

Tiara Auxier proposes the following substitute bill:

Religious Curriculum in Schools

2026 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

Chief Sponsor: Todd Weiler

House Sponsor: Tiara Auxier

LONG TITLE

General Description:

This bill amends education curricula requirements relating to religious liberty.

Highlighted Provisions:

This bill:

- amends curricula requirements to address religious liberty;
- amends requirements for higher education graduates; and
- makes technical and conforming changes.

Money Appropriated in this Bill:

None

Other Special Clauses:

This bill provides a special effective date.

Utah Code Sections Affected:

AMENDS:

53E-4-205.2, as enacted by Laws of Utah 2025, Chapter 142

53G-10-202, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2025, Chapter 380

53G-10-302, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2024, Chapter 452

53H-3-605, as renumbered and amended by Laws of Utah 2025, First Special Session,
Chapter 8

ENACTS:

53E-4-205.3, Utah Code Annotated 1953

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the state of Utah:

Section 1. Section **53E-4-205.2** is amended to read:

53E-4-205.2 . American constitutional government and citizenship course standards.

(1) Beginning in the 2026-2027 school year, except as provided in Subsection (2)(e), and as

- 30 part of the social studies requirement established under Section 53E-4-204, the state
31 board shall require instruction on American constitutional government and citizenship.
- 32 (2) In accordance with Subsections (3) and (4), the state board shall create standards for the
33 course required under Subsection (1) that:
- 34 (a) examine American founding principles, including:
- 35 (i) classical republicanism, natural rights, and colonial religious traditions; and
36 (ii) the text and principles of the Declaration of Independence and relationship to the
37 United States Constitution;
- 38 (b) examine the text of the United States Constitution, including:
- 39 (i) structure, powers, and limits of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches;
40 and
41 (ii) the principles and operation of federalism and the state constitutional tradition;
- 42 (c) examine the development of the United States Constitution through amendments,
43 including:
- 44 (i) the creation and application of the Bill of Rights;
45 (ii) the adoption and enforcement of the Civil War and Reconstruction Amendments;
46 and
47 (iii) the adoption and enforcement of the ~~[other]~~ voting rights amendments; ~~[and]~~
- 48 (d) examine the practice of self-government at the state and local level, including:
- 49 (i) the Utah Constitution and local government, including counties, municipalities,
50 and tribal governments;
51 (ii) state and local elections, including the current candidate nomination and selection
52 processes; and
53 (iii) the responsibilities of citizenship and participation in civil society~~[-]~~ ; and
- 54 (e) beginning no later than the 2027-2028 school year, examine the fundamental role of
55 religion in United States history and the primacy of religious liberty to American
56 constitutional government, including the optional topics described in Section
57 53E-4-205.3.
- 58 (3) The course described in this section shall prioritize a close reading of the following
59 primary source documents:
- 60 (a) the Mayflower Compact;
61 (b) the Declaration of Independence;
62 (c) the Iroquois Constitution;
63 (d) the United States Constitution;

- 64 (e) George Washington's Farewell Address;
 - 65 (f) selected passages from the Federalist and Antifederalist Papers;
 - 66 (g) the Articles of Confederation;
 - 67 (h) speeches of Frederick Douglass;
 - 68 (i) the Lincoln-Douglas Debates;
 - 69 (j) speeches of Abraham Lincoln;
 - 70 (k) the Seneca Falls Declaration;
 - 71 (l) the Letter from Birmingham Jail;
 - 72 (m) the Utah Constitution; and
 - 73 (n) other essential documents from American constitutional history.
- 74 (4) The state board shall, in collaboration with the Civic Thought and Leadership Initiative
 75 within the Center for Constitutional Studies at Utah Valley University, develop
 76 standards that fulfill the requirements of this section.

