



**House  
Legislative  
Analysis  
Section**

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**SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

House Bill 4009 (Substitute H 4)  
Second Analysis (5-18-89)

**RECEIVED**  
JUN 06 1989

Sponsor: Rep. James E. O'Neill, Jr.  
First House Committee: Education  
Second House Committee: Appropriations

***THE APPARENT PROBLEM:***

Many of today's high school graduates reportedly do not know when the Civil War was fought, never read Shakespeare, are ignorant of basic scientific principles, are deficient in understanding geography, and have difficulty with mathematic computations. Cries are echoing across the nation that America has become a land of illiterates: this country, many say, is failing to keep pace with competing nations in the world market. Michigan has had a long tradition of providing quality education to all citizens. However, recent studies on the status of education here and elsewhere indicate that the knowledge and skills students receive in the course of elementary and secondary schooling often are inadequate to meet the demands today's graduates face in the workplace. Some contend that graduating a high school student who is not prepared devalues the meaning of a high school education, provides students with, at best, a false sense of accomplishment, and feeds the perception that high school is little more than a place where students mark time until they can graduate or, worse, drop out prematurely. Many employers, in fact, while inclined to hire the state's high school graduates, cannot be assured that a job applicant who holds a high school diploma will even be able to read, much less able to perform basic skills required for a job. While disparity between the resources available to different school districts within the state is growing, some feel a greater demand exists to prepare students for a changing economic and technological society and that both quality and financing of the state's K-12 schools need to be examined and revitalized.

***THE CONTENT OF THE BILLS:***

The bill would amend the School Code (MCL 380.6 et al.) to allow a local school board to adopt a core curriculum available to all students, and would allow a school board to adopt and implement a three-to-five year school improvement plan and continuing process for each school building. The bill would also require the state board to develop a model core curriculum, and would allow intermediate school districts to provide to school districts, if requested, comprehensive school improvement support services.

Intermediate District School Improvement Support. An intermediate school district, or a consortium of one or more of these, if requested by the board of a constituent district, could provide comprehensive school improvement support services to the district. The services would include the following:

- developing a core curriculum;
- evaluating a core curriculum;
- preparing one or more school improvement plans;
- disseminating information concerning one or more school improvement plans;
- preparing an annual educational report;

- professional development;
- educational research;
- compiling instructional objectives, instructional resources, pupil demographics, and pupil academic achievement;
- assisting in obtaining school accreditation; and
- providing general technical assistance.

School Improvement. The board of each local school district could adopt and implement a three- to five-year school improvement plan and school improvement process for each school within the district, considering criteria established by the state board. The plan would have to include, at a minimum, proposed methods for effective classroom management, methods of improving pupil academic and personal achievement, dropout prevention, parental and community involvement in the school improvement process, staff development, and building-level decision making. Among those that would have to be involved in the planning process are school board members, school building administrators, teachers, students, parents of students at the school, and other school district residents. At the request of a local school board, the state Department of Education would have to assist, and the intermediate district to which the school district was constituent or a consortium of one or more intermediate districts *could* assist, the school district in developing and implementing a plan. A school improvement plan would have to be updated annually, and kept on file with the appropriate intermediate school district. Annually, the state board would have to review a random sampling of school improvement plans and submit a report to the Senate and House committees responsible for education legislation.

Core Curriculum. Local school districts could make available to all pupils a core curriculum. The state board would have to develop a model core curriculum which would define achievement outcomes for pupils and would be based on the state board-approved "Michigan K-12 program standards of quality." A school board would determine, considering the state board's model, the courses that would make up the district's core curriculum and the sequence, by grade cluster, in which those courses would be taught. If a locally-developed core curriculum varied from that developed by the state board, the variance would have to be explained in the core curriculum developed. A subject or course required by a core curriculum would have to be made available to all pupils in a district by the school district, a consortium of school districts, or a consortium of one or more local and intermediate districts.

Nonpublic Schools. The state board would have to offer to all nonpublic schools in the state, for review, the core curriculum developed for public schools to assist the governing bodies of nonpublic schools in developing their own core curricula. Further, the bill would not alter the

obligation of public school districts to offer to resident pupils of nonpublic schools elective courses that had traditionally been offered on a shared-time basis to these pupils (as recognized under Snyder v Charlotte schools of 1984).

