  
25 affiliation of the course in religious instruction, when  
26 determining whether the course in religious instruction meets  
27 the education program requirement pertaining to any unit under  
28 section 256.11, subsection 5.

29 *b.* A policy adopted by the board of directors of a  
30 school district pursuant to subsection 1 must require the  
31 school district to do all of the following when determining  
32 whether the course in religious instruction meets the education  
33 program requirement pertaining to any unit under section 256.11,  
34 subsection 5:

35 (1) Consider the number of hours of classroom instruction

1 time provided to the student under the course in religious  
2 instruction, the methods of assessment used in the course  
3 in religious instruction, and the qualifications of the  
4 instructor who provided instruction under the course in religious  
5 instruction.

6 (2) Review the syllabus associated with the course in  
7 religious instruction and any materials provided to the student  
8 as part of the course in religious instruction.

9 Sec. 4. Section 299.1, subsection 4, paragraph b, Code 2025,  
10 is amended by adding the following new subparagraph:

11 NEW SUBPARAGRAPH. (7) While attending a course in religious  
12 instruction pursuant to section 299.1D.

13 Sec. 5. NEW SECTION. **299.1D Absences related to courses in**  
14 **religious instruction.**

15 1. Section 299.1 shall not apply to a child while the child  
16 is attending a course in religious instruction that is provided  
17 by a private organization if all of the following requirements  
18 are satisfied:

19 a. The child's parent, guardian, or legal or actual custodian  
20 of the child, if the child is not an emancipated minor, or  
21 the child, if the child is an emancipated minor, must submit a  
22 notification to the public school or accredited nonpublic school  
23 informing the school that the child will attend a course in  
24 religious instruction during the school day.

25 b. The course in religious instruction must not require the  
26 child to be absent from school for more than five hours per week.

27 c. The private organization that provides the course in  
28 religious instruction must maintain attendance records and must  
29 make the attendance records available to the school district or  
30 accredited nonpublic school to verify when the child is attending  
31 a course in religious instruction.

32 d. Transportation related to the course in religious  
33 instruction must be provided by the private organization, the  
34 child's parent, guardian, or legal or actual custodian, or the  
35 child.

1 e. The private organization must make provisions for and  
2 assume liability for the child while the child is attending the  
3 course in religious instruction.

4 f. The school district or accredited nonpublic school  
5 must not expend any moneys related to the course in  
6 religious instruction, not including de minimis administrative  
7 costs associated with processing notifications received under  
8 subsection 1 and tracking the child's attendance to ensure  
9 compliance with this section.

10 g. The course in religious instruction must not be held  
11 on school district property unless authorized by the board of  
12 directors of the school district pursuant to section 297.9.

13 h. The child must agree to make up any school work that the  
14 child does not complete while attending the course in religious  
15 instruction.

16 2. A child's parent, guardian, or legal or actual custodian  
17 of the child, if the child is not an emancipated minor, or  
18 the child, if the child is an emancipated minor, who alleges  
19 that a school district has violated this section may bring a  
20 civil action for injunctive relief and actual damages against  
21 the school district. If the child's parent, guardian, or legal  
22 or actual custodian, or the child, is the prevailing party in a  
23 civil action instituted pursuant to this subsection, the court  
24 shall award reasonable court costs and attorney fees to the  
25 child's parent, guardian, or legal or actual custodian, or the  
26 child, as applicable.

27 Sec. 6. Section 299.2, Code 2025, is amended by adding the  
28 following new subsection:

29 NEW SUBSECTION. 7. While attending a course in religious  
30 instruction pursuant to section 299.1D.

31 Sec. 7. Section 299.12, subsection 1, paragraph a, Code 2025,  
32 is amended to read as follows:

33 a. "*Chronically absent*" means any absence from school for  
34 more than ten percent of the days or hours in the grading  
35 period established by a public school; provided, however, that

1 an absence from school that is related to attending a course in  
2 religious instruction pursuant to section 299.1D shall not count  
3 toward this amount.

4 EXPLANATION

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

7 This bill relates to students who attend a course in  
8 religious instruction that is provided by a private organization,  
9 including by modifying provisions related to compulsory education  
10 and chronic absenteeism and allowing school districts, charter  
11 schools, and innovation zone schools to adopt policies related  
12 to awarding academic credit for the completion of a course in  
13 religious instruction.

14 Under current law, the parent, guardian, or legal or actual  
15 custodian of a child who is of compulsory attendance age is  
16 required to cause the child to attend some public school or an  
17 accredited nonpublic school, or place the child under competent  
18 private instruction or independent private instruction, during  
19 a school year. Current law establishes certain exceptions to  
20 this general rule. The bill adds to this list of exceptions  
21 children who are attending a course in religious instruction  
22 that is provided by a private organization and that satisfies  
23 certain specified requirements, including requirements related  
24 to notification, number of absences, maintenance of attendance  
25 records, transportation, assumption of liability, expenditure of  
26 moneys, location of instruction, and completion of school work.  
27 The bill requires schools to incorporate provisions related to  
28 attending courses in religious instruction into policies related  
29 to chronic absenteeism. Absences associated with attending a  
30 course in religious instruction are not counted toward truancy or  
31 enforcement mechanisms associated with chronic absenteeism.

32 The bill allows parents, guardians, legal or actual  
33 custodians, and children who allege that a school district has  
34 violated the bill's provisions to bring a civil action for  
35 injunctive relief and actual damages against the school district.

1 If the child's parent, guardian, or legal or actual custodian,  
2 or the child, is the prevailing party in such a civil action,  
3 the court is required to award reasonable court costs and  
4 attorney fees to the child's parent, guardian, or legal or actual  
5 custodian, or the child, as applicable.

6 The bill allows school districts, charter schools, and  
7 innovation zone schools to adopt policies related to awarding  
8 students academic credit for the completion of a course in  
9 religious instruction that is provided in accordance with  
10 the bill's provisions. The bill establishes prohibitions and  
11 requirements related to the school's practices under the policy,  
12 if adopted, including prohibiting the school from considering the  
13 religious content included in the course in religious instruction  
14 when determining whether the course meets the education program  
15 requirement pertaining to any unit under Code section 256.11(5)  
16 (high school educational standards), and requiring the school  
17 to consider the number of hours of classroom instruction time  
18 provided to the student under the course, the methods of  
19 assessment used in the course, and the qualifications of the  
20 instructor who provided instruction under the course, and to  
21 review the syllabus associated with the course, when determining  
22 whether the course meets the education program requirement  
23 pertaining to any unit under Code section 256.11(5).