

Senate File 510 - Introduced

SENATE FILE 510
BY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

(SUCCESSOR TO SF 138)

(COMPANION TO HF 448 BY FETT)

A BILL FOR

1 An Act relating to elective social studies courses emphasizing
2 religious scripture that school districts may offer and teach.
3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF IOWA:

unofficial

1 Section 1. Section 256.7, Code 2025, is amended by adding the
2 following new subsection:

3 NEW SUBSECTION. 15. Adopt rules establishing course
4 standards for elective social studies courses listed in
5 paragraph "a", any of which a school district may offer
6 and teach to students in grades nine through twelve subject
7 to the provisions of section 279.50B. The rules shall
8 include 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 or the Old
12 Testament of the Bible.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 c. In complying with this subsection, the state board shall
2 not violate any provision of law as defined in section 17A.2.
3 A course offered and taught in accordance with this section
4 is subject to federal and state guidelines regarding religious
5 neutrality and the diverse religious views, traditions, and the
6 perspectives of students enrolled in the school district shall
7 be recognized and accommodated. A course offered and taught
8 in accordance with this subsection shall not endorse, favor,
9 promote, or disfavor, or be hostile toward, any particular
10 religion, faith, or nonreligious perspective.

11 Sec. 2. NEW SECTION. **279.50B Elective social studies**
12 **courses — religious scripture.**

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

19 2. A student enrolled in a course offered and taught pursuant
20 to section 256.7, subsection 15, and this section, shall not be
21 required to use a specific translation as the sole text for the
22 Hebrew Scriptures or the Old Testament of the Bible, or the New
23 Testament of the Bible for the course, and may use instead a
24 translation other than the text chosen for the course by the
25 teacher, the school improvement advisory committee, the school
26 district, or the state board of education.

27 3. A school improvement advisory committee appointed in
28 accordance with section 280.12, or the principal of a school
29 offering an elective social studies course in accordance with
30 section 256.7, subsection 15, and this section, may authorize
31 the display of historic artifacts, monuments, symbols, and texts,
32 including religious materials, in conjunction with the course if
33 such display is appropriate to the overall educational purpose
34 of the course and is consistent with the provisions of section
35 280.6.

1 4. In offering and teaching a course in accordance with
2 section 256.7, subsection 15, and this section, a school district
3 shall not knowingly violate any provision of law as defined in
4 section 17A.2. A course offered in accordance with section
5 256.7, subsection 15, and this section, is subject to federal
6 and state guidelines regarding religious neutrality, and the
7 diverse religious views, traditions, and the course so offered
8 shall recognize and acknowledge the perspectives of students
9 enrolled in the school district. The course shall not endorse,
10 favor, promote, or disfavor, or be hostile toward, any particular
11 religion, faith, or nonreligious perspective.

12 Sec. 3. Section 280.12, Code 2025, is amended by adding the
13 following new subsection:

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

19 EXPLANATION

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

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

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

1 The state board's rules must include practitioner preparation
2 and professional development requirements for practitioners
3 employed by a school district to teach such a course.

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

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

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

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