

Legislative Analysis



ELIMINATE SUNSET ON CAREER AND TECH PREP ACT

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House Bill 5282 as introduced
Sponsor: Rep. Lorence Wenke
Committee: Higher Education and Career Preparation

First Analysis (11-28-05)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would eliminate the June 30, 2006 sunset in the Career and Technical Preparation Act.

FISCAL IMPACT: The bill would eliminate a sunset and thus preserves the status quo.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Michigan is one of more than 30 states with established dual enrollment programs. Dual enrollment programs allow high school students to take college level courses and receive credit at both institutions toward the completion of a college degree. Dual enrollment dates back to the 1970s, but began gaining popularity in the mid-1980s. At that time, states established the programs in an attempt to ensure that academically gifted and other qualified students would have access to college courses while still enrolled in high school.

In Michigan, students may be dually enrolled in a college or university or in a technical program. Section 21b of the School Aid Act allows a student's foundation grant to be used for tuition and fees if the student is attending a postsecondary institution or a career and technical preparation program. Credit earned in post-secondary programs can be used as high school credit, postsecondary credit, or both.

Two statutes govern Michigan's dual enrollment programs: The Career and Technical Preparation Act and the Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act. The first allows eligible high school students to enroll in certain courses offered in programs that teach a trade, occupation, or vocation at postsecondary institutions. The second allows students to enroll in college courses under certain conditions. Under both acts, the student's home district is required to pay the costs of taking the post-secondary courses, up to the prorated percentage of the student's state foundation allowance. Earlier in this legislative session, two bills were enacted into law (House Bills 4143 and 4144) to prohibit fifth-year high school students from participating in these programs.

The Career and Technical Preparation Act which took effect on April 1, 2001 is sunsetted five years after its enactment, and so is due to be eliminated on June 30, 2006. Legislation has been introduced to repeal the sunset provision in the law so that the act can continue.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 5282 would amend the Career and Technical Preparation Act to eliminate the provision that will sunset the law on June 30, 2006.

MCL 388.1913

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

New technologic tools used for the design, manufacture, and distribution of goods have changed the world of work for nearly all Americans during the past two decades. The invention of the computer has, as it has matured, thrust us into a new economy that continues to develop in what has come to be called the information age. These changes in the economy require differently educated workers.

According to the 1998 Governor's Report to the Legislature entitled "Gold Collar Jobs: The Future of Michigan," the percentage of management and professional jobs which usually require a four-year college degree will remain relatively constant over the next decade. However, the percentage of jobs that require skills training will increase dramatically, while the percentage of jobs that go to unskilled workers will shrink. The report observes that this phenomenon will create more "gold-collar" jobs, which are defined as those jobs within high-wage, high-skill, high-demand occupations.

According to reports, the number of good-paying occupations in the Midwest that do not require a four-year college degree outpaces those that do. However, all of the ten top jobs for which a degree is not necessary require technical training, including employment as millwrights, appliance repairers, tool and die makers, and science technicians. In addition, job growth is expected for drafters, electricians, carpenters, machine tool makers, some computer technicians, programmers, and computer network administrators.

Few new employment opportunities will be available to workers who are improperly educated or inadequately trained. Indeed, according to Michigan Future Inc., 1997, one in ten information technology jobs in the United States was unfilled, creating a stunning industry-wide unemployment rate of negative 10 to 15 percent. Further, the rate was falling, not rising, and more jobs were expected to be created in these fields. Consequently, and even as early as 1996, the unemployment rate for skilled production, crafts, and repair workers in Michigan was below the average for all workers in general, demonstrating the need that industry has for skilled employees.

In Michigan, an education that prepares a student for employment in high-skill work customarily begins in high school, often at a regional vocational technical center, and then continues two years beyond high school graduation in one of the state's 29 community colleges. These curricular options are sometimes called 'tech prep' (or technical preparation) courses of study because they concentrate the student's education and training on learning the sorts of information and knowledge that can be immediately helpful in the high-skill world of work. According to committee testimony when the

Career and Technical Preparation Act was enacted nearly five years ago, several of the state's community colleges have already re-designed their education programs as state-of-the-art 'tech prep' business training sites, and have developed their curriculum, instruction, and evaluation in league with corporate employers in the business community.

The need for literate and numerate workers who understand and use the most recent design and computing tools will require continually renewing educational opportunities of the sort that can incorporate thinking that relies on the most recently gained understanding of those technologies when they are utilized to their full capacity. Public schools too seldom provide these kinds of educational opportunities.

While the core technology of public schools has been and likely will continue to be teaching and learning within the subject matter disciplines, some observe that what is needed is new thinking within those disciplines--the kind of thinking that accommodates authentic problem-solving and that relies on more highly technologic tools. They argue that this kind of learning should be more present in Michigan schools, especially since businesses can employ students who are trained in this way. One way to accomplish this aim is to more closely connect the job skills training and education that already is available at the state's 29 community colleges with a larger array of highly technologic vocational opportunities in high schools and regional career and technical centers. To that end, the Career and Technical Preparation Act was enacted to allow dual enrollment in high school and community colleges, and to more closely articulate the vocational curriculum at the three sites so that students seeking state-of-the-art employment training can more easily move between the three educational institutions.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

This legislation would permanently enact a law that helps students transfer more easily from high school to community college and then on to the world of work. The series of transitions between school and work can be a nearly seamless progression, if the career and 'tech prep' vocational education opportunities in schools can be more closely aligned with jobs available in business corporations. It is clear that businesses need employees who are differently educated than those prepared by the traditional academic school curriculum. For example, some corporations report there are unfilled jobs in the highly technologic skilled trades, and it seems likely those jobs will continue to stand empty until Michigan's high school students have more opportunities to graduate from state-of-the-art 'tech prep' programs. Employers report that they need literate and numerate workers who can understand and use the most recent design and computing tools. In order to learn these kinds of skills, a student should be able to begin a course of study in high school and then continue beyond high school graduation to study an additional two years in a community college. An explicit dual enrollment policy that encourages well-prepared high-schoolers to take course work in both high school and the local community college can give students the enrollment flexibility they need in order to move between the two instructional sites in educationally effective and cost-efficient ways. For these

reasons, the Career and Technical Preparation Act should be permanent, and its sunset provision—set for June 30, 2006—should be removed.

POSITIONS:

No positions were advanced.

Legislative Analyst: J. Hunault

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