

House Bill 816

By: Representatives Lunsford of the 109<sup>th</sup>, Smith of the 169<sup>th</sup>, Byrd of the 170<sup>th</sup>, Mosley of the 171<sup>st</sup>, Cash of the 108<sup>th</sup> and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
AN ACT

1 To amend Part 2 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia  
2 Annotated, relating to competencies and core curriculum for elementary and secondary  
3 students under the "Quality Basic Education Act," so as to provide for the offering of a state  
4 funded high school course in the history, literature, and culture of the ancient Middle East;  
5 to provide for the adoption of the curriculum for such course by the State Board of  
6 Education; to provide for the topics of instruction, reading materials, and methods of  
7 teaching in such course; to require certain training for teachers of such course; to provide for  
8 certain matters relating to the employment and assignment of teachers of such course; to  
9 provide for the granting of academic credit for the successful completion of such course; to  
10 provide for the monitoring of the content and teaching of such course; to provide for  
11 construction with regard to other elective courses; to provide for related matters; to provide  
12 for an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

13 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:**

14 **SECTION 1.**

15 Part 2 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated,  
16 relating to competencies and core curriculum for elementary and secondary students under  
17 the "Quality Basic Education Act," is amended by adding at the end thereof a new Code  
18 section to read as follows:

19 "20-2-148.

20 (a) All public schools with grade nine or above may make available to eligible students in  
21 grades nine through 12 an elective course in the history, literature, and culture of the  
22 ancient Middle East. As used in this Code section, an eligible student is a student whose  
23 parent or guardian has granted written permission for the student to participate in the  
24 course in the history, literature, and culture of the ancient Middle East.

25 (b)(1) No later than February 1, 2002, the State Board of Education shall adopt a  
26 curriculum for the course, including objectives, reading materials, and lesson plans,

1 which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of this subsection and in  
2 consultation with the Attorney General.

3 (2) The topics to be included in the course may include the historical background and  
4 events of the period; the history of the Kingdom of Israel; the poetry of the Hebrew Bible  
5 or the Old Testament; and the influence of Hebrew Bible or Old Testament history and  
6 literature on subsequent art, music, literature, law, and events, including recent and  
7 current events in the Middle East. The course shall not address accounts of the creation  
8 of the world.

9 (3) The book or collection of books commonly known as the Hebrew Bible or the Old  
10 Testament shall be one text for the course in the history, literature, and culture of the  
11 ancient Middle East. In addition, students shall be assigned a range of reading materials  
12 for the course, including selections from secular historical and cultural works and  
13 selections from other religious and cultural traditions. The course shall familiarize  
14 students with the customs and cultures of the times and places studied. The course shall  
15 familiarize the students with the methods and tools of writing and preserving written text  
16 during the era studied. The local board of education may determine which version of the  
17 Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament shall be used or, if the local board of education does  
18 not do so, that determination may be made by the teacher of the course. No student shall  
19 be required to use one version as the sole text of the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament.  
20 If a student desires to use as the basic text a different version of the Hebrew Bible or Old  
21 Testament from that chosen by the local board of education or teacher, he or she shall be  
22 permitted to do so.

23 (4)(A) The course provided for in this Code section shall:

24 (i) Be taught in an objective and nondevotional manner with no attempt made to  
25 indoctrinate the students as to either the truth or falsity of the biblical materials or  
26 texts from other religious or cultural traditions;

27 (ii) Not include teaching of religious doctrine or sectarian interpretation of the Bible  
28 or texts from other religious or cultural traditions; and

29 (iii) Not disparage or encourage a commitment to a set of religious beliefs.

30 (B) At the discretion of the local board of education, the course may familiarize the  
31 students with the various theories and methods of analyzing, interpreting, and  
32 understanding the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament. However, the course shall not  
33 attempt to coerce students to accept or reject any of these methods.

34 (c) The State Board of Education shall develop training materials and offer training  
35 programs for the teachers of the course provided for in this Code section no later than  
36 February 1, 2002. Such training materials and programs shall be developed in consultation  
37 with the Attorney General and shall contain a segment devoted to the freedom of religion

1 clauses contained in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution and the  
2 relevant United States Supreme Court and lower court decisions interpreting these clauses  
3 and the relevant paragraphs of the Georgia Constitution and court decisions interpreting  
4 these paragraphs. No state funds distributed in accordance with this article may be  
5 expended in connection with a course focusing on this era and this geographic area unless  
6 the teacher of the course has completed the training program offered by the State Board of  
7 Education.

8 (d) The provisions of this chapter relating to personnel employed by local units of  
9 administration, including without limitation certification requirements, employment, and  
10 supervision, shall apply to persons who teach the course provided for in this Code section.  
11 In addition, no person shall be assigned to teach such course based in whole or in part on  
12 any religious test, profession of faith or lack of faith, prior or present religious affiliation  
13 or lack of affiliation, or criteria involving particular beliefs or lack of beliefs about the  
14 Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament.

15 (e) On and after August 1, 2002, for the purpose of earning Carnegie unit curriculum  
16 credits at the high school level, satisfactory completion of the course in the history,  
17 literature, and culture of the ancient Middle East shall be accepted by the State Board of  
18 Education for one unit of elective credit; provided, however, that such course is taught in  
19 strict compliance with the requirements of this Code section.

20 (f) A local board of education may make such arrangements for monitoring the content and  
21 teaching of the course in the history, literature, and culture of the ancient Middle East as  
22 it deems appropriate.

23 (g) Nothing in this Code section shall be construed to limit the authority of a local board  
24 of education to offer courses regarding this era or geographic area that are not in  
25 compliance with this Code section; provided, however, that no state funds distributed  
26 pursuant to this article shall be expended in connection with such a course that does not  
27 meet the requirements of this Code section.

28 (h) Nothing in this Code section shall be construed to prohibit local boards of education  
29 from offering elective courses based upon the books of other religions or societies. In  
30 determining whether to offer such courses, the local board may consider various factors  
31 including, but not limited to, student and parent demand for such courses and the impact  
32 such books have had upon history and culture."

## 33 SECTION 2.

34 This Act shall become effective on July 1, 2001.

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**SECTION 3.**

2 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.