

HOUSE BILL NO. HB0130

Education-elective academic bible study.

Sponsored by: Representative(s) Watt

A BILL

for

1 AN ACT relating to public school elective courses;
2 providing for elective classes in biblical studies;
3 requiring training of educators; providing rulemaking
4 authority; and providing for an effective date.

5

6 *Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Wyoming:*

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8 **Section 1.** W.S. 21-9-104 and 21-9-105 are created to
9 read:

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11 **21-9-104. Elective courses on the bible's Hebrew**
12 **scriptures (old testament) and new testament.**

13

14 (a) A school district may offer to students in grade
15 nine (9) or above an elective course on the Hebrew
16 scriptures (old testament) and its impact and an elective
17 course on the new testament and its impact or a course

1 combining the two (2) subject matters noted herein into one
2 (1) course.

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4 (b) The purpose of this course is to:

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6 (i) Teach students knowledge of biblical
7 content, characters, poetry and narratives that are
8 prerequisites to understanding contemporary society and
9 culture, including literature, art, music, mores, oratory
10 and public policy;

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12 (ii) Familiarize students with, as applicable:

13

14 (A) The contents of the Hebrew scriptures
15 or new testament;

16

17 (B) The history of the Hebrew scriptures or
18 new testament;

19

20 (C) The literary style and structure of the
21 Hebrew scriptures or new testament;

22

1 (D) The influence of the Hebrew scriptures
2 or new testament on law, history, government, literature,
3 art, music, customs, morals, values and culture.

4
5 (c) A student may not be required to use a specific
6 translation as the sole text of the Hebrew scriptures or
7 new testament and may use as the basic textbook a different
8 translation of the Hebrew scriptures or new testament from
9 that chosen by the board of trustees of the student's
10 school district or the student's teacher.

11
12 (d) A course offered under this subsection shall
13 follow applicable law and all federal and state guidelines
14 in maintaining religious neutrality and accommodating the
15 diverse religious views, traditions and perspectives of
16 students in their school district. A course offered under
17 this section shall not endorse, favor or promote, or
18 disfavor or show hostility toward, any particular religion
19 or nonreligious faith or religious perspective. Nothing in
20 this statute is intended to violate any provision of the
21 United States constitution or federal law, the Wyoming
22 constitution or any state law, or any rules or guidelines
23 provided by the United States department of education or
24 the state department of education.

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2 (e) Before adopting rules identifying the essential
3 knowledge and skills of a course offered under this
4 section, the state board of education shall submit the
5 proposed essential knowledge and skills to the attorney
6 general. The attorney general shall review the proposed
7 essential knowledge and skills to ensure that the course
8 complies with the first amendment to the United States
9 constitution, and the board shall not adopt rules
10 identifying the essential knowledge and skills of a course
11 offered under this section without the attorney general's
12 approval under this subsection.

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14 (f) A teacher of a course offered under this section
15 shall hold a minimum of certification of high school
16 teacher in language arts, social studies or history with,
17 where practical, a minor in religion or biblical studies. A
18 teacher selected to teach a course under this section shall
19 successfully complete staff development training required
20 under W.S. 21-9-105. A course under this section may only
21 be taught by a teacher who has successfully completed
22 training under W.S. 21-9-105.

23

1 (g) For the purpose of a student earning credit for
2 high school graduation, a school district shall grant one-
3 half (1/2) academic elective credit for satisfactory
4 completion of a course on the Hebrew scriptures, one-half
5 (1/2) academic elective credit for satisfactory completion
6 of a course on the new testament and one-half (1/2)
7 academic elective credit for satisfactory completion of a
8 combined course on both the Hebrew scriptures and the new
9 testament. This subsection applies only to a course that is
10 taught in strict compliance with this section.

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12 (h) If, for a particular semester, fewer than fifteen
13 (15) students at a school within any district register to
14 enroll in a course required by this section, the district
15 is not required to offer the course at that school for that
16 semester.

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18 (j) This section does not prohibit the board of
19 trustees of a school district from offering an elective
20 course based on the books of a religion other than
21 christianity. In determining whether to offer such a
22 course, the board may consider various factors, including
23 student and parent demand for such a course and the impact
24 the books have had on history and culture.

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2 (k) This section does not prohibit a school district
3 from offering a course, other than the course authorized by
4 this section, in the academic study of the Hebrew
5 scriptures, the new testament or both for local credit or
6 for state elective credit towards high school graduation.

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8 **21-9-105. Bible course training.**

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10 (a) The Wyoming state board of education, in
11 consultation with the Wyoming professional teaching
12 standards board, shall develop and make available training
13 materials and other teacher training resources for a school
14 district to use in assisting teachers of elective bible
15 courses in developing:

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17 (i) Expertise in the appropriate bible course
18 curriculum;

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20 (ii) Understanding of applicable supreme court
21 rulings and current constitutional law regarding how bible
22 courses are to be taught in public schools objectively as a
23 part of a secular program of education;

24

1 (iii) Understanding of how to present the bible
2 in an objective, academic manner that neither promotes nor
3 disparages religion, nor is taught from a particular
4 sectarian point of view;

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6 (iv) Proficiency in instructional approaches
7 that present course material in a manner that respects all
8 faiths and religious traditions, while favoring none;

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10 (v) Expertise in how to avoid devotional content
11 or proselytizing in the classroom.

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13 (b) The Wyoming state board of education, in
14 consultation with the Wyoming professional teaching
15 standards board, shall develop materials and resources
16 under this section in consultation with appropriate faculty
17 members at institutions of higher education.

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19 (c) The Wyoming state board of education, through the
20 Wyoming professional teaching standards board, shall make
21 the training materials and other teacher training resources
22 required under subsection (a) of this section available to
23 bible course teachers through access to in-service
24 training.

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2 **Section 2.** This act is effective July 1, 2013.

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(END)