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SUBSTITUTES IN GRADES K-9

House Bill 5481 (Substitute H-2) First Analysis (4-21-98)

Sponsor: Rep. Clyde LeTarte
Committee: Education

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Among the many provisions contained in the Revised School Code, which took effect July 1, 1996, was a change to the requirements for substitute teachers. The new legislation permitted local and intermediate school districts to employ a person without a teaching certificate as a substitute teacher if he or she had at least 90 semester hours of college credit. (Generally, this means the person would have finished the junior year.) This was done to address the shortage of available substitute teachers. Although this significantly increased the number of substitute permits issued (from roughly 14,000 to 22,000), superintendents still report substitute shortages in some areas of the state. Legislation has been proposed that would, on a temporary basis, increase the pool of candidates available by allowing students training to be teachers with at least 60 hours of semester credit to substitute on a short-term basis in classrooms at the ninth grade level and below.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Revised School Code to permit a local or intermediate school district to use a person with at least 60 semester hours of college credit as a substitute teacher in kindergarten through ninth grade under certain circumstances and with certain limitations. The bill would apply until July 1, 2000.

Under the bill, if a school board was unable to engage a substitute teacher with at least 90 semester hours of college credit, it could employ a person with at least 60 hours of college credit as a substitute for no more than two consecutive days in the same classroom if the person had been admitted to an approved teacher education program leading to a provisional teaching certificate and was at least 21 years old.

Not later than March 1, 2002, the Department of Education would have to prepare and submit to the legislature a detailed plan for meeting the needs of school districts for substitute teachers. If applicable,

the plan would have to include recommendations for legislation needed to implement the plan.

MCL 380.1233

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The bill would have minimal impact, according to the House Fiscal Agency. (HFA Fiscal Note dated 4-16-98)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

There is still a shortage of substitute teachers. This bill proposes to expand the pool of available candidates in a way that would ensure that classrooms were staffed while protecting schoolchildren from unqualified substitute teachers. College juniors at least 21 years old and admitted to teacher training programs would be allowed to substitute in a particular classroom for no more than two consecutive days. However, they could only be hired if a district could not find a substitute from the current list of eligible persons. And, the new substitutes could only be used at the ninth grade level and below. The actual hiring of substitutes, of course, is up to local districts. They will decide whether to employ an eligible person or not and whether to ask that person back. The bill would sunset at the end of the 2001 school year, and the Department of Education would be required to study the substitute teacher issue and report back to the legislature before then. It should be noted that the Revised School Code currently permits people with 90 semester hours of college credit to substitute -- no matter how long it has been since they were in school and no matter what they studied. This bill at least requires that the substitutes be admitted to a teacher training program, which would be an indication of their interest in and, perhaps, aptitude for classroom teaching. The increased availability of substitutes will contribute to improved teaching because short-term

substitutes make it possible for regular classroom teachers to attend professional development programs, professional meetings, and planning sessions.

Against:

Standards for substitutes should not be lowered. (Indeed, some people are not happy about the 90-hour standard that took effect in 1996.) Lowering standards devalues the work of substitute teachers and could put children at risk. College juniors likely will have no training in classroom management or instructional strategies. Further, the bill proposes to put the least experienced substitutes in classrooms with the youngest children, the classrooms where knowledge of pedagogy may be most important. Perhaps a better approach would be to increase the compensation and improve working conditions for substitutes. At the very least, more training needs to be available to substitutes who have not completed teacher training.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Association of School Administrators supports the bill. (4-1-98)

The Michigan Education Association does not oppose the bill. (4-1-98)

The American Federation of Teachers and School-Related Personnel opposes the bill. (4-1-98)

The State Board of Education has no position on the bill. (4-2-98)

Analyst: C. Couch

■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.