

By: Representative Currie

To: Education

HOUSE BILL NO. 298

1 AN ACT TO REQUIRE THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO PROMULGATE
 2 RULES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CURRICULUM FOR BIBLICAL STUDIES
 3 TO BE OFFERED AS ELECTIVE COURSES AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL; TO
 4 PRESCRIBE THE CONTENT AND OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSES; TO REQUIRE
 5 THE COURSES TO FOLLOW ALL FEDERAL AND STATE GUIDELINES IN
 6 MAINTAINING RELIGIOUS NEUTRALITY AND ACCOMMODATING THE DIVERSE
 7 RELIGIOUS VIEWS, TRADITIONS AND PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS IN THE
 8 SCHOOL; TO PROHIBIT COURSES FROM ENDORSING, FAVORING, PROMOTING,
 9 DISFAVORING, OR SHOWING HOSTILITY TOWARD ANY PARTICULAR RELIGION
 10 OR NONRELIGIOUS FAITH OR RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE; TO PROVIDE THAT
 11 THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION SHALL NOT VIOLATE ANY PROVISION OF
 12 THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION OR FEDERAL LAW, THE MISSISSIPPI
 13 CONSTITUTION OR ANY STATE LAW IN ITS DEVELOPMENT OF CURRICULUM
 14 CONTENT; TO AMEND SECTION 37-1-3, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO
 15 REQUIRE THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO DEVELOP BIBLE HISTORICAL
 16 AND LITERACY STANDARDS AND OBJECTIVES FOR APPROPRIATE EXISTING
 17 COURSES AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL BEFORE THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR;
 18 TO BRING FORWARD SECTIONS 37-16-17 AND 37-13-3, MISSISSIPPI CODE
 19 OF 1972, FOR THE PURPOSE OF POSSIBLE AMENDMENTS; AND FOR RELATED
 20 PURPOSES.

21 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

22 **SECTION 1.** (1) (a) Pursuant to Section 37-1-3, the State
 23 Board of Education shall promulgate administrative regulations to
 24 establish the courses of study for students at the high school
 25 level. The administrative regulation that sets forth the required
 26 and elective courses for the schools shall include:



27 (i) The history and literature of the Old
28 Testament Era;
29 (ii) The history and literature of the New
30 Testament Era;
31 (iii) The Hebrew Scriptures, Old Testament of the
32 Bible;
33 (iv) The New Testament of the Bible; and
34 (v) The Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament of
35 the Bible.
36 (b) The purpose of a course under this section is to:
37 (i) Teach students knowledge of biblical content,
38 characters, poetry, and narratives that are prerequisites to
39 understanding contemporary society and culture, including
40 literature, art, music, morals, oratory and public policy; and
41 (ii) Familiarize students with, as applicable:
42 1. The contents of the Hebrew Scriptures or
43 New Testament;
44 2. The history of the Hebrew Scriptures or
45 New Testament;
46 3. The literary style and structure of the
47 Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament; and
48 4. The influence of the Hebrew Scriptures or
49 New Testament on law, history, government, literature, art, music,
50 customs, morals, values and culture.



51 (c) A student shall not be required to use a specific
52 translation as the sole text of the Hebrew Scriptures or New
53 Testament, and may use, as the basic textbook, a different
54 translation of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament from that
55 chosen by the school council.

56 (2) The State Department of Education shall include the
57 course standards in the program of studies for Mississippi
58 schools, including the teacher qualifications and required
59 professional development.

60 (3) A course offered under this section shall follow
61 applicable law and all federal and state guidelines in maintaining
62 religious neutrality and accommodating the diverse religious
63 views, traditions, and perspectives of students in the school. A
64 course under this section shall not endorse, favor, promote,
65 disfavor or show hostility toward, any particular religion or
66 nonreligious faith or religious perspective. The State Board of
67 Education, in complying with this section, shall not violate any
68 provision of the United States Constitution or federal law, the
69 Mississippi Constitution or any state law, or any administrative
70 regulations of the United States Department of Education or the
71 State Department of Education.

