

Legislative Analysis



SCHOOL SAFETY DRILLS: CONDUCT SOME DRILLS WHEN STUDENTS ARE NOT IN CLASSROOM

Mitchell Bean, Director
Phone: (517) 373-8080
<http://www.house.mi.gov/hfa>

Senate Bill 1108 (Substitute H-1)
Sponsor: Sen. Jud Gilbert, II
House Committee: Education
Senate Committee: Education

First Analysis (6-22-06)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would require a school to conduct some of its emergency preparedness drills during lunch or recess, or at other times when students were gathered but not in the classroom.

FISCAL IMPACT: The bill would have no direct fiscal impact on the state but would have an indeterminate fiscal impact on K-12 school districts.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Under the Fire Prevention Code, schools in Michigan must perform a minimum number of fire drills and tornado drills on a regular basis. Typically, these drills occur during times when students are in class, under the direct supervision of teachers.

Some have pointed out that an emergency can occur at any time, generally without warning, and have suggested schools may not be well prepared to handle an emergency that occurs during recess, lunchtime, or between classes, when students are not in the classroom.

Because the students, faculty, and staff working in schools should practice what to do if something happens at a time when students are not in class, legislation has been introduced.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Fire Prevention Code to require a school that operated any grades between kindergarten and 12th grade to conduct some of the drills required under the code during lunch or recess, or at other times when a significant number of students were gathered but not in the classroom.

MCL 29.19

HOUSE COMMITTEE ACTION:

The House Education Committee did not amend the bill. Instead, committee members adopted an up-to-date "conflict substitute" bill, in order to ensure that recent changes in

this section of the code are incorporated into this legislation. In all other ways, the bill is identical to the Senate-passed version of the bill. Some of the information in this analysis is derived from the Senate Fiscal Agency's analysis of the Senate-passed bill dated 5-17-06.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Although schools have significantly improved their emergency preparedness in recent years, most schools do not have a plan to address an emergency that occurs during recess, lunch, or between classes. At these times, students may be scattered throughout the school, with no adult to turn to for guidance, and no idea what to do. Natural disasters such as fire or tornadoes can occur at any time, and schools need to develop a plan for students to follow if they are not in class. The bill would fill this common gap in many schools' emergency preparedness plans by requiring some drills to be conducted during times when students were not in class.

Against:

While this legislation is well-intended, it is unnecessary. According to testimony, school leaders can, and already do, conduct emergency preparedness drills at unexpected times during the school day, in order to ensure that students, faculty, and staff can protect their health and safety—and that of others—at all times.

The bill also usurps a school district's control over its local operations. School leaders do not need, nor should they have to yield to, edicts from Lansing about building safety. Policies such as these should be left to the education officials having the greatest understanding of day-to-day school operations, allowing them to exercise local control.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Elementary, Middle, and Secondary Principals oppose the bill. (6-21-06)

Legislative Analyst: J. Hunault
Fiscal Analyst: Mary Ann Cleary
Bethany Wicksall

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