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# SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Connie Leyva, Chair

2021 - 2022 Regular

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**Bill No:** SR 55 **Hearing Date:** September 7, 2021  
**Author:** Portantino  
**Version:** August 18, 2021  
**Urgency:** **Fiscal:** No  
**Consultant:** Lynn Lorber

**Subject:** Italian American Heritage Month.

## SUMMARY

This resolution resolves that the Legislature designates the month of October 2021, and every October thereafter, as Italian American Heritage Month, and encourages public schools to highlight and include Italian American achievements and contributions to the culture of California and to take steps to promote the inclusion of Italian American history in elementary and secondary social science textbooks during the revision process for those textbooks.

## BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Provides that the adopted course of study in grades one through 12 for instruction in social sciences shall include the early history of California and a study of the role and contributions of both men and women, Native Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, European Americans, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans, persons with disabilities, and members of other ethnic and cultural groups, to the economic, political, and social development of California and the United States of America, with particular emphasis on portraying the role of these groups in contemporary society. (Education Code § 51204.5)
- 2) Requires the Instructional Quality Commission to recommend curriculum frameworks to the State Board of Education (SBE) and develop criteria for evaluating instructional materials submitted for adoption so that the materials adopted adequately cover the subjects in the indicated grade levels. (EC § 60204)
- 3) Requires governing board, when adopting instructional materials for use in the schools, to include only instructional materials which, in their determination, accurately portray the cultural and racial diversity of our society, including:
  - a) The contributions of both men and women in all types of roles, including professional, vocational, and executive roles.
  - b) The role and contributions of Native Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, European Americans, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans, persons

with disabilities, and members of other ethnic and cultural groups to the total development of California and the United States.

- c) The role and contributions of the entrepreneur and labor in the total development of California and the United States. (EC 60040)
- 3) Resolves that the Legislature designates the month of October 2009 and every October thereafter as Italian American Heritage Month. Resolves that the Legislature encourages public schools to highlight and include Italian American achievements and contributions to the culture of California and to take steps to promote the inclusion of Italian American history in elementary and secondary social science textbooks during the revision process for those textbooks. (Resolution Chapter 113, Statutes of 2009)
- 4) Resolves that the Legislature designates the month of October 2018 as Italian American Heritage Month. Resolves that the Legislature encourages public schools to highlight and include Italian American achievements and contributions to the culture of California and to take steps to promote the inclusion of the role and contributions of Italian Americans to the culture and history of California and the United States in the elementary and secondary school social science textbooks during the revision process for those textbooks. (Res. Ch. 244, Statutes of 2018)

## ANALYSIS

This resolution resolves that the Legislature designates the month of October 2021, and every October thereafter, as Italian American Heritage Month, and encourages public schools to highlight and include Italian American achievements and contributions to the culture of California and to take steps to promote the inclusion of Italian American history in elementary and secondary social science textbooks during the revision process for those textbooks. Specifically, this bill:

- 1) States, among other things, that:
  - a) A study published in December 2004 of social science textbooks used in California schools and universities by Lawrence DiStasi and the Italian American Textbook Committee, titled *The Treatment of Italian Americans in California Textbooks*, found that Italian American contributions were largely absent from elementary, secondary, and postsecondary textbooks used in California.
  - b) Italian Americans are the sixth largest ethnic group in America, numbering roughly 25 million people, with nearly 1.5 million residing in California. For much of the 20th century, Italian Americans were the largest immigrant group in the United States, yet they are not extended proper credit for their role in shaping American culture.
  - c) Italian American contributions to California and United States history can be easily incorporated in the current elementary and secondary curriculum content. Including the vital role of Italian Americans in shaping California into

the state it is today will help pupils truly understand a significant part of our state's unique culture and will help them understand how the interdependence of people of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural differences makes our country truly great.

- d) In 1996, the Legislature established the California Italian-American Task Force. The highest priority of the task force is the inclusion in the public school curriculum of Italian American history, achievements, and contributions.
- 2) Resolves that:
- a) The Legislature designates the month of October 2021, and every October thereafter, as Italian American Heritage Month.
  - b) The Legislature encourages public schools to highlight and include Italian American achievements and contributions to the culture of California and to take steps to promote the inclusion of Italian American history in elementary and secondary social science textbooks during the revision process for those textbooks.

## STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) *Need for the bill.* According to the author, "A study published in December 2004 of social science textbooks used in California schools and universities by Lawrence DiStasi and the Italian American Textbook Committee, titled 'The Treatment of Italian Americans in California Textbooks,' found that Italian American contributions would largely absent from elementary, secondary, and postsecondary textbooks used in California"
- 2) *History-Social Science Standards and Framework.* The History-Social Science Content Standards, adopted in 1998, require inclusion of ethnic groups, including Italians and Italian Americans, in the discussion of historical events throughout all grade levels. For example, the 11th grade standards on the topic of America's participation in World War II state:

"Discuss the constitutional issues and impact of events on the U.S. home front, including the internment of Japanese Americans (e.g., *Fred Korematsu v. United States of America*) and the restrictions on German and Italian resident aliens; the response of the administration to Hitler's atrocities against Jews and other groups; the roles of women in military production; and the roles and growing political demand of African Americans."

The State Board of Education adopted the most recent version of the History-Social Science Framework on July 14, 2016. It will not be revised again until 2024, as the Instructional Quality Commission revises the frameworks on an eight-year cycle. The framework includes references to the content above as well as, "In addition, many persons of Italian and German origin who were in the United States when World War II began were classified as "enemy aliens" under

the Enemy Alien Control Program and had their rights restricted, including thousands who were interned.

The resolution highlights examples of individual Italian American achievements and contributions such as that of Bay Area native Amedeo Pietro “A.P.” Giannini, who established the first branch banking system in the U.S. known as Bank of America; Italian immigrant Marco Fontana, who arrived in the United States in 1859 and started the California Packing Company under the Del Monte label; Domenico Ghirardelli, who settled in San Francisco during the Gold Rush and founded the Ghirardelli Chocolate empire; and of Andrea Sbarboro who is credited as one of the major founders of the California wine industry.

These individuals do not appear to be highlighted in the most recent revision of the framework.

- 3) *Technical amendment.* This resolution resolves the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies to the author, members of the State Board of Education, the Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission, and to school districts for appropriate distribution. However, the Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission is now known as the Instructional Quality Commission. **Staff recommends that the resolution be amended** to reflect that name change.
- 4) *Prior legislation.* SCR 157 (Portantino, Res. Chapter 244) resolves that the Legislature designates the month of October 2018 as Italian American Heritage Month and encourages public schools to highlight and include Italian American achievements and contributions to the culture of California and to take steps to promote the inclusion of Italian American history in elementary and secondary social science textbooks during the revision process for those textbooks.

ACR 68 (Portantino, Res. Ch. 83, Stats. 2011) continues designation and observance of the month of October as Italian American Heritage Month; encourages the Legislature to continue the Italian American Legislator Project and welcome the exhibit “The Italian American Legislator Project of 2011: A Legacy of Service to the California Legislature” to the State Capitol Building in October 2011; and encourages all Californians, through K-12 curriculum and otherwise, to learn about the history, role, and contributions of Italian Americans to the State of California.

ACR 89 (Galgiani, Res. Ch. 113, Stats. 2009), was similar to this resolution and designates October 2009 and each October thereafter as Italian American Heritage Month and also encourages public schools to highlight and include Italian American achievements and contributions to the culture of California and to take steps to promote the inclusion of Italian American history in elementary and secondary social science textbooks during the revision process for those textbooks.

ACR 145 (Portantino, Res. Chapter 125, Stats. 2008) was similar to this resolution and designates the month of October as Italian American Heritage Month and encourages public schools to highlight Italian American achievements

and contributions to the culture of California and to take steps to promote the inclusion of the achievements and contributions of Italian Americans to U.S. and California history in elementary and secondary textbooks during the revision process for those textbooks.

AB 1863 (Portantino, 2008) would have expressed the encouragement of the Legislature for schools to include the role and contribution of Italian Americans to the economic, political, and social development of California and the United States in the instruction of social sciences, and encouraged the State Board of Education (SBE) to include the role and contribution of Italian Americans to the economic, political, and social development of California and the U.S. in the social sciences curriculum frameworks at the next revision of those frameworks. AB 1863 was vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger with the following veto message:

***"While I respect the author's intent to recognize the role of Italian Americans in California and United State history, I have consistently vetoed legislation that has attempted to include specific details or events into areas of instruction. The State Board of Education adopted content standards are developed by a diverse group of experts and are intentionally broad in order to allow coverage of various events, developments, and issues. I continue to believe that the State should establish rigorous academic standards and frameworks, but refrain from being overly prescriptive in specific school curriculum."***

AB 390 (Canciamilla, of 2005) would have required that the SBE, at the next revision of curriculum frameworks in social sciences, to include the role and contribution of Italian Americans to the economic, political, and social development of California and the United States. AB 390 was sent to the Governor's desk in 2006 but was returned to the Assembly prior to action taken by the Governor and was held on the Assembly Floor.

## **SUPPORT**

None received

## **OPPOSITION**

None received

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