

Legislative Analysis



MICHIGAN MERIT CURRICULUM: FOREIGN LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT

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House Bill 5793 as enacted
Public Act 293 of 2014
Sponsor: Rep. Lisa Posthumus Lyons
House Committee: Education
Senate Committee: Committee of the Whole

Second Analysis (1-29-15)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill requires that beginning with students entering grade three in 2006 (that is, those who will graduate 12th grade in 2016), high school graduates must have successfully completed at least two credits of a foreign language in order to earn a diploma. Reportedly, the bill aims to fix an inadvertent error made with the passage House Bill 4465 (PA 208 of 2014) earlier in the 2013-14 legislative session.

FISCAL IMPACT: The bill would have no fiscal impact on the state or local units of government as it intends to maintain both current practice and the intent of HB 4465 in regard to the cohort for whom the foreign language requirement first applies.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Public Act 208 of 2014 made modifications to the requirements of the Michigan high school Merit Curriculum, with the aim of providing students more flexibility when choosing their high school courses. (See *Background Information*.) In general, the PA 208 altered a high school student's graduation requirements to make time for courses in Career and Technical Education (CTE). The new law allows students to substitute CTE classes in place of other academic requirements.

When the new CTE flexibility law was drafted, an important phrase was removed. That phrase required graduating students to have earned two credits of a foreign language during one's school career, *beginning with seniors who will graduate in the class on 2016*. Without the phrase in place, the two-credit foreign language requirement now applies to the high school graduating class of 2015.

Legislation was proposed to reinstate the requirement that high school seniors graduating in 2016 and after earn two credits of foreign language in order to be awarded a high school diploma.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 5793 amended the Revised School Code to make it clear that the foreign language requirement in the high school Michigan Merit Curriculum applies *beginning with pupils who entered 3rd grade in 2006* (a cohort who generally would enter the 12th

grade in the 2015-16 school year). As noted above, the bill aims to fix an inadvertent error in House Bill 4465 (PA 208 of 2014) that deleted the italicized phrase, unintentionally applying the requirement to students entering the 12th grade this school year (2014-15), which is the last cohort for whom the foreign language requirement did not apply.

Under the bill (and as current law intends), *beginning with students entering grade three in 2006*, the board of a school district or charter school cannot award a high school diploma to a student unless the student has successfully completed (during grades K to 12) at least two credits that are grade appropriate of a language other than English (or other learning experiences that are substantially equivalent).

Under current law, schools are strongly encouraged to ensure that all students complete at least one credit in a language other than English in grades K to 6.

(American Sign Language is considered a language other than English for the purpose of this requirement. Also under current law, students who graduate from high school through 2020 may partially or fully fulfill one credit of the foreign language requirement by completing a career and technical education program or visual or performing arts instruction.)

MCL 380.1278a

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

To review the requirements of the Michigan high school Merit Curriculum, visit this link on the Michigan Department of Education website.

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/New_MMC_one_pager_11.15.06_183755_7.pdf

ARGUMENTS:

For:

As already noted, House Bill 5793 makes it clear that the foreign language requirement in the high school Michigan Merit Curriculum applies beginning with students who entered third grade in 2006—a cohort who would graduate from twelfth grade in the 2015-16 school year.

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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.