

REVISE SUBSTITUTE TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS

House Bill 5272 as introduced First Analysis (3-15-00)

Sponsor: Rep. Randy Richardville
Committee: Education

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

According to an article in *Phi Delta Kappan*, an education journal for teachers, the average student spends seven days out of every school year with a substitute teacher. When classroom teachers cannot meet their students because of illness or because time has been set aside for adult learning in their teaching disciplines (what has come to be known as professional development), school districts hire substitute teachers.

Generally, substitutes are paid by the day (about \$70 a day in Michigan, but ranging from \$42 to \$175 a day throughout the nation), and they are required to have completed some college-level course work. (In contrast, a teacher might earn \$350 a day, and an attorney \$800 a day.) The amount and kind of college course work varies depending on the state where the substitute works. Further, the kind of contract or work agreement a substitute signs--temporary part-time or permanent part-time--varies depending on the school district and the state. However, school districts usually develop a list of qualified substitute teachers, and then notify a substitute early in the morning on the school day during which he or she will teach.

The qualifications of substitute teachers differ from state to state. Some states such as Rhode Island require their substitute teachers to be fully certified in the learning discipline that is taught in the classroom where they will be temporarily assigned. Or, states such as Ohio require a substitute teacher to have a college degree in any subject area. Other states such as Michigan and Florida require at least some college credit. In yet further contrast, Utah and Georgia require only a high school diploma.

In 1995 when the Michigan legislature adopted the Revised School Code, a section was added to specify that the board of a school district or intermediate school district could employ a person without a teaching certificate as a substitute teacher if the person had at

least 90 semester hours of college credit from a college or university.

Before the change, the state issued permits for regular substitute teachers and also permits for emergency substitute teachers. Districts with an inadequate supply of substitutes could apply to the state to lessen the requirements for those teachers. Normally a substitute teacher who did not hold a valid teaching certificate would have to have completed 120 semester hours at an accredited institution, including six hours of professional educational credit. However, if the state declared a district to have an emergency situation, substitute teachers could work if they had a bachelor's degree with no educational credits, or if they were in a teacher education program and had completed 90 semester hours toward certification. During the 1994-95 school year, the state issued 13,610 permits for regular subs, and 1,613 permits for emergency subs.

Finding an adequate number of qualified substitute teachers is difficult in some school districts, and the reports of the substitute "shortage" appear in the press nationwide. Generally two reasons are given: substandard pay without benefits; and unruly students who harass their temporary teachers. (See *BACKGROUND INFORMATION* below.)

In order to make easier the recruitment of substitute teachers, some have argued that the qualifications could be eased. They suggest that the pool of eligible candidates will be larger if the 90 hours of higher education currently required could be earned at a community college, rather than be restricted to 90 hours of course work at a college or university.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 5272 would amend the Revised School Code to change the minimum qualifications for substitute teachers. Under current law the board of a

school district or intermediate school district may employ a person without a teaching certificate as a substitute teacher if the person has at least 90 semester hours of college credit from a college or university. House Bill 5272 would amend the provision to specify that “college” would include an accredited community college located in this state.

MCL 380.1233

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Substitute teacher shortage. Nationwide school districts struggle to find qualified substitute teachers. As a result, some states have reduced educational requirements. Most researchers who track the substitute “shortage” phenomenon observe that until recently schools have been able to hire better talent than they were paying for, but that since people (mostly women) who used to become teachers now have other career opportunities, substitute teaching has lost its appeal. That is to say, today’s shortage of substitute teachers isn’t caused by a lack of qualified people. It’s caused by qualified people who are unwilling to work at sub-market wages, or as one report suggests, substitute teaching entails a subhuman day at substandard pay. Indeed, according to remarks made before a school finance committee in the Iowa legislature in October 1999, a substitute teacher makes from \$55 to \$95 per day. That per diem amounts to an annual salary of \$9,900 to \$17,100, while the poverty level for a family of four is \$15,965. Few find the pay and working conditions appealing.

Substitute teacher training and recruitment. Some community colleges and private education consultants have created new training programs to help school districts recruit qualified substitute teachers. At least one of the new programs is video-based and distributed electronically through distance learning networks. The program, used by Michigan school districts, consists of four video lessons with advice from veteran substitute teachers, full-time classroom teachers, and school administrators. After using this training program for two years, the St. Clair Intermediate School District has added 175 people to its substitute teacher lists, freeing teachers to attend their five state-mandated days of staff development.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The House Fiscal Agency notes that the bill would have no fiscal impact. (3-10-00)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The state’s substitute teacher qualification requirements can be relaxed without causing harm to school children. Ideal candidates for substitute teaching are positive and energetic workers. It is not important that a substitute teacher who is a temporary employee display either deep subject matter knowledge or teaching skill. Substitute teachers are effective when they display excellent verbal communications skills; stimulate intellectual growth; motivate students’ academic interests; and, exhibit warmth, caring, and a dedication to human growth and development. These skills and personal qualities can be found in many adults, and certainly in many adults who have successfully completed course work and associate degrees in community colleges. Allowing people who have 90 hours of community college course work to substitute teach will ease the substitute teacher shortage in some regions of Michigan.

For:

This legislation would make lawful what already is the practice in many Michigan school districts. The current law specifies that substitute teachers should have 90 hours of course work at a college or university. According to reports, some school districts have interpreted ‘college’ to mean a community college, instead of a four-year college of higher learning. Those school districts have hired substitute teachers who have community college associate degrees. This legislation clarifies the law, and enables school districts to continue their practice of including community college-educated substitute teachers on their sub lists.

Against:

A growing number of reports point out that school resources--and most important of all, highly qualified teachers--are key to student learning. Those who teach and those who substitute teach should undertake their temporary assignments only in classes where they will teach their major or minor fields of study. State policy should require that all teachers in classrooms be fully trained and have ample knowledge so that a student’s day in school can be productive. Underqualified teachers in classrooms, even on a temporary basis, are a matter of concern as there is a relationship between teacher quality and student achievement. Efforts in education policy are always toward the goal of raising standards; thus, standards should not be lowered for substitute teachers.

POSITIONS:

The Monroe County Intermediate School District supports the bill. (3-14-00)

The Monroe County Superintendents Association supports the bill. (3-15-00)

The Jefferson Schools support the bill. (3-14-00)

Analyst: J. Hunault

■ 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.