

Legislative Analysis



TEACHER CERTIFICATION FOR SIXTH GRADE

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House Bill 5279 (Substitute H-1)

Sponsor: Rep. Fred Miller

Committee: Education

First Analysis (6-19-06)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would authorize an individual who holds a secondary level teaching certificate to teach his or her subject areas of endorsement in grade six.

FISCAL IMPACT: The bill would have minimal fiscal impact on the state and local school districts. The bill could result in a slight reduction in state certification fees, and local school districts would see increased flexibility under this legislation

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

In Michigan, teachers with a general elementary teaching certificate are permitted to teach all subjects in grades from kindergarten up to 5th grade, and may teach subjects in their major or minor areas of preparation in 6th grade to 8th grade. A teacher with a secondary certificate is permitted to teach 9th grade to 12th grade in the teacher's major and minor areas of preparation. For 6th grade teachers, however, the certification requirements no longer match the actual structure of Michigan schools.

Typically, in elementary schools, students remain in the same classroom throughout the day, and one teacher instructs them in all subjects. In secondary schools, students change classrooms during the day and receive instruction from teachers who specialize in one or more subjects. Although for certification purposes 6th grade is considered an elementary grade, more often than not it is offered in middle schools, and generally is taught on the secondary school model, with separate classes for each subject.

Reportedly, some teachers who have been teaching 6th grade for many years have found that they do not meet the "highly qualified teacher" requirements under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. According to the Department of Education, a highly qualified teacher in Michigan must have full state certification, among other qualifications. Middle school teachers frequently have endorsements authorizing them to teach 7th grade to 12th grade, but they must earn an additional elementary certification or endorsement to be certified to teach 6th grade.

To reconcile the state's certification requirements with the actual structure of many Michigan school systems, it has been suggested that secondary teachers be authorized to teach 6th grade.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Revised School Code (MCL 380.1531g) to authorize, regardless of existing rules, an individual who held a secondary level teaching certificate to teach in grade

six, but only in the subject areas in which he or she had endorsements on the teaching certificate.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Under the Administrative Code, a secondary certificate endorsement is an authorization to teach in grades 9 to 12 in major and minor areas of preparation.

In Michigan, there are 27 different categories of endorsements which include more than 80 specialty areas of instruction. For example, the category called Language Arts (BX) includes English, journalism, speech, reading, and reading specialist. The category Social Studies (RX) includes economics, geography, history, and political science. The category Mathematics (EX) has no specialty areas of instruction. However, the category Integrated Science (DI) includes biology, chemistry, physics, earth/space science, and physical science. The category World Language includes French, German, Greek, Latin, Russian, Spanish, Other, Italian, Polish, Hebrew, Japanese Language and Culture, and Chinese Language and Culture.

For more information about teacher certification, visit the Michigan Department of Education website at <http://www.michigan.gov/mde>. Under publications, click on Office of Professional Preparation Services Reference Manual – Fall 2005 and review the 52-page report. All endorsements are listed on page 12.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, teachers must demonstrate that they are highly qualified to teach their assigned subjects. In Michigan, some middle school teachers who do not meet the highly qualified teacher requirements may have to take university courses to gain highly qualified status.

Although teachers may earn a secondary certificate endorsement to teach a specific subject in grades 7-12, in order to teach 6th grade, teachers must earn an elementary certificate, a K-12 endorsement, or a middle school endorsement. It makes little sense to have to earn an elementary certification to teach 6th grade considering that it is rarely taught in elementary schools, and that the students and the structure of the courses have more in common with secondary grade levels.

In addition, some teachers are concerned that if they received an elementary certification, they could be subject to an involuntary transfer to an elementary school.

For teachers who want to remain in middle school, working with students of that age group, currently there are few good options for certification. The bill would address the problem, allowing teachers with a secondary certificate to teach 6th grade in their subject areas of specialization.

Response:

If this bill is enacted into law, the legislature should be given the opportunity to review the change after it has been implemented, in order to ensure that it is having its desired effect.

The bill should include a requirement that the Department of Education report to the Legislature on the implementation of the bill after a certain period of time.

For:

The bill would give school districts added flexibility to place teachers where they are needed. With the requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act, and the recently enacted high school graduation requirements (which will take effect for 9th graders in the 2007-08 school year), teachers likely will be moved around as school priorities and schedules change. Under the bill, high school teachers could be used to fill positions in 6th grade.

Against:

Sixth graders are at a difficult age emotionally, and their needs are different from those of either elementary school children or high school students. High school teachers are well prepared in terms of content knowledge, but in dealing with the personal, emotional requirements of the students, secondary school teachers could find that the strategies for working with high school students may not translate to preadolescents. Teachers should not be put into these classrooms without some training on the developmental needs of the children.

Response:

Although 6th grade students certainly have unique emotional needs and cognitive abilities, experienced secondary teachers have the skills to deal with those issues. In many cases, 6th graders are in the same schools with higher grades, and teachers already interact with these students. Furthermore, teacher education includes training in working with all grade levels, regardless of a teacher's specialization.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Department of Education supports the bill. (6-14-06)

Oakland Schools supports the bill. (6-14-04)

Wayne Regional Education Services Administration (RESA) supports the bill. (6-14-06)

The American Federation of Teachers-Michigan supports the bill. (6-14-06)

The Michigan Association of School Boards supports the bill. (6-14-06)

The Michigan Elementary, Middle, and Secondary School Principals support the bill. (6-14-06)

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