

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

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AUTHOR'S/SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

For nearly 2,000 years, the Bible has been a cornerstone in the development of Western civilization, permeating nearly all aspects of our culture, manifesting itself most notably in our literature, music, art, drama, and philosophy.

Biblical references abound in the works of Western literature, including those of William Shakespeare and John Milton, and allusions to biblical themes and characters have been used effectively by writers as diverse as Dante Alighieri and William Faulkner.

Because the Bible was, for a long time, part of a common heritage shared by our forebears, great leaders of the past, including George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King, Jr., could inspire entire generations by sprinkling their speeches liberally with biblical references. Indeed, the English language itself is so filled with biblical vocabulary, themes, and terms that it cannot be fully understood and appreciated by individuals unfamiliar with the Bible, depriving them of much of the richness of the language.

A recent report on Bible literacy, which included findings from a Gallup Poll survey on American teenagers' knowledge of the Bible, found that American high school students are deficient in their academic knowledge of the Bible and that this deficiency is limiting their ability to study literature and to understand art, music, history, and culture.

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Tom Clark, in the 1963 case *Abington v. Schempp*, wrote, "[It] might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization [and] that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment."

In 1999, in a document entitled *The Bible & Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide*, 20 widely diverse groups, including the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, and the National Association of School Boards, as well as major Christian, Jewish, and Muslim organizations, agreed that the Bible can and should be taught in public schools; and furthermore, Gallup Polls over the years have consistently shown that more than two-thirds of the American public believe the Bible should be taught in public schools as part of the literature and social studies curricula.

Section 28.002(f), Education Code, allows a school district to offer courses for local credit in addition to those in the required curriculum, and, according to the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools, 49 school districts already offer elective Bible classes in their curricula; Section 28.002(f) also requires the State Board of Education to be flexible in approving a course for credit toward the state's high school graduation requirements.

RESOLVED

That the Senate of the 79th Texas Legislature hereby declare its intent that the State of Texas lead the nation in understanding what students need to know about the Bible, in building that knowledge into standards and curricula, in testing for that knowledge, and in working with publishers to develop appropriate curricula and textbooks.

That the State Board of Education be directed to incorporate these goals in its long-range planning and that the board and the Texas Education Agency be directed to (1) develop standards for Biblical knowledge at appropriate grade levels so that students can fully understand Western and American civilization, including its history, music, art, literature, culture, legal system, form of government, major events, and the English language itself; and (2) build these standards into the required curriculum as essential knowledge and skills.

That the State Board of Education be directed to add to the list of approved courses for credit toward graduation requirements an elective course on the Bible and its influence on America, consistent with academic study as interpreted by the U.S. Supreme Court and the national consensus evident in *The Bible & Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide*.

That the State Board of Education be directed to work with textbook publishers toward the development and subsequent selection of appropriate textbooks and supplemental materials.

That the State Board of Education and the Texas Education Agency be directed to develop specific and detailed recommendations for implementation of this resolution, including an aggressive but realistic implementation schedule, and that they be further directed to work with the Texas Legislature to determine whether specific legislation may be required to achieve the goals of this resolution.

That an intent of this resolution be to encourage districts, teachers, school staff, the media, and other interested parties to build an understanding and consensus as to the importance of teaching about the Bible in the public schools of this state.

That the secretary of the Texas Senate forward official copies of this resolution to the commissioner of education and to the chair of the State Board of Education.