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BILL



ANALYSIS

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Senate Bill 358 (as introduced 6-3-15)
Sponsor: Senator Goeff Hansen
Senate Committee: Appropriations

Date Completed: 6-3-15

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Revised School Code to do the following with respect to requirements for, and the issuance of, teacher certificates and licenses:

- Require a person holding a teacher certificate from another state to have met ongoing professional learning requirements established by the Superintendent of Public Instruction, instead of having earned at least 18 semester credit hours, or a master's or doctoral degree.**
- Require a person to pass the basic skill exam before being admitted to an approved teacher preparation program, instead of before being enrolled for student teaching.**
- Require a person to pass the elementary certification exam and subject area exams before being enrolled for student teaching, instead of before being recommended for certification.**
- Remove the cap on the fees for the basic skills examination, elementary certification examination, and the subject area examination for the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification (MTTC).**

Currently, a person holding a teaching certificate from another state must meet two requirements in order to receive a teaching certificate in Michigan. First, the person must demonstrate that he or she taught successfully for at least three years in a position for which the person's teaching certification from another state was valid. Second, the person must have earned, after receiving the initial certification in another state, at least 18 semester credit hours in a planned course of study at an institution for higher education approved by the Superintendent of Public Instruction or earned a master's or doctoral degree approved by the Superintendent of Public Instruction. This bill would replace the second criterion with a requirement that the person "has met ongoing professional learning requirements established by the superintendent of public instruction".

The bill would change when a person must successfully pass examinations in order to progress along the route of teacher certification. Specifically, the bill would require that a person pass the basic skills examination before being admitted to an approved teacher preparation program. Current law allows admittance without this requirement, and requires a person to pass the basic skills exam before he or she is enrolled for student teaching. The bill also would require a person to pass the elementary certification examination and applicable subject area examinations before being enrolled for student teaching. Currently, this is required for a candidate to be recommended for certification.

In addition, the bill would strike the cap on the amount that can be charged for the basic skills examination, elementary certification examination, and subject area examination. This would

allow the State to set the testing fee rate at the amount that would pay for updates made by the testing vendor and for Department of Education oversight.

MCL 380.1531 & 380.1531i

BACKGROUND

The current fee cap is \$50 for the basic skills examination and \$75 for the elementary certification examination and subject area examination. This cap has been in place since it was established in 1992 and has not been increased. Currently, Michigan has the lowest teacher certification fee cap in the country. There is only one vendor that offers the examination at the current rate, which limits the bargaining power of the State to increase the quality of the examination.

In FY 2013-14, 11,200 basic skills examinations were taken and 14,500 elementary certification and subject area examinations were taken. The number of examinations being taken in a given year has declined over the decade. In FY 2014-15, the Michigan Department of Education received \$1.8 million for MTTC assessments to move from providing teaching certificates to individuals who are "minimally acceptable teacher candidates" to those who are "adequately prepared to be effective teachers". The appropriations covered changes to seven of the approximately 72 MTTC assessments. The Department has additional changes that need to be made to the assessments, including: updating the content area questions, adding constructed answer responses, including questions that involve real teacher situations, and allowing vendors to develop computer-based tests.

The Department has indicated that assessment fees need to be increased or the Department needs to receive additional State appropriations in order to revise all of the assessments in a timely manner. Currently, the Department receives \$5 from each examination, which funds 1.0 FTE position that oversees the MTTC.

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would result in additional revenue to the Department if and when the Department increased fees, but in an indeterminate amount. Any revenue raised by teacher testing fees is statutorily required to be spent solely for administrative expenses the Department incurs in implementing the teacher certification program. The additional revenue could be used to enter into contracts with vendors to provide assessments that would be designed to indicate which candidates are adequately prepared to be effective teachers. The Department would first need to seek contracts through an RFP process in order to establish the total costs for updating the assessments, and then would have to establish a new assessment fee to be paid by prospective teachers.

The costs for some subject areas might be greater than the costs for other areas. An example of a subject area that is more costly is American Sign Language, which would include the assessment of signing competency. Depending on the costs, with the enactment of this bill, the Department could either raise the fee for an individual subject area or increase all the assessment fees. At this time, it is unclear whether the Department would need to increase the portion of the examination fee that goes to the Department in order to ensure that the assessments are being modified to Michigan standards.

The bill would have no fiscal impact on local school districts.

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