



Olds Plaza Building, 10th Floor
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: 517/373-6466

BRaille PROFICIENCY

House Bill 4497

Sponsor: Rep. Joseph Young, Sr.

Committee: Education

Complete to 7-12-93

A SUMMARY OF HOUSE BILL 4497 AS INTRODUCED 3-16-93

The bill would amend the School Code to require the following.

-- The evaluation of each blind pupil by an individualized educational planning committee would have to include an assessment of the appropriateness of instruction in braille, to be conducted under the presumption that proficiency in braille is essential for satisfactory educational progress.

-- Unless an exemption was granted by the planning committee, a blind pupil's individualized education program would have to include instruction in braille reading and writing sufficient to enable the pupil to communicate at the same level of proficiency expected of his or sighted peers of comparable ability in the same grade level.

-- The blind pupil's program would not have to include such instruction if the planning committee unanimously determined after the required assessment, and using a standard evaluation guideline developed by the state board, that the visual impairment did not affect the student's reading and writing performance commensurate with his or her ability.

-- The qualifications and requirements established (by rules of the state board of education) for special education teachers who teach students who are blind or visually impaired would have to include at least a requirement that the teacher demonstrate competence in reading and writing braille. The state board would have to establish procedures and standards to assess competency consistent with those adopted by the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped of the Library of Congress.

Planning Committee Assessment. The assessment of a blind pupil by a individualized educational planning committee would have to include at least: a braille skills inventory with a statement of strengths and deficiencies; a low vision assessment and evaluation provided through the Michigan Commission for the Blind; and a print skills inventory with a statement of strengths and deficiencies. If the committee determined that a pupil's educational program did not need to include braille, the committee would have to specify in writing the evidence used to determine that the pupil's ability to read and write effectively without braille instruction was not impaired. The state board of education would have to develop a standard evaluation guideline for committees to use and would have to include a requirement that a planning committee must review pertinent literature describing the educational benefits of braille instruction and use.

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Individualized Education Program. A program would have to specify in writing: the results of the committee assessment; how braille would be implemented as the primary mode for learning and integrated with other classroom activities; the date on which braille instruction will begin for the pupil; the length of the period of braille instruction and frequency and length of each braille instructional session; the level of competency in braille reading and writing to be achieved by the end of the braille instruction and the assessment measures to be used to objectively assess competency.

The bill specifies that it would not require the exclusive use of braille if other special education methods were appropriate to a pupil's educational needs, as determined by the planning committee. A determination to provide other appropriate methods would not preclude braille use or instruction.

The term "blind pupil" in the bill would refer to "a handicapped person who has a visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with corrective lenses or has a limited field of vision such that the widest diameter subtends an angular distance of 20 degrees or less, or who has a medically indicated expectation of visual deterioration to one or both of those conditions."

MCL 380.1703