72 (4) (a) The book or collection of books commonly known as
73 the Old Testament shall be the basic text for the course in the
74 History and Literature of the Old Testament Era, and the book or
75 collection of books commonly known as the New Testament shall be



76 the basic text for the course in the History and Literature of the
77 New Testament Era. Additionally, students may be assigned a range
78 of reading materials for the courses, including selections from
79 secular historical and cultural works and selections from other
80 religious and cultural traditions. The content of standards for
81 the courses shall familiarize students with the customs and
82 cultures of the times and places referred to in the Old and New
83 Testaments. The content and standards for the courses shall also
84 familiarize students with the methods and tools of writing at the
85 times the Old and New Testament books were written, the means by
86 which they were preserved, the languages in which they were
87 written and into which they were translated, and the historical
88 and cultural events which led to the translation of the Old and
89 New Testaments into the English language.

90 (b) The local school board may recommend which version
91 of the Old and New Testament may be used in the course. However,
92 the teacher of the course shall not be required to adopt that
93 recommendation, but may use the recommended version or another
94 version.

95 (c) No student shall be required to use one (1) version
96 as the sole text of the Old or New Testament. If a student does
97 desire to use, as the basic text, a different version of the Old
98 or New Testament from that chosen by the local school board or
99 teacher, he or she shall be permitted to do so.

100 (5) The courses provided in this section shall:



101 (a) Be taught in an objective and nondevotional manner
102 with no attempt made to indoctrinate students as to either the
103 truth or falsity of the biblical material or texts from other
104 religious or cultural traditions;

105 (b) Not include teaching of religious doctrine or
106 sectarian interpretations of the Bible or of texts from other
107 religious or cultural traditions, in violation of Section 37-13-3;
108 and

109 (c) Not disparage or encourage a commitment to a set of
110 religious beliefs.

111 (6) No person employed by a local school district in an
112 instructional capacity shall be assigned to teach a biblical
113 course based in whole or in part on any religious test,
114 profession of faith or lack thereof, prior or present religious
115 affiliation or lack of affiliation, or criteria involving
116 particular beliefs or lack thereof about the Bible.

117 (7) From and after July 1, 2020, for the purpose of Carnegie
118 unit curriculum credits at the high school level, satisfactory
119 completion of any of the courses described in subsection (1) of
120 this section shall be accepted by the State Board of Education for
121 one-half (1/2) unit of elective credit. However, the courses
122 shall be taught in strict compliance with this section.

123 (8) (a) A local school board may make necessary
124 arrangements to monitor the content and teaching of any of the



125 courses described in subsection (1) of this section as it deems
126 appropriate.

127 (b) Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit
128 the authority of a local school board to offer courses regarding
129 the Old Testament or New Testament that are not in compliance with
130 this section. However, no state funds distributed under this
131 chapter shall be expended in connection with any course that does
132 not meet the requirements of this section.

133 (c) Nothing in this section shall be construed to
134 prohibit local school boards from offering elective courses based
135 upon the books of other religions or societies. In determining
136 whether to offer such courses, the local school board may consider
137 various factors, including, but not limited, to student and parent
138 demand for such courses and the impact those books have had upon
139 history and culture.

140 **SECTION 2.** Section 37-1-3, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
141 amended as follows:

142 37-1-3. (1) The State Board of Education shall adopt rules
143 and regulations and set standards and policies for the
144 organization, operation, management, planning, budgeting and
145 programs of the State Department of Education.

146 (a) The board is directed to identify all functions of
147 the department that contribute to or comprise a part of the state
148 system of educational accountability and to establish and maintain
149 within the department the necessary organizational structure,



150 policies and procedures for effectively coordinating such
151 functions. Such policies and procedures shall clearly fix and
152 delineate responsibilities for various aspects of the system and
153 for overall coordination of the total system and its effective
154 management.

