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## PROFICIENCY TEST: NO "NOVICE"

### House Bill 4492 (Substitute H-2) First Analysis (5-22-97)

**Sponsor: Rep. Kirk A. Profit**  
**Committee: Education**

#### ***THE APPARENT PROBLEM:***

Juniors in Michigan high schools are supposed to take the high school proficiency test in order to earn an "endorsed diploma" when they graduate. The endorsed diploma concept has been around for several years, but the high school proficiency test was first taken by students in May of 1996 (with the first re-testing in September of that year). There are three sections to the 11-hour test correlating to the three areas in which a student can get an endorsement -- mathematics, science, and communication arts. Students can score "proficient", "novice", or "not-yet novice". Only a proficient score qualifies a student to receive an endorsed diploma, but the indication of a "novice" score also appears on a student's transcript. 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. The first-year scores 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. (The communication arts endorsement involves two parts, reading and writing.) About half of the test-takers received a "novice" score on the science, reading, and writing portions, and 38 percent received a "novice" score in mathematics.

As might be expected, the test has become quite controversial, and questions have arisen about its purposes and its suitability. Critics cite cases of outstanding students with excellent scores on college admission and scholastic aptitude and achievement tests faced with being classified as "novices" on their high school transcripts. In one highly publicized case, anxious parents in a school district with many affluent, college-bound students, are said to have opted out of the test on behalf of their children. The reasoning, reportedly, was that otherwise successful students had nothing to gain and much to lose by taking a test that could designate them as "novices" in one of the tested areas. State education officials defend the reliability of the test, which aims not only at assessing student performance but in improving the state's public schools by focusing attention on the state's model core curriculum outcomes. Among both supporters and critics of the test, however, there appears widespread

agreement that the nomenclature used in scoring (proficient, novice, and not-yet-novice) is inappropriate. As the Class of 1997 approaches graduation, legislation has been proposed that would eliminate the "novice" designation on student records.

#### ***THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:***

The bill would amend the Revised School Code to eliminate the provision that requires the State Board of Education to establish a novice level score for state endorsed diploma assessments (i.e., the high school proficiency test). That provision also says that transcripts are to note when a student has achieved a novice level score but such a score does not result in a state-endorsed diploma.

The bill also deletes a provision regarding an "advanced mastery" endorsement (which has never been implemented) and deletes obsolete language regarding students scheduled to graduate in 1994, 1995, and 1996.

MCL 380.1279

#### ***FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:***

There is no information at present. (5-21-97)

#### ***ARGUMENTS:***

##### ***For:***

The bill would eliminate the "novice" designation on student transcripts as a result of their performance on the high school proficiency test. Students should not have the term "novice" on their transcripts or other student records. This is an inappropriate and unfair description of that level of performance on what is a brand new, difficult test, based on high expectations of student achievement. The test is not a basic skills test. Students designated as "proficient" in a subject area as a result of their performance on the high school proficiency test would continue to earn an endorsed diploma under this bill. (A parallel provision is to be added to the State School Aid Act by House Bill 4299.)

***Against:***

Some would propose the suspension or elimination of the high school proficiency test.

***Response:***

That action would be unwarranted. The legislature is still in the process of holding hearings and gathering information on this new test from critics and supporters. This bill eliminates one generally agreed-upon offensive aspect of the test.

***POSITIONS:***

There are no positions on the bill at present. (5-21-97)

Analyst: C. Couch

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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.