77 Section 2. Section **53E-4-205.3** is enacted to read:

78 **53E-4-205.3 . Religious liberty instruction -- Optional topics.**

- 79 (1) In accordance with Section 53E-4-205.2, the state board standards for the course on
 80 American constitutional government and citizenship may instruct an educator that the
 81 educator may examine the fundamental role of religion on the following topics:
- 82 (a) foundational documents and speeches in United States history, including the primary
 83 source documents described in Subsection 53E-4-205.2(3);
 - 84 (b) exploration and colonization of the Americas;
 - 85 (c) early settlement of the North American colonies by religious refugees, including
 86 Puritans, Catholics, Quakers, and Jews;
 - 87 (d) education and literacy, including early colleges;
 - 88 (e) concepts of the consent of the governed, including covenantal concepts in the
 89 Mayflower Compact and early New England church and civil government;
 - 90 (f) the American Revolution, including the influence of the First Great Awakening and
 91 of religious sermons and pamphlets on liberty and tyranny;
 - 92 (g) concepts of moral equality and natural rights, including in the Declaration of
 93 Independence and other American declarations of rights;
 - 94 (h) the debates in the Constitutional Convention and state ratifying conventions on the
 95 United States Constitution, especially the First Amendment;
 - 96 (i) the abolition of slavery in the United States;
 - 97 (j) social welfare and reform movements, including:

- 98 (i) the temperance;
 99 (ii) women's suffrage;
 100 (iii) freedmen's aid;
 101 (iv) child labor;
 102 (v) immigrant aid; and
 103 (vi) anti-lynching movements;
 104 (k) United States opposition to totalitarianism, fascism, and communism;
 105 (l) United States reconstruction of former World War II enemies;
 106 (m) the 1950s and 1960s nonviolent Civil Rights Movement; and
 107 (n) religious pluralism in contemporary America.
 108 (2) An LEA shall ensure that the topics enumerated in Subsection (1) are optional.

109 Section 3. Section **53G-10-202** is amended to read:

110 **53G-10-202 . Maintaining constitutional freedom in the public schools.**

- 111 (1) Except as provided in this section and in Section 53G-10-206, any instructional activity,
 112 performance, or display which includes examination of or presentations about religion,
 113 political or religious thought or expression, or the influence thereof on music, art,
 114 literature, law, politics, history, or any other element of the curriculum, including the
 115 comparative study of religions and the fundamental role of religion in the history of the
 116 United States and other countries, which is designed to achieve academic educational
 117 objectives included within the context of a course or activity and conducted in
 118 accordance with applicable rules or policies of the state and LEA governing boards, may
 119 be undertaken in the public schools.
 120 (2) No aspect of cultural heritage, political theory, moral theory, or societal value shall be
 121 included within or excluded from public school curricula for the primary reason that it
 122 affirms, ignores, or denies religious belief, religious doctrine, a religious sect, or the
 123 existence of a spiritual realm or supreme being.
 124 (3) ~~[Public schools-]~~ A public school may not sponsor or deny the practice of prayer or
 125 religious devotionals.
 126 (4) ~~[School officials and employees may not, regardless of a school, LEA, or state board~~
 127 ~~rule or policy,-]~~ Notwithstanding any policy or state board rule, a school official or
 128 employee may not use the official's or employee's position to endorse, promote, or
 129 disparage a particular religious, denominational, sectarian, agnostic, or atheistic belief or
 130 viewpoint.
 131 (5) An LEA shall ensure that:

- 132 (a) a student may express the student's beliefs about religion in homework, artwork, and
 133 other written or oral assignments free from discrimination based on the religious
 134 perspective of the student's submissions;
 135 (b) home and classroom work is:
 136 (i) not penalized or rewarded on the basis of religious perspective; and
 137 (ii) judged by ordinary academic standards of substance, relevance, and other
 138 legitimate pedagogical objectives; and
 139 (c) notification of the constitutional freedoms described in this section is provided to
 140 school officials, employees, and students.

