



Telephone: (517) 373-5383
Fax: (517) 373-1986
TDD: (517) 373-0543

Senate Bill 1153 (as enrolled)
Senate Bill 1154 (as enrolled)
Senate Bill 1155 (as enrolled)
Senate Bill 1156 (as enrolled)
Senate Bill 1157 (as enrolled)
Sponsors: Senator Wayne Kuipers (S.B. 1153)
Senator Michael Switalski (S.B. 1154)
Senator Ron Jelinek (S.B. 1155)
Senator Gerald Van Woerkom (S.B. 1156)
Senator Buzz Thomas (S.B. 1157)

Senate Committee: Education
House Committee: Education

Date Completed: 7-11-05

RATIONALE

Exams under the Michigan Education Assessment Program, or MEAP, were first administered in the 1969-1970 school year for the purpose of determining what students knew and were able to do, compared with standards set by the State Board of Education. For the first 23 years, MEAP tests measured students' basic skills in grades 4, 7, and 10 using multiple-choice questions. In the late 1980s, educational policy shifted toward "outcomes based" education, in which students were taught to achieve proficiency in explicitly-stated outcomes. Public Act 335 of 1993 reflected this philosophy: It amended the School Code to require the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to develop new model core curriculum outcomes and content standards, and required MEAP tests to assess students' levels of proficiency in these standards. The new MEAP tests contained, in addition to multiple-choice questions, "constructed response", or essay questions. The Act also established the High School Proficiency Test, or MEAP HST, to test students in communication skills, math, science, and social studies at the end of the 11th grade. As an incentive to take the tests seriously, graduating seniors received an endorsement on their diploma for each subject-area MEAP test in which they demonstrated proficiency--that is, achieved a score of a 1 (exceeded expectations) or a 2 (met expectations).

Proponents of the MEAP HST believed that it would boost student expectations, provide valuable feedback to teachers, and serve as an accountability tool for parents and administrators. From its onset, however, parents, teachers, and students complained that the MEAP HST was burdensome to schools and irrelevant to students. Detractors pointed out that, because out-of-State applicants did not take the MEAP test, colleges and universities could not use its scores in the admissions process. Some claimed that the MEAP HST was difficult to prepare for because the tests changed from year to year. Some students, especially in the test's early years, simply refused to take it.

In an effort to increase participation in the MEAP HST, Public Act 94 of 1999 created the Michigan Merit Award Scholarship Act. Students who demonstrate proficiency on the reading, writing, math, and science tests qualify for a \$2,500 award to be used at a State college or university, or a \$1,000 award to be used at an out-of-State school. (Later, the award was extended to students who achieve qualifying results on only two of their MEAP tests but score in the top 25% on the nationally recognized ACT.)

The significance of MEAP results for school districts increased in 2001, when two new evaluation systems, the State's "Education YES!" and the Federal government's determination of adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), went into effect. Both systems heavily rely on MEAP scores to grade a school's performance. These grades are made public in the newspaper and on websites published by Standard and Poor's and the MDE.

In the last several years, use of the MEAP and the emphasis on test scores received increase criticism from educators, school districts, and others. In 2002, 22 districts were publicly embarrassed when the news media received advance notice of alleged "testing irregularities" occurring in those districts, e.g., claims that students or teachers were suspected of cheating on the test. In the end, investigations exonerated most schools and students. Then, in the summer of 2003, Measurement Inc., the company responsible for grading the MEAP tests, was unable to account for about 3,400 answer documents from the winter 2002 testing session. Although these documents were from middle school, not high school, MEAP tests, the incident further soured the MEAP HST's reputation. It was suggested that a national high-school assessment test, such as the ACT (American College Test) or the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test), replace the MEAP High School Proficiency Test, provided the new test complies with the assessment requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act.

CONTENT

Senate Bill 1153 amended the Revised School Code, and Senate Bill 1155 amended the State School Aid Act, to replace the 11th-grade MEAP test with a new Michigan Merit Examination, if approved for use by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE). The bills do the following:

-- Provide that, in the 2005-2006 school year, school districts statewide must administer the MEAP test to all 11th grade pupils, and the Michigan Merit Exam must be given to a sample of 11th grade pupils.

