Legislative Analysis

REVISE GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

House Bill 5463 (passed by the House as substitute H-1)
Sponsor: Rep. Lisa Posthumus Lyons
Committee: Workforce and Talent Development
Complete to 7-25-16

BRIEF SUMMARY: House Bill 5463 would amend the Revised School Code by requiring a high school student, in order to receive a high school diploma, to complete at least three credits in "21st century skills," which could be met by completing *any combination* of three credits in the following:

- o A language other than English
- o Visual, performing, or applied arts.
- o Computer science or computer coding, or a combination of the two.
- o A Michigan Department of Education (MDE)-approved formal career and technical education program.

This would revise the current provisions that require students to complete at least one credit in the visual, performing, or applied arts, and at least two credits in a language other than English to receive a diploma. (Although, currently, for students graduating high school from 2016 through 2021, one credit of the 'foreign language" requirement can be met by completing a formal career and technical education program, or by completing additional visual or performing arts instruction.)

For a complete list of high school graduation requirements, see the box on page 2 at: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Complete_MMC_FAQ_August_2014_467323 _7.pdf

FISCAL IMPACT: House Bill 5463 would have no fiscal impact on the state or local school districts.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

According to testimony presented in committee by the bill sponsor and others, computer coding skills are in high demand among employers, who are having difficulty attracting qualified coders. Because this represents a potential area of job growth, the sponsor and others advocate incorporating computer coding courses into Michigan's high school graduation requirements.

Because many of the credits a student takes over the course of high school are already needed to meet other parts of the required curriculum, computer coding courses could be used, say advocates, to meet, in whole or in part, the required credits associated with foreign language courses and visual, performing, or applied arts courses.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

Currently, as part of the requirements for a high school diploma, students must complete at least one credit in the visual, performing, or applied arts and at least two credits in a language other than English to receive a high school diploma. This provision, in Section 1278a of the Revised School Code, would be revised by House Bill 5463 so that, instead, students would have to complete at least three credits in "21st century skills," which could be met by completing any combination of three credits in the following:
- A language other than English
- Visual, performing, or applied arts.
- Computer science or computer coding, or a combination of the two.
- A Michigan Department of Education (MDE)-approved formal career and technical education program.

Currently, for students graduating high school in 2016 through 2021 only, one credit of the "foreign language" requirement can be met in whole or in part by completing a department-approved formal technical education program or curriculum, or by completing visual or performing arts instruction that is in addition to the one credit of visual arts, performing arts, or applied arts that is also required to receive a high school diploma. House Bill 5463 would remove this provision.

American Sign Language counts as a language other than English currently, and would continue to do so under the bill. The bill would continue to allow the foreign language requirement to be satisfied with online course work.

Presently, the foreign language requirement can be satisfied through credits taken at any time during grades K to 12. Under House Bill 5463, credits in a language other than English could still be taken any time during grades K to 12 (although the language requirement would essentially disappear for students who chose to satisfy the new "21st century skills" mandate through other means).

The bill would take effect 90 days after it is enacted into law.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

As noted above, proponents of the bill believe that allowing computer coding courses to meet high school graduation requirements will remove a potential obstacle to fitting such courses into a high school schedule, and thus make it more likely that students interested in pursuing classes in computer coding will do so. As this is a high-demand skill area, supporters of the bill believe that this will lead to more technology-sector jobs being filled in Michigan. Supporters also note that the bill does not eliminate a student's choice to take foreign language credits to fulfill graduation requirements, and does not force students not interested in coding to take those courses.

Against:
While agreeing that promoting computer coding could lead to better job opportunities for students, critics of the bill say that the foreign language requirement is useful as part of a well-rounded education, and that in a global economy, exposure to other cultures can be valuable in obtaining a good job. Opponents also note that computer coding is not a "language other than English" in the same way as Spanish or even American Sign Language is, and would be better classified as an alternative to math or science credits.

POSITIONS:

The following indicated support for HB 5463:

Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (5-19-16)
Michigan Association of School Administrators (5-19-16)
Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce (5-19-16)
West Michigan Talent Triangle (5-19-16)
Open Systems Technology (4-28-16)
Forest Hills Public Schools (4-28-16)
Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning (4-28-16)
Fraser Public Schools (4-28-16)
TechNet (4-28-16)

The following were neutral on HB 5463:

Michigan Department of Education (4-28-16)

The following were opposed to HB 5463:

Education Trust Midwest (5-19-16)
Oakland Schools (4-28-16)

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