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HIGH SCHOOL PROFICIENCY TEST

**House Bill 5228 as enrolled
Public Act 175 of 1997
Sponsor: Rep. Sharon Gire**

**House Bill 5229 as enrolled
Public Act 176 of 1997
Sponsor: Rep. Mark Schauer**

**House Bill 5230 as enrolled
Public Act 177 of 1997
Sponsor: Rep. Ron Jelinek**

**House Bill 5232 as enrolled
Public Act 178 of 1997
Sponsor: Rep. Jessie Dalman**

**House Bill 5233 as enrolled
Public Act 179 of 1997
Sponsor: Rep. James Agee**

**House Bill 5234 as enrolled
Public Act 180 of 1997
Sponsor: Rep. Clyde LeTarte**

**House Bill 5235 as enrolled
Public Act 181 of 1997
Sponsor: Rep. Kwame Kilpatrick**

**Second Analysis (1-9-98)
House Committee: Education
Senate Committee: Education**

House Bills 5228-5230 and 5232-5235 (1-9-98)

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

A special subcommittee of the House Education Committee held extensive hearings throughout the spring and summer on the state's high school proficiency test. This controversial new test was designed to be taken midway through the junior year in Michigan high schools to determine if students are eligible for an "endorsed diploma" when they graduate. The endorsed diploma concept has been around for a number of years, but the high school proficiency test was first administered in the spring of 1996. It is actually a series of tests or assessments. There are three sections to the test

correlating to the three areas in which a student can earn an endorsement -- mathematics, science, and communication arts. Further, the communication arts endorsement involves two assessments, one in reading and one in writing. (A social studies assessment is planned for the Class of 2000.) Until recently, students were ranked as "proficient", "novice", or "not-yet-novice". Only a proficient ranking qualified a student to receive an endorsed diploma, but the indication of a novice score also was placed on the student's transcript. (Recent legislation has eliminated the "novice" category.)

This new test, say state education officials, is not a basic skills test but is a rigorous test based on high expectations. It is designed to be aligned with the Michigan model core curriculum outcomes. It is not the typical multiple choice standardized test but focuses on the application of knowledge, problem solving, and critical thinking. It assesses what students are expected to know by the end of 10th grade, and the test itself was designed "to model good instructional practice." The first scores reported showed less than half of the test takers proficient in mathematics; less than one-third proficient in science; about 40 percent proficient in reading; and about one-third proficient in writing. About one-half of the students received a novice score on the science, reading, and writing portions, and 38 percent received a novice score in mathematics. However, after several opportunities for retesting, the final Class of 1997 scores were 52.5 percent in mathematics; 41.6 percent in science; 48.6 percent in reading; and 41.7 percent in writing. The scores of first-time test takers from the winter 1997 testing of the Class of 1998 showed an increase in student achievement in reading, science, and mathematics, and a slight decline in writing performance, according to the Department of Education.

As might be expected, the test has become quite controversial and aroused significant public opposition. Numerous questions have been raised about its purpose and suitability. Criticisms range from technical matters, such as the time and complexity involved in its administration and the methods of scoring, to political ones, such as whether the test is designed to embarrass public schools and public school students. One common criticism is that the test offers no benefit to students, only negative consequences. Students gain little by doing well, since colleges and employers do not appear to make use of the scores, but can be stigmatized by a poor performance. Such concerns led many anxious parents in one affluent suburban area to opt their children out of the test. (Their concerns were exacerbated by often-repeated stories of outstanding students failing to achieve proficiency in one area or another.) Educators complain that while students receive their scores and the categories into which they fall, they get no indication of what they did right or wrong. The writing test, for example, is not returned or critiqued. So students are given no guidance for retaking the test. Others criticize the test for assessing students on what a state model suggests they should know, which is not necessarily what their local curriculum has taught them. This is unfair to students, they say, particularly to those not college-bound, and reflects a "one size fits all" attitude towards schools and students. And some people are suspicious of any increased state role in directing education policies.

Defenders of the test say that, despite its problems, some of which stem from simply being new, the high school proficiency test is working to achieve its aims of raising standards and making local school districts focus attention on the state's model core curriculum outcomes. Business leaders, who were in the forefront of creating the concept of endorsed diplomas and proficiency testing, have testified that the test emphasizes the kind and quality of school performance expected of students if they are to succeed in today's working environments.

A special subcommittee of the House Education Committee has developed recommendations for improving the test in response to many of the criticisms at hearings held around the state during the spring and summer. Legislation has been introduced to implement those recommendations.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILLS:

The bills would amend several acts to make changes in the administration of the high school proficiency test. (The test is generally referred to in the bills as "the assessments used for state endorsement." The term "proficiency" has been removed and replaced, usually, with "achieved state endorsement.") Unless otherwise noted, the bills would amend the Revised School Code (MCL 380.1279 et al.).

