

HB2187



103RD GENERAL ASSEMBLY

State of Illinois

2023 and 2024

HB2187

Introduced 2/7/2023, by Rep. Mary E. Flowers

SYNOPSIS AS INTRODUCED:

105 ILCS 5/27-23.17 new

Amends the School Code. Beginning with the 2023-2024 school year, allows public schools to include in their curriculum, for students in grades 3 through 12, a course in the history and literature of the Old Testament era and a course in the history and literature of the New Testament era. Provides that the purpose of such courses shall be to teach and study the Old and New Testaments and to familiarize students with the contents of the Old and New Testaments, the history recorded by the Old and New Testaments, the literary style and structure of the Old and New Testaments, the customs and cultures of the peoples and societies recorded in the Old and New Testaments, and the influence of the Old and New Testaments upon law, history, government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture. Requires the State Board of Education to adopt a curriculum for each course. Sets forth provisions concerning course requirements, personnel, and monitoring. Effective immediately.

LRB103 00162 RJT 45167 b

A BILL FOR

1 AN ACT concerning education.

2 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,**
3 **represented in the General Assembly:**

4 Section 1. Findings and policy. The General Assembly finds
5 the following:

6 (1) The Bible has been of great influence in the
7 history of the world and of the United States in the arts,
8 music, literature, and laws, on civilization, and as part
9 of the story of man's struggles throughout history.

10 (2) The United States Supreme Court, in *Stone v.*
11 *Graham*, 449 U.S. 39 (1980), noted in its decision that
12 "the Bible may constitutionally be used in an appropriate
13 study of history, civilization, ethics, comparative
14 religion, or the like".

15 (3) In a landmark case of prayer in the public
16 schools, the United States Supreme Court decision of
17 *Abington Township School District v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203
18 (1963), written for the majority by Justice Tom Clark,
19 noted, "Nothing we have said here indicates that such
20 study of the Bible or of religion, when presented
21 objectively as a part of a secular program of education,
22 may not be effected consistently with the First
23 Amendment.".

24 (4) Justice Clark also stated, "In addition, it might

1 well be said that one's education is not complete without
2 a study of comparative religion or the history of religion
3 and its relationship to the advancement of civilization.
4 It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study
5 for its literary and historic qualities.".

6 (5) Public school courses involving the study of the
7 Bible have spread to at least 43 states, and at least 7
8 state legislatures (Oklahoma, Missouri, Arizona,
9 Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, and Texas) have approved laws
10 encouraging some form of Bible study.

11 It is, therefore, the policy of the State of Illinois
12 that, in seeking to provide the best education for this
13 State's students, a course in the Bible for purposes of
14 learning of its influence on the arts, music, civilizations,
15 the Founding Fathers, presidents, ethics, history, and the
16 laws of our federal and State governments would be of good
17 educational benefit to our students.

18 Section 5. The School Code is amended by adding Section
19 27-23.17 as follows:

20 (105 ILCS 5/27-23.17 new)

21 Sec. 27-23.17. Courses in history and literature of the
22 Old and New Testament eras.

23 (a) Beginning with the 2023-2024 school year, public
24 schools may include in their curriculum, for students in

1 grades 3 through 12, a course in the history and literature of
2 the Old Testament era and a course in the history and
3 literature of the New Testament era. The purpose of such
4 courses shall be to teach and study the Old and New Testaments
5 and to familiarize students with the contents of the Old and
6 New Testaments, the history recorded by the Old and New
7 Testaments, the literary style and structure of the Old and
8 New Testaments, the customs and cultures of the peoples and
9 societies recorded in the Old and New Testaments, and the
10 influence of the Old and New Testaments upon law, history,
11 government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values,
12 and culture.

13 (b) No later than May 1, 2023, the State Board of Education
14 shall adopt a curriculum for each course under this Section,
15 including objectives, reading materials, and lesson plans,
16 which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of
17 this subsection (b).

18 The book or collection of books commonly known as the Old
19 Testament shall be the basic text for the course in the history
20 and literature of the Old Testament era, and the book or
21 collection of books commonly known as the New Testament shall
22 be the basic text for the course in the history and literature
23 of the New Testament era. In addition, students may be
24 assigned a range of reading materials for the courses,
25 including selections from secular historical and cultural
26 works and selections from other religious and cultural

1 traditions. The courses shall familiarize students with the
2 customs and cultures of the times and places referred to in the
3 Old and New Testaments. The courses shall familiarize the
4 students with the methods and tools of writing at the times the
5 Old and New Testament books were written, the means by which
6 they were preserved, the languages in which they were written
7 and into which they were translated, and the historical and
8 cultural events that led to the translation of the Old and New
9 Testaments into the English language. School districts may
10 recommend which version of the Old or New Testament is to be
11 used in the course, provided that the teacher of the course
12 must not be required to adopt that recommendation but may use
13 the recommended version or another version. No student may be
14 required to use one version as the sole text of the Old or New
15 Testament. If a student desires to use as the basic text a
16 different version of the Old or New Testament from that chosen
17 by the school district or teacher, the student must be
18 permitted to do so.

19 The courses provided for in this Section shall:

20 (1) be taught in an objective and non-devotional
21 manner with no attempt made to indoctrinate students as to
22 either the truth or falsity of the biblical materials or
23 texts from other religious or cultural traditions;

24 (2) not include the teaching of religious doctrine or
25 sectarian interpretation of the Bible or of texts from
26 other religious or cultural traditions;

1 (3) not disparage or encourage a commitment to a set
2 of religious beliefs; and

3 (4) not disparage or criticize the content within the
4 Old and New Testaments.

5 (c) The provisions of this Code relating to personnel
6 employed by a school district, including, without limitation,
7 licensure requirements, employment, and supervision, shall
8 apply to persons who teach the courses provided for in this
9 Section. In addition, no person may be assigned to teach such
10 courses based in whole or in part on any religious test,
11 profession of faith or lack thereof, prior or present
12 religious affiliation or lack of affiliation, or criteria
13 involving particular beliefs or lack thereof about the Bible.
14 Except as specified in this subsection (c), the qualifications
15 and training of teachers shall be determined by the school
16 board.

17 (d) A school board may make such arrangements for
18 monitoring the content and teaching of the course in the
19 history and literature of the Old Testament era and the course
20 in the history and literature of the New Testament era as it
21 deems appropriate.

22 Section 99. Effective date. This Act takes effect upon
23 becoming law.