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READING CREDITS; TEACHER CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

House Bill 4378 (Substitute H-1) First Analysis (9-27-00)

Sponsor: Rep. Bob Brown
Committee: Education

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The State Board of Education determines the requirements for, and then also issues, all licenses and certificates for teachers in the public schools of this state (including preprimary teachers, counselors, and elementary-grade foreign language teachers). Generally, a teaching certificate may be issued only to those who have passed appropriate examinations, or if the applicant has been certified in another state, only to those who provide evidence of education and training similar to Michigan's, including having met the elementary or secondary reading credit requirement established under state board rule.

Among the requirements for teacher candidates is a limited amount of course work in reading. Currently, teacher certification requirements include six semester hours of reading as part of the training for an elementary teaching certificate, or three hours for a secondary certificate.

Some people believe the present reading course work does not put sufficient emphasis on training teachers how to recognize students' reading disorders, and how to provide instruction and support for students with reading disorders. Too often, say these reading reform advocates, student reading problems go undiagnosed, and students fail to achieve their academic potential because teachers are not adequately trained to recognize their reading problems.

In addition, the Revised School Code specifies that the teacher licensing and certification program in the State of Michigan is the responsibility of the State Board of Education. However, in 1996 the governor issued Executive Reorganization Order 1996-7 (MCL 388.994) to transfer many responsibilities from the elected state board of education to the gubernatorially appointed superintendent of public instruction. The legality of the executive order was challenged but in 1999 the executive order was upheld by the courts. Since the executive order has been upheld by the courts and is no longer the subject of litigation, it has been

proposed that this section of the school code be amended to reflect the ruling of the court.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 4378 would amend the Revised School Code to add new reading requirements to the public school teaching certificate. Specifically, within one year after the bill took effect, the superintendent of public instruction would be required to develop new reading standards, or to revise the existing reading standards, in order to address reading disorders, and to enable teachers to provide effective instruction and support for students with reading disorders. The bill would then require the superintendent of public instruction to issue an elementary or secondary teaching certificate only to an applicant who had met the reading credit requirements established under the new rule.

House Bill 4378 also would change references throughout this section of the code, which concerns the teacher certification and licensing program, in order to shift the responsibility for the teacher licensing and certification programs from the state board of education to the superintendent of public instruction.

MCL 380.1531

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The House Fiscal Agency notes that House Bill 4378 would result in indeterminate state costs and minimal revenue increases. (9-26-00)

The Department of Education notes that there is no anticipated fiscal impact to local units of government. Colleges and universities with approved teacher preparation programs may have to do some course development in order to respond to the new or revised requirements. (9-13-00)

ARGUMENTS:***For:***

Although some course work in reading is required of college graduates who seek certification as teachers, the administrative rule that requires the reading requirement, R390.1132, specifies the number of semester hours (more customarily called “credits”), but not the content of the courses. Consequently, teachers can become certified but never study the nature of particular reading disorders. Likewise, they can become certified but never learn specific diagnostic skills and intervention techniques. The aim of the bill is to provide teachers with improved training in the detection of reading disorders. It would apply to all teachers seeking certification, without regard to their subject matter specialty. So, a physics major seeking secondary certification would be required to have studied reading disorders, as would a French teacher and a teacher of calculus. This requirement would help school teachers know how best to deliver reading instruction, and assist those among their students who have difficulty reading. It also would reduce the likelihood that students’ reading disorders might go undiagnosed, and improve the opportunities for non- and slow-reading students to achieve academically.

For:

The bill would apply only to new teachers, and would not be retroactive. Instead, the superintendent of public instruction in the Department of Education would be required to develop or revise the reading requirements, within one year after the effective date of this legislation. (The current reading requirements are now specified by administrative rule and are found at R390.1132.)

Against:

Reading is a specialty study area for those concerned with human development. Indeed, reading can be a college “major”, a domain of study all unto itself, and teachers can earn an endorsement in the area of reading for elementary and/or secondary teaching certificates. The reason is simple: reading problems can be complex. Often technical skills are needed to diagnose students’ reading problems, because those “problems” serve as indicators of the child’s cognitive, social, and psychological development. A more effective approach to identifying and then reversing students’ reading problems would be to require an adequate number of reading specialists in each school district to ensure that all non-reading and slow-to-read students would have an optimal chance to learn. A reading specialist would

be better equipped to diagnose the problem, and then design an effective intervention.

POSITIONS:

The Department of Education supports the bill. (9-26-00)

The Michigan Education Association supports the bill. (9-26-00)

Analyst: J. Hunault

#This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.