141 Section 4. Section **53G-10-302** is amended to read:

142 **53G-10-302 . Instruction in American history and government -- Study and**
 143 **posting of American heritage documents.**

- 144 (1) As used in this section, "Ten Commandments" means the Decalogue, known as the Ten
 145 Commandments, as recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures in Exodus 20:2-17 and
 146 Deuteronomy 5:6-21.
- 147 (2) The Legislature recognizes that a proper understanding of American history and
 148 government is essential to good citizenship, and that the public schools are the primary
 149 public institutions charged with responsibility for assisting children and youth in gaining
 150 that understanding.
- 151 (3)(a) The state board and local school boards shall periodically review school curricula
 152 and activities to ensure that effective instruction in American history and government
 153 is taking place in the public schools.
- 154 (b) The boards shall solicit public input as part of the review process.
- 155 (c) Instruction in American history and government shall include a study of:
- 156 (i) forms of government, such as a republic, a pure democracy, a monarchy, and an
 157 oligarchy;
- 158 (ii) political philosophies and economic systems, such as socialism, individualism,
 159 and free market capitalism; [~~and~~]
- 160 (iii) the fundamental role of religion in United States history and the primacy of
 161 religious liberty to American constitutional government; and
 162 [~~(iii)~~] (iv) the United States' form of government, a compound constitutional republic.
- 163 (4) School curricula and activities shall include a thorough study of historical documents
 164 and principles such as:
- 165 (a) the Declaration of Independence;

- 166 (b) the United States Constitution;
- 167 (c) the national motto;
- 168 (d) the pledge of allegiance;
- 169 (e) the national anthem;
- 170 (f) the Mayflower Compact;
- 171 (g) the writings, speeches, documents, and proclamations of the Founders and the
- 172 Presidents of the United States;
- 173 (h) organic documents from the pre-Colonial, Colonial, Revolutionary, Federalist, and
- 174 post[-] -Federalist eras;
- 175 (i) United States Supreme Court decisions;
- 176 (j) the Ten Commandments;
- 177 (k) the Magna Carta;
- 178 (l) Acts of the United States Congress, including the published text of the Congressional
- 179 Record; and
- 180 (m) United States treaties.
- 181 (5) To increase student understanding of, and familiarity with, American historical
- 182 documents, public schools may display historically important excerpts from, or copies
- 183 of, those documents in school classrooms and common areas as appropriate.
- 184 (6) There shall be no content-based censorship of American history and heritage documents
- 185 referred to in this section due to their religious or cultural nature.
- 186 (7) Public schools shall display "In God we trust," which is declared in 36 U.S.C. 302 to be
- 187 the national motto of the United States, in one or more prominent places within each
- 188 school building.

189 Section 5. Section **53H-3-605** is amended to read:

190 **53H-3-605 . Granting of degrees, diplomas, or certifications -- Board approval --**

191 **Termination of previous approval.**

- 192 (1)(a) An institution of higher education may not issue a degree, diploma, or certificate
- 193 outside of the institution of higher education's primary role, as described in Section
- 194 53H-3-602, unless the institution of higher education receives approval from the
- 195 board of the adequacy of the study for which the degree, diploma, or certificate is
- 196 offered.
- 197 (b) A student shall demonstrate a reasonable understanding of the [~~history, principles,~~
- 198 ~~form of government, and economic system of the United States]~~ following before
- 199 receiving a bachelor's degree or teaching credential[-] :

200 (i) the history, principles, form of government, and economic system of the United
201 States; and

202 (ii) the fundamental role of religion in United States history and the primacy of
203 religious liberty to American constitutional government.

204 (2) Degrees, diplomas, and certificates issued [~~prior to~~] before the effective date of this
205 section do not require board approval.

206 (3) The board may terminate the granting of previously approved degrees, diplomas, and
207 certificates if the degrees, diplomas, or certificates are inconsistent with the primary role
208 prescribed by the board for the affected institution of higher education.

209 Section 6. **Effective Date.**

210 This bill takes effect on July 4, 2026.