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Education... the Bridge to the Future

February 26, 2010

To: School Board Members
Fr: Dave Bond, Superintendent
Re: Initiative 1058

Monte Benham approached the School Board at the February 24, 2010 and asked for the School Board to endorse his proposed Initiative 1058.

On its face, Initiative 1058 says that it "would require the teaching of and testing on the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, the Washington State Constitution, and other specified documents, as a prerequisite to graduation from high school." Actually, it requires much more than that.

Initiative 1058 also has a number of very specific requirements, including that students read George Washington's first inaugural address and his farewell address and Abraham Lincoln's first inaugural address and Gettysburg address. It also encourages students to memorize the preamble of the United States Constitution along with the preamble and Article I, Section 1 of the Washington state Constitution. It has other sections where suggested student readings are listed which include "Thomas Jefferson's "Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom" (1786), and James Madison's "Memorial and Remonstrance.""

Initiative 1058 also requires testing – including state standardized testing, on the meanings of the Founders' intent when writing the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, including the Bill of Rights and the Washington State Constitution. "Testing will also include the meanings and intent of the inaugural and farewell addresses given by Washington and the inaugural (sic) and Gettysburg addresses given by Lincoln. Sources for this instruction are to be taken from the Federalist Papers, (and) the founders' letters and speeches when writing these documents or administrating the affairs of government."

I believe that the Kennewick School District already teaches the documents above, including the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the Washington State Constitution and their contents. We use Magruder's American Government as our text for the senior-year required US Government class. Unit 1 deals with the *Foundations of American Government* and has chapters on the "Principles of Government," "Origins of American Government," "The Constitution," and "Federalism."

In Chapter 2 – "Origins of American Government," the Declaration of Independence is explained and quoted from. The entire Declaration of Independence is part of the historical documents section at the end of the book.

Chapter 3 takes up the United States Constitution. It covers the six basic principles of the constitution and how it is amended. The entire United States Constitution is contained in the historical documents section of the textbook.

Units 3-5 each spend considerable time teaching Articles I-III, the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial branches of government with Unit 5 also covering many of the rights contained in the Amendments to the Constitution.

In Washington State History, taught in middle school in the Kennewick School District, students use the text Washington in the Pacific Northwest. Chapter 13 deals with state government. The constitution and duties of each branch of government are discussed.

My concerns about this Initiative are as follows:

- First, it takes away from the local School Board the power to choose the curriculum materials for the students of that district. It is another example of outside influences attempting to dictate to the local school board which specific materials will be used at the exclusion of other materials.
- It requires that we teach specific documents other than the Declaration of Independence and Constitution at the exclusion of other historical documents. For example, it requires that students read "George Washington's first inaugural address and his farewell address and Abraham Lincoln's first inaugural address, and Gettysburg address." School Boards who would prefer that the Magna Carta, Mayflower Compact, or Articles of Confederation be read over those documents in the Initiative would not have that choice.
- It is another unfunded mandate. All these additional materials documents will need to be purchased by local school districts.
- It adds more testing. One of the benefits of the new administration at OSPI is that they have been attempting to reduce the number of days (or parts of days) spent on state testing. This would add time back to testing and take away that time from instruction.
- It adds to the expense of testing. To carry out this initiative, the state will have to create a test, print the test, and ship the test to all districts with seniors. Districts will have to take time out of class to administer the test, and then box it up and ship it back. The state will have to score the test, compile results, and ship those results back to districts. This will create an additional state expense at a time when state resources are limited.
- It seems to imply that passing the test is a graduation requirement. This would create another level of stress related to the timing of the taking of the test and the return of the results. If it is a graduation requirement, the test would have to be taken in time for the results to be returned for graduating seniors. There is no information on whether or not all of the safeguards related to the former WASL test would be in place, including those for Special Education students. It does not specify what options would exist – as they did for the WASL – for students to be able to graduate without taking the test, such as the Collection of Evidence, GPA Comparison, college admission test results, etc. If passing the test is not a graduation requirement, then I doubt that any serious effort will be put toward it by seniors a few weeks or months shy of graduation.

- It prescribes the content of the test. Rather than have content-area curriculum specialists working with teachers to devise an appropriate test over United States Government, it specifies the content of the test. In particular, it states that students will need to know the meaning of words based on the 1828 edition of Webster's Dictionary and that word list will include – among others – the terms “consanguinity, rectitude, endowed, unalienable, created, equal, tranquility, posterity, ordain, blessings, licentiousness and law of nature.”
- It has sections that require teachers to do things that aren't clearly defined or understood. For example, it requires “Illustrating, with teacher instruction, the relationship of the "Pledge of Allegiance to the United States" to the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, including the preamble and the First Amendment, and the Washington state Constitution, including the preamble, and Article I, sections 1 and 11.” How exactly would teachers illustrate that?

Students should know their primary historical documents. That's why the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the Washington State Constitution are taught to our students. Initiative 1058 would not improve that practice. Rather, it would add some very burdensome requirements to schools, which would usurp the local School Board's power. For these reasons, I don't support Initiative 1058.

- (a) Teaching the relationship of the Preamble to the Washington state Constitution to the heritage and meaning of this statement from the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness";
- (b) Teaching how Article I, section 1 and Article II of the state Constitution implement this statement in the Declaration of Independence: "That to secure these rights Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." Students shall be taught the inherent right of the people to elect government officials, and to enact or reject, at the polls, legislation independent of the legislature, and to approve or reject, at the polls, any law passed by the legislature;
- (c) Relating the declaration of rights in the Washington state Constitution to statements made in the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, including the Bill of Rights, and the Northwest Ordinance, which sets the requirements for states to join the union of states;
- (d) Teaching the heritage and meaning of the religious freedom statement of Article I, section 11 of the Washington state Constitution. Suggested student readings include: Thomas Jefferson's "Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom" (1786), and James Madison's "Memorial and Remonstrance." The purpose of this instruction is to illustrate the struggle for obtaining "absolute freedom of conscience in all matters of religious sentiment..." as stated in Article I, section 11 of the Washington state Constitution;
- (e) Encouraging but not requiring students to memorize the preamble of the United States Constitution along with the preamble and Article I, section 1 of the Washington state Constitution;
- (f) Requiring that students read George Washington's first inaugural address and his farewell address and Abraham Lincoln's first inaugural address, and Gettysburg address. The purpose of this study is to identify Washington's and Lincoln's advice in supporting and defending the United States Constitution;
- (g) Illustrating, with teacher instruction, the relationship of the "Pledge of Allegiance to the United States" to the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, including the preamble and the First Amendment, and the Washington state Constitution, including the preamble, and Article I, sections 1 and 11;
- (h) Testing, including state standardized testing, on the meanings of the founders' intent when writing the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, including the Bill of Rights and the Washington state Constitution. Testing will also include the meanings and intent of the inaugural and farewell addresses given by Washington and the inaugural and Gettysburg addresses given by Lincoln. Sources for this instruction are to be taken from the Federalist Papers, the founders' letters, and speeches when writing these documents or administering the affairs of government. This testing will include the meaning of words found in these documents such as: Initiative, referendum, tyrant, despotism, providence, consanguinity, rectitude, endowed, unalienable, created equal, tranquility, posterity, ordain, blessings, licentiousness, and "law of nature" as defined in the 1828 edition of Webster's Dictionary.

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