

HB 1807, to rebuild civics education and restore open academic discourse in public schools

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Key Findings

1. In October 2021, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) lowered the quality of Washington's academic learning standards by including harmful civics misinformation.
2. HB 1807 would rebuild the quality of civics education provided to Washington's students.
3. HB 1807's outline of the founding documents and influential articles that students should study would provide a full and accurate account of the nation's history.
4. The bill would provide that teachers address controversial subjects in an even-handed, objective and impartial way.
5. HB 1807 would help reassure parents and the broader community that race-discrimination is not being taught in the schools and that the state's learning standards and curricula are not mandating the politicization of classrooms.
6. HB 1807 would promote the return of open and free discussion of current issues in the classroom without fear of job loss or social cancellation.
7. The bill would strengthen democracy by promoting positive civic engagement in the classroom and in broader society.
8. HB 1807 would help prepare students to become full participants as citizens and voters in a responsible, self-governing community.
9. The bill would remove mandates on school employees attending racial discrimination and race-identity courses.

Introduction

Last May, the state legislature passed and the governor signed SB 5044, which mandated the training of school employees and school board directors in diversity and equity courses based on the critical theory approach of race essentialism and race-based discrimination.

A few months later, in October 2021, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction published the Ethnic Studies Framework. This Framework lowered the academic learning standards in civics and Social Studies in public schools by introducing race-based policies and other racialized concepts into the academic standards.¹ The Framework also lowered academic learning standards in Art, English Language Arts, Environmental and Sustainability Education, Computer Science, and Health.

This new approach re-organized academic topics into four domains of "Identity," "Power and Oppression," "History of Resistance and Liberation," and "Reflection and Action." For example, the U.S. History Ethnic Studies standards includes:

"Power and oppression, as defined by ethnic studies, are the ways in which the United States government was founded on racist intellectual premises and economic practices that institutionalized oppression of people of color that continues to the

¹ "Washington public school officials lower academic standards as they implement Critical Race Theory," by Liv Finne, Washington Policy Center, September 21, 2021, at: <https://www.washingtonpolicy.org/publications/detail/washington-public-school-officials-lower-academic-standards-as-they-implement-critical-race-theory>. And see "OSPI releases Ethnic Studies Frameworks rules, the next step in implementing Critical Race Theory in public schools," by Liv Finne, Washington Policy Center, October 13, 2021, at: <https://www.washingtonpolicy.org/publications/detail/washington-public-school-officials-lower-academic-standards-as-they-implement-critical-race-theory>.

present day.”²

These standards also teach socialist principles to put the U.S. in a negative light:

“Understand how the rise of industrial capitalism intersects with labor (of all ethnicities) exploitation and oppression.”

They also teach a slanted politicized view of Europeans and U.S. History:

“Understand that Europeans brought the dominant worldview values of ‘Guns, the bible, private property and social hierarchy, and racial supremacy’ (William Katz) that have driven U.S. history.”

The new race-based Ethnic Studies policy encourages students to take “Action” in political causes. For example, “What actions can students take now in the struggle toward a social justice cause?”

In response to weakening educational and civics standards in public schools, Rep. Walsh (R-Longview) has introduced HB 1807, to improve the quality of civics education in Washington public schools.

The bill’s intent section says its purpose is to reassure parents and families that “the state’s basic education and curricula have not been torn apart but are still vibrant and designed for full academic discourse and discovery without mandated politicization in the classroom.”³

The bill would provide that the public school civics course include the following elements:

1. an understanding of “the fundamental moral, political, and intellectual foundations of the American

experiment in self-government and Washington’s role in that noble experiment”;

2. the history, qualities, traditions and features of civic engagement in the U.S. and Washington, consistent with the values and character traits described in RCW 28A.150.211;⁴
3. the history of the indigenous peoples of Washington and the Pacific Northwest, consistent with RCW 28A.320.170;
4. the structure, function and processes of government institutions at the federal, state and local levels;
5. the founding and historical documents of the United States, including at a minimum those documents listed in the bill;
6. the history of white supremacy, and how these groups caused harm and were combatted through peaceful protest, civic engagement, and the courts;
7. the history and importance of the American civil rights movement, including the writings of Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, Martin Luther King Jr., the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954), and historical documents relating to the civic accomplishments of marginalized populations, including the women’s suffrage movement, the Chicano movement, the US organized labor movement, and the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965.

HB 1807 would require the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to provide schools with a list of civic education

2 The U.S. History Ethnic Studies Frameworks posted on the OSPI website can be accessed at: <https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/socialstudies/pubdocs/US%20History%20SDS%20ES%20Framework.pdf>.

3 “An Act Relating to the protection of quality civic education and academic discourse,” Introduced January 6, 2022 by Representatives James Walsh, Rob Chase, Robert Sutherland, Alex Ybarra, Jeremie Dufault, Jenny Graham, and Jesse Young, Washington State Legislature, Section 1(3), at <https://app.leg.wa.gov/bills/summary/BillNumber=1807&Initiative=false&Year=2021>.

4 RCW 28A.150.211, the values and traits include honesty, respect, responsibility, self-discipline, moderation, diligence, healthy behavior and respect for family.

curricula that meet the bill's requirements.⁵ The bill would also prohibit any state agency, public school or school district from accepting private funding for the purpose of developing, purchasing or selecting civic education materials.

Prohibition on harmful civics misinformation

HB 1807 also provides that no public school teacher could be compelled to discuss currently controversial topics or harmful historical or civics misinformation, such as the discredited The 1619 Project, Critical Race Theory, or "How to be an AntiRacist."

The bill would require teachers to present "diverse and contending perspectives, without giving deference to any one perspective." Teachers would be prohibited from assigning students to engage in political activism or in political lobbying.

HB 1807 would provide that no public school employee could be forced to attend training or indoctrination which teaches that one race or sex is inherently superior to another, that the United States is "structurally racist," that any person should be discriminated against due to race or sex, that moral character is determined by race or sex, or that anyone should be made to feel guilt or psychological distress due to race or sex.⁶

Policy analysis

HB 1807 would restore quality civics education in Washington state. HB 1807's outline of the founding documents and influential articles that students should study would provide a full and accurate account of the nation's history.

HB 1807 would also restore open academic discourse in Washington's classrooms. The bill would provide that teachers address

controversial subjects in an even-handed, objective and impartial way.

HB 1807 would help reassure parents and the broader community that race-discrimination is not being taught in public schools.

Conclusion

HB 1807 serves the public interest because it would restore quality civics education to Washington's students. The bill would remove mandates on school employees attending racial discrimination and race-identity courses. It would also promote the return of open and free discussion of current issues in the classroom without fear of job loss or social cancellation. The bill would strengthen democracy by promoting positive civic engagement in the classroom and in broader society and would help prepare students to become full participants as citizens and voters in a responsible, self-governing community.

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Nothing here should be construed as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any legislation before any legislative body.

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5 Ibid, Section 2, subsection 3, at: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1807&Initiative=false&Year=2021>

6 Ibid, Section 4, subsection 1, at: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1807&Initiative=false&Year=2021>