Under House Bill 5228:

-- The assessments would be administered to students during the last 30 school days of Grade 11.

-- The Department of Education would have to ensure that the assessments were scored and the scores returned to students, parents or guardians, and school districts or public school academies no later than the beginning of the first semester of 12th grade. The returned scores would have to indicate the student's scaled score for each subject area, the range of scores for each subject area, and the range of scores that constitute each performance category. In reporting the scores, the department would have to provide specific, meaningful, and timely feedback on student performance.

-- Not later than Fall of 1999, the department would have to arrange for those portions of the test that cannot be scored mechanically to be scored by persons holding a valid Michigan teaching certificate, by retired Michigan teachers, or by Michigan school administrators trained for that purpose.

-- The State Board of Education would be required to develop scaled scores for reporting subject area assessment results for each of the subject areas. Subject to approval by the state board, the superintendent of public instruction would have to establish three

categories for each subject area, indicating basic competency, above average, and outstanding, and would have to establish the scaled score range required for each category. The department would have to design and distribute to school districts, charter schools, and private schools a simple and concise document describing the categories and indicating the scaled score ranges for each category in each subject area.

-- A student's scaled score on each subject area assessment would be included on his or her high school transcript. If the score fell within one of the three categories cited above, then the transcript would contain an indication that the student had achieved state endorsement for that subject area. The bill also would require a transcript to contain the number of school days the student was in attendance at school each school year during high school and the total number of school days in session for each of those years. References in the act to "a state-endorsed high school diploma" would be eliminated.

-- The department would be required to ensure that the assessments themselves and the combined total time necessary to administer all of the assessments, including social studies, takes the shortest time possible while maintaining the degree of reliability and validity determined necessary by the department. The department would be required to ensure that the maximum total combined length of time that schools are required to set aside for administration of all of the assessments does not exceed eight hours. However, the bill says this does not limit the amount of time individuals may have to complete the assessments.

-- The department would be required to submit a comprehensive report to the legislature on the status of the state endorsement program not later than July 1 each year until 2000. The report would have to include the annual student assessment data; the description of feedback provided to students, parents, and schools; a description of any significant alterations made in the program by the department or state board; any recommendations for legislative changes; and an update of the reports of the assessment advisory committee of the state board.

-- No later than 90 days after the bill's effective date, the State Board of Education would be required to appoint an 11-member assessment administration advisory committee to advise them on MEAP tests and on the high school proficiency test. The committee would be composed of representatives of school districts, school administrators, teachers, and parents, with the appointments to reflect the geographic and population diversity of school districts in the state. The representatives of local and intermediate school districts would have to be expert in testing or test

administration. The committee would have to evaluate the various tests and make recommendations related to administration, scoring, and the reporting and use of results. The evaluation would have to cover, among other things, the length of the tests; the time of the testing period during the school year; feedback provided to students, parents, and schools; accurate and relevant reporting of results to the general public; the selection of a retesting period and procedures and arrangements for repeating tests; local scoring and other general scoring-related issues; the categories of scoring; and professional development for teachers.

-- A child who is a student in a nonpublic school or home school would be able to take an assessment. The home school student would have to contact his or her local school district and the district would administer the assessment, or the child could take the assessment at a nonpublic school. Upon the request of a nonpublic school, the department would have to supply assessments and the nonpublic school could administer them to its students. (This is said to be current state education department policy.)

-- The department would be required to establish, schedule, and arrange periodic retesting periods throughout the year for individuals who wanted to repeat an assessment. The department would have to coordinate the arrangements for administering the repeat assessments and ensure that the retesting was made available at least within each intermediate school district and, to the extent possible, within each school district. An individual could repeat any of the assessments during any retesting period. The bill also says a student who wants to repeat an assessment could do so without charge in the next school year or after graduation. A person who graduated after 1996 and has not ever taken an assessment could take an assessment without charge at the school district from which he or she graduated at any time the assessment was administered or during a retesting period. The graduate's scaled score and any endorsement would be included on his or her high school transcript.

-- A statement of purpose would be added to the act regarding the assessments, to read as follows: "The purpose of the assessments under this section is to assess pupil competency in mathematics, science, social studies, and communication arts for the purpose of improving academic achievement and establishing a statewide standard of competency. The assessment under this section provides a common measure of data that will contribute to the improvement of Michigan schools' curriculum and instruction by encouraging alignment with Michigan's curriculum framework standards. These standards are based on the expectations of what pupils should know and be able to do by the end of Grade 11."

