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SCHOOL BUS SAFETY INSTRUCTION

House Bill 5243 (Substitute H-2) First Analysis (6-7-00)

Sponsor: Rep. Samuel Buzz Thomas
Committee: Education

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Two young children were killed in school bus accidents in Michigan this spring. Nationally, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, an average of 30 school-age children die in school bus-related traffic crashes each year - 9 school bus occupants and 22 pedestrians. Nearly half of all school-age pedestrians killed in school bus crashes were between the ages of 5 and 7. Many of these tragedies involve children being hit while in the "danger zone" around the bus, in the area where they cannot be seen by the bus driver, either before boarding or after getting off the bus. Young children are most likely to be hit because they hurry to get on or off the bus, act before they think and have little experience with traffic, assume motorists will see them and will wait for them to cross, and don't always stay within the bus driver's sight.

Currently, the Pupil Transportation Act allows school districts to provide instruction to students on proper school bus etiquette, including boarding and leaving the bus, evacuation of the bus in an emergency, and road crossing procedures. Legislation has been proposed to make such instruction mandatory.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Pupil Transportation Act to delete a provision that allows school districts to offer bus safety instruction, and instead would require that such instruction be provided.

Upon registration, the parent or parents or guardian of each student not previously transported in a school bus who is in prekindergarten, kindergarten, or grades one to six be provided with written information on school bus safety and conduct. The information would include, but need not be limited to: a) a list of school bus stops near each student's home; b) general rules of conduct at school bus loading zones; c) red light crossing instructions; and, d) walking to and from school bus stops.

Further, at least once each year, each student who received transportation in a school bus who was in prekindergarten through eighth grade would be required to receive safety instruction that included, but would not be limited to: a) proper loading and unloading procedures; b) instruction on the use of the passenger restraint system, if available; c) proper passenger conduct; and d) bus evacuation and the location of emergency equipment and exits. As part of this instruction, students would be required to practice evacuating the bus through the emergency exit doors.

As under the current provision, if a school used school bus drivers for this instruction, the state board could reimburse the school for this training. However, the bill would specify that "a school shall not incur any additional costs as a result of the requirements" of the bill.

MCL 257.1855

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the Department of Education, the bill has no fiscal implications for the state. Local districts could incur costs to the extent that they were not already providing bus safety instruction to students. (6-6-00)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Given recent tragedies involving young students who were killed while de-boarding their school buses, mandatory training for students on safety skills, especially involving getting on and off the bus, seems well justified. Elementary school age children are at the most risk of being injured or killed while being transported by a school bus, but there are curriculum materials available that can be used by school districts to teach children the basic safety rules that could save their lives. Pupil transportation safety guidelines issued by the National Highway Traffic Safety

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Administration recommend that each bus rider be instructed at least once per semester in safe riding practices, proper loading and unloading techniques, and proper street crossing to and from school bus stops, and that each rider participate in timed emergency evacuation drills. The NHTSA further recommends that before each field trip on a school bus, each pupil should be instructed on safe riding practices and the location and operation of emergency exits.

Against:

While the bill specifies, as does current law, that school districts could be reimbursed for the costs of providing such instruction, reportedly such reimbursement has never been provided in the past. And, though the bill says that school districts “shall not incur any additional costs” as a result of the bill, it is hard to imagine how this could be possible, considering the bill’s requirements to provide instruction and produce written materials.

POSITIONS:

The Department of Education supports the bill. (6-6-00)

The Michigan Association of School Boards has no position on the bill. (6-6-00)

Analyst: D. Martens

■ 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.