

Legislative Analysis



GENERAL DIPLOMA CURRICULUM; SPECIALTY SCHOOLS; AND PERSONAL CURRICULUM

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House Bill 5943

Sponsor: Rep. Joel Sheltroun

Committee: Education

Complete to 6-18-08

A SUMMARY OF HOUSE BILL 5943 AS INTRODUCED 4-8-08

The bill would amend the Revised School Code to provide a "general diploma curriculum" as an alternative to the Michigan high school graduation requirements; allow the Department of Education to designate up to 15 specialty schools; and provide for the creation of a personal high school curriculum.

The bill specifies that beginning with students entering Grade 8 in 2006 (those now entering 10th Grade), the boards of all school districts and charter schools would be prohibited from awarding a high school diploma unless the student had met either the requirements for the Michigan Merit Standards, or had met the requirements for a general diploma.

The requirements for a general diploma would be as follows:

- Meet the existing online course or learning experience requirement; and
- Successfully complete all of the following credit requirements before graduating high school, in courses that align with subject area content expectation developed by the Department of Education and approved by the State Board of Education:
 - At least three credits in mathematics, including completion of at least algebra I (or the integrated equivalent in a career and technical preparation course), geometry (or the integrated equivalent in a career and technical preparation course), and an additional mathematics credit.
 - At least four credits in English Language Arts.
 - At least two credits in science, including completion of at least biology and an additional science credit.
 - At least two credits in social science, including the civics course described in the code.
 - At least one credit in subject matter that includes both health and physical education.

- At least three credits in a career and technical preparation academic sequence.
- At least one additional credit.

Further, beginning with students entering Grade 3 in 2006 (those who will enter Grade 5 this fall), the board of a public school or charter school could not award a high school diploma to a student unless the student had successfully completed, during Grades 9 to 12, at least two credits in a language other than English (or the student had successfully completed an equivalent course work or experiences during grades K to 12). The department would develop guidelines concerning the language requirement; in those guidelines, American sign language would be considered a language; and students could meet this requirement by taking online coursework.

The bill specifies that these requirements would be considered to be in addition to any local requirement imposed by the board of a school district or a charter school (such as completing subject area assessments; the Michigan Merit Examination, or the MI Access assessments, if appropriate).

To successfully earn a credit, a person would have to successfully complete the subject area content expectations or guidelines developed by the department.

Under the bill, a school district or charter school would determine a student's success, at least in part, by the student's performance on the assessments developed or selected by the Department of Education or performance on more assessments developed or selected by the school district or charter school. Those assessments would measure a student's understanding of the subject area content expectations or guidelines that apply to the credit.

15 Specialty Schools. If a high school was designated by the state superintendent as a specialty school, and the school met the requirements, above, then the students of the high school would not be required to successfully complete the four credits in English language arts or the two credits in social science that are required above. Further, the school district or charter school would not be required to ensure that each student was offered the curriculum necessary for meeting those English language arts or social science credit requirements.

The state school superintendent could designate up to 15 high schools as specialty schools. To be so designated, a high school would have to meet both of the following criteria:

- Incorporate a significant reading and writing component throughout its curriculum.
- Use a specialized, innovative, and rigorous curriculum in such areas as performing arts, foreign language, extensive use of internships, or other learning innovations that conform to pioneering innovations among other leading national or international high schools.

A high school that is designated as a specialty school would be exempt from the requirements noted above, only so long as the state superintendent determined that the high school met the following requirements:

- The high school clearly stated to prospective students and their parents that it did not meet the requirements of the general diploma curriculum, but that it was a designated specialty school and therefore exempt for some requirements. Further the specialty school officials would have to inform students and parents that upon subsequent transfer to a non-specialty school, the students would be required to meet that school's state curricular requirements--the Michigan Merit Standard--in order to graduate.
- The mean score of the high school's science and math ACT tests was at least 10 percentage points greater than was the mean science and math ACT score for the district in which the majority of the specialty school's students live.
- Had a graduation rate of at least 85 percent, as determined by the Department of Education.
- Had a post-secondary school enrollment and placement rate of at least 75 percent.
- All students had met the mathematics credit requirements noted above, with no modification of those requirements, and each student was offered the necessary curriculum to succeed.
- All students were required to meet the science credit requirement, and were also required to successfully complete at least two additional science credits, for a total of at least four science credits, with no modification of those requirements.

If a student successfully completed one or more of the high school credits before entering high school, then the student would be given high school credit for that credit.

