

SENATE COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR
SENATE, Nos. 854 and 237

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
219th LEGISLATURE

ADOPTED FEBRUARY 13, 2020

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SYNOPSIS

“Laura Wooten’s Law”; requires civics instruction in middle school; authorizes New Jersey Center for Civic Education to provide curricula, professional development and technical assistance for middle and high school civics.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

Substitute as adopted by the Senate Education Committee.

(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 05/20/2021)

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

5

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

8

9 1. (New section) The Legislature finds and declares that:

10 a. New Jersey law requires school districts to provide a two-
11 year course of United States history in high school, which is
12 supposed to include curriculum on civics, economics, and the
13 history of the State of New Jersey; however, most school districts’
14 curricula focus solely on a chronology of United States history in
15 meeting this statutory requirement;

16 b. New Jersey law also requires school districts to adopt a
17 course of study about New Jersey history, geography, and
18 community civics in an elementary grade; however, there are no
19 social studies requirements for middle school;

20 c. Civic literacy and engagement are essential to maintaining a
21 representative democracy;

22 d. Unlike 40 other states, New Jersey does not require school
23 districts to provide a specific course in civics;

24 e. By age 10, students possess the higher order thinking skills
25 necessary for a rigorous, reflective course in civics;

26 f. Independent studies conclude that well-designed civics
27 education fosters an understanding and appreciation of democracy
28 and the skills needed for participation in a democratic society;

29 g. Requiring students to complete a civics course in middle
30 school will ensure that all New Jersey students have the opportunity
31 to gain the knowledge and skills for active citizenship;

32 h. Professional development for teachers is critical to ensure
33 effective classroom instruction; and

34 i. The New Jersey Center for Civic Education at Rutgers, The
35 State University has substantial expertise and 30 years of
36 experience providing professional development, sample curricula,
37 and resources for New Jersey teachers.

38

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

41 1. The **【State Department of Education】** New Jersey Center for
42 Civic Education at Rutgers, The State University shall prepare
43 curriculum guidelines **【for the teaching of civics which may be used**
44 **by】** and provide professional development for high school social
45 studies teachers to help local school boards in fulfilling the

EXPLANATION – Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets **【thus】** in the above bill is
not enacted and is intended to be omitted in the law.

Matter underlined thus is new matter.

1 requirements of integrating civics, economics, and the history of
2 New Jersey as part of the required United States history course
3 established pursuant to N.J.S.18A:35-1 and N.J.S.18A:35-2.
4 (cf: P.L.1987, c.425, s.1)

5
6 3. (New section) Beginning in the 2022-2023 school year,
7 each board of education shall provide a course of study in civics,
8 which shall be taken by all students in an appropriate middle school
9 grade. The course shall address: the values and principles
10 underlying the American system of constitutional democracy; the
11 function and limitations of government; and the role of a citizen in a
12 democratic society. The board shall ensure that the course of study
13 includes a minimum of two quarters of instruction, or the
14 equivalent.

15
16 4. (New section) The New Jersey Center for Civic Education
17 at Rutgers, the State University shall provide a clearinghouse of
18 materials, an online resource center, technical assistance,
19 professional development and any other activities to encourage the
20 integration of civics, economics, and New Jersey history in the
21 teaching of United States history pursuant to N.J.S.18A:35-1 and
22 N.J.S.18A:35-2 and to enhance the middle school civics course of
23 study as required pursuant to section 3 of this act. The Legislature
24 shall annually appropriate such sums as are necessary to effectuate
25 the purposes of this act to the New Jersey Center for Civic
26 Education at Rutgers, the State University.

27
28 5. This act shall take effect immediately.