

2021 -- H 5697 AS AMENDED

LC001597

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2021

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- AFRICAN HERITAGE HISTORY EDUCATION

Introduced By: Representatives Williams, Hull, Alzate, Barros, Henries, Biah, Abney,
Morales, Giraldo, and Cassar

Date Introduced: February 24, 2021

Referred To: House Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by
2 adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 110

4 AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY

5 SCHOOL

6 **16-110-1. Legislative findings.**

7 The General Assembly hereby finds and declares that:

8 (1) Rhode Island holds a unique place in history with the establishment of its Royal Charter
9 on July 8, 1663, that marked the first time that a sovereign leader signed a charter guaranteeing that
10 individuals within a society were free to practice the religion of their choice without any
11 interference from the government.

12 (2) As Rhode Island became the first American colony to declare its independence from
13 Great Britain on May 4, 1776, it simultaneously was one of the most active slave ports in British
14 North America within the Transatlantic Slave Trade transporting thousands of enslaved Africans
15 to the colony, with the first documented slave ship arriving at Newport in 1696.

16 (3) The contributions of African Heritage Peoples from across the African Diaspora
17 representing all walks of life and their endeavors to learn and thrive throughout history and make
18 unforgettable marks in our state and nation as artists, scientists, educators, businesspeople,
19 influential thinkers, members of the faith community, athletes, and political and governmental

1 leaders, reflects the greatness of the state of Rhode Island.

2 (4) The United States Department of Education says "education is primarily a state and
3 local responsibility in the United States. It is states and communities, as well as public and private
4 organizations of all kinds that establish schools and college and develop curricula."

5 (5) The state of Rhode Island also has previously demonstrated its concerns and interests
6 regarding raising awareness on the subject of African Heritage and History through the work of the
7 1696 Historical Commission as established by the general assembly and signed into law on July 1,
8 2014 and was tasked with developing a comprehensive African Heritage History curriculum for
9 Rhode Island public schools from kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) and said commission
10 led by our secretary of state and comprised of scholars, civic and educational leaders developed
11 and submitted a comprehensive report that included units of instruction and educational resources.

12 (6) With the unifying call that Black Lives Matter, for racial reconciliation, and for social
13 justice during the summer of 2020, and citizen equity being reflected across the state, nation and
14 world, the establishment of an African Heritage History curriculum in Rhode Island is long
15 overdue. Given the importance of the issue to the political affairs of the United States, as well as
16 the responsibility of the state to educate its citizens, it is a fundamental responsibility of the state
17 of Rhode Island to ensure that the critical subject of African Heritage History is included as part of
18 the curriculum in all public schools. In the words of civil rights leader, Reverend Doctor Martin
19 Luther King, Jr., "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think
20 critically. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of a true education." Doctor King further
21 stated, "History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was
22 not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.

23 (7) It is the judgment of the Rhode Island general assembly to encourage that every board
24 of education in the state shall include instruction on the subject of African Heritage History studies
25 where in an appropriate place in the curriculum, for all elementary and secondary students.

26 **16-110-2. Definitions.**

27 For the purpose of this chapter, the following words shall have the following meanings:

28 (1) "African Diaspora" means the term commonly used to describe the mass dispersion of
29 peoples from Africa during the Transatlantic Slave Trades, from the 1500s to the 1800s.

30 (2) "African Heritage" means any one people with racial, ethnic and cultural ties to the
31 African Diaspora.

32 (3) "African Heritage People" means the people that can be seen in our many state residents
33 of African, white, bi-racial, Latino, Cape Verdean, Caribbean, and Native backgrounds.

34 (4) "Transatlantic Slave Trade" means the forced transportation by European slave traders

1 of various enslaved African people, mainly to the Americas. Current estimates are that about twelve
2 million (12,000,000) to twelve million eight hundred thousand (12,800,000) Africans were shipped
3 across the Atlantic over a span of four hundred (400) years.

4 **16-110-3. Powers and duties.**

5 The state shall adhere to the following procedures:

6 (1) The department of education shall collect and disseminate to every school district,
7 private school, mayoral academy and charter school, and make available currently on its website at
8 [https://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/CivicsSocialStudies/ResourcesOnAfricanAmerica](https://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/CivicsSocialStudies/ResourcesOnAfricanAmericanHistory.aspx)
9 nHistory.aspx

10 (2) The curriculum materials and such other materials as may assist local and regional
11 school committees, and governing bodies of any private school, mayoral academy or charter school,
12 in developing instructional programs pursuant to this section materials on African Heritage and
13 History.

14 (3) Every school district shall include in its curriculum a unit of instruction on African
15 Heritage and History utilizing, but not being limited to, the materials collected and disseminated
16 by the department of education, commencing with the 2022-2023 school year. Nothing herein shall
17 require school districts to require African Heritage History instruction in every year, but that
18 African Heritage education and instruction shall be utilized during appropriate times in the
19 elementary and secondary school curricula, as determined by the local authority. All students
20 should have received instruction on African Heritage and History materials by the time they have
21 graduated from high school.

22 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO EDUCATION -- AFRICAN HERITAGE HISTORY EDUCATION

- 1 This act would require implementation of education courses in African American history
- 2 in elementary and secondary schools in Rhode Island commencing in the 2022-2023 school year.
- 3 This act will take effect upon passage.

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