

## COMPUTER CODING AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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<http://www.house.mi.gov/hfa>

**House Bill 4326 as reported from committee**

**Sponsor: Rep. Greg VanWoerkom**

**Committee: Education**

**Complete to 4-9-21**

Analysis available at  
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

**BRIEF SUMMARY:** House Bill 4326 would amend the Michigan Merit Curriculum requirements under the Revised School Code to allow computer coding to qualify as a language other than English for purposes of the Merit Curriculum language requirement.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The bill would have no fiscal impact on the state or on school districts, intermediate school districts (ISDs), or public school academies (PSAs, or charter schools).

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

Now and under the bill, a district or PSA must ensure that a student has earned a certain number of credits in various disciplines before awarding a high school diploma. Among those is a requirement that a student receive two credits that are age-appropriate in a language other than English between kindergarten and 12th grade, beginning with the class of 2016. Recent legislation<sup>1</sup> has allowed one credit of that requirement to be met in whole or in part by completing a department-approved career and technical education (CTE) program 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).

Under the bill, computer coding would be considered to be a language other than English. This would allow a student to complete all or part of the foreign language requirement by taking a course or courses in computer coding.

Additionally, the bill refers to a shift in testing in high school math and science from “the ACT or SAT examinations, as applicable” to using the SAT examination to assess math and the “applicable state assessment” to assess science. This reflects the use of the Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP) to measure student performance relative to the Michigan Academic Standards in science. The move to the M-STEP was

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<sup>1</sup> 2014 PA 208 (HB 4465) allowed this for students graduating in 2015-2020.

<http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2013-2014/billanalysis/House/pdf/2013-HLA-4465-35409EB4.pdf>

2014 PA 293 (HB 5793) extended that ability to students graduating in 2021.

<http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2013-2014/billanalysis/House/pdf/2013-HLA-5793-0B22D18C.pdf>

2018 PA 232 (SB 175) extended the ending year to 2024.

<http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2017-2018/billanalysis/House/pdf/2017-HLA-0175-DB2D6B57.pdf>

2020 PA 158 (SB 171) removed the deadline entirely.

<http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2017-2018/billanalysis/House/pdf/2017-HLA-0175-DB2D6B57.pdf>

planned for spring 2020 but was not implemented due to the cancellation of testing. The M-STEP science test will be operational for spring 2021.<sup>2</sup>

MCL 380.1278a

### ***BACKGROUND INFORMATION:***

Bills proposing to incorporate computer coding into the Michigan Merit Curriculum have been considered by the legislature since at least the 2015-16 legislative session. Often, the bill was grouped with other initiatives as “21st century skills” intended to prepare students better for an evolving workforce.<sup>3</sup>

### ***ARGUMENTS:***

#### ***For:***

Proponents advance the bills as a way to provide flexibility to students to determine their own areas of interest and the skills needed for their future educational or career goals. The Michigan Merit curriculum is intended to be rigorous, but with 18 credits prescribed as to subject matter, students are left with little freedom to explore different areas of study or explore computer coding as an elective. Allowing students to identify areas of aptitude within the MMC requirements allows them to build on that aptitude when selecting electives.

Just as a foreign language demonstrates a communication alternative to English, some argue that computer coding is similarly another way of communicating and expressing ideas, even with people in other countries and from other cultures.

#### ***Against:***

Opponents have advanced some of the following arguments for retaining a stand-alone credit in world languages:

- World languages courses represent one of the main ways in which students are exposed to different cultures, by studying the countries where the language is spoken. They lead to a more informed multicultural and multilingual citizenry.
- Students benefit from exposure to a language other than their own—even a single credit can teach them vocabulary and basic language skills that can help them in business or when traveling later in life.
- Knowledge of another language can help in understanding the structure of English grammar and the origins of various English words.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Guide\\_to\\_State\\_Assessments\\_622260\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Guide_to_State_Assessments_622260_7.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> House Fiscal Agency analysis of House Bill 5463 of 2015-16: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2015-2016/billanalysis/House/pdf/2015-HLA-5463-4A5F143F.pdf>

House Fiscal Agency analysis of House Bills 4315 and 4316 of 2017018:

<http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2017-2018/billanalysis/House/pdf/2017-HLA-4315-4343E5D2.pdf>

House Fiscal Agency analysis of House Bills 4269, 4271, and 4282 of 2019-20:

<http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2019-2020/billanalysis/House/pdf/2019-HLA-4269-FE9DC5B7.pdf>

***POSITIONS:***

The following entities indicated support for the bill:

Michigan Chemistry Council (3-9-21)

Michigan Manufacturers Association (3-9-21)

Grand Rapids Chamber (3-16-21)

The following entities indicated opposition to the bill:

Michigan Department of Education (3-16-21)

Michigan Education Association (3-9-21)

AFT Michigan (3-16-21)

Michigan World Language Association (3-16-21)

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.