

Legislative Analysis



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

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House Bill 4181 as enacted
Public Act 151 of 2017
Sponsor: Rep. Brett Roberts

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

House Committee: Workforce and Talent Development
Senate Committee: Education
Complete to 1-19-18

BRIEF SUMMARY: House Bill 4181 would amend Section 1233 of the Revised School Code to direct that 50 of the 150 required professional development (PD) hours for school counselors must be dedicated to the college preparation and selection process and career counseling, beginning two years after the bill takes effect. The bill would take effect 90 days after its enactment.

FISCAL IMPACT: The bill would have an indeterminate, yet minimal, fiscal impact on the Department of Education (MDE), and it could have an indeterminate, yet minimal, fiscal impact on local school districts, intermediate school districts (ISDs), or public school academies (PSAs).

The bill would increase administrative costs to the MDE and the Department of Talent and Economic Development (TED) to approve professional development for school counselor credentials. Currently, there is not an official working relationship between the two departments in creating school counselor credentials, and there would be an administrative cost in coordination, in addition to working with outside organizations such as groups representing school counselors, college admissions professionals, financial aid officers, employers, and others. There would also be an additional administrative cost, though likely minimal, to categorize and make sure that the specifically required professional development—25 hours of college preparation and selection process and 25 hours of career counseling—is acquired.

The bill could increase administrative costs to local school districts and ISDs that offer professional development to school counselors. Since the bill would require the MDE to approve professional development for school counselor credentials, there could be administrative costs to implementing new or amended professional development as provided by school districts, ISDs, or PSAs.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

According to the bill sponsor, House Bill 4181 would ensure that school counselors have specific and ongoing training in one of their most important areas of emphasis: educating students on their college and career opportunities after leaving high school. After all, for many students, a school counselor represents their main source of information for college

applications, career and technical educational options, future professional prospects, and the trends and opportunities surrounding those topics. Ideally, requiring this specialized training could result in enhanced educational and career opportunities for hundreds of students per counselor.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 4181 would amend the Revised School Code to direct that 50 of the 150 required professional development (PD) hours for school counselors must be dedicated to the college preparation and selection process and career counseling, beginning two years after the bill takes effect.

Existing Professional Development requirements

Under the Code, individuals who wish to serve in a counseling role in a school district or intermediate school district (ISD) must either hold a teaching certificate with a school counseling endorsement or meet the requisite education or employment experience standards. In order to maintain licensure or endorsement, in addition to other requirements, a counselor must complete one of the following every five years: (1) 150 district-provided PD hours,¹ (2) 150 State Continuing Education Clock Hours, or (3) six credit hours.

New Professional Development requirements for schools

The bill would set more specific PD requirements for counselors wishing to renew their school counseling credentials, beginning January 1, 2019. Counselors would need to complete 25 hours of professional development for counseling on the college preparation and selection process, and 25 hours for counseling on career counseling, within their existing 150 hours of PD every five years. (For the purposes of the requirement, career counseling would include exploration of military career options and the skilled trades, and credentials for technical or occupational skills necessary to obtain employment or advance within an occupation. At least 5 of the 25 career counseling hours must cover military career options.)

This requirement would take effect two years after the bill takes effect, to account for counselors who are nearing recertification and have already completed most, if not all, of their PD hours without the new condition.

MDE must develop Professional Development standards

Under the bill, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), in consultation with the Department of Talent and Economic Development (TED) and groups representing school counselors, college admissions professionals, financial aid officers, employers, and other groups deemed appropriate by the MDE, would be required to develop PD standards by July 1, 2018, which would consist of the college preparation and career counseling described above.

¹ R 390.1305 of the Teacher Certification Code actually requires “the completion of 6 semester hours of credit in an approved program or the 18 approved state board continuing education units [which equates to 180 hours], or a combination of both.” A waiver issued by the MDE on June 13, 2014, lowered this requirement to 150 hours, so that it conformed to other departmental PD requirements.

The MDE would approve PD programs or courses submitted by schools if it determines that the content and curriculum meets the MDE standards.

The bill also deletes a provision that a school district or ISD that employs a person as a school counselor who does not have a teaching certificate must comply with certain criminal background check requirements (in Sections 1230 and 1230a of the Code) just as it would in employing a certificated teacher. Because those sections apply to all school employees and people working under contract at a school, this removal is merely technical and has no substantive effect.

MCL 380.1233

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

House Bill 4552 of the 2015-2016 legislative session underwent several iterations before the H-3 substitute, passed by the House, proposed the same requirements as those in House Bill 4181 as passed by the House.²

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Although this bill does not change the total hours of professional development required for school counselors, it does shift the emphasis. A counselor's school district may offer PD opportunities, but they are more likely tailored to the hundreds of teachers in the district, rather than the few counselors. It is hoped that the requirement will spur the demand for more courses and, consequently, the supply of those courses.

Proponents stressed that the advice school counselors give is only as effective as the information they have. If counselors are not receiving ongoing information on updates to the college application process and new opportunities and programs for career training, they leave students without necessary guidance at a pivotal point in their lives.

For example, according to a recent presentation by the Department of Talent and Economic Development, Michigan currently has approximately 14,000 unfilled computing-related jobs. A counselor regularly updated in the job market would be able to identify professions suffering from a "skills gap," and provide information about those professions to students who may not have defined career goals.

Against:

Opponents maintained that the greatest challenge confronting school counselors is not addressed by this bill—namely, that there are not enough counselors to provide the necessary support to students. The areas of emphasis in this bill—college and career

² House Bill 4552 of 2015-2016; <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2015-2016/billanalysis/House/pdf/2015-HLA-4552-CB2E4376.pdf>

counseling—represent the traditional role of school counselors, but hardly begin to address the tasks required of school counselors today.

One school counselor testified that, at the high school level, counselors are required to do any or all of the following: “scheduling, college guidance, post-secondary guidance, financial aid, scholarships, send transcripts to colleges, enroll new students, interpret transcripts, personal curriculums, explain flex opportunities, early college programs, dual enrollment, AP advising, credit recovery, summer school, 21f online, AP coordinators, PSAT coordinators, SAT coordinators, State Testing coordinators, write letters of recommendations (which colleges weigh heavily), assist with educational development plans, write 504 plans (which have increased exponentially due to more anxiety disorder diagnosis), assist with homebound services, manage school refusal, refer to alternative learning, evaluate credits for graduation, aid students with testing out, work with English Learners, Special Education students, and ADHD students, manage conflict resolution, handle harassment issues, bullying issues, help students abusing substances, have anger issues, need grief counseling, have self-esteem issues, anxiety, depression, or are suicidal, experiencing gender dysphoria, and still respond to parent phone calls and emails.”

According to opponents, providing specialized training may seem to address the problem, but does not give counselors or students the tools to ensure that all students truly have access to this vital information: additional counselors in the schools. In effect, the information may get to counselors, but not to the students who need it most, due to a lack of staffing and time.

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.