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CREATE SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION ACT

House Bill 4196 (Substitute H-3)
First Analysis (5-23-95)

Sponsor: Rep. Glenn Oxender
First Committee: Education
Second Committee: Appropriations

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

There has been an increasing focus in recent years on the need for our educational system to prepare people for today's world of work and for the workplace of the future. In 1990, the Michigan State Board of Education developed a Strategic Plan for Vocational-Technical Education aimed at creating a new system whose intent would be "to develop a seamless transition from education to work that is continually accountable to the external forces that shape the employment picture of Michigan." Under this career and technical education system, according to an executive summary of the board plan, "the old distinctions between secondary and post-secondary, between technical and vocational skills and other distinctions that presently serve as barriers [would be] transcended to create a life-long learning system." The system would integrate academic skills with technical skills and do away with the "artificial wall between academics and 'vocational' courses." The plan notes that the creation of such a system requires a partnership of business, industry, labor, and education, and requires flexibility in the kinds of programs and activities undertaken to respond to the changing needs of the employee sector. Those needs should be used to help to determine the standards and outcomes that guide the system.

A similar system was urged by a 1992 report by a House of Representatives Blue Ribbon Commission on Career/Technical Education, which had been formed by the speaker of the House to address what was perceived as the growing gap "between what our children need to know to become employed and what they are learning in our schools." The report, which also employed the "seamless transition" phrase, urged that our educational system "identify the jobs that will be available in the future and the education, skill level and training that will be necessary to obtain those jobs." The emphasis, the report said, should on

'competencies' and 'mastery of skills.' It too recommended investing in the current work force to provide it with the skills in demand in the labor market and creating partnerships between business and education. Legislation has been crafted that would assist in the development and implementation of a new system of career and technical education.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would add a new part to the School Code, creating a new act within the code titled the "School to Work Transition Act." The act would establish a statewide Cabinet for Professional and Technical Standards in the Department of Michigan Jobs Commission to do the following:

- (1) Develop, implement, and oversee a statewide information system (which would include establishing a statewide labor market information exchange network, and establishing and coordinating a number of work training programs) on employment and workplace skill-level needs;
- (2) "Engage in related activities in collaboration with the state board [of education], and
- (3) Identify and establish skill standards for (and, if necessary, create) "occupational clusters."

Cabinet members. The statewide Cabinet for Professional and Technical Standards would have 19 members: 4 state officials and 15 members appointed by the governor and legislative leadership. Appointments would be made within 90 days of the bill's effective date.

The state officials would be: the superintendent of public instruction or a designee; the director of the Department of Labor or a designee; the director of the Department of Commerce or a designee; and

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the director of the Department of Social Services or a designee. The governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Senate Majority Leader would each appoint four members, one each representing business, education, organized labor, and parents. (Organizations representing business, education, and organized labor would nominate candidates. Of the education members one each would have to represent local public education, postsecondary institutions, and vocational education.) Two additional representatives of business and industry also would be appointed, one by the Speaker and one by the Majority Leader, from nominations submitted by organizations representing business and industry. Finally, the governor would appoint a representative of community-based organizations, based on nominations submitted by community-based organizations.

The appointed members would serve three-year terms (although the initial terms would vary). The governor, Speaker of the House, and Senate Majority Leader would jointly appoint the first cabinet chair; thereafter, the cabinet would select its own chair. Staffing would be provided by the Department of Michigan Jobs Commission, in collaboration with the state board of education.

Statewide information system and other cabinet duties. Within nine months (270 days) after the bill took effect, the cabinet would have to develop and implement a statewide system for gathering and disseminating accurate information on current and anticipated employment needs and for determining the type and level of skills and education required for employment. To the extent possible, the system would incorporate existing resources of and information already gathered by existing agencies, organizations, councils, and committees established by law and having a primary function directly related to education, employment, or job training.

The system would have to include (a) the establishment of a new statewide labor market information exchange system and (b) the establishment and coordination of "school to apprenticeship" programs, internship programs, and cooperative educational programs in the private sector work setting (see below). In addition, the cabinet would also be required to do the following:

(a) Identify ways in which existing revenue was being used to train and educate individuals for the

workplace, including state, federal, and private resources, and make recommendations to the governor and legislature on a more efficient and effective use of those funds, on whether additional funding was needed, and the purpose of additional funding;

(b) Identify ways in which business could invest in the educational system by assisting in teacher training, providing equipment, and furnishing information on workplace changes;

(c) Identify the educational expectations of community colleges and other institutions of higher education and make recommendations to the governor, legislature, and state board of education about their role in helping provide students with a seamless transition from high school to college or work;

(d) Provide oversight over the labor market information exchange system and the state and local occupational councils;

(e) Based on information from the state occupational councils, identify the competencies, skills, skill levels, and knowledge, including employability and problem solving skills, needed in the workplace and provide the information to the governor, legislature, and state board of education; and

(f) Make recommendations to the governor and legislature on ways in which the state could assist employers in providing workplace-based training for existing employees, including guidelines and criteria that should be used in evaluating such programs and the mechanisms that could be used to provide financial and other incentives to employers.

