

# Legislative Analysis

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## SCHOOL-BASED COMMUNITY SERVICE REQUIREMENT

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**House Bill 4278 (Substitute H-7)**  
**Sponsor: Rep. Robert Gosselin**  
**Committee: Education**

### First Analysis (11-28-05)

**BRIEF SUMMARY:** The bill would allow parents to appeal a school's community service requirements.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The bill has no state or local fiscal impact.

### **THE APPARENT PROBLEM:**

Schools district officials adopt policies to establish high school graduation requirements. Generally, the policies require students to enroll in certain academic courses—for example, four years of English, three years of mathematics and science, two years of social science—and learn enough in each course to earn a passing grade, in order to accumulate the credits that will ensure they are awarded high school diplomas. Some school districts also require that students earn a credit for community service. In this instance, the high schools in the school district coordinate a community-based program where students work outside the school on a project intended to serve their communities. The high school community service programs in Michigan vary in the ways they are administered and in the kinds of service commitments they acknowledge and reward.

According to committee testimony, the requirements for high school community service programs are sometimes unclear to students and their parents. In one instance, a student was denied credit for volunteering on a political campaign of a family member. The same student was subsequently told that community service credit could not be earned for her church-related volunteer activity.

When the authority of school officials is unilateral, and they are able to implement the school district's community service policy without making its principles apparent, then parents and students have little recourse to question the policy. Legislation has been introduced to address this difficulty.

### **THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:**

The bill would amend the Revised School Code (MCL 380.1164) to specify that if a school district or public school academy (customarily called a charter school) has any community service requirements for high school graduation, then a student's parent or legal guardian would have the right to appeal those requirements to the board of the school district, or to the board of directors of a public school academy.

***BACKGROUND INFORMATION:***

In a related matter, the attorney general ruled earlier this year—in Opinion No. 7176 issued on June 21, 2005—that the Michigan Merit Award Board did not have the authority to add a requirement that a student complete 40 hours of voluntary community service in order to qualify for a Michigan Merit Award Scholarship.

***ARGUMENTS:***

***For:***

Parents are entitled to know and understand a school's graduation requirements, including the requirement that a student earn community service credit. This bill will enable parents to appeal a school's interpretation of "community service" when there is a misunderstanding or disagreement about what kind of volunteer work would fulfill the requirement.

***Against:***

This bill is likely unnecessary, since school officials customarily meet with parents to ensure there is a clear understanding about their high school student's graduation requirements.

***POSITIONS:***

No positions were advanced on the (H-7) substitute version of House Bill 4278.

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