

CHAPTER 185

AN ACT concerning civics education in public schools and designated as Laura Wooten's Law, amending P.L.1987, c.425, and supplementing chapter 35 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

C.18A:35-40 Findings, declarations relative to civics education in public schools.

1. The Legislature finds and declares that:
 - a. New Jersey law requires school districts to provide a two-year course of United States history in high school, which is supposed to include curriculum on civics, economics, and the history of the State of New Jersey; however, most school districts' curricula focus solely on a chronology of United States history in meeting this statutory requirement;
 - b. New Jersey law also requires school districts to adopt a course of study about New Jersey history, geography, and community civics in an elementary grade; however, there are no social studies requirements for middle school;
 - c. Civic literacy and engagement are essential to maintaining a representative democracy;
 - d. Unlike 40 other states, New Jersey does not require school districts to provide a specific course in civics;
 - e. By age 10, students possess the higher order thinking skills necessary for a rigorous, reflective course in civics;
 - f. Independent studies conclude that well-designed civics education fosters an understanding and appreciation of democracy and the skills needed for participation in a democratic society;
 - g. Requiring students to complete a civics course in middle school will ensure that all New Jersey students have the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills for active citizenship;
 - h. Professional development for teachers is critical to ensure effective classroom instruction; and
 - i. The New Jersey Center for Civic Education at Rutgers, The State University has substantial expertise and 30 years of experience providing professional development, sample curricula, and resources for New Jersey teachers.

2. Section 1 of P.L.1987, c.425 (C.18A:35-2.1) is amended to read as follows:

C.18A:35-2.1 Civics curriculum guidelines.

1. The New Jersey Center for Civic Education at Rutgers, The State University shall prepare curriculum guidelines and provide professional development for high school social studies teachers to help local school boards in fulfilling the requirements of integrating civics, economics, and the history of New Jersey as part of the required United States history course established pursuant to N.J.S.18A:35-1 and N.J.S.18A:35-2.

C.18A:35-41 Provision of course of study in civics.

3. Beginning in the 2022-2023 school year, each board of education shall provide a course of study in civics, which shall be taken by all students in an appropriate middle school grade. The course shall address: the values and principles underlying the American system of constitutional democracy; the function and limitations of government; and the role of a

citizen in a democratic society. The board shall ensure that the course of study includes a minimum of two quarters of instruction, or the equivalent.

C.18A:35-42. Provision of materials, online resources.

4. The New Jersey Center for Civic Education at Rutgers, the State University shall provide a clearinghouse of materials, an online resource center, technical assistance, professional development and any other activities to encourage the integration of civics, economics, and New Jersey history in the teaching of United States history pursuant to N.J.S.18A:35-1 and N.J.S.18A:35-2 and to enhance the middle school civics course of study as required pursuant to section 3 of this act. The Legislature shall annually appropriate such sums as are necessary to effectuate the purposes of this act to the New Jersey Center for Civic Education at Rutgers, the State University.

5. This act shall take effect immediately.

Approved July 23, 2021.