

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2020 REGULAR SESSION

Committee Substitute

for

House Bill 4780

BY DELEGATES BARTLETT, D. JEFFRIES, FAST, P. MARTIN,
DEAN, C. MARTIN, PORTERFIELD, WAXMAN, FOSTER, BUTLER
AND RODIGHIERO

[Introduced February 10, 2020; Referred to the
Committee on Education.]

1 A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding thereto a new section,
2 designated §18-2-9a, relating to allowing county boards of education to offer students in
3 grade nine or above an elective social studies course on Hebrew Scriptures, Old
4 Testament of the Bible, New Testament of the Bible, or Hebrew Scriptures and New
5 Testament of the Bible; setting forth the purposes of the course; permitting students to use
6 a translation of their choice; requiring county board of education to submit to the West
7 Virginia Department of Education the course standards, including the teacher
8 qualifications and required professional development; and imposing requirements
9 applicable to the course, the county board of education, and the State Board of Education.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 2. STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

§18-2-9a. Elective courses of instruction on the Bible.

1 (a) County boards of education may offer to students in grade nine or above:

2 (1) An elective social studies course on the Hebrew Scriptures, Old Testament of the Bible;

3 (2) An elective social studies course on the New Testament of the Bible; or

4 (3) An elective social studies course on the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament of
5 the Bible.

6 (b) The purpose of a course under this section is to:

7 (1) Teach students knowledge of biblical content, characters, poetry, and narratives that
8 are prerequisites to understanding the development of American society and culture, including
9 literature, art, music, mores, oratory, and public policy; and

10 (2) Familiarize students with, as applicable:

11 (A) The contents of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament;

12 (B) The history of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament;

13 (C) The literary style and structure of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament; and

14 (D) The influence of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament on law, history,
15 government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture.

16 (c) A student may not be required to use a specific translation as the sole text of the
17 Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament and may use as the basic textbook a different translation
18 of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament from that chosen by the county board or school.

19 (d) The county board of education shall submit to the West Virginia Department of
20 Education the course standards for any elective to be offered pursuant to subsection (a), of this
21 section including the teacher qualifications and required professional development.

22 (e) A course offered under this section shall follow applicable law and all federal and state
23 guidelines in maintaining religious neutrality and accommodating the diverse religious views,
24 traditions, and perspectives of students in the school. A course under this section may not
25 endorse, favor, promote, disfavor, or show hostility toward, any particular religion or nonreligious
26 faith or religious perspective. Any county board offering a course under this section, shall not
27 violate any provision of the United States Constitution or federal law, the West Virginia
28 Constitution or any state law, any administrative regulations of the United States Department of
29 Education, or any rule of the state board. The state board shall provide guidance to the county
30 boards on complying with the requirements of this subsection.