



House Committee on Education
April 10, 2013
Chris Fisher
Associated Builders and Contractors of Michigan
Testimony on House Bills 4465 and 4466

Good morning Chairwoman Lyons and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. My name is Chris Fisher and I am with Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) of Michigan. We are here today in support of House Bills 4465 and 4466 to strengthen the Michigan Merit Curriculum by allowing for better flexibility.

ABC is a statewide trade association working in partnership with regional chapters representing contractors, suppliers and related firms that perform commercial and industrial construction work. ABC also provides apprenticeship and craft training throughout Michigan and across the United States. In fact, tens of thousands of apprentices and craft students train in more than 20 construction crafts through our various programs.

In Michigan, ABC has educational partnerships with Community Colleges, M-TEC Centers, the Veteran's Administration, Michigan Works, high schools and major Michigan employers who depend on a highly skilled and educated workforce such as Dow Chemical. Above all else, however, we mostly work directly with construction employers to help fill their need for a highly skilled workforce in our state. Indeed, it is part of our mission to train tomorrows workforce to be skilled, motivated, and safety conscious. This is where the Michigan Merit Curriculum comes into play for employers.

Simply put, vocational education and CTE opportunities in high school prepare kids for a skilled trades career that is in high demand. However, employers we work with believe that Michigan needs to not only be doing a good job at offering college prep options, but that we must also be doing just as good a job at offering skilled trades, vocational and tech prep options.

The state of Michigan expects construction trade and technical jobs to expand in the next decade. In the construction industry, for example, we have an aging workforce. Both the National Safety Council and the Employment Research Institute report that the average construction worker is nearing 50 years of age. This alone points to the need to be preparing future workforces. Moreover, just last year the U.S. Department of Labor projected that construction industry employment will increase a staggering 22 percent between the years 2010 and 2020. At a time when demand for skilled construction workers is increasing, data like this demonstrates the need for the Michigan Merit Curriculum to have greater flexibility so students can pursue rigorous technical training to help develop marketable job skills that are relevant for today's and tomorrow's job market.

One thing any contractor will eagerly explain is that a construction career is challenging, well paid, highly skilled and in demand. Yet, all too often, young people are steered away from a construction career in favor of another (and often lower paid) career pathway, or they simply are not able to fit CTE classes into their current class schedule because of other graduation requirements. The Michigan Merit Curriculum, we believe, is a contributing factor to this trend. Fortunately, this legislation can help reverse this trend.

Therefore, we urge the Legislature to limit the current "one size fits all" approach, and advocate fine-tuning graduation requirements to open up opportunities that help a larger percentage of students succeed. After all, Algebra II or advanced foreign language mandates do not have an educational monopoly on rigor and relevance any more than other crucial curriculum options.

Now is the time to finish the job by ensuring all students have access to a high school education that will prepare them for Michigan's job market. Good careers and a strong economy depend upon it. So do our students.