Personal Curriculum. The bill specifies that the parent or legal guardian of a student could request a personal curriculum that modified certain of the general diploma curriculum requirements. If all of the requirements (some of which are noted below) were met, then a board could award a high school diploma to a student who successfully completed his or her personal curriculum, even if it did not meet the requirements of the general diploma curriculum. All of the following would apply to a personal curriculum:

- It was developed by a group that included at least a student's parent (or legal guardian), and high school counselor (or designee selected by the principal). In addition, a school psychologist would be included for students who receive special education services.
- It incorporated as much of the subject area content expectations of the general diploma curriculum as was practicable for the student; established measurable goals that the student would have to achieve while enrolled in high school and

provided a method to evaluate whether the student achieved them; and was aligned with the student's educational development plan.

- It was agreed to by the student's parent or legal guardian, and by the school superintendent, or the chief executive of a charter school.
- The student's parent was required to be in communication with each of the student's teachers at least once each calendar quarter to monitor the student's progress.
- Revisions to the personal curriculum were developed and agreed to in the same manner as the original personal curriculum.
- The English language arts and science credit requirements were not subject to modification.
- The mathematics credit requirements could be modified as part of a personal curriculum only after the student had successfully completed at least 1-1/2 credits of the mathematics credits, and only if the student successfully completed at least 2-1/2 total credits of the mathematics credits before completing high school.
- The civics course was not subject to modification.
- The health and physical education credit could be modified, only if the modification required the student to complete one additional credit in English language arts, mathematics, or science, or one additional credit in a language other than English.
- If the parent or legal guardian of a student requested a modification that would not otherwise be allowed, and demonstrated that the modification was necessary because the student was a child with a disability, then the school officials could allow that additional modification, if the group determined that the modification was consistent with both the student's educational development plan, and the individualized education program (a practice monitored by the state superintendent).
- If a student transferred to a school district or charter school from out-of-state or from a private school, the student's parent or legal guardian could request, as part of the student's personal curriculum, a modification of the general diploma curriculum requirements that would not otherwise be allowed. This additional modification could be allowed if all of the following requirements were met:
 - The transfer student had successfully completed at least the equivalent of two years of high school credit out-of-state or at a private school (as measured by local assessment tools).

- The transfer student's personal curriculum incorporated as much of the subject area content expectations of the general diploma curriculum as was practicable.
- The transfer student's personal curriculum required that student to successfully complete at least one mathematics course during his or her final year of high school enrollment. In addition, if the transfer student were enrolled in the school district or public school academy for at least one full school year, both of the following would apply: (1) the transfer student's personal curriculum would require at least algebra I; and (2) if the transfer student demonstrated mastery of algebra I, then the personal curriculum would require a math course normally taken after completing algebra I.

The bill specifies that an 18-year-old transfer student could act on his own behalf, and further specifies that this subsection would not apply to a student enrolled in a high school that was designated as a specialty school (that is exempt from the English language arts and social science credit requirements).

If a student received special education services, the student's individualized education program, in accord with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, would identify the appropriate course or courses of study and identify the supports, accommodations, and modifications necessary to allow the student to progress in the curricular requirements, or in a personal curriculum, and meet the requirements for a high school diploma.

The board of a school district or of a charter school that operated a high school would have to ensure that each student was offered the curriculum necessary to meet the requirements. The board could do this by using alternative instructional delivery methods, such as alternative course work, humanities courses sequences, career and technical education, industrial technology courses, or career and technical preparation education, or any combination of these. Districts that operated career and technical education programs would be encouraged to integrate these credit requirements into those programs.

If the board of a school district or charter school wanted its high school to be accredited, then the board would have to ensure that all elements of the curriculum were available to all affected students. If the school did not offer all of the required credits, the board would have to ensure that the student had access to the required credits by another means, such as enrollment in a post-secondary course, enrollment in an online course, a cooperative arrangement with a neighboring school district or with a public school academy, or granting approval for the student to be counted in membership in another school district.

If a school district or charter school was unable to implement all of the curricular requirements for students entering Grade 9 in 2007 (students soon to enter Grade 10), then its officials could apply to the Department of Education for permission to phase in one or more of the requirements. To apply, the officials would submit a phase-in plan

which the department would approve if state officials determined that the plan would result in the school district or charter school making satisfactory progress toward full implementation of the requirements. If the department disapproved a phase-in plan, state officials would work with local school officials to develop a satisfactory plan that could be approved. However, this subsection would not apply to a high school designated as a specialty school, and that was exempt from the English language arts and social science requirements.

MCL 380.1278a, 380.1278b, 380.1278c, and 380.1280

FISCAL IMPACT:

State Impact. The Department of Education could face increased costs related to developing subject area content expectations and model assessments for credits included in the general diploma curriculum that are not already part of the Michigan Merit Standard.

Local Impact. Districts may face increased costs associated with developing credits to satisfy the general diploma curriculum; however, they may also see cost savings if the new general diploma curriculum reduces the level of change that otherwise would have been necessary to fully implement the Michigan Merit Standard.

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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.