



Senate Fiscal Agency
P. O. Box 30036
Lansing, Michigan 48909-7536

BILL ANALYSIS

Telephone: (517) 373-5383
Fax: (517) 373-1986

Senate Bill 209 (as passed by the Senate)
Sponsor: Senator Patrick J. Colbeck
Committee: Education

Date Completed: 6-23-15

RATIONALE

The Revised School Code prescribes, among other things, standards for various academic curricula, the establishment of recommended model core academic curriculum content standards, and student assessments. The Code also requires all public and nonpublic schools in this State to provide regular courses of instruction in the Constitution of the United States and the Michigan Constitution. In addition, the Code specifies that a high school must require a one-semester course in civics in which students are taught the form and functions of the Federal, state, and local governments, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens.¹ Some have raised concerns regarding the degree to which students are learning U.S. history and civics. Evidently, proficiency in these subjects is low and is not improving. To remedy this, some have suggested that the Code should identify specific topics of instruction for students, as well as provide a means of feedback for teachers and students learning U.S. history and civics.

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Revised School Code to do the following:

- Encourage the board of a school district or board of directors of a public school academy (PSA) to provide instruction that focused on core principles of the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the Michigan Constitution, as described by the bill.**
- Allow a school district or PSA to develop curricula and materials for the instruction described by the bill that were aligned with the State Board of Education's recommended model core academic curriculum content standards.**
- Require the State Board of Education, by May 1, 2016, to update the recommended model core academic curriculum content standards to ensure that they covered the instruction described in the bill.**
- Require the Superintendent of Public Instruction to ensure that State assessments included questions related to the instruction and historical documents described in the bill.**

The bill would take effect 90 days after its enactment.

Topics of Instruction

The bill would encourage the board of a school district or board of directors of a PSA to provide instruction that focused on the following topics during the school year in a grade- and age-level appropriate manner for all of its pupils in grades K to 12:

- The core principles of the Declaration of Independence (specifically including language contained in the preamble).

¹ MCL 380.1166.

- The core principles of the United States Constitution (specifically including the preamble, Articles I through V, and the First, Second, and Tenth Amendments).
- The core principles of the State Constitution.

The bill would permit a school district or PSA, and its professional school personnel, to develop curricula and materials for the specified instruction that were grade- and age-level appropriate, and aligned with the State Board recommended model core academic curriculum content standards developed under Section 1278.

Curriculum & Assessments

Section 1278 of the Code requires the State Board of Education to develop, and periodically update, recommended model core academic curriculum content standards. The standards must set forth desired learning objectives in math, science, reading, history, geography, economics, American government, and writing for all children at each stage of schooling and be based on the "Michigan K-12 program standards of quality".

The bill would require the State Board, by May 1, 2016, to update the recommended model core academic curriculum content standards for each grade level for which there was a State assessment for social studies to ensure that they covered the instruction described in the bill.

Beginning with assessments conducted during the 2015-2016 school year, for each grade level for which there was a State assessment for social studies, the Superintendent would have to ensure that State assessments included questions related to the instruction described in and the documents enumerated in the bill, including at least the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

MCL 380.1278 et al.

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2014 only 18% of eighth graders tested at proficient or above on United States history and 23% tested at proficient or better in civics; in both subjects, there was "no significant change" from the 2010 scores.² Those statistics demonstrate that students are not learning about U.S. history and civics. The concepts that are taught within a robust U.S. history and civics curriculum inform students about the origins of the United States government and students' rights and responsibilities as citizens. The bill would encourage public schools to provide instruction on the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the Michigan Constitution. Those important documents contributed to the history of the nation and the foundation of its system of governments. The bill also would ensure that the recommended model core academic curriculum content standards for social studies would be updated to reflect the encouraged instruction, and that State tests would include questions to assess student progress.

Opposing Argument

The bill would encourage the instruction of select principles enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, United States Constitution, and Michigan Constitution, above other equally important concepts within those documents. In order for students to understand the significance of those documents, it is necessary that they receive instruction on the documents in their entirety.

Legislative Analyst: Jeff Mann

² "The Nation's Report Card: 2014 U.S. History, Geography, and Civics at Grade 8", National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, retrieved 6-22-2015, at: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2015112>.

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State or local government.

Fiscal Analyst: Cory Savino

A1516\S209a

This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.