

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

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 reading materials, and
7 methods of teaching in such courses; to provide for certain matters relating to the
8 employment and assignment of teachers of such courses; to provide for the granting of
9 academic credit for the successful completion of such courses; to provide for the monitoring
10 of the content and teaching of such courses; to provide for related matters; to provide for an
11 effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

12 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

13 style="text-align:center">**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

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

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

8 (2) The book or collection of books commonly known as the Old Testament shall be the
9 basic text for the course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era, and the
10 book or collection of books commonly known as the New Testament shall be the basic
11 text for the course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era. In addition,
12 students may be assigned a range of reading materials for the courses, including
13 selections from secular historical and cultural works and selections from other religious
14 and cultural traditions. The courses shall familiarize students with the customs and
15 cultures of the times and places referred to in the Old and New Testaments. The courses
16 shall familiarize the students with the methods and tools of writing at the times the Old
17 and New Testament books were written, the means by which they were preserved, the
18 languages in which they were written and into which they were translated, and the
19 historical and cultural events which led to the translation of the Old and New Testaments
20 into the English language. The local board of education may recommend which version
21 of the Old or New Testament may be used in the course; provided, however, that the
22 teacher of the course shall not be required to adopt that recommendation but may use the
23 recommended version or another version. No student shall be required to use one version
24 as the sole text of the Old or New Testament. If a student desires to use as the basic text
25 a different version of the Old or New Testament from that chosen by the local board of
26 education or teacher, he or she shall be permitted to do so.

27 (3) The courses provided for in this Code section shall:

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

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

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

34 (c) The provisions of this chapter relating to personnel employed by local units of
35 administration, including without limitation certification requirements, employment, and
36 supervision, shall apply to persons who teach the courses provided for in this Code section.
37 In addition, no person shall be assigned to teach such courses based in whole or in part on

1 any religious test, profession of faith or lack thereof, prior or present religious affiliation
2 or lack of affiliation, or criteria involving particular beliefs or lack thereof about the Bible.
3 Except for these requirements, the qualifications and training of teachers shall be
4 determined by the local boards of education.

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

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

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

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

25 **SECTION 2.**

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

27 **SECTION 3.**

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