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BILL ANALYSIS

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Senate Bill 65 (Substitute S-1 as reported)  
Sponsor: Senator Jackie Vaughn III  
Committee: Education and Mental Health

Date Completed: 2-29-90

**RATIONALE**

Much attention has been focused on efforts to improve the quality of education in this State. No matter what approach is taken to improve the educational system, some people contend, effective education cannot take place in a disruptive school atmosphere where students are fighting with each other and school personnel are being assaulted by students. Some people believe that students and school staff need to learn how to manage and resolve disputes in a peaceful manner in an effort to develop an environment in schools that is conducive to learning.

**CONTENT**

The bill would amend the School Code to require the State Board of Education to develop for school districts guidelines for the teaching of "dispute management and resolution" as separate course or as part of other courses.

The guidelines would have to structure an outline or part of an outline for one or more courses or part of a course that would do all of the following:

- Develop an awareness and concern for the rights and well-being of others.
- Provide insight into how attitudes are formed and decisions are made.
- Provide an understanding of other cultures and the origins and nature of conflict between cultures.
- Develop skills and attitudes for effective

communication and cooperation with people from other cultures different from the student's own, both in this country and in other countries.

- Improve dispute management and resolution skills.
- Encourage creative problem-solving through peaceful means, including, but not limited to, mediation and arbitration.

In implementing the bill, the State Board would be required to seek advice from representatives of the following: school boards, school administrators, school counselors, elementary and secondary classroom teachers, curriculum development organizations, parents, and students.

Not later than August 1, 1991, the State Board would have to make available to school districts the guidelines and would have to encourage their implementation in public school classrooms.

Proposed MCL 380.1167

**FISCAL IMPACT**

There would be minimal costs to the State in developing guidelines. There would be no costs to local units of government.

**ARGUMENTS****Supporting Argument**

Too often people resort to violence as a means

of resolving a dispute. Students of all ages need to learn that there are alternatives to violence--such as creative problem-solving and critical thinking skills--for reconciling conflicts. A number of school districts around the State, working with Wayne State University's Center for Peace and Conflict Studies, have instituted conflict resolution programs that are similar to what is proposed in the bill. Where dispute management is being used in schools around the country, school officials report decreases in violent incidents occurring at their schools. For example, in 16 New York City high schools where dispute management has been taught, the number reportedly of suspensions for fighting dropped by 45%-70% after the first year of the program. In addition, Ohio, New York, Oregon, Iowa, and California have enacted legislation similar to Senate Bill 65 (S-1) that encourages the inclusion of conflict resolution in school curricula.

**Response:** Under the bill, the State Board of Education would have to develop guidelines for the teaching of conflict resolution. The bill outlines a number of issues that would have to be covered in the guidelines, such as providing an understanding of other cultures and the origins and nature of conflict between cultures as well as developing skills and attitudes for effective communication and cooperation with people from cultures different from a student's culture. While the teaching of conflict resolution is to be supported, schools already may be providing some of this information through other courses, such as social science, that are part of schools' current curricula.

### **Supporting Argument**

The bill would result in schools placing a greater emphasis on the need for improving students' communication and problem-solving skills. If dispute management and resolution skills were taught to Michigan students, the atmosphere in schools could be less disruptive and more conducive to learning. Furthermore, the teaching of conflict resolution would equip students with skills that they could use throughout their lives.

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