Labor market information exchange network. The cabinet would have to establish a statewide labor market information exchange network, which would be made up of "state occupational councils" and local "education for employment councils."

There would be a state occupational council for each major occupational area in the state. The cabinet would determine the major occupational areas; ensure that there were enough state occupational councils to represent each major occupational area or cluster of occupational areas; and determine the councils' responsibilities, as well as the procedures and timelines under which they

operated. Each state occupational council would be composed of individuals representative of the council's major occupational area, with the cabinet setting the number, method for selection, and length of term of the council members. Each council would be responsible (a) for providing information on current and anticipated employment needs throughout the state in that occupational area, including the education and skills that would be required, and (b) for developing a uniform standard of competency for that occupational area.

The cabinet also would decide the number of local "education for employment" councils needed across the state and how they should be configured. Each local council would have to include representatives from local school districts, intermediate school districts, and, where applicable, local community colleges, though the cabinet would make recommendations on other categories of individuals to serve on local councils (the bill mentions representatives from business and industry, labor, school districts, intermediate school districts, community colleges, the private industry council, and parents). The cabinet also would determine the number, method for selection or appointment, and length of term of local council members. Local councils would be responsible for assessing local and regional employment needs and make that information available to agencies delivering services; for planning and coordinating technical preparation programs; for allocating resources to those programs; and for helping local and intermediate school districts and community colleges to implement needed changes. If possible, an existing entity created by law whose primary function directly related to education, employment, or job training would have to be used in structuring the local council.

Training programs. The statewide information system established by the cabinet also would have to include the establishment and coordination of "school to apprenticeship" programs, internship programs, and cooperative educational programs in the private sector work setting. ("School to apprenticeship" would mean a high school pupil's work-based learning under a plan designed in cooperation with business, education, and labor to lead to formal statewide recognition of the pupil's mastery of skills and knowledge in a specific work-related field.) The establishment and coordination of these programs would draw on the experience

and results of pilot "school to apprenticeship" programs, and would be subject to the following conditions:

(1) Each program would be required to include mechanisms for business to work cooperatively with schools and other educational institutions to develop school-to-apprenticeship strategies, including on-the-job training and employment orientation for students wishing to pursue areas of study related to particular employment;

(2) The programs also would have to include mechanisms for business and higher education to help in efforts to provide work-based education by developing models for these programs and the appropriate curricula to complement this learning.

(3) The models for internship programs and cooperative educational programs would have to emphasize career areas rather than specific jobs, and the focus would be on providing students with broad and widely applicable knowledge and job skills. All of the models would have to include structured on-the-job training combined with classroom instruction; the transfer of skills on the job through a mentor or skilled supervisor; the opportunity to acquire skills while earning a wage; a contract or agreement between the training sponsor and trainee on the process and outcomes of training; and formal recognition, such as accreditation, afforded programs, and the awarding of worker credentials upon completion of the program.

Pilot "school to apprenticeship" programs. Within 180 days after the bill took effect, the cabinet would have to establish guidelines for pilot "school to apprenticeship" programs in order to establish four to six such pilot programs within one year. In establishing the guidelines, the cabinet initially could use the Wisconsin Youth Apprenticeship Program described in Wisconsin law, or any other "school to apprenticeship" program that the cabinet determined was appropriate. The cabinet would be required to provide each school district (and each intermediate school district) with written notice of these guidelines. The guidelines would have to include at least the following:

(a) General criteria for curriculum content, and assurance that the program met all of the bill's requirements for models for such programs;

(b) Performance-based evaluation methods by which to measure both the performance of each pupil in the program and the success of the program itself;

(c) Provisions requiring the program to work both with industry and with the federal Bureau of Apprenticeship Training to ensure that the pupils in the program were acquiring the necessary skills to enable the pupil to meet the current industry standard skill level for the particular occupational area; and

(d) A way of formally recognizing that a pupil who successfully completed the program had these necessary skills.

