

# SENATE, No. 854

## STATE OF NEW JERSEY 219th LEGISLATURE

PRE-FILED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE 2020 SESSION

**Sponsored by:**

**Senator SHIRLEY K. TURNER**

**District 15 (Hunterdon and Mercer)**

**Senator THOMAS H. KEAN, JR.**

**District 21 (Morris, Somerset and Union)**

**Co-Sponsored by:**

**Senator Rice**

**SYNOPSIS**

“Laura Wooten’s Law”; Requires civics instruction in middle school; authorizes New Jersey Center for Civic Education to provide curricula, professional development and technical assistance for middle and high school civics and provides annual center funding.

**CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT**

As introduced.



**(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 2/13/2020)**

1 AN ACT concerning civics education in public schools and  
2 designated as Laura Wooten’s Law, amending P.L.1987, c.425,  
3 and supplementing chapter 35 of Title 18A of the New Jersey  
4 Statutes.

5

6 **BE IT ENACTED** by the Senate and General Assembly of the State  
7 of New Jersey:

8

9 1. (New section) The Legislature finds and declares that:

10 a. New Jersey law requires school districts to provide a two-  
11 year course of United States history in high school, which is  
12 supposed to include curriculum on civics, economics, and the  
13 history of the State of New Jersey; however, most school districts’  
14 curricula focus solely on a chronology of United States history in  
15 meeting this statutory requirement;

16 b. New Jersey law also requires school districts to adopt a  
17 course of study about New Jersey history, geography, and  
18 community civics in an elementary grade; however, there are no  
19 social studies requirements for middle school;

20 c. Civic literacy and engagement are essential to maintaining a  
21 representative democracy;

22 d. Unlike 40 other states, New Jersey does not require school  
23 districts to provide a specific course in civics;

24 e. By age 10, students possess the higher order thinking skills  
25 necessary for a rigorous, reflective course in civics;

26 f. Independent studies conclude that well-designed civics  
27 education fosters an understanding and appreciation of democracy  
28 and the skills needed for participation in a democratic society;

29 g. Requiring students to complete a civics course in middle  
30 school will ensure that all New Jersey students have the opportunity  
31 to gain the knowledge and skills for active citizenship;

32 h. Professional development for teachers is critical to ensure  
33 effective classroom instruction; and

34 i. The New Jersey Center for Civic Education at Rutgers, The  
35 State University has substantial expertise and 30 years of  
36 experience providing professional development, sample curricula,  
37 and resources for New Jersey teachers.

38

39 2. Section 1 of P.L.1987, c.425 (C.18A:35-2.1) is amended to  
40 read as follows:

41 1. The **【State Department of Education】** New Jersey Center for  
42 Civic Education at Rutgers, The State University shall prepare  
43 curriculum guidelines **【for the teaching of civics which may be used**  
44 **by】** and provide professional development for high school social  
45 studies teachers to help local school boards in fulfilling the

**EXPLANATION** – Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets **【thus】** in the above bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted in the law.

Matter underlined thus is new matter.

1 requirements of integrating civics, economics, and the history of  
2 New Jersey as part of the required United States history course  
3 established pursuant to N.J.S.18A:35-1 and N.J.S.18A:35-2.  
4 (cf: P.L.1987, c.425, s.1)  
5

6 3. (New section) Beginning in the 2022-2023 school year,  
7 each board of education shall provide a course of study in civics,  
8 which shall be taken by all students in an appropriate middle school  
9 grade. The course shall address: the values and principles  
10 underlying the American system of constitutional democracy; the  
11 function and limitations of government; and the role of a citizen in a  
12 democratic society. The board shall ensure that the course of study  
13 includes a minimum of two quarters of instruction, or the  
14 equivalent.  
15

16 4. (New section) A minimum of \$300,000 shall annually be  
17 appropriated to the New Jersey Center for Civic Education at  
18 Rutgers, the State University. The purpose of the appropriation  
19 shall be to enable the center to provide a clearinghouse of materials,  
20 an online resource center, technical assistance, professional  
21 development and any other activities to encourage the integration of  
22 civics, economics, and New Jersey history in the teaching of United  
23 States history pursuant to N.J.S.18A:35-1 and N.J.S.18A:35-2 and  
24 to enhance the middle school civics course of study as required  
25 pursuant to section 3 of this act.  
26

27 5. This act shall take effect immediately.  
28  
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30 STATEMENT  
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33 The bill amends current law that requires the State  
34 Department of Education to prepare curriculum guidelines for the  
35 teaching of civics for use by local school boards in implementing  
36 the two-year high school course of study in the history of the United  
37 States required under N.J.S.18A:35-1 and N.J.S.18A:35-2. The bill  
38 now directs the New Jersey Center for Civic Education at Rutgers,  
39 The State University to prepare curriculum guidelines and provide  
40 professional development for high school social studies teachers in  
41 fulfilling the requirement of integrating civics, economics, and the  
42 history of New Jersey into the United States history course.

43 This bill requires the provision of civics instruction to middle  
44 school pupils in public schools. Current law requires a course of  
45 study in civics, geography, and the history of New Jersey to be  
46 provided to public school elementary students, but no similar  
47 requirement exists for middle school pupils. Under this bill,  
48 beginning in the 2022-2023 school year, each board of education is

1 required to provide a course of study about the values and  
2 principles underlying the American system of constitutional  
3 democracy, the function and limitations of government, and the role  
4 of a citizen in a democratic society. The course is to be taken by all  
5 pupils in an appropriate middle school grade. The course of study  
6 must include a minimum of two quarters of instruction, or the  
7 equivalent.

8 The bill also directs that a minimum of \$300,000 be appropriated  
9 annually to the New Jersey Center for Civic Education at Rutgers,  
10 the State University. The purpose of the appropriation will be to  
11 enable the center to provide a clearinghouse of materials, an online  
12 resource center, technical assistance, professional development and  
13 any other activities to encourage the integration of civics,  
14 economics, and New Jersey history in the required high school  
15 course in the history of the United States and to enhance the  
16 teaching of civics in middle school required pursuant to the bill.

17 This bill is named in honor of Mrs. Laura Wooten, a great New  
18 Jerseyan who contributed a lifetime of civic service. Mrs. Wooten  
19 was born on Dec. 19, 1920, in Goldsboro, North Carolina and was  
20 the longest serving poll volunteer in the nation. Mrs. Wooten  
21 graduated from Princeton High School in 1939, was an elder of the  
22 First Baptist Church of Princeton, and joined Princeton University  
23 as a part time staff member after retiring from Princeton Medical  
24 Center at the age of 72. Mrs. Wooten passed away on March 24,  
25 2019 at the age of 98.