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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT CONTRACTS

House Bill 4630 (Substitute H-1) First Analysis (5-2-01)

Sponsor: Rep. Wayne Kuipers
Committee: Education

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The U. S. Department of Education has issued a report entitled “Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Learning”, to delineate factors inhibiting parental involvement in their children’s education, and to review 30 years of research indicating that the starting point of American education is parent expectations and parental involvement in their children’s education. In order to track effective involvement, the department maintains a research database for family involvement in learning, and information about parental involvement is published by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). For example, NCES recently reviewed a report issued jointly by the Danforth and Mott foundations entitled “A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement.” That report summarizes 66 studies, reviews, reports, analyses, and books to confirm that the most accurate predictor of student achievement is the extent to which the family is involved in a student’s education.

Further, in its recent report to assess annual progress on a host of educational indicators called “The Condition of Education 2000,” NCES shows that the overall percentage of parents who participated in some way in school events or meetings increased between 1996 and 1999 from 91.7 to 92 percent. However, the survey findings reveal a small decline for parental involvement reported in two areas. Specifically, the parents interviewed indicated they took part in any of four activities: attending a general meeting (76.9 percent in 1996 and 79 percent in 1999); attending a scheduled meetings with a teacher (71.8 percent in 1996 and 73 percent in 1999); attending a school event (a slight decline from 66.7 percent in 1996 to 66.2 percent in 1999); or acting as a volunteer or serving on a committee (a slight decline from 38.7 percent in 1996 to 38 percent in 1999). The percentages were slightly higher than the norm in families with two biological or adoptive parents, and slightly lower than the norm in families with one biological or adoptive parent. The indicator

showing the least improvement—volunteering at school—decreased for all parents regardless of education level. What is more, in both two- and single-parent families, the proportion of parents who acted as volunteers or served on a committee was low: 47 percent in two-parent homes, and 27 percent in one-parent homes.

Despite the overall increase in parental involvement at school reported by NCES, studies indicate that parental involvement decreases as children move from elementary to middle to high school, and there is evidence the decrease is due to more limited opportunities for parental involvement. In addition, recent studies indicate that the involvement of fathers in their children’s education is low (in two-parent families, 27 percent of fathers involved versus 56 percent of mothers; in single-parent families 46 percent of fathers versus 49 percent of mothers).

In a recent study conducted by the Center on Organization and Restructuring Schools undertaken at the University of Wisconsin/Madison, researchers found a variety in not only the amount of parental participation, but also the quality of participation at 24 restructuring elementary, middle, and high schools. In the seven schools where parents were highly involved, the researchers found three kinds of substantial parent participation and decision-making: parents were involved in organization policy (decisions about the school calendar, hiring new staff, and availability of after-school care); pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment (helping create particular courses and new approaches to student assessment); and, technical support for school activities (helping teachers with classroom activities, raising funds for the school, or tutoring). Substantive parental involvement (in contrast to what the study calls symbolic parental involvement) generally includes parents in pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment.

One kind of substantive parental involvement that increases student achievement, according to the

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Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning at Johns Hopkins University, is a parental involvement pledge. The center endorses involvement pledges because research shows that schools with properly implemented parent compacts, or pledges, raise achievement higher than the achievement gains at schools without them. Indeed, under Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act [formerly known as Chapter I of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act of 1994 (reauthorization of 1965)], every public school receiving Title I funds is now required to use learning compacts, like the involvement pledge, to increase parental involvement in their children's learning. In addition, some school districts use different forms of parent-school contracts to involve family members in student homework assignments, and to encourage more parents to read with children at home. See *BACKGROUND INFORMATION* below.

In order to improve student achievement, legislation has been introduced to encourage school districts to increase parental involvement in their students' learning by using parent-school learning contracts.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 4630 would amend the Revised School Code to encourage school districts to develop and implement parental involvement contracts with parents of students. The contracts would be voluntary and designed to encourage and facilitate a parent's involvement in his or her child's education. The bill also would require the Department of Education to develop and make available to school districts a model parental involvement contract within 90 days after the effective date of the bill.

