

## COMPUTER CODING AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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**House Bill 4974 as referred to second committee**

**Sponsor: Rep. Greg VanWoerkom**

**1st Committee: Education**

**2nd Committee: Ways and Means**

**Complete to 12-8-19**

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

### SUMMARY:

House Bill 4974 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 the purposes of the Merit Curriculum language requirement.

Now and under the bill, a district or public school academy (PSA, or charter school) must ensure that a student has earned a certain number of credits in various disciplines before awarding a high school diploma. Among those is the 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 would remove a requirement instituted by 2018 PA 232 (SB 175) that by September 1, 2018, and yearly thereafter, a school district or PSA report the number of students who partially or fully fulfilled a foreign language requirement by completing a CTE program or curriculum, or visual or performing arts instruction, in the previous year.

MCL 380.1278a

### FISCAL IMPACT:

House Bill 4974 would result in a minimal cost savings for the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and school districts and PSAs. MDE would no longer incur administrative costs to collect a report from districts regarding the number of pupils who partially or fully fulfilled one credit in a language other than English by completing comparable coursework in

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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>

CTE or visual or performing arts. School districts and PSAs would no longer incur administrative costs to track and comply with new reporting requirements.

## **ARGUMENTS:**

### ***For:***

Those in favor of the bill argued that it would 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 take CTE courses.

Additionally, because CTE courses may be offered a half-hour away from the school, students are best served when they are able to fulfill multiple requirements at a time—taking back-to-back courses at the location, rather than spending much of their school day on the road.

### ***Against:***

Opponents 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 better 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 origins of various English words.

## **POSITIONS:**

The following entities indicated support for the bill:

Michigan Manufacturers Association (10-22-19)  
West Michigan Talent Triangle (10-22-19)  
Michigan Chemistry Council (10-29-19)

The following entities indicated opposition to the bill:

Education Trust Midwest (10-29-19)  
Michigan World Language Association (10-28-19)  
Michigan State University Department of Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, Asian, and African Languages and Department of Romance and Classical Studies (10-28-19)

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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.