

SUBJECT: Revising the public school social studies curriculum

COMMITTEE: Public Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: *After recommitted:*
8 ayes — Dutton, Lozano, Allison, K. Bell, Buckley, Huberty, K. King,
VanDeaver

4 nays — Allen, Bernal, M. González, Talarico

1 absent — Meza

WITNESSES: *April 13 public hearing:*
For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Vanessa Beltran, Girls
Empowerment Network; Alison Fernandez, Spark Change Project;
Micaela Williams, Spark Change Project; Cindi Castilla, Texas Eagle
Forum; and six individuals)

Against — Maggie Stern, Children's Defense Fund-Texas; (*Registered,
but did not testify:* Andrea Chevalier, Association of Texas Professional
Educators; Anthony Gutierrez, Common Cause Texas; Earl Gilbert,
Equality Texas; Chloe Latham Sikes, IDRA (Intercultural Development
Research Association); Susana Carranza, League of Women Voters of
Texas; Dena Donaldson, Texas AFT; Paige Williams, Texas Classroom
Teachers Association; Carrie Griffith, Texas State Teachers Association
(TSTA); Meghan Dougherty)

On — Nyla Pete, Civics4Y'all; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Michael
Baumgartner, Amie Calhoun, and Stella Cunningham, Civics4Y'all; Eric
Marin and Monica Martinez, Texas Education Agency; David Thomason)

DIGEST: CSHB 3979 would add requirements for certain topics to be included in the public school social studies curriculum. The bill would prohibit requirements for teacher training on certain matters related to race and sex. It would prohibit grade or course credit from being awarded for certain student activities.

Social studies curriculum. CSHB 3979 would require the State Board of Education to adopt essential knowledge and skills for the social studies curriculum that developed each student's civic knowledge, including an understanding of:

- the fundamental moral, political, and intellectual foundations of the American experiment in self-government;
- the history, qualities, traditions, and features of civic engagement in the United States;
- the structure, function, and processes of government institutions at the federal, state, and local levels; and
- the founding documents of the nation, including the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, the Federalist Papers, including Essays 10 and 51;
- excerpts from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*;
- the transcript of the first Lincoln-Douglas debate; and
- the writings of the founding fathers of the United States.

A state agency, school district, or charter school could not accept private funding for the purpose of developing a curriculum, purchasing or selecting curriculum materials, or providing teacher training or professional development for specified courses in social studies, history, or government.

Teachers. A teacher of specified social studies, history, and government courses could not be compelled to discuss current events or widely debated and currently controversial issues of public policy or social affairs. A teacher who chose to discuss such topics would have to, to the best of the teacher's ability, strive to explore those topics from diverse and contending perspectives without giving deference to any one perspective.

A teacher, administrator, or other employee of a state agency, school district, or charter school could not be required to engage in training, orientation, or therapy that presented any form of race or sex stereotyping or blame on the basis of race or sex and could not require or make part of

a course the concept that:

- one race or sex was inherently superior to another race or sex;
- an individual by virtue of the individual's race or sex was inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously;
- an individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of the individual's race or sex;
- members of one race or sex cannot and should not attempt to treat others without respect to race or sex;
- an individual's moral character is necessarily determined by the individual's race or sex;
- an individual, by virtue of the individual's race or sex, bore responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex;
- an individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of the individual's race or sex; or
- meritocracy or traits such as a hard work ethic are racist or sexist or were created by members of a particular race to oppress members of another race.

Students. A school district, open-enrollment charter school, or teacher could not require, make part of a course, or award a grade or course credit, including extra credit, for a student's:

- work for, affiliation with, or service learning in association with any organization engaged in lobbying for legislation at the federal, state, or local level, or social or public policy advocacy;
- political activism, lobbying, or efforts to persuade members of the legislative or executive branch at the federal, state, or local level to take specific actions by direct communication; or
- participation in any practicum or similar activity involving social or public policy advocacy.

Effective dates. The bill would apply beginning with the 2021-2022 school year, except the new curriculum requirements would apply beginning with the 2022-2023 school year. The State Board of Education revisions to the essential knowledge and skills required by the bill would have to be done by December 31, 2022.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2021.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 3979 would revise the public school social studies curriculum to ensure that schools teach traditional concepts about the moral, political, and intellectual foundations that make the United States a great country, including the story of how the country has risen to meet those ideals. The bill would focus social studies lessons on the history and traditions of the American experiment in self-government, giving students a strong and balanced foundation to understand history and navigate current events.

By studying the writings of the nation's founding fathers, as well as the Lincoln-Douglas debates over the topic of slavery, students would learn to think critically without being subjected to divisive concepts about race that might be promoted by certain advocacy groups. CSHB 3979 would uphold the Bill of Rights by requiring the teaching of social studies be done in a way that does not discriminate on the basis of race or sex.

While some say the bill would prevent the teaching of times that America failed to live up to its ideals, it would not prohibit teaching about the country's historical failures, such as slavery and Jim Crow laws. The bill would ensure that educators did not push a political ideology or require student involvement with organizations that promote public policy advocacy. Students still could be involved with school organizations, but decisions on their engagement in public policy are best made in the family environment.

**CRITICS
SAY:**

CSHB 3979 would fall short of providing a civics education that prepares students to critically analyze history and current events and to become

informed and engaged citizens. All students deserve an education that balances an appreciation of the nation's ideals with candid reckoning that it has not always lived up to those ideals.

By prohibiting school-wide trainings on issues related to diversity and inclusion, the bill would do little to guarantee a civics education that recognized the complicated history of the United States. Texas should establish a curriculum that prepares students for future self-governance by encouraging them to think about solving problems in their communities and by becoming actively engaged in civic activities.