Under the bill, the model parental involvement contract would establish a learning partnership between parent, teacher, and student. To that end, the contract would be required to address responsibilities for parents, pupils, and teachers. In particular, the bill specifies that the pupil's parent or guardian would agree to do all of the following:

- review homework assignments and offer assistance when needed;
- ensure that the pupil gets to school each day, on time and ready to learn;
- demonstrate interest in the pupil's well-being by attending school functions and supporting the pupil's school activities; and

-make every effort to attend parent-teacher conferences.

Further, the bill specifies that the pupil would agree to do all of the following:

- participate in class discussions and complete assignments in a manner that is accurate, neat, and timely;
- come to school each school day and be on time;
- pay attention in class and complete assigned lessons;
- obey the rules and codes of conduct set for the classroom; and
- respect teachers, school administrators, and other pupils at all times by not antagonizing, intimidating, or threatening them.

Finally, the bill specifies that the teacher would agree to do all of the following:

- set high standards for quality instruction that promote development of grade-appropriate academic skills;
- keep accurate attendance records and inform the parent or guardian promptly if an attendance problem starts to develop;
- teach pupils how to study and review basic concepts taught in class; and
- maintain a welcome atmosphere and scheduling flexibility toward parent or guardian visits and participation.

Further, House Bill 4630 specifies that the voluntary parental involvement contract should include a way for the pupil's parent or guardian to explain any obstacles that prevent him or her from complying with the contract. Under the bill, if a parental contract included such an explanation, then school officials would be required to consider accessing possible resources to help overcome the obstacles identified by the parent or guardian.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

For further information about parental involvement in schools, readers can visit many Web sites, including the following:

* The National Center for Education Statistics,
<http://www.ed.gov/help/sitemap.asp>

* Education World: 14 Activities to Promote Parent Involvement, <http://www.education-world.com>

* Parental Involvement Checklist,
<http://www.projectappleseed.org>

* Michigan Safe Schools: Parental Involvement Programs, <http://www.michigansafeschools.org>

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The House Fiscal Agency notes that the bill would have no state or local fiscal impact. (4-26-01)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Ample research evidence demonstrates a higher incidence of student achievement when parents are involved in student learning. However, the intellectual work within the subject matter learning disciplines is generally little understood by students' parents. One substantive way to include parents is to establish school-parent contracts that involve parents in the intellectual work of their children while informing them about the curricular and assessment practices at the school. This legislation would encourage school districts to establish parent involvement contracts, in order to increase achievement.

For:

Often school-based violence is caused by a few students who have been marginalized through incessant ridicule by their peers. Alienated in this manner, their anger builds and eventually erupts in vicious behavior that harms self and others. It is possible that parental involvement contracts will enable more controlled learning environments for both students who harass and also those subjected to harassment, because acceptable behavior standards would be explicit and clear for all parties to the contract—parents, students, and teachers.

Against:

This bill puts in place a policy guideline for which school district compliance is entirely voluntary. Those who support this approach to policy making should recognize the legislation's limitations, most especially its limited ability to ensure the involvement of those adults and children who are

hardest to engage in learning and academic work, such as truant students and recalcitrant parents.

Response:

An amendment added to the bill in committee improves the likelihood that the policy guideline can be implemented effectively. As amended, the bill allows parents to specify the constraints they encounter when attempting contract compliance, and then requires school officials to help ameliorate those barriers.

POSITIONS:

The Department of Education supports the bill. (4-26-01)

The Michigan Association of School Administrators supports the concept of the bill. (4-26-01)

The Wayne Regional Educational Services Agency (RESA) supports the concept of the bill. (4-26-01)

The Michigan Association of School Boards supports the bill. (4-27-01)

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■ 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.