

Senate Bill 79

By: Senators Williams of the 19th, Pearson of the 51st, Rogers of the 21st, Goggans of the 7th, Heath of the 31st and others

**AS PASSED SENATE**

**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 state  
4 funded high school courses in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era and the  
5 History and Literature of the New Testament Era; to provide for the adoption of the curricula  
6 for such courses by the State Board of Education; to provide for the topics of instruction,  
7 reading materials, and methods of teaching in such courses; to provide for certain matters  
8 relating to the employment and assignment of teachers of such courses; to provide for the  
9 granting of academic credit for the successful completion of such courses; to provide for the  
10 monitoring of the content and teaching of such courses; to provide for related matters; to  
11 provide for an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

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

13 **SECTION 1.**

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

18 "20-2-148.

19 (a) All public schools with grade nine or above may make available to eligible students in  
20 grades nine through 12 an elective course in the History and Literature of the Old  
21 Testament Era and an elective course in the History and Literature of the New Testament  
22 Era. The purpose of such courses shall be to accommodate the rights and desires of those  
23 teachers and students who wish to teach and study the Old and New Testaments and to  
24 familiarize students with the contents of the Old and New Testaments, the history recorded  
25 by the Old and New Testaments, the literary style and structure of the Old and New

1 Testaments, the customs and cultures of the peoples and societies recorded in the Old and  
2 New Testaments, and the influence of the Old and New Testaments upon law, history,  
3 government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture.

4 (b)(1) No later than February 1, 2007, the State Board of Education shall adopt a  
5 curriculum for each course, including objectives, reading materials, and lesson plans,  
6 which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of this subsection.

7 (2) The topics to be included in the course in the History and Literature of the Old  
8 Testament Era may include the historical background and events of the period; the history  
9 of the Kingdom of Israel; the poetry of the Old Testament; the influence of Old  
10 Testament history and literature on subsequent art, music, literature, law, and events,  
11 including recent and current events in the Middle East. The topics to be included in the  
12 course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era may include the historical  
13 background and events of the period; the life of Jesus of Nazareth; the parables of Jesus;  
14 the life and travels of Paul; and the influence of New Testament history and literature on  
15 subsequent art, music, literature, law, and events.

16 (3) The book or collection of books commonly known as the Old Testament shall be the  
17 basic text for the course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era, and the  
18 book or collection of books commonly known as the New Testament shall be the basic  
19 text for the course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era. In addition,  
20 students may be assigned a range of reading materials for the courses, including  
21 selections from secular historical and cultural works and selections from other religious  
22 and cultural traditions. The courses shall familiarize students with the customs and  
23 cultures of the times and places referred to in the Old and New Testaments. The courses  
24 shall familiarize the students with the methods and tools of writing at the times the Old  
25 and New Testament books were written, the means by which they were preserved, the  
26 languages in which they were written and into which they were translated, and the  
27 historical and cultural events which led to the translation of the Old and New Testaments  
28 into the English language. The local board of education may determine which version  
29 of the Old or New Testament shall be used as the main text or, if the local board of  
30 education does not do so, that determination may be made by the teacher of the course.  
31 No student shall be required to use one version as the sole text of the Old or New  
32 Testament. If a student desires to use as the basic text a different version of the Old or  
33 New Testament from that chosen by the local board of education or teacher, he or she  
34 shall be permitted to do so.

35 (4) The courses provided for in this Code section shall:

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

4 (B) Not include teaching of religious doctrine or sectarian interpretation of the Bible  
5 or of texts from other religious or cultural traditions; and

6 (C) Not disparage or encourage a commitment to a set of religious beliefs.

7 (c) The provisions of this chapter relating to personnel employed by local units of  
8 administration, including without limitation certification requirements, employment, and  
9 supervision, shall apply to persons who teach the courses provided for in this Code section.

10 In addition, no person shall be assigned to teach such courses based in whole or in part on  
11 any religious test, profession of faith or lack thereof, prior or present religious affiliation  
12 or lack of affiliation, or criteria involving particular beliefs or lack thereof about the Bible.  
13 Except for these requirements, the qualifications and training of teachers shall be  
14 determined by the local boards of education.

15 (d) On and after July 1, 2007, for the purpose of earning Carnegie unit curriculum credits  
16 at the high school level, satisfactory completion of the course in the History and Literature  
17 of the Old Testament Era shall be accepted by the State Board of Education for one-half  
18 unit of elective credit, and satisfactory completion of the course in the History and  
19 Literature of the New Testament Era shall be accepted by the State Board of Education for  
20 one-half unit of elective credit; provided, however, that such courses are taught in strict  
21 compliance with the requirements of this Code section.

22 (e) A local board of education may make such arrangements for monitoring the content  
23 and teaching of the course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era and the  
24 course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era as it deems appropriate.

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

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

## 35 SECTION 2.

36 This Act shall become effective on July 1, 2006.

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**SECTION 3.**

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