

# Legislative Analysis

---



## HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS FOR TRANSFER STUDENTS

Mitchell Bean, Director  
Phone: (517) 373-8080  
<http://www.house.mi.gov/hfa>

**Senate Bill 403 (Substitute H-3)**  
**Sponsor: Sen. Wayne Kuipers**  
**House Committee: Education**  
**Senate Committee: Education**

### **First Analysis (10-17-07)**

**BRIEF SUMMARY:** The bill would permit the parent or legal guardian of a transfer student who had completed at least two years of high school, either out-of-state or at a non-public school, to request modifications of the Michigan Merit Standard.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** Estimates for current year costs of developing end-of-course examinations are \$4.4 million. While the final Fiscal Year 2007-08 budget is not yet in place, the Executive, House, and Senate versions of the bill have all provided the additional \$4.4 million requested by the Department of Education for this purpose.

### **THE APPARENT PROBLEM:**

In 2006, the legislature enacted statewide high school graduation requirements known as the Michigan Merit Standard.

The Michigan Merit Standard requires a student to successfully complete high school credits in English, math, science, social sciences, and other subject areas before receiving a high school diploma. To that end, the Department of Education is required to develop or select and approve assessments that can be used by school districts and charter schools to determine whether students have successfully completed a credit. The assessments must measure a student's understanding of the subject area content expectations for at least algebra I, geometry, algebra II, earth science, biology, physics, chemistry, English in grades 9 through 12, world history, United States history, economics, and civics. Generally, these tests have been referred to as end-of-course exams.

Although the Revised School Code permits the parent or legal guardian of a student to request modifications of those requirements under certain circumstances, some are concerned that a student transferring from a non-public school, or from out-of-state might not be able to meet the requirements, or that he or she might have to delay graduation to do so.

To address these concerns, it has been suggested that students transferring to Michigan public schools midway through high school or later should be allowed additional modifications of the Michigan Merit Standard.

## ***THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:***

Senate Bill 403 (H-3) would amend the Revised School Code (MCL 380.1278b) to do the following:

- Permit the parent or legal guardian of a transfer student who had completed at least two years of high school credit out-of-state, or at a nonpublic school, to request additional modifications of the Michigan Merit Standard as part of the student's personal curriculum.
- Retain the requirement that the Department of Education, by January 3, 2010, develop or select and approve assessments that school districts and charter schools may use to determine whether a student has successfully completed a required credit under the Michigan Merit Standard. The Senate-passed version of Senate Bill 403 had removed that requirement.

***Personal Curriculum.*** Under the code, beginning with students who entered 8th grade in 2006, the board of a school district or board of directors of a public school academy (customarily called a charter school) may not award a high school diploma to a student unless the student completes the credit requirements of the Michigan Merit Standard, including specific credits in math, science, English, social sciences, and other subject areas. The credits must be aligned with subject area content expectations or guidelines developed by the Department of Education.

The code allows the parent or legal guardian of a student to request a personal curriculum for the student that modifies some of the Michigan Merit Standard requirements. If the personal curriculum meets certain conditions, and if the student successfully completes it, he or she may be awarded a high school diploma even if the curriculum does not meet all of the requirements of the Michigan Merit Standard.

Under Senate Bill 403 (H-3) if a student transferred to a school district or public school academy from out-of-state or from a nonpublic school, a parent or legal guardian could request, as part of the student's personal curriculum, a modification of the Michigan Merit Standard requirements that would not otherwise be allowed, if all of the following were met:

- The student had completed successfully at least the equivalent of two years of high school credit out-of-state or at a nonpublic school.
- The personal curriculum incorporated as much of the subject-area content expectations of the Michigan Merit Standard as was practicable for the student.
- The personal curriculum required the student to successfully complete at least one math course during his or her final year of high school. (If the transfer student were enrolled in the school district or charter school for at least one full year, then certain math requirements are specified.)
- The personal curriculum included the civics course required under the Code.

If the student were enrolled in the school district for at least one full school year, that math course would have to be at least algebra I. If the student demonstrated that he or she had mastered the content of algebra I, then the personal curriculum would require that the course be one that is normally taken after the completion of algebra I.

The school district or public school academy could use appropriate assessment examinations to determine what credits, if any, the student had earned out-of-state or at a nonpublic school that could be used to satisfy the curricular requirements of the Michigan Merit Standard, as well as the bill's requirement that the student successfully complete the equivalent of two years of high school credit out-of-state or at a nonpublic school.

