

ASSEMBLY, No. 2902

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED FEBRUARY 20, 2020

Sponsored by:

Assemblyman PARKER SPACE

District 24 (Morris, Sussex and Warren)

Co-Sponsored by:

Assemblyman Wirths

SYNOPSIS

Requires principals and teachers of public schools to conduct oral recitation from Declaration of Independence before opening of school each day in grades 3-12; appropriates \$10,000.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 2/24/2020)

1 **AN ACT** requiring principals and teachers of public schools to
2 conduct an oral recitation from the Declaration of Independence
3 before the opening of each school day for certain pupils,
4 supplementing chapter 36 of Title 18A of the New Jersey
5 Statutes, and making an appropriation.

6
7 **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*
8 *of New Jersey:*

9
10 1. The Legislature finds and declares that:

11 a. In writing the Declaration of Independence, in addition to
12 listing the specific grievances of the American Colonies toward the
13 British King and Parliament, Thomas Jefferson set forth a statement
14 of the fundamental principles of government upon which the new
15 nation was to be founded, and this statement continued to have
16 resonance long after the contents of the remainder of the document
17 were forgotten.

18 b. In his writing, Jefferson was influenced by the ideas of John
19 Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, and of the French
20 philosophes of the Enlightenment such as Rousseau, Montesquieu,
21 and Voltaire, in his dislike of absolute monarchy and in his belief
22 that governments were legitimate only when based on the consent
23 of the governed.

24 c. The Abolitionist movement in the United States prior to the
25 Civil War used Jefferson's words in the Declaration as the basis for
26 arguing for the elimination of slavery; the Republican party of
27 1860, which was dedicated to the antislavery cause, incorporated
28 Jefferson's words into their platform; William Lloyd Garrison, the
29 abolitionist publisher of the *Liberator*, cited Jefferson's words in
30 arguing for the immediate, rather than gradual, elimination of
31 slavery; and Stephen Douglas, in his first debate with Abraham
32 Lincoln, noted that Lincoln, in his campaign for the presidency,
33 "reads from the Declaration of Independence that all men were
34 created equal, and then asks, How can you deprive a Negro of that
35 equality which God and the Declaration of Independence awards to
36 him?"

37 d. In adopting its "Declaration of Sentiments" at the Seneca
38 Falls Convention of 1848, the women's suffrage movement invoked
39 the principles set forth in the Declaration of Independence in
40 arguing for the equality of women, and again in 1910, Senator
41 Robert Owen of Oklahoma, a strong advocate of giving women the
42 right to vote, invoked the Declaration, noting, "The great doctrine
43 of the American Republic that 'all governments derive their just
44 powers from the consent of the governed' justifies the plea of one-
45 half of the people, the women, to exercise the suffrage."

46 e. This great statement of the fundamental principles on which
47 this nation is based has transcended the economic, social, and
48 cultural changes that have occurred in the two centuries that have

1 passed since it was written, and remains as relevant today as it was
2 at the time of the founding of the Republic.

3

4 2. In grades three through 12, principals and teachers in each
5 public elementary and secondary school of each school district in
6 this State shall conduct, before the opening exercises of each school
7 day and immediately following the pledge of allegiance, an oral
8 recitation of the following excerpt from the Declaration of
9 Independence:

10 "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created
11 equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain
12 unalienable rights that among these are life, liberty, and the
13 pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments
14 are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the
15 consent of the governed. . . ."

16

17 3. Every board of education shall establish an age-appropriate
18 curriculum that includes the meaning and importance of this
19 statement in its historical context, including the relationship of its
20 ideas to the American Revolution, the abolition of slavery, the
21 formulation of the American Constitution and its amendments,
22 women's suffrage, the civil rights movement, and other
23 developments in American history.

24

25 4. Every board of education shall determine the appropriate
26 means of implementing this act. This act shall not apply to any
27 pupil who has conscientious scruples against the recitation required
28 by this act or who is the child of an accredited representative of a
29 foreign government to whom the United States government extends
30 diplomatic immunity.

31

32 5. In order to comply with the provisions of Article VIII,
33 Section II, paragraph 5 of the State Constitution, there is
34 appropriated to the Department of Education from the General Fund
35 \$10,000 for the preparation and distribution to each board of
36 education of a notice to the principals and teachers of each public
37 elementary and secondary school of each school district in this State
38 informing them of their obligation under this act and containing the
39 complete text of the Declaration of Independence, with the excerpt
40 for recitation printed in bold typeface. After the initial distribution
41 of the notice, the department shall take the steps necessary to insure
42 that sufficient copies of the notice are available, upon request, to
43 boards of education.

44

45 6. This act shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

This bill requires public elementary and secondary school principals and teachers to conduct, in grades 3 through 12, an oral recitation of the following excerpt from the Declaration of Independence before the beginning of the school day:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. . . .

The bill directs each board of education to establish an age-appropriate curriculum that includes the meaning and importance of this statement in its historical context, including the relationship of its ideas to the American Revolution, the abolition of slavery, the formulation of the American Constitution and its amendments, women's suffrage, the civil rights movement and other developments in American history.

Current law requires the pupils in each school to salute the flag and say the pledge of allegiance on every school day (N.J.S.18A:36-3). In addition, N.J.S.18A:36-13 provides that appropriate patriotic exercises must be held in all public schools on the last school day preceding certain patriotic holidays.

The bill appropriates \$10,000 to the Department of Education for preparation and distribution of a notice to boards of education regarding the requirement, including the complete text of the Declaration of Independence with the excerpt printed in bold typeface. The department is directed to insure that after initial distribution, sufficient copies of the notice are available, upon request, to boards of education.