

Legislative Analysis



GREEN, EMERALD, AND EVERGREEN SCHOOLS

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Senate Bill 904

Sponsor: Sen. Valde Garcia

House Committee: Great Lakes and Environment

Senate Committee: Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs

Complete to 2-10-10

A SUMMARY OF SENATE BILL 904 AS PASSED BY THE SENATE 12-10-09

The bill would amend Part 25 (Environmental Education) of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act to revise the current section (MCL 324.2511) under which a public or private school may be designated as a "green school." The bill would adopt new criteria for granting schools one of three possible environmental stewardship designations depending on the number of "green" activities performed by the school or its students:

"Green school" for 10 activities.

"Emerald school" for 15 activities.

"Evergreen school" for 20 activities.

In addition, the school or its students would have to perform at least two activities from each of four categories (recycling, energy, environmental protection, and miscellaneous) to qualify for one of these designations. An activity not described in the bill could count toward a designation if approved by the county or the intermediate school district by December 1 of the school year.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Senate Bill 904 has no fiscal impact on the state or local school districts.

DETAILED SUMMARY:

Current criteria. Under Part 25 of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (Environmental Education), a public or private school may apply for and receive a "green school" designation if it meets at least 10 of the following criteria: (1) the school recycles paper; (2) the school reuses magazines and newspapers; (3) the school has adopted an endangered species and posted a picture of it in a main traffic area; (4) the school media center regularly updates its ecological materials; (5) the school has instituted an energy savings program; (6) students participate in a planned program of energy savings, including dusting refrigerator coils, placing film on windows, lowering hot water settings, seeing how strategically-placed plants and trees can save energy, and checking the tires of buses and other school vehicles for proper inflation each month; (7) the school has hosted a visit by an ecological spokesperson, a Sierra Club representative, an endangered

species show, or a similar presentation; (8) the school has a birdhouse habitat project; (9) the school has established a natural Michigan garden project with native plants; (10) the school has solar power presentations or experiments, such as a solar cookout; (11) classes do energy audits of their classrooms; (12) the school has a printer cartridge recycling program; (13) the school has a battery recycling program; (14) the school has a cell phone recycling program; (15) the school observes Earth Day in some way in April; (16) art classes have a poster contest to support ecology concerns and a schoolwide display in conjunction with its earth day activities; (17) the school has science class projects in which students do home energy improvements (such as turning down hot water heaters, installing home window insulation, cleaning refrigerator coils, and installing draft guards on doors; (18) the school has an ecology club, whose activities include helping senior citizens make their homes more energy efficient, putting in new furnace filters, caulking windows, cleaning refrigerator coils, and lowering water heater settings; (19) classes visit Internet sites where clicking saves rainforest habitat and teachers document the students' efforts; and (20) the school has set a goal of five percent less energy usage and works with local power utilities toward the goal.

New criteria and designations. The bill would replace the current criteria and provide for three possible environmental stewardship designations, depending on the number of activities performed by the school or its students: "Green school," for 10 activities; "emerald school," for 15 activities; "evergreen school," for 20 activities. In addition, the school or its students would have to perform at least two activities from each of four categories (recycling, energy, environmental protection, and miscellaneous) to qualify for any of these designations.

Recycling. The recycling category would include the following activities:

- Coordinating a recycling program for at least two of the following: (1) office paper; (2) plastic water bottles; (3) metal cans; (4) printer cartridges; (5) newspapers and magazines; (6) computers and electronic waste; (7) batteries; (8) cell phones; (9) cardboard; (10); fabric and clothing; (11) CDs and DVDs; or (12) glass.
- Composting food and organic wastes.
- Conducting a waste-free lunch program.
- Implementing a policy to buy recycled, biodegradable, locally-produced, or less toxic food and school supplies.

Energy. The energy category would include the following activities:

- Offering at least one teaching unit on alternative energy.
- Using alternative energy, renewable fuels, or specialized energy-efficient technology in school operations.
- Implementing a school energy-saving program.
- Performing energy audits at student homes and educating student families and the community.
- Taking part in a project or event to promote improved vehicle fuel efficiency.

- Sponsoring an alternative energy presentation, project or event.

Environmental protection. The environmental protection category would include the following activities:

- Participating in activities promoting the health of the Great Lakes watershed.
- Offering a teaching unit on environmental issues facing Michigan.
- Establishing or maintaining a natural Michigan garden project with native plants.
- Establishing or maintaining an animal habitat project.
- Participating in a local community environmental issue by activities such as letter-writing, attending public hearings, raising funds, or community outreach.

Miscellaneous. The miscellaneous category would include the following activities.

- Adopting an endangered or threatened species and publicizing the activity.
- Establishing a student organization that participates in environmental activities.
- Observing Earth Day by participating in an Earth Day event in April.
- Maintaining an updated bulletin board or kiosk with information on environmental concerns and the school's actions in addressing those concerns.
- Establishing an eco-reading program.
- Updating the school's media center environmental materials.
- Visiting Internet sites that educate about the environment and support endangered ecosystems.

Other activities. In addition to activities described above, a school could design and propose another activity that would qualify toward a designation if approved by the appropriate county department or ISD by December 1 of the applicable school year.

Role of county or ISD. Currently, the county in which the school is located may designate either a county department or the intermediate school district (ISD) as the entity to accept and consider the approval of a school's application for a green school designation. The bill would clarify this language so that the county department or ISD would "accept, consider, and approve or reject an application." As noted above, the designated county department or ISD would also decide whether to approve an activity not mentioned in the bill as counting toward the number of activities needed for a designation.

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■ 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.