

HB 584 -- MISSOURI CIVICS EDUCATION INITIATIVE

SPONSOR: LaFaver

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Elementary and Secondary Education by a vote of 7 to 5.

This bill repeals the provisions requiring every high school student in any public or private school except private trade schools to satisfactorily pass an examination on the provisions and principles of the United States Constitution and the Missouri Constitution and in American history and American institutions in order to receive a certificate of graduation. The bill establishes the Missouri Civics Education Initiative that requires, beginning January 1, 2016, every high school student attending any public, charter, or private school except private trade schools or a student seeking to complete a general educational development (GED) equivalency to, as a condition of high school graduation or its equivalent, take and receive a passing grade on a basic civics test similar to the United States Citizenship Civics Test, produced by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

The test must use the same 100 questions used by the USCIS and administered to all applicants for United States citizenship. In order to receive a passing score on the test, the student must answer at least 60 of the questions correctly. Any student may take the test as many times as necessary for passage, but must receive a passing score prior to receiving a certificate of high school graduation or a GED equivalency. Every public, charter, or private school except private trade schools and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education must certify a student has taken and received a passing grade on the test in a way it deems adequate to ensure it is in compliance with these requirements.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that Missouri students are suffering from a drastic diminishment of civic knowledge and that knowledge is vital.

Testifying for the bill were Representative LaFaver; Bryan Sanders; Missouri Chamber Of Commerce; Missouri Education Reform Council; Katherine Casas, Children's Education Council of Missouri; Kelly Gillespie, Missouri Biotechnology Association; Glen Klippenster; Sandy Diamond; and Tony Feather.

OPPONENTS: Those opposing the bill are concerned about repealing the requirement for a test on the Missouri Constitution and replacing locally developed tests.

Testifying against the bill were Russel Sackreiter; Missouri

National Education Association; and Missouri State Teachers Association.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill wanted to include language for students with individualized learning programs and home school students.

Testifying for informational purposes was Missouri Association of School Administrators.