2020 -- H 7577

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2020

AN ACT

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- THE CIVIC LITERACY ACT

Introduced By: Representatives Newberry, Amore, Kislak, Carson, and Edwards

Date Introduced: February 13, 2020

Referred To: House Health, Education & Welfare

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

SECTION 1. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

CHAPTER 22.3

THE CIVIC LITERACY ACT

16-22.3-1. Short Title.

This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "The Civic Literacy Act."

16-22.3-2. Legislative Findings.

The legislature finds and declares that:

(1) The adoption of the United States Declaration of Independence of 1776 and the signing of the United States Constitution were principal events in the history of the United States. The Declaration of Independence providing the philosophical foundation on which this nation rests and the Constitution of the United States providing its structure of government.

(2) It is essential to the health of Rhode Island and of our republic, that all citizens be knowledgeable about democratic principles and practices, including the fundamental documents of the United States Declaration of Independence, the Federalist Papers, the United States Constitution, and the Rhode Island Constitution.

(3) Many Americans lack even the most basic knowledge and understanding of the history of our nation, fundamental democratic principles, the rights and responsibilities of citizens, and the participatory skills necessary for effective and responsible participation as competent citizens.
Providing civic education and promoting good citizenship and understanding of fundamental democratic principles should be a core mission of our state’s schools.

The survival of the republic requires that our nation’s children, the future guardians of its heritage, and participants in its governance, have a firm, actionable knowledge and understanding of its principles and history.

16-22-3. Purpose.

The purpose and intent of this chapter is to require all students between grades eight (8) and twelve (12), attending public schools, or other schools managed and controlled by the state of Rhode Island, to complete a course in American Civics proficiency, as defined in § 16-22-3-6, through project based assessment, commencing with the graduating class of 2025, and all graduating classes thereafter.

16-22-3.4. Administration.

The commissioner of elementary and secondary education shall adopt and promulgate rules and regulations for the administration of this chapter to:

1. Specifically provide for curriculum content and teacher training to ensure the intent of this legislation.

2. Create a project-based civics learning assessment for district adoption, requiring students to conduct analytical research on a local community issue of his or her choice, engage an institution of government to influence the issue, and fulfill a summative assessment to demonstrate the process and outcomes.

3. Articulate specific quantifiable standards for student-led civics projects and support local education agencies in the implementation.

4. Prioritize supporting course implementation in districts that serve historically underserved students, including low-income, immigrant or refugee students.

16-22-3.5. Funding for Civics Education.

(a) There shall be established and set up on the accounts of the Rhode Island department of education, a separate fund to be known as the "civics project trust fund." The fund shall be administered by the Rhode Island commissioner of education. The fund shall be funded with:

1. Revenue from appropriations or other money authorized by the legislature and specifically designated to be credited to the fund;

2. Interest earned on the revenues set forth in subsection (a)(1) of this section; and

3. Funds from public or private sources such as gifts, grants and any other donations to further civic education and professional development.

(b) The amounts credited to the fund shall not be subject to further appropriation and any
money remaining in the fund at the end of the fiscal year shall not revert to the general fund. The
amounts credited to the fund may focus on underserved communities, including those school
districts with high concentrations of economically disadvantaged students, and may be expended,
without further appropriation, by the commissioner of education to administer the requirements set
forth in §§ 16-22.3-3 and 16-22.3-4, and further ensuring a diverse teacher workforce, in the subject
matter of social studies, that reflects student demographics to the maximum extent possible.

16-22.3-6. Reporting and assessment.

(a) The commissioner of elementary and secondary education shall submit an annual report
to the governor and the legislature describing the specific rules and regulations issued pursuant to
this chapter and reporting the effectiveness of these rules and regulations, as measured by the
passage of the course or courses pursuant to § 16-22.3-3.

(b) For purposes of statewide accountability, proficiency in civics education means the
development of civics knowledge regarding the history and heritage of the United States,
foundational documents, and the roles and responsibilities of federal, state and local documents, as
well as the development of skills to access, analyze, debate and evaluate media, historical trends,
and public policy issues related to the common good.

16-22.3-7. Severability.

If any provisions of this chapter are declared unconstitutional, or the applicability of any
provisions to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the constitutionality of the remainder of
the chapter and its applicability to other persons and circumstances shall not be affected thereby.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.
This act would require the implementation of the civic literacy act for all students between the eighth grade and twelfth grade, attending public schools, or other schools managed and controlled by the state of Rhode Island, requiring the students to demonstrate proficiency in civics education, commencing with the graduating class of 2025 and all graduating classes thereafter.

This act would take effect upon passage.