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STATE CORE CURRICULUM: NO MANDATE

House Bill 4241 as introduced
First Analysis (9-28-95)

Sponsor: Rep. William R. Bryant, Jr.
Committee: Education

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

One of the many amendments made to the School Code by Public Act 335 of 1993 (House Bill 5121) was a requirement that school districts, beginning in the 1997-98 school year, provide to each student a core academic curriculum as established by the State Board of Education. At the time of the amendment, the code required each school district to establish a core academic curriculum and required the state board to develop a recommended model core academic curriculum. The model had to set forth desired learning objectives in math, science, reading, history, geography, economics, American government, and writing for all children at each stage of schooling. Some people believe that the requirement that local districts adopt a state-developed curriculum (rather than use a model to develop their own) should be eliminated. They are concerned that the requirement could lead to lawsuits under the Headlee Amendment, which requires, generally speaking, that the state pay for new programs and services it requires local units to provide. Critics of a state-imposed curriculum also point out that such a requirement is not necessary since new state-developed tests will, in conjunction with a state model curriculum, have sufficient influence over the offerings of local school districts. Local school leaders and developers of charter schools should be allowed the flexibility to determine what to teach, critics say.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the School Code to eliminate the requirement that school districts adopt a core academic curriculum established by the State Board of Education. Provisions in the code requiring districts to adopt a core academic curriculum and requiring the state board to develop a recommended core curriculum would remain.

MCL 380.1278

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The House Fiscal Agency reports that, "to the extent that a district in 1997-98 did not offer the core curriculum required under current law, there may be a cost savings to the district." (Fiscal Note dated 9-25-95)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

A state-imposed core curriculum is contrary to the concept of local control of schools. School districts ought to be able to design their own curriculums to meet their own needs. There is, moreover, no need for a state-imposed curriculum. The offerings of local school districts can be influenced in other ways, such as through the statewide testing of students. The tests will reflect what the state believes students ought to know. Under this bill, local districts will still be required to develop and offer to all students a core academic curriculum and they will have a model developed by the state to use in fashioning this curriculum. Further, some people are concerned that if the state imposes a core curriculum on local districts, local schools will eventually sue the state under the Headlee Amendment to provide greater financial support.

Against:

Some educators and business leaders believe that improvement of the state's schools is best served through uniform standards that guarantee that all students will be exposed to a solid basic education. That was the purpose of the mandatory core curriculum provision. This bill is a step backwards. Uniform state standards also reportedly enjoy significant public support. Some people believe that the application of state standards was the education reform counterpart to the reform of school financing, which produced greater state financial support for schools. The bill at least ought to be

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amended to require that a school district's core academic curriculum meet or exceed the content standards adopted by the State Board of Education.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Association of School Boards has indicated its support for the bill. (9-26-95)

The Michigan Association of School Administrators has indicated its support for the bill. (9-26-95)

The Michigan Education Association is opposed to the bill. (9-26-95)

The Michigan Federation of Teachers is opposed to the bill. (9-26-95)