155 (b) The board shall establish and maintain a
156 system-wide plan of performance, policy and directions of public
157 education not otherwise provided for.

158 (c) The board shall effectively use the personnel and
159 resources of the department to enhance technical assistance to
160 school districts in instruction and management therein.

161 (d) The board shall establish and maintain a central
162 budget policy.

163 (e) The board shall establish and maintain within the
164 State Department of Education a central management capacity under
165 the direction of the State Superintendent of Public Education.

166 (f) The board, with recommendations from the
167 superintendent, shall design and maintain a five-year plan and
168 program for educational improvement that shall set forth
169 objectives for system performance and development and be the basis
170 for budget requests and legislative initiatives.

171 (2) (a) The State Board of Education shall adopt and
172 maintain a curriculum and a course of study to be used in the
173 public school districts that is designed to prepare the state's
174 children and youth to be productive, informed, creative citizens,



175 workers and leaders, and it shall regulate all matters arising in
176 the practical administration of the school system not otherwise
177 provided for.

178 (b) Before the 1999-2000 school year, the State Board
179 of Education shall develop personal living and finances objectives
180 that focus on money management skills for individuals and families
181 for appropriate, existing courses at the secondary level. The
182 objectives must require the teaching of those skills necessary to
183 handle personal business and finances and must include instruction
184 in the following:

185 (i) Opening a bank account and assessing the
186 quality of a bank's services;

187 (ii) Balancing a checkbook;

188 (iii) Managing debt, including retail and credit
189 card debt;

190 (iv) Completing a loan application;

191 (v) The implications of an inheritance;

192 (vi) The basics of personal insurance policies;

193 (vii) Consumer rights and responsibilities;

194 (viii) Dealing with salesmen and merchants;

195 (ix) Computing state and federal income taxes;

196 (x) Local tax assessments;

197 (xi) Computing interest rates by various
198 mechanisms;

199 (xii) Understanding simple contracts; and



200 (xiii) Contesting an incorrect billing statement.

201 (c) Before the 2020-2021 school year, the State Board
202 of Education shall develop Bible historical and literacy standards
203 and objectives for appropriate, existing courses at the secondary
204 level, separated into three (3) curriculum categories, which must
205 include instruction in the following:

206 (i) Disciplinary literacy, with the following
207 components:

208 1. Analyzing literary aspects of the Bible;

209 2. Determining and analyzing the themes,
210 concepts, figures, places and events depicted in biblical texts;

211 3. Recognizing and analyzing literary forms
212 and genres found in biblical texts; and

213 4. Identifying and analyzing figurative
214 language and literary structures in biblical texts;

215 (ii) Historical thinking, with the following
216 components:

217 1. Analyzing the interplay of economic,
218 political, social, geographical, historical, cultural, linguistic
219 and anthropological impacts on the development of biblical texts;

220 2. Examining biblical texts considering a
221 variety of textural elements;

222 3. Analyzing biblical texts, engaging in the
223 skills of sourcing, close reading, contextualizing and comparing;

224 and



225 4. Comparing and contrasting various Bible
226 versions to analyze the contextual influences of canons,
227 translations and editions; and

228 (iii) Analyzing influences, with the following
229 components:

230 1. Analyzing the relationship between the
231 Bible and society and culture;

232 2. Examining the influence of the Bible on
233 historical, political and social movements and realities;

234 3. Analyzing influences of the Bible on the
235 development of religious and secular identities; and

236 4. Determining the interplay between the
237 Bible and cultural expressions through the examination of a
238 variety of literature, art, language, oratory and music.

239 (3) The State Board of Education shall have authority to
240 expend any available federal funds, or any other funds expressly
241 designated, to pay training, educational expenses, salary
242 incentives and salary supplements to licensed teachers employed in
243 local school districts or schools administered by the State Board
244 of Education. Such incentive payments shall not be considered
245 part of a school district's local supplement as defined in Section
246 37-151-5(o), nor shall the incentives be considered part of the
247 local supplement paid to an individual teacher for the purposes of
248 Section 37-19-7(1). MAEP funds or any other state funds shall not



249 be used to provide such incentives unless specifically authorized
250 by law.