### **FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:**

According to the House Fiscal Agency, the school improvement provisions of the bill could be implemented by the Department of Education within existing resources. However, as more and more districts opted to adopt improvement plans — and asked for departmental assistance — additional resources may be required. A cost of \$132,000 is estimated for the department to develop a model core curriculum. (5-15-89)

### **ARGUMENTS:**

#### **For:**

The state's future depends on the development of an educational system that is excellent in quality and effective in outcome. The Michigan School Finance Commission, appointed by the State Board of Education in February 1987 to review school finance and equal educational opportunities, noted in a September 1987 report that schools, if provided appropriate guidance and resources, would be able and willing to improve the quality of educational opportunity and results. To accomplish this, however, schools need assistance, resources, and educational standards. The bill would establish standards for schools to follow in order to improve themselves and would ensure that assistance was provided from an array of different sources at the state and local level. For schools to improve, reforms should happen according to a process of change which arises from self-determined action taken at the local level. The process suggested in the bill — providing a core curriculum, establishing mid- to long-term goals for schools and their students, etc. — would provide schools with a well-planned path to follow in their task of assuring a quality education for every public school student in the state.

**Response:** On the contrary, although the concept behind the bill is good, it lacks a key ingredient in the process to implement school improvement: money. Many of the state's 560-plus public school districts, even if they wished to, do not have the funds needed to implement change. In fact, many districts currently are working toward school improvement in the ways suggested in the bill. For the state to hold out ideals for public schools without providing the financial means to accomplish these, as the bill would do, only discourages those groups of parents, teachers, administrators, and other interested parties who've already met to plan ways to improve schools. Proposals to improve quality in the state's public schools, simply stated, cannot work without a corresponding state commitment to finance them. If schools are to improve, the bill should ensure that all schools not only offered such things as generally-uniform core curricula, but also that there were enough quality teachers or textbooks, for example, to meet the demands established by minimum core requirements. (At least Senate-passed versions of this bill would mandate the proposals, and thereby would imply the state would be involved in improvement from a fiscal standpoint.) The bill should either be tied to a specific appropriation or to a school finance proposal that would increase the amount that schools could spend on quality.

#### **For:**

The bill would allow school boards the *option* to implement a process of school improvement, rather than mandating change as would be required under Senate-passed versions. School boards could make available to students a core curriculum that was developed by various interested parties at the local level, rather than having to adopt a state board-approved core curriculum. In fact, many districts would probably be more than willing to adopt the state board's model for its core requirements, depending on their fiscal ability to meet the state board's model. (Even if a district's curriculum did not conform to the state board model, its variance would have to be explained.) A "top-down" mandate fails to recognize the fact that the best reforms begin at the grassroots level and work their way upward: people involved at the local level must want to improve schools for a change to occur. A mandate also could incur state liability to reimburse districts that implemented the provisions, as specified under Article IX, Section 29 of the State Constitution — the Headlee Amendment. (The constitutional language states:

"A new activity or service beyond that required by existing law shall not be required by the legislature . . . , unless a state appropriation is made and disbursed to pay the unit of local government for any necessary increased costs.")

#### **Against:**

Without a mandate, the bill would have very little positive impact on improving the quality of the state's public schools. While most schools do want to improve, and are working to find ways to improve, there exist a number of school districts which operate without regularly and effectively implementing school improvement as suggested in the bill. It should be reasonable for the state to establish standards for schools to meet, and then be given time to see whether local districts truly desire to improve their schools with available resources.

#### **For:**

The bill includes intermediate school districts within the school improvement process, and thereby recognize the important role they could play in improving school districts. Intermediate districts could combine their available resources with school districts and with other intermediate districts to develop a more organized way of recording and storing information pertinent to the present condition of constituent school districts.

#### **For:**

The bill would require the state board to make available its model core curriculum for consideration by nonpublic school administrative bodies. Thus, nonpublic schools could pattern their core curricula after that specified in the state board model. Under the School Code's compulsory school attendance provisions, children can choose to regularly attend a nonpublic school as long as the school is state-approved and teaches "subjects comparable to those taught in public schools," at the appropriate age and grade levels. Further, the bill recognizes a public school's obligation to teach elective courses to nonpublic school students on a shared-time basis, as specified under the Snyder v Charlotte state supreme court decision of 1984.

### **POSITIONS:**

The Michigan Education Association supported the Senate-passed versions of the school improvement bills (Senate Bills 39, 40, and 43) which call for a mandate for

this and other school improvement proposals, and would like them tie-barred to school finance reform. (3-15-89)

The following groups support the concept of school improvement, but would like the bill either to include a funding mechanism for implementation, or would like the school improvement package tie-barred to a school finance proposal that would raise additional funds for public schools:

Michigan Association of School Boards (3-17-89)

Michigan Association of School Administrators (3-17-89)