- Require the Michigan Merit Exam to be given to all 11th graders beginning in the 2006-2007 school year unless the USDOE has not approved its use for purposes of the No Child Left Behind Act.**
- Require school districts to continue administering the MEAP test to 11th grade pupils until the USDOE approves the Michigan Merit Exam.**
- Require the Department of Management and Budget (DMB) to contract with one or more providers to develop, supply, and score the Michigan Merit Exam.**

Senate Bill 1154 amended the Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act, and Senate Bill 1157 amended the Career and Technical Preparation Act, to require a high school student, beginning in the 2006-2007 school year, to achieve a qualifying score on a "readiness assessment", instead of earning State endorsements on the high school proficiency exam, in order to enroll in postsecondary or career and technical courses. The readiness assessment must be a nationally used assessment instrument aligned with State learning standards that contains a comprehensive career planning program.

Senate Bill 1156 amended the Michigan Merit Award Scholarship Act to require an 11th-grade student, beginning in the 2006-2007 school year, to receive qualifying results in each subject area component of the Michigan Merit Examination, in order to be eligible for a Michigan Merit Award Scholarship, unless the USDOE has not approved the Merit Exam.

All of the bills were tie-barred to each other. The bills took effect on January 5, 2005.

A detailed description of each bill follows.

Senate Bills 1153 and 1155

Michigan Merit Exam

The Revised School Code and the State School Aid Act require a school board or public school academy board to administer State assessments in the subject areas of communications skills, mathematics,

science, and social studies to 11th-grade students during the last 90 days of school.

Under the bills, in the 2005-2006 school year, the MEAP HST must be administered to all 11th-grade pupils and the Michigan Merit Exam must be given to a sample of pupils in 11th grade statewide, as determined by the Michigan Department of Education. The MDE must include pupils in the sample as it determines necessary to seek the approval of the USDOE to use the Michigan Merit Exam for the purposes of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Previously, the State Board of Education had to ensure that the MEAP tests were based on the State-recommended model core academic content standards, and that they tested for proficiency in basic academic skills and subject matter. Further, all assessment instruments related to K to 12 education had to be objective-oriented and consistent with the core academic standards. Under the bills, the 2005-2006 MEAP, the Merit Exam, and all future assessments must be based on "grade level content expectations or course content expectations", as appropriate, instead of core academic content standards.

For pupils in grade 11 in the 2006-2007 school year and subsequent school years, the Michigan Merit Exam will have to be administered statewide. If the USDOE does not approve the Merit Exam, however, the following apply:

- Schools must continue administering the MEAP test to all 11th-grade pupils until the next calendar year beginning after the USDOE gives its approval.
- The Merit Exam will have to be given to all 11th-graders beginning in the next calendar year beginning after the exam is approved.
- If necessary as part of the process of continuing to seek approval of the Merit Exam, the MDOE again may provide for the administration of both the MEAP test and the Merit Exam to a sample of 11th graders statewide.

The MDOE must take all steps necessary, including conducting a content alignment study and statistical analyses, to obtain the USDOE's approval of the Michigan Merit Exam by December 31, 2006, or as soon after that date as possible.

Development of Merit Exam

The bills require the Department of Management and Budget to contract with one or more providers to develop, supply, and score the Michigan Merit Exam. The Merit Exam must consist of all of the following:

- Assessment instruments that measure English language arts, mathematics, reading, and science and are used by colleges and universities in Michigan for entrance or placement purposes.
- One or more tests from one or more test developers that assess a pupil's ability to apply reading and math skills in a manner intended to allow employers to use the results in making employment decisions.
- A social studies component.
- Any other component necessary to obtain the USDOE's approval.

The Department must consider a contractor that provides electronically scored essays with the ability to score constructed response feedback in multiple languages and provides ongoing instruction and feedback.

The DMB and the Superintendent of Public Instruction must ensure that any contractor used to score the MEAP test or the Merit Exam supplies an individual report for each pupil that will identify for the pupil's parents and teachers whether the pupil met or failed to meet expectations for each standard, to allow the pupil's parents and teachers to assess and remedy problems before the pupil moves to the next grade.

In addition, the DMB and State Superintendent must ensure that any contractor used for scoring, developing, or processing the MEAP test or the Merit Exam meets quality management standards commonly used in the assessment industry, including at least meeting Level 2 of the Capability Maturity Model developed by the Software Engineering Institute of Carnegie Mellon University for the 2005-2006 MEAP test and the first Merit Exam and, for subsequent assessments, at least meeting Level 3 of the Capability Maturity Model.

Any contract for scoring, administering, or developing the MEAP test or