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 110
AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL
16-110-1. Legislative findings.

The General Assembly hereby finds and declares that:

(1) Rhode Island holds a unique place in history with the establishment of its Royal Charter on July 8, 1663, that marked the first time that a sovereign leader signed a charter guaranteeing that individuals within a society were free to practice the religion of their choice without any interference from the government.

(2) As Rhode Island became the first American colony to declare its independence from Great Britain on May 4, 1776, it simultaneously was one of the most active slave ports in British North America within the Transatlantic Slave Trade transporting thousands of enslaved Africans to the colony, with the first documented slave ship arriving at Newport in 1696.

(3) The contributions of African Heritage Peoples from across the African Diaspora representing all walks of life and their endeavors to learn and thrive throughout history and make unforgettable marks in our state and nation as artists, scientists, educators, businesspeople, influential thinkers, members of the faith community, athletes, and political and governmental
leaders, reflects the greatness of the state of Rhode Island.

(4) The United States Department of Education says "education is primarily a state and local responsibility in the United States. It is states and communities, as well as public and private organizations of all kinds that establish schools and college and develop curricula."

(5) The state of Rhode Island also has previously demonstrated its concerns and interests regarding raising awareness on the subject of African Heritage and History through the work of the 1696 Historical Commission as established by the general assembly and signed into law on July 1, 2014 and was tasked with developing a comprehensive African Heritage History curriculum for Rhode Island public schools from kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) and said commission led by our secretary of state and comprised of scholars, civic and educational leaders developed and submitted a comprehensive report that included units of instruction and educational resources.

(6) With the unifying call that Black Lives Matter, for racial reconciliation, and for social justice during the summer of 2020, and citizen equity being reflected across the state, nation and world, the establishment of an African Heritage History curriculum in Rhode Island is long overdue. Given the importance of the issue to the political affairs of the United States, as well as the responsibility of the state to educate its citizens, it is a fundamental responsibility of the state of Rhode Island to ensure that the critical subject of African Heritage History is included as part of the curriculum in all public schools. In the words of civil rights leader, Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr., "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of a true education." Doctor King further stated, "History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.

(7) It is the judgment of the Rhode Island general assembly to encourage that every board of education in the state shall include instruction on the subject of African Heritage History studies where in an appropriate place in the curriculum, for all elementary and secondary students.


For the purpose of this chapter, the following words shall have the following meanings:

(1) "African Diaspora" means the term commonly used to describe the mass dispersion of peoples from Africa during the Transatlantic Slave Trades, from the 1500s to the 1800s.

(2) "African Heritage" means any one people with racial, ethnic and cultural ties to the African Diaspora.

(3) "African Heritage People" means the people that can be seen in our many state residents of African, white, bi-racial, Latino, Cape Verdean, Caribbean, and Native backgrounds.

(4) “Transatlantic Slave Trade” means the forced transportation by European slave traders
of various enslaved African people, mainly to the Americas. Current estimates are that about twelve
million (12,000,000) to twelve million eight hundred thousand (12,800,000) Africans were shipped
across the Atlantic over a span of four hundred (400) years.


The state shall adhere to the following procedures:

(1) The department of education shall collect and disseminate to every school district,
private school, mayoral academy and charter school, and make available currently on its website at
https://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/CivicsSocialStudies/ResourcesonAfricanAmerica
History.aspx

(2) The curriculum materials and such other materials as may assist local and regional
school committees, and governing bodies of any private school, mayoral academy or charter school,
in developing instructional programs pursuant to this section materials on African Heritage and
History.

(3) Every school district shall include in its curriculum a unit of instruction on African
Heritage and History utilizing, but not being limited to, the materials collected and disseminated
by the department of education, commencing with the 2022-2023 school year. Nothing herein shall
require school districts to require African Heritage History instruction in every year, but that
African Heritage education and instruction shall be utilized during appropriate times in the
elementary and secondary school curricula, as determined by the local authority. All students
should have received instruction on African Heritage and History materials by the time they have
graduated from high school.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N   A C T
RELATING TO EDUCATION -- AFRICAN HERITAGE HISTORY EDUCATION

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1 This act would require implementation of education courses in African American history in elementary and secondary schools in Rhode Island commencing in the 2022-2023 school year.

2 This act will take effect upon passage.

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