

Legislative Analysis



AFRICAN HISTORY IN MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS

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House Bill 4902 as enrolled
Public Act 312 of 2008
Sponsor: Rep. Mike Nofs
House Committee: Education
Senate Committee: Education

First Analysis (1-5-09)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would encourage certain curricular foci for middle or high school African history courses, to ensure they covered the following kingdoms: Ghana, Mali, Songhay, Benin, Bornu, Nubia, Axum, Meroe, Monomotapa, medieval Ethiopia, or the Swahili Coast prior to 1750.

FISCAL IMPACT: The bill could increase local school districts' costs for professional development, books, and materials to add the suggested content to their current curricula.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

According to committee testimony, high school world history courses often depict the African continent as having few if any notable kingdoms, leaders, or advanced social and scientific technologies.

To the contrary, a review of Africa's early kingdoms beginning in the first century and continuing to pre-colonial times indicates a rich history of ideas easily communicated among educated people in highly organized societies. See *BACKGROUND INFORMATION*.

Legislation has been introduced to encourage middle school and high school world history teachers to focus their teaching on any of 11 distinct kingdoms or regions located on the African continent.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would encourage certain curricular foci for middle or high school African history courses.

House Bill 4902 would amend the Revised School Code (MCL 380. 1164b) to specify that if a school district or charter school taught *world history in a middle or high school grade*, then the board would be encouraged to focus the content of the instruction regarding Africa on at least one or more of the following kingdoms: Ghana, Mali, Songhay, Benin, Bornu, Nubia, Axum, Meroe, Monomotapa, medieval Ethiopia, or the Swahili Coast prior to 1750. The bill specifies that this section would not prohibit or limit teaching about other areas of African history.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

For further information about pre-colonial African kingdoms, visit the Public Broadcasting Service website, "Wonders of the African World," developed by the historian Henry Louis Gates, Jr. at <http://www.pbs.org/wonders/main.htm>

ARGUMENTS:

For:

As originally introduced, the bill would have *required* school boards to ensure that world history courses included teaching about any of the 11 pre-colonial African kingdoms explicitly noted in the legislation. Instead, as amended, the bill *encourages* (rather than *requires*) certain curricular foci for middle or high school African history courses. By eliminating the mandate, the bill is improved. The change cuts costs, and ensures that local school leaders and teachers retain the right to make curricular decisions that meet benchmarks within the state's content area curricular frameworks.

Against:

House Bill 4902 should also apply to the African history taught in elementary school. Indeed, as originally introduced and debated, House Bill 4902 was a companion bill to House Bill 4886, and both bills passed the House of Representatives. However, House Bill 4886 died in the Senate Education Committee. Similar to House Bill 4902, House Bill 4886 would have specified that if a school district or charter school taught African history in an *elementary grade*, then the content of the instruction should focus on one or more of the 11 African kingdoms noted in the legislation.

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