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BILL ANALYSIS

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Senate Bill 904 (as reported without amendment)
Sponsor: Senator Valde Garcia
Committee: Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs

(as passed by the Senate)

Date Completed: 12-7-09

RATIONALE

Several years ago, as part of an environmental science course, students at Hartland High School began to undertake various activities aimed at protecting the environment and conserving energy. For example, the students developed a program to recycle old batteries, cell phones, and printer cartridges, and began to encourage students and faculty to conserve energy by turning off lights when a room was not in use and shutting down computers at night and over the weekend. Evidently, the school has experienced reduced energy costs as a result of these efforts. In 2006, legislation was enacted to develop a "green schools" program to encourage other schools to undertake similar activities. Under this program, schools must perform at least 10 of 20 specified activities aimed at environmental protection and energy efficiency in order to receive a "green school" designation.

It has been suggested that the list of activities eligible for the designation be expanded, and that the structure of the program be changed to a three-tiered system of recognition based on the number of activities a school performs.

CONTENT

The bill would amend Part 25 (Environmental Education) of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act to delete the criteria a school must meet in order to receive a "green school" designation; and establish criteria for a school to receive a green school, emerald school, or evergreen school environmental

stewardship designation based on four categories of activities.

Under Part 25, a public or private school in Michigan may apply to be designated as a "green school" by submitting an application to a department of a county or intermediate school district designated to accept, consider, and approve or reject the application. A school is eligible to receive a "green school" designation if it meets 10 of the following criteria:

- The school recycles paper.
- The school reuses its magazines and newspapers for other projects.
- The school has adopted an endangered species animal and posted a picture of it in a main traffic area.
- The school media center updates its print and nonprint ecological materials regularly.
- An energy savings program has been instituted at the school.
- Students at the school participate in a planned program of energy savings, including dusting coils on cafeteria refrigerators, placing film on windows, setting hot water heaters one degree lower, seeing how plants and trees strategically placed can save energy, and checking proper inflation on bus tires and other school vehicles once a month.
- The school has hosted a visit by an ecological spokesperson, a representative of the Sierra Club, an endangered animals species show, or a similar presentation.
- The school has a birdhouse habitat project.

- The school has established a natural Michigan garden project with native plants.
- The school has solar power presentations or experiments, such as a solar cookout.
- Classes do energy audits of their classrooms and make improvements, such as placing film on windows, caulking windows, or using kits to make windows more energy efficient.
- The school has a printer cartridge recycling program through which the school earns money by selling the cartridges to companies that buy them from schools.
- The school recycles batteries and has designated a representative to return them to an appropriate recycling program.
- The school recycles cellular telephones and receives money for them from recycling companies that work at schools.
- The school observes Earth Day in some way in April.
- Art classes at the school have a poster contest to support ecology concerns and a schoolwide display in conjunction with Earth Day activities.
- The school has science class projects in which students do several home energy improvements, such as turn down hot water heaters, install home window insulation kits, clean coils on home refrigerators, and install draft guards for the doors.
- 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 in homes, and setting water heaters one degree lower.
- The school's classes visit internet sites where clicking saves rainforest habitat and teachers document the students' efforts.
- The school sets a goal of 5% less energy usage in the school and works with local power utilities to see progress toward the goal.

The bill would eliminate these criteria. Instead, a school could receive a green school, emerald school, or evergreen school environmental stewardship designation if the school or students performed 10, 15, or 20 required activities, respectively. The school or students would have to perform at least

two activities from each of the following categories, which would qualify toward an environmental stewardship designation: recycling, energy, environmental protection, and miscellaneous.

The recycling category would include coordinating a program for recycling at least two of the following: office paper, plastic water bottles, metal cans, printer cartridges, newspapers and magazines, computers and electronic waste, batteries, cellular telephones, cardboard, fabric and clothing, compact discs and digital video discs, or glass.

In addition, the recycling category would include the following:

- 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.

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.

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.

The miscellaneous category would include the following activities:

- Adopting an endangered or threatened species and publicizing the activity.
- Hosting an environmental or energy speaker, event, or field trip.
- Establishing a student organization that participated 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 them.
- 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.

In addition to the activities described in the bill, a school could design and propose another activity, which could qualify toward an environmental stewardship designation if the entity designated to review, consider, and approve or reject applications approved the activity by December 1 of the applicable school year.

MCL 324.2511

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

The implementation of "green" programs in schools can save money, help to create a culture of conservation within the schools, and enable students to educate others in their communities. The program was implemented at Hartland High School in response to concerns that rising energy costs were diverting money from other needs. By turning off computers, unplugging soda machines, and reusing paper, the students and faculty have generated significant savings for the school. Additionally, students work with their bus garage to ensure that the tires on school vehicles are inflated properly to maximize fuel efficiency, and educate younger children about Earth Day. The activities help teach students the benefits of environmental conservation and provide them with a

working laboratory in which they can experience first-hand what they are learning. The 2006 "green school" legislation has promoted the establishment of similar measures in other schools, which helps students develop an awareness of the importance of protecting the natural resources critical to making Michigan a desirable place to live and do business.

The program has been successful, with participation increasing from 18 schools in the first year to over 500 for the current academic year. In an effort to obtain a "green school" designation, Michigan students have recycled hundreds of pounds of materials, planted more than 100 gardens showcasing native Michigan plants, and adopted endangered animals, among other things. Students and faculty at individual schools have exercised a great deal of creativity in generating ideas for eco-friendly activities. For example, one school has implemented designated waste-free lunch days and arranged for a local horse owner to collect students' uneaten apples to feed to her animals. Some of these activities, however, are not specified in the current law as being eligible for a "green school" designation. The bill would expand the listed activities and give schools more leeway to design their own activities and programs. In addition, the three-tiered designation system would encourage schools to set goals for improvement from year to year.

Legislative Analyst: Julie Cassidy

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State or local government.

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.