After the guidelines were established, a local "education for employment" council would be able to apply to the cabinet to have a program operated by a school district (or intermediate school district) be designated as a pilot "school to apprenticeship" program. After the cabinet designated a school district (or intermediate school district) to operate a pilot program, the school board (or intermediate school board) could enter into one or more agreements -- subject to the cabinet's review and approval -- with employers within the district to establish such a program.

Duties of the state board of education. The board of education, using information provided by the statewide cabinet, would be required to:

- * Based on model core curriculum requirements, evaluate whether existing curricula and programs reflected needed competencies, skill levels, and knowledge, including employability and problem solving skills;

- * Evaluate whether existing assessment mechanisms used in the educational system -- including, but not limited to, the statewide proficiency test and the Michigan educational assessment program -- reflected the basic competencies, skills, skill levels, and knowledge that will be needed in the workplace;

- * Develop mechanisms that could be used in assessing whether students had attained the expected competencies, skills, and skill levels, including employability and problem solving skills;

- * Help local and intermediate school boards to alter, expand, and improve existing educational programs to meet future employment needs;

- * Establish ways for community colleges, proprietary schools, and colleges and universities to provide advance placement for students successfully completing an applied academic area of study, by taking into account the credits earned and skills mastered from that study;

- * Establish ways for community colleges, colleges, and universities to collaborate with local and intermediate school districts to make equipment, laboratories, and supplies available to the districts if it was more cost effective than acquisition by the districts; and

- * Make recommendations on the best ways to ensure that ongoing comprehensive and accurate information and counseling about employment opportunities was available to all students.

Repealer. The bill would repeal Public Act 97 of 1974, the Career Education Act.

MCL 380.1651 et al.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the House Fiscal Agency, the bill could cost up to \$120,000 annually for travel expenses for the members of the proposed 19-member Cabinet for Professional and Technical Standards. (5-23-95)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Generally, the bill proposes to strengthen the link between school and the world of work and ensure that the educational system provides children and adults with the competencies and skills they need to participate successfully in the state's ever-changing economy. That, in turn, would make the state's businesses better able to compete in the global economy. Towards this end, the bill sets up a system that will continually identify the skills and knowledge required in the workplace and help schools at all levels put in place the kinds of programs and activities that will produce the required outcomes. This involves evaluating

curriculums to see that the proper kind of opportunities for learning are available and evaluating students to see if the anticipated learning is happening. There would be additional emphasis on apprenticeships, internships, and cooperative education programs, and a greater integration of academic and vocational learning. Under the bill, representatives of business, industry, labor, education, state government, and other sectors of society would work together on a special cabinet. The state board of education would have a key role as well in evaluating existing curriculums and methods of testing students, in providing leadership to local and intermediate school districts, and in promoting cooperation between the public schools and higher education. The hope is that the structures and process put in place by this bill will bring far-reaching change to the state's educational system in order to improve the quality of life of its people.

Against:

While the bill contains much that could improve the state's educational system, a number of concerns remain.

* The bill intends to make significant changes to the K-12 school system and yet there is no guarantee that a public school teacher or administrator will serve on the cabinet. It is possible only one representative on the cabinet will be connected to the K-12 system at all.

* Why is an entirely new cabinet (and the new spending it will involve) necessary? Couldn't these functions be carried out by the state board of education? Doesn't this bill just create another level of bureaucracy, with no guarantee that the schools will change significantly? The cabinet, it should be noted, is placed within the Jobs Commission, which many in the education community do not support.

* While the thrust of this bill makes sense, it should be noted that many schools already think that their task is preparing students for work and for additional education. Many undoubtedly believe they are doing a good job at this now. It seems odd to portray this as a startlingly new role (or "vision") for the state's public schools.

* Preparing students (both children and adults) for work and for future education are important responsibilities of the schools, but they are not the

only responsibilities. While this bill's concern for student achievement and competency is to be applauded, it should be kept in mind that schools have purposes beyond producing "products" for the state's employers.

* Reportedly, virtually all of the skilled trades already have apprenticeship programs in place, and yet the bill doesn't seem to take advantage of these existing programs. Proposals for work-related education should take advantage of existing programs in the state, expanding on and strengthening existing resources as well as implementing new programs.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Manufacturers Association supports the bill. (5-23-95)

The Michigan Federation of Teachers supports the bill. (5-23-95)

The Michigan Education Association supports the concept of the bill but believes that the Department of Education should oversee any such programs. (5-23-95)

The Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals supports the concept of the bill but does not support placing the cabinet in the Jobs Commission. (5-23-95)