***Modify MDE End-of-Course Exam Development/Selection.*** The code requires the Department of Education, by January 3, 2010, to develop or select and approve assessments that school districts and charter schools may use to determine whether a student has successfully completed a required credit under the Michigan Merit Standard, including assessments for algebra I, geometry, algebra II, earth science, biology, physics, chemistry, English in 9th grade through 12th grade, world history, U.S. history, economics, and civics. The assessments for each credit must measure a student's understanding of the subject area content expectations or guidelines that apply to that credit. Senate Bill 403 (H-3) would retain these provisions.

#### ***HOUSE COMMITTEE ACTION:***

The House Education Committee adopted a substitute version of the Senate-passed bill. Senate Bill 403 (H-3) differs from the Senate-passed version in one significant way: the bill reinserts the requirement that the Department of Education develop or select model assessments for school districts that measure a student's understanding of the subject area content expectations or guidelines that apply to the completed credits required in algebra I, geometry, algebra II, earth science, biology, physics, chemistry, English grades 9-12, world history, United States history, economics, and civics. Some of the information in this analysis is derived from the Senate Fiscal Agency analysis dated 5-9-07.

#### ***ARGUMENTS:***

##### ***For:***

Students who transfer from one school to another during their high school years face tremendous pressures adjusting to a new learning environment, and the new Michigan Merit Standard may raise additional concerns for students who come from other states where the graduation requirements are not so rigorous. The Merit Standard requires a student to earn three credits of science (including biology and chemistry or physics), four credits of math (including algebra I, geometry, and algebra II), four credits of English, and other specific credits in order to receive a high school diploma. A student who transfers to a Michigan public school in the 11th grade may not have taken the appropriate prerequisite courses to enable him or her to complete all of those requirements. Math in particular could be problematic, because of its sequential nature.

It would be unfair to punish students who were working under a different set of graduation requirements for not meeting a new and unanticipated set of requirements. For example, the children of military personnel or those affiliated with the military could be particularly affected, since their parents may be transferred several times during their school years. Reportedly, children in military families change schools an average of six to nine times. The bill would help to ease the transition for students coming into Michigan public schools, and give those students the chance to graduate along with their peers.

These provisions also would help to reassure parents who are considering moving to Michigan, but may be concerned that their children will be unable to complete the high school requirements. In these troubled economic times, the state should make every effort to encourage people to relocate to Michigan.

The bill would preserve the rigor of the system by requiring a student to meet as many of the requirements as was practicable for him or her, and requiring that math be taken in the student's final year of high school. If the student transferred with at least one year of high school remaining, that class would have to be algebra I or a higher course. These provisions would retain high standards for students graduating from public schools in the state, while setting reasonable exceptions for those entering the system in their last year or two of secondary schooling.

***Response:***

Reportedly, it is current practice in some districts to allow students transferring to Michigan in their final year of high school to transfer the credits earned in Michigan back to their former schools, and receive a diploma from that school. Perhaps a similar arrangement would be possible in Michigan to accommodate students without creating additional exceptions to the Michigan Merit Standard.

***Against:***

The code requires the Department of Education to develop or select assessments for a number of credits required under the Michigan Merit Standard, although school districts are not required to adopt those assessments. According to estimates from the Michigan Department of Education, the cost of developing or selecting the assessments could be significant—as much as \$15 million. In the Fiscal Year 2008 budget, \$4.4 million is earmarked to begin test development. Given the current fiscal situation, it seems ill-advised to spend limited resources on tests that may never be implemented. In some cases, school districts may already have assessments that determine whether a pupil has completed a required credit, or a district may choose to develop its own assessments. For these reasons, the bill should remove the requirement that the department develop or select assessments.

***Response:***

If the Department of Education does not develop the tests to ensure students' successful completion of the high school Merit Core Curriculum, then the responsibility to develop or purchase and administer the assessments would unfairly fall to local school districts, increasing their costs at a time they are increasingly strapped for cash.

***POSITIONS:***

The Michigan Department of Education supports the bill. (10-16-07)

Oakland Schools supports the bill. (10-16-07)

The Michigan Catholic Conference supports the bill. (10-16-07)

The Secondary School Principals support the bill. (10-16-07)

The Macomb Intermediate School District supports the bill as passed by the Senate. (10-16-07)

The Ottawa, Kalamazoo, and Muskegon Intermediate School Districts support the bill. (10-16-07)

Legislative Analyst: J. Hunault  
Fiscal Analyst: Mary Ann Cleary  
Bethany Wicksall

---

■ 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.