-- Definitions of the terms "communication skills" and "social studies" would be added to the act, with the former referring to "reading and writing" and the latter to "geography, history, economics, and American government."

House Bill 5229 would put the provisions described above in the State School Aid Act (MCL 388.1704a), except for those regarding the assessment administration advisory committee.

At present, students who are in grade 10 and above are allowed, upon the written request of a parent or guardian, to take an assessment without charge whenever a district regularly administers it, or when it administers a retest, for the purpose of qualifying for one or more postsecondary courses under the Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act. A school district is not required to include in an annual education report or any other accreditation-related report submitted to the Department of Education the results of tests or assessments taken by a student in grade 10. House Bill 5230 would specify that a student who was in grade 10 or above could take an assessment during a retesting period established by the Department of Education under House Bill 5228. Also, the bill would specify that school districts are not required to report the results of tests or assessments by a student in grades 11 or lower until the results of that student's graduating class are otherwise reported.

House Bill 5232 would amend the Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act (MCL 388.513) to take into account the effect changes in the administration of the state endorsement assessments would have on eligibility for the dual enrollment program. Students in Grades 11 and 12 would be eligible for dual enrollment in a subject area for which they had achieved an endorsement (as well as a foreign language not offered by the district, computer science, and fine arts).

House Bill 5233 would rewrite the provisions that spell out certain additional matters that must be addressed in the school improvement plans that local school districts are required to produce each year. Plans would have to include goals centered on student academic learning; strategies to accomplish those goals; professional development to help teachers and administrators learn approaches for attaining the goals; and evaluation of the plan. (These items would replace the requirement that plans include identification of adult roles for which graduates need to be prepared; identification of the education and skills needed to allow graduates to fulfill those adult roles; a determination of whether the existing school curriculum is providing students with that education and those skills; and identification of changes that must be made to provide graduates with the

necessary education and skills and specific recommendations for implementing those changes.)

Further, changes would be made in the items to be contained in an intermediate school district school improvement plan. The bill would require the plan to include methods to assist districts in academic learning; activities for professional development that support academic learning; collaborative efforts with supporting agencies that enhance academic learning; and evaluation of the plan. Six other items would remain unchanged. (The items replaced required the plans to include a plan for addressing classroom needs and improvements throughout the territory of the ISDs without regard to school district boundaries; a plan for delivery of effective and relevant professional development for teachers within the ISD that will lead to improved teaching and learning; and coordination of services and service delivery with other existing state and local human service agencies.)

House Bill 5234 would require that school accreditation standards include the percentage of students achieving state endorsement and multiple year change in those percentages. (This is in addition to pupil performance on MEAP tests and multiple year change in performance, which are already included.)

Currently, a school board is required to provide a core academic curriculum, learning processes, special assistance, and sufficient access to each of those so that students have a fair opportunity to achieve a state endorsement. House Bill 5235 would require a school board to use MEAP test results as an indicator of which students need special assistance to have a fair opportunity to achieve state endorsement and of whether the district's curriculum is aligned adequately to prepare students to achieve state endorsement. The special assistance could include at least one meeting attended by the student and a member of the district staff or a local or intermediate district consultant knowledgeable in the measurement and evaluation of students. The district could provide the meeting as a group meeting for students in similar circumstances. If the student is a minor, the district would have to invite and encourage the parent or guardian (or other person in loco parentis) to attend and would have to mail a notice of the meeting to them.

The purpose of the meeting and any subsequent meeting would be to determine an educational program for the student designed to assist the student to achieve state endorsement. Subsequent meetings could be provided to be conducted by a counselor or teacher designated by the school principal, with the parent or guardian to be invited and encouraged to attend. The district could provide special programs or develop a program using

educational programs regularly used by the school district.

information on their performance, critics say, which limits the value of retesting.

The code currently requires that the board of a school district provide special assistance if necessary to provide students a fair opportunity to achieve a state endorsement. The bill would add, "particularly for students with reading disorders or who have demonstrated marked difficulty in achieving success on standardized tests."

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

Both the House Fiscal Agency and Senate Fiscal Agency have reported that the fiscal impact of the proposals is uncertain, but say that it is possible that both state and local costs would increase with changes to the assessment process. Among the items that could lead to cost increases are the faster turnaround in test scoring; development of a scaled scoring system; the creation of the advisory group; the shortening of the test; the required Department of Education report; and possible increased participation in dual-enrollment programs. (For more detail, see the discussion in the HFA's Fiscal Notes dated 10-9-97 and the SFA analysis dated 12-3-97)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The bills as enacted represent a compromise version of revisions to the state's high school proficiency test. The changes grew out of a series of recommendations made by a House subcommittee after several months of hearings around the state. The subcommittee consensus was that the test has value as an instrument for evaluating students and improving schools, but has flaws that need to be addressed. Among the changes contained in the bills are the following.