251 (4) The State Board of Education shall through its actions
252 seek to implement the policies set forth in Section 37-1-2.

253 **SECTION 3.** Section 37-16-17, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
254 brought forward as follows:

255 37-16-17. (1) Purpose. (a) The purpose of this section is
256 to create a quality option in Mississippi's high schools for
257 students not wishing to pursue a baccalaureate degree, which shall
258 consist of challenging academic courses and modern
259 career-technical studies. The goal for students pursuing the
260 career track is to graduate from high school with a standard
261 diploma and credit toward a community college certification in a
262 career-technical field. These students also shall be encouraged
263 to take the national assessment in the career-technical field in
264 which they become certified.

265 (b) The State Board of Education shall develop and
266 adopt course and curriculum requirements for career track programs
267 offered by local public school boards in accordance with this
268 section. The Mississippi Community College Board and the State
269 Board of Education jointly shall determine course and curriculum
270 requirements for the career track program.

271 (2) Alternative career track; description; curriculum. (a)
272 A career track shall provide a student with greater technical
273 skill and a strong academic core and shall be offered to each high



274 school student enrolled in a public school district. The career
275 track program shall be linked to postsecondary options and shall
276 prepare students to pursue either a degree or certification from a
277 postsecondary institution, an industry-based training or
278 certification, an apprenticeship, the military, or immediate
279 entrance into a career field. The career track shall be designed
280 primarily for those students who are not college bound and shall
281 provide them with alternatives to entrance into a four-year
282 university or college after high school graduation.

283 (b) Students pursuing a career track shall be afforded
284 the opportunity to dually enroll in a community or technical
285 college or to participate in a business internship or work-study
286 program, when such opportunities are available and appropriate.

287 (c) Each public school district shall offer a career
288 track program approved by the State Board of Education.

289 (d) Students in a career track program shall complete
290 an academic core of courses and a career and technical sequence of
291 courses.

292 (e) The twenty-one (21) course unit requirements for
293 the career track shall consist of the following:

294 (i) At least four (4) English credits, including
295 English I and English II.

296 (ii) At least three (3) mathematics credits,
297 including Algebra I.



298 (iii) At least three (3) science credits,
299 including one (1) unit of biology.

300 (iv) At least three (3) social studies credits,
301 including one (1) unit of U.S. History and one (1) unit of
302 Mississippi Studies/U.S. Government.

303 (v) At least one-half (1/2) credit in health or
304 physical education.

305 (vi) At least four (4) credits in career and
306 technical education courses in the dual enrollment-dual credit
307 programs authorized under Section 37-15-38.

308 (vii) At least one (1) credit in integrated
309 technology with optional end of course testing.

310 (viii) At least two and one-half (2-1/2) credits
311 in additional electives or career and technical education courses
312 required by the local school board, as approved by the State Board
313 of Education. Academic courses within the career track of the
314 standard diploma shall provide the knowledge and skill necessary
315 for proficiency on the state subject area tests.

316 (3) Nothing in this section shall disallow the development
317 of a dual enrollment program with a technical college so long as
318 an individual school district, with approval from the State
319 Department of Education, agrees to implement such a program in
320 connection with a technical college and the agreement is also
321 approved by the proprietary school's commission.



322 (4) The career track program for students not pursuing a
323 Baccalaureate Degree shall not be available to any student
324 entering the Ninth Grade in the 2017-2018 school year or
325 thereafter.

326 **SECTION 4.** Section 37-13-3, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
327 brought forward as follows:

328 37-13-3. No doctrinal, sectarian or denominational teaching
329 shall be permitted in public schools of this state. It shall be
330 the duty of the county superintendents of education and the
331 superintendents of municipal separate school districts to enforce
332 the provisions of this section.

333 **SECTION 5.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
334 and after July 1, 2020.

