

SUBJECT: Replacing the U.S. history end-of-course assessment with a civics test

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 12 ayes — Huberty, Bernal, Allen, Allison, Ashby, K. Bell, M. González, K. King, Meyer, Sanford, Talarico, VanDeaver

0 nays

1 absent — Dutton

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Jane McFarland, League of Women Voters of Texas; Jerod Patterson, Texas Rural Education Association; Mary Castle, Texas Values; Nathan Balasubramanian; Maria Burford; Daphne Hoffacker; Thomas Ratliff)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Angela Smith, Fredericksburg Tea Party; Renee Blackmon, Texas Council for the Social Studies; Dee Carney, Texas School Alliance; Richard Bohnert; Matt Long; Joseph Murphy)

On — Meredith Norris, Generation Citizen; Laura Yeager, Texans Advocating For Meaningful Student Assessment (*Registered, but did not testify:* Kristi Hassett and Theresa Trevino, Texans Advocating For Meaningful Student Assessment; Jamie Crowe and Monica Martinez, Texas Education Agency; Scott Bush, Texas Social Studies Supervisors Association; Arthur Burford; Rhonda McGaughey; Claudia Pannell; Jennifer Rosenboom)

BACKGROUND: Education Code sec. 39.023(c) requires the Texas Education Agency to adopt end-of-course assessments for high school courses in Algebra I, biology, English I, English II, and U.S. history and requires school districts to administer these exams. Sec. 39.025 requires students to perform satisfactorily on end-of-course assessments to receive a high school diploma.

DIGEST: HB 1244 would require high school students to pass a civics test to graduate and would remove the requirement for students to pass an end-of-course assessment in U.S. history.

The civics test would consist of all the questions on the civics test administered by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services as part of the naturalization process. The questions would have to be presented in a multiple-choice format. Students would have to answer at least 70 percent of the questions correctly to pass. School districts would administer the tests when the school counselor or teacher of the U.S. history course in which the student was enrolled determined the student was prepared.

The bill would require the commissioner of education to adopt rules that required:

- the test to be administered electronically in the presence of a teacher, teacher's aide, proctor, or campus testing coordinator and scored by those officials or by the school district; and
- the results of the test to be submitted to the Texas Education Agency by the last instructional day of the school year in which the test was administered.

The rules could not restrict the high school grade level at which the civics test could be taken or limit how many attempts a student could make to pass the test.

The admission, review, and dismissal committee for a student in special education would determine if any allowable modifications to the civics test were necessary and if the student would be required to pass the civics test in order to receive a high school diploma.

Students currently required to pass the U.S. history end-of-course exam would be allowed to satisfy this requirement by passing the civics test instead if they so chose. This provision would expire on September 1, 2027.

The bill would include the civics test in the list of high school end-of-course exams for the purposes of the public school accountability system. The commissioner would be required to determine the level of performance needed on the civics test to indicate college readiness.

This bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2019, and would apply beginning with students entering the ninth grade in the 2020-2021 school year.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 1244 would create productive and civically engaged high school graduates by ensuring they had demonstrated knowledge of the core principles of American civics. By using the civics test required to become a naturalized U.S. citizen, the material for which is already incorporated into state curriculum, the bill would ensure that all Texas high school graduates were equipped with civics knowledge.

The U.S. history end-of-course assessment is not required by federal law and is not an effective assessment of historical knowledge. Teachers still would be required to teach U.S. history and social studies in line with Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills standards.

Allowing students to take the exam when they were deemed prepared for it and as many times as needed to pass would reduce pressure on students by eliminating a stressful, high-stakes exam on a single testing day. It would relieve burdens on U.S. history teachers by allowing them to spend more time teaching core concepts in the history curriculum, rather than teaching to the end-of-course exam, and it would serve as a useful diagnostic tool to take corrective measures with students.

Replacing the U.S. history end-of-course assessment with a civics test could save the state about \$1.2 million in a biennium.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 1244 would not effectively assess civic knowledge among students and could lower the quality of civics education in Texas high schools. While civics education should be a core part of the history curriculum in

Texas high schools, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Naturalization Exam would not be an effective measure of civics knowledge for students. That test is designed to measure a superficial level of civic knowledge rather than engagement with U.S. history and government.

HB 1244 could weaken civics education by encouraging teachers to teach to the proposed civics test. The test's format could prompt students to simply memorize the answers to multiple-choice questions. Allowing students to take a test as many times as necessary to pass would not improve their knowledge of the material. By setting too low a bar for assessing civics knowledge, this bill could undermine the aspect of the curriculum it seeks to strengthen.

If the goal is to incorporate civics education into the state curriculum, the best strategy would be to improve the existing U.S. history end-of-course assessment by adding civics questions.

OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:

HB 1244 would replace one high-stakes assessment with another. Students should not have their high school diplomas tied to passing such assessments.

NOTES:

According to estimates from the Legislative Budget Board, HB 1244 would have a positive impact of \$1.2 million through fiscal 2020-21.