-- The test would be moved to the end of the 11th grade, with scores to be returned by the beginning of the first semester of 12th grade. This addresses the criticism that the test is given too early, with the result that schools are being forced to push their curriculums downward. Critics say this has meant denying students the opportunity to take valuable, enriching elective courses whose subject matter will not be on the test (including music, art, etc.). Pushing the test back will restore some flexibility in curriculum design for school districts and students. Plus, by returning scores by the beginning of the first semester, there will be opportunities for retests.

-- Specific, meaningful, and timely feedback would be required when scores are reported on the areas in which a student needs to improve to achieve an endorsement in a subject area. Currently, students receive little useful

-- Portions of the test not scored mechanically would be scored by Michigan educators. Currently, to cite the prime example, the writing test is sent to North Carolina for scoring, which appears to have added to the public skepticism about the fairness of the test (particularly since students as a whole have not done well). Scoring by Michigan teachers would also assist them in better teaching the students the skills the test demands.

-- Three categories of endorsement would be developed under this proposal to replace the current pass/fail test, with the categories roughly approximating basic competency, above average, and outstanding. This will provide a better accounting of the various levels of student achievement on the test.

-- The concept of a state-endorsed diploma would be replaced by individual subject matter endorsements that would be recorded on a student's transcript. Also, a student's actual scaled scores would appear on the transcript.

-- The test would be shortened. The proposal calls for the administration of the test to take no more than 8 hours. There have been complaints that the administration of the test takes too much school time and is too disruptive to high schools generally. Some people describe it as an 11- or 12-hour test. (Department of Education officials say the actual test taking time should be about 8 hours and 40 minutes, and that only the writing portion has actual time limits.) This is without the addition of a social studies component scheduled for implementation with the Class of 2000. The new 8-hour maximum would include the social studies test.

-- The proposal includes a statement of purpose to appear in statute, to answer complaints and questions about what the test is supposed to be accomplishing. The statement intends to make it clear that the test intends both to assess student competency and improve the curriculum and instruction in the state's schools by encouraging alignment with state model content standards.

-- An advisory group would be established to provide ongoing assistance to the Department of Education on school testing. It would focus on the administration of the test, including its length, scoring, feedback, reporting of results, and other matters, and would be made up of educators, parents, and school district representatives, as well as experts in assessment and measurement.

-- Emphasis would be put on using MEAP tests as an indicator of which students are likely to encounter difficulty in achieving state endorsements when in high school. This allows for early intervention to provide

special assistance to students and to school districts whose curriculums are not offering students an opportunity to succeed.

Response:

Some of these recommendations raise concerns. Wouldn't it be better to ask the Department of Education to try to shorten the test without specifying a time limit? Besides, the current test does not seem that long compared with the amount of time devoted in high school to other far less important events and activities. The test ought to be seen as a meaningful part of the learning experience in high school, not as a nuisance and an add-on. Shortening the test could affect its reliability and validity. Further, while the State Board of Education has expressed its desire to have the writing test scored in Michigan, it might not be feasible by the 1999 deadline imposed here, particularly if the pool of potential scorers is limited to people holding teaching certificates, retired teachers, and administrators. That leaves a lot of potential scorers out, and teachers may not be interested in participating. Also, the current test is based on what students have learned by the end of the 10th grade, while the proposed legislation would base the test on what students are supposed to have learned by the end of the 11th grade. What effect will this have on the test? Will it make it more difficult? And how will it affect attempts to shorten the test? A House subcommittee recommended giving the test in the first semester of 12th grade. The final version of the bills requires the tests be given during the last 30 days of the 11th grade. This is already a busy time (with end-of-school year tests and activities) for students and schools.

Against:

Some critics would prefer that the test be eliminated. They say that it is taking away local school flexibility and encroaching on local decision making by forcing schools to adapt their curriculums to the test. It should be noted that there is no mandated statewide curriculum, even though the test functions as if there is. The test is forcing districts to change course offerings, limit choices and opportunities previously available, and emphasize a college-bound model, even though many students are not preparing to attend a four-year college. The college-bound student already takes a multitude of tests that are recognized by the schools they plan to attend, and other employment-related tests are available for the student going directly to the workforce. This test adds nothing beneficial to students or school systems. Many of the major criticisms of the test, as regards its design, its administration, its purposes, its affect on students and curriculums, have not been addressed.

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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.