

LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA  
ONE HUNDRED NINTH LEGISLATURE  
FIRST SESSION

**LEGISLATIVE BILL 550**

Introduced by Lippincott, 34.

Read first time January 22, 2025

Committee: Education

- 1 A BILL FOR AN ACT relating to education; to require school districts to
- 2 adopt a policy that excuses students to attend a released time
- 3 course for religious instruction as prescribed; to authorize a civil
- 4 action for violations; and to declare an emergency.
- 5 Be it enacted by the people of the State of Nebraska,

1           **Section 1.** (1) For purposes of this section:

2           (a) Educational decisionmaker has the same meaning as in section  
3 79-530;

4           (b) Released time course means a course in religious instruction,  
5 taught by a sponsoring entity, during which a student is excused from  
6 public school to attend;

7           (c) School district has the same meaning as in section 79-101;

8           (d) Sponsoring entity means a private entity that offers students an  
9 elective course in religious instruction pursuant to this section; and

10          (e) Secular evaluation criteria includes, but is not limited to:

11          (i) The number of hours of classroom instruction;

12          (ii) A review of the course syllabus that reflects course  
13 requirements and materials used;

14          (iii) The methods of student assessment used in the course; and

15          (iv) The qualifications of the course instructor.

16          (2) On or before July 1, 2025, each school district shall adopt a  
17 policy that excuses any student of such school district to attend a  
18 released time course for at least one class period per week. Such policy  
19 shall require:

20          (a) The parent, guardian, or educational decisionmaker of the  
21 student to provide written consent for the student to attend the released  
22 time course;

23          (b) The sponsoring entity to maintain attendance records and make  
24 such records available to the school district the student attends;

25          (c) The sponsoring entity, parent, guardian, or educational  
26 decisionmaker to provide transportation to and from the place of  
27 instruction;

28          (d) The sponsoring entity to make provision and assume liability for  
29 each student that attends its released time course while under the  
30 control of the sponsoring entity;

31          (e) No school district funds to be expended other than de minimis

1 administrative costs; and

2 (f) A released time course not to be held on school district  
3 property unless permitted under a neutral policy of equal access that  
4 opens school district property for use by community groups.

5 (3) For any period of time a student is excused from a school  
6 district to attend a released time course in accordance with this  
7 section, such student shall be considered as attending the school from  
8 which such student is excused for the purpose of determining school  
9 funding and satisfying attendance requirements.

10 (4) A school district may adopt a policy that awards academic credit  
11 for the completion of a released time course. In determining the amount  
12 of credit to award for completion of such a course, the school district  
13 shall evaluate the course based on purely secular criteria that are  
14 substantially the same criteria used to evaluate similar courses. The  
15 decision to award credit for a released time course shall be neutral to,  
16 and shall not involve any test for, religious content or denominational  
17 affiliation.

18 (5) Nothing in this section shall be interpreted to deny a released  
19 time course or the sponsoring entity equal access to funds, benefits, or  
20 services that the school district may provide or make available to  
21 community groups or other independent entities.

22 (6) Any person or organization aggrieved by a violation of this  
23 section may bring an action against the school district responsible for  
24 the violation and seek appropriate relief. For purposes of this  
25 subsection, appropriate relief includes:

26 (a) Actual damages;

27 (b) Such preliminary and other equitable or declaratory relief as  
28 may be appropriate; and

29 (c) Reasonable attorney's fees and other litigation costs reasonably  
30 incurred.

31 **Sec. 2.** Since an emergency exists, this act takes effect when

1 passed and approved according to law.