

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 2828 Session of
2008

INTRODUCED BY BASTIAN, ROHRER, BAKER, BENNINGHOFF, BOYD, CAUSER,
CLYMER, EVERETT, FLECK, GEORGE, GIBBONS, GRUCELA, HERSHEY,
HESS, KENNEY, KORTZ, McILHATTAN, METCALFE, RAPP, READSHAW,
REICHLEY, ROAE, ROCK, SIPTROTH, SONNEY, STERN, R. STEVENSON,
SWANGER AND GEIST, OCTOBER 15, 2008

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, OCTOBER 15, 2008

AN ACT

1 Amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), entitled "An
2 act relating to the public school system, including certain
3 provisions applicable as well to private and parochial
4 schools; amending, revising, consolidating and changing the
5 laws relating thereto," in terms and courses of study,
6 providing for academic study of the Bible.

7 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
8 hereby enacts as follows:

9 Section 1. The act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known
10 as the Public School Code of 1949, is amended by adding a
11 section to read:

12 Section 1551. Academic Study of Bible.--(a) The General
13 Assembly finds and declares as follows:

14 (1) The Bible has had an unparalleled influence on our
15 literature, art, music, history and culture. As just one
16 example, there are more than one thousand three hundred (1,300)
17 Biblical references in the works of Shakespeare.

18 (2) While it is worthwhile to study the great works of any

religious tradition to provide perspective on their societal influence, knowledge of the Bible as a literary work is critical to a good education. Loss of Bible knowledge is currently harming students' ability to fully comprehend some of the most important contributions to our cultural heritage.

(3) As noted by Justice Clark in the decision of the United States Supreme Court in Abington Township v. Schempp, "It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment."

(4) In order to provide an opportunity to study the Bible in a manner which comports with the guarantees of both the Constitution of Pennsylvania and the Constitution of the United States, it is in the best interests of Pennsylvania's students for the Department of Education to develop standards for an elective course on the Bible for secondary schools.

(b) (1) The Department of Education shall establish standards for a course in Biblical literacy which studies, from a secular perspective, the impact of the Bible on literature, art, music, history and culture. The course shall present information in an objective and non-devotional manner in compliance with the requirements of both the Constitution of Pennsylvania and the Constitution of the United States.

(2) The Department of Education shall make the standards available to each school district in this Commonwealth and shall assist school districts by providing resource information on the academic study of the Bible.

(3) Within fourteen (14) months of the effective date of

1 this section, and annually thereafter, the Secretary of
2 Education shall prepare and submit to the Governor and the
3 General Assembly a report on the status of the academic study of
4 the Bible in this Commonwealth.

5 (c) Each school district may offer, in compliance with the
6 standards established by the Department of Education in
7 subsection (b), a course in the academic study of the Bible as
8 an elective to students in grades eleven and twelve. No student
9 shall be required to take this course.

10 Section 2. This act shall take effect in 60 days.