



**Senate Fiscal Agency**  
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**BILL ANALYSIS**

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Senate Bill 251 (Substitute S-1 as reported)  
 Sponsor: Senator Dick Posthumus  
 Committee: Education

Date Completed: 2-22-95

**RATIONALE**

Under the School Code, pupils who are to graduate from high school in 1994, 1995, or 1996, must achieve passing scores on certain basic proficiency tests to receive on their diplomas a State endorsement in communication arts, mathematics, or science. To be eligible for this endorsement, students must do one of the following: receive a passing score on locally adopted and State-approved proficiency tests; achieve at least 50% of the objectives on the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) 10th grade reading and mathematics tests as well as the 11th grade science test; or, receive a passing score on a general education development (GED) test on one or more of the previously specified subject areas, if the student is eligible to take the GED test. School districts may use their own locally developed proficiency tests, upon approval of the Michigan Department of Education, to determine a student's eligibility for a State-endorsed diploma. Beginning with students scheduled to graduate in 1997, State law requires that they be tested only by an assessment instrument developed or selected and approved by the State Board of Education. Currently, 24 public and nonpublic school districts are using locally adopted and State-approved assessment instruments. Some people believe that local districts that currently administer their own proficiency tests should be able to do so even after the State has developed its test.

**CONTENT**

**The bill would amend the School Code to permit a school district, beginning with pupils scheduled to graduate in 1997, to use a locally adopted and State-approved basic proficiency test to determine pupil eligibility for a State endorsement. A school district could offer an**

**assessment instrument to any pupil in grade nine or higher.**

**The bill would repeal provisions in the State School Aid Act that require a school district, in order to receive State aid in 1993-94, 1994-95, or 1995-96, to award a State-endorsed high school diploma to an eligible graduate.**

Under the bill, beginning with pupils scheduled to graduate in 1997, a school district could use either a State-developed or -selected assessment instrument or a locally adopted and State-approved basic proficiency test, measuring proficiency in communication arts, mathematics, science, and beginning with 1999 graduates, social studies, to determine pupil eligibility for a State endorsement. Currently, a district that offered or offers a pupil the opportunity to pass a locally adopted basic proficiency test as a means to obtain a State-endorsed diploma in 1994, 1995, or 1996 may submit the test to the Department of Education for approval. The bill would delete reference to these years.

MCL 380.1279

**ARGUMENTS**

*(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)*

**Supporting Argument**

Before the State instituted proficiency standards for issuing an endorsed diploma, some school districts had established their own requisites for granting a high school diploma, including the student's achievement of certain levels of proficiency as demonstrated on a locally adopted

proficiency test. While many of these tests were designed to reflect local curricula standards, they are as rigorous as current State achievement tests, if not more so. Currently, a district that wants to administer a locally adopted test must receive State approval. The bill would retain the requirement that districts seek State Board approval of a locally adopted test to be administered to pupils scheduled to graduate in 1997. Thus, the State Board could deny approval if it found that a local test did not meet standards of the State Board assessment instrument. The bill would permit local districts already administering their own proficiency tests to continue to do so, but would provide a safeguard by requiring that these tests meet State standards.

### **Opposing Argument**

Allowing school districts to administer their own proficiency tests runs counter to the concepts of providing a uniform standard for granting State-endorsed diplomas and establishing a mechanism to measure consistently the performance of secondary schools across the State. The State's proficiency tests for an endorsed diploma will be aligned with the State Board's core academic curriculum. Some local districts that administer their own proficiency tests reportedly use nationally normed reference tests while others administer locally developed tests. There is concern that many of the locally adopted tests may not focus on testing students' understanding of the required core curriculum. Furthermore, the Department of Education reportedly plans to update the State proficiency test every three years, but the bill would not require locally adopted tests, after receiving initial State Board approval, to be subject to future State Board review. This could result in local districts' using outdated tests, thus undermining further the value of a State-endorsed high school diploma. The bill also would permit a school district to offer an assessment instrument to any pupil in grade nine or higher. The State's proficiency test reportedly is based on State educators' vision of what students should know and be able to perform by the end of the 10th grade. Consequently, the State's test is to be administered at the beginning of a student's junior year of high school.

**Response:** Many of the locally adopted tests are at least as rigorous as the State tests. In addition, it may be appropriate for a student to take a test earlier than the 10th grade. This decision should be made at the district level, in conjunction with a parent or guardian, to serve the best interests of the student.

### **Opposing Argument**

The School Code requires a school board to ensure that each public school within a school district is accredited or face certain measures. Accredited means certified by the State Board as having met or exceeded State Board-approved standards established for six areas of school operation, including student outcomes. The State Board recently gave final approval to phase one of the accreditation standards. Under these standards, school principals are required to identify students' MEAP scores or high school proficiency test results to determine whether accreditation standards were met. Permitting districts to use locally developed proficiency tests could result in the development and use of a patchwork of assessment instruments across the State. If this were to occur, there could be some difficulty in determining whether districts were achieving student outcome levels required for accreditation and in comparing the performance of schools within districts and across the State.

Legislative Analyst: L. Arasim

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State government. Currently, for students scheduled to graduate in 1994, 1995, and 1996, local school districts may use the results from the MEAP tests or the results of a locally adopted and State-approved proficiency test to determine eligibility for State endorsement of a high school diploma. According to the Michigan Department of Education (MDOE), all but 24 local school districts have chosen to use the MEAP tests. The costs associated with developing and administering the MEAP tests currently are appropriated in the annual budget for the MDOE. The estimated cost for developing and administering the MEAP tests in FY 1994-95 is \$1.7 million. This cost is estimated to increase to \$2.7 million in FY 1995-96. Local school districts that choose to use locally adopted and State-approved basic proficiency tests to determine eligibility for State endorsement pay the full costs for developing and administering these tests from their individual budgets. Beginning with students graduating in 1997, the State will use assessment instruments developed and approved by the State Board of Education to determine eligibility for State endorsement of high school diplomas. School districts no longer will use the MEAP tests to determine eligibility for endorsement; rather, they will use the Michigan High School Proficiency Test.

The costs of developing and administering this test would continue to be paid by the MDOE. In FY 1994-95, \$1.5 million is appropriated to MDOE for developing and administering the proficiency test and an estimated \$2.9 million is recommended in the Governor's FY 1994-95 Executive budget. Schools choosing to continue to use locally adopted and State-approved tests would continue to pay the full cost for these tests from their individual budgets. The proposed repeal of Section 104a of the School Aid Act would mean that local school districts would no longer have State school aid payments withheld for failure to award endorsed diplomas. However, the School Code still would require that local school districts award State-endorsed high school diplomas.

Fiscal Analyst: J. Carrasco

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.