AN ACT

relating to public school elective courses providing academic study
of the Bible.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Subchapter A, Chapter 28, Education Code, is
amended by adding Section 28.011 to read as follows:

Sec. 28.011. ELECTIVE COURSES ON THE BIBLE'S HEBREW
SCRIPTURES (OLD TESTAMENT) AND NEW TESTAMENT AND THEIR IMPACT ON
THE HISTORY AND LITERATURE OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION. (a) A school
district may offer to students in grade nine or above:

(1) an elective course on the Hebrew Scriptures (Old
Testament) and its impact and an elective course on the New
Testament and its impact; or

(2) an elective course that combines the courses
described by Subdivision (1).

(b) The purpose of a course under this section is to:

(1) teach students knowledge of biblical content,
characters, poetry, and narratives that are prerequisites to
understanding contemporary society and culture, including
literature, art, music, mores, oratory, and public policy; and

(2) familiarize students with, as applicable:

(A) the contents of the Hebrew Scriptures or New
Testament;

(B) the history of the Hebrew Scriptures or New
(C) the literary style and structure of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament; and

(D) the influence of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament on law, history, government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture.

(c) A student may not be required to use a specific translation as the sole text of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament and may use as the basic textbook a different translation of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament from that chosen by the board of trustees of the student's school district or the student's teacher.

(d) A course offered under this section shall follow applicable law and all federal and state guidelines in maintaining religious neutrality and accommodating the diverse religious views, traditions, and perspectives of students in their school district. A course under this section shall not endorse, favor, or promote, or disfavor or show hostility toward, any particular religion or nonreligious faith or religious perspective. Nothing in this statute is intended to violate any provision of the United States Constitution or federal law, the Texas Constitution or any state law, or any rules or guidelines provided by the United States Department of Education or the Texas Education Agency.

(e) Before adopting rules identifying the essential knowledge and skills of a course offered under this section, the State Board of Education shall submit the proposed essential knowledge and skills to the attorney general. The attorney general
shall review the proposed essential knowledge and skills to ensure
that the course complies with the First Amendment to the United
States Constitution, and the board may not adopt rules identifying
the essential knowledge and skills of a course offered under this
section without the attorney general's approval under this
subsection.

(f) A teacher of a course offered under this section must
hold a minimum of a High School Composite Certification in language
arts, social studies, or history with, where practical, a minor in
religion or biblical studies. A teacher selected to teach a course
under this section shall successfully complete staff development
training outlined in Section 21.459. A course under this section
may only be taught by a teacher who has successfully completed
training under Section 21.459.

(g) For the purpose of a student earning credit for high
school graduation, a school district shall grant one-half academic
elective credit for satisfactory completion of a course on the
Hebrew Scriptures, one-half academic elective credit for
satisfactory completion of a course on the New Testament, and
one-half academic elective credit for satisfactory completion of a
combined course on both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New
Testament. This subsection applies only to a course that is taught
in strict compliance with this section.

(h) If, for a particular semester, fewer than 15 students at
a school district campus register to enroll in a course required by
this section, the district is not required to offer the course at
that campus for that semester.
This section does not prohibit the board of trustees of a school district from offering an elective course based on the books of a religion other than Christianity. In determining whether to offer such a course, the board may consider various factors, including student and parent demand for such a course and the impact such books have had on history and culture.

This section does not prohibit a school district from offering a course, other than the course authorized by this section, in the academic study of the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, or both for local credit or for state elective credit towards high school graduation.

SECTION 2. Subchapter J, Chapter 21, Education Code, is amended by adding Section 21.459 to read as follows:

Sec. 21.459. BIBLE COURSE TRAINING. (a) The commissioner shall develop and make available training materials and other teacher training resources for a school district to use in assisting teachers of elective Bible courses in developing:

(1) expertise in the appropriate Bible course curriculum;

(2) understanding of applicable supreme court rulings and current constitutional law regarding how Bible courses are to be taught in public schools objectively as a part of a secular program of education;

(3) understanding of how to present the Bible in an objective, academic manner that neither promotes nor disparages religion, nor is taught from a particular sectarian point of view;

(4) proficiency in instructional approaches that
present course material in a manner that respects all faiths and
religious traditions, while favoring none; and

(5) expertise in how to avoid devotional content or
proselytizing in the classroom.

(b) The commissioner shall develop materials and resources
under this section in consultation with appropriate faculty members
at institutions of higher education.

(c) The commissioner shall make the training materials and
other teacher training resources required under Subsection (a)
available to Bible course teachers through access to in-service
training.

(d) The commissioner shall use funds appropriated for the
purpose to administer this section.

SECTION 3. Section 28.002(a), Education Code, is amended to
read as follows:

(a) Each school district that offers kindergarten through
grade 12 shall offer, as a required curriculum:

(1) a foundation curriculum that includes:
   (A) English language arts;
   (B) mathematics;
   (C) science; and
   (D) social studies, consisting of Texas, United
   States, and world history, government, and geography; and

(2) an enrichment curriculum that includes:
   (A) to the extent possible, languages other than
   English;
   (B) health, with emphasis on the importance of
proper nutrition and exercise;

   (C) physical education;

   (D) fine arts;

   (E) economics, with emphasis on the free enterprise system and its benefits;

   (F) career and technology education; [and]

   (G) technology applications; and

   (H) religious literature, including the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and New Testament, and its impact on history and literature.

SECTION 4. The provisions of this Act pertaining to a school district do not take effect until the 2009-2010 school year.

SECTION 5. This Act takes effect immediately if it receives a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this Act takes effect September 1, 2007.
H.B. No. 1287

President of the Senate

I certify that H.B. No. 1287 was passed by the House on May 9, 2007, by the following vote: Yeas 139, Nays 1, 3 present, not voting.

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Chief Clerk of the House

I certify that H.B. No. 1287 was passed by the Senate on May 23, 2007, by the following vote: Yeas 28, Nays 2.

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Secretary of the Senate

APPROVED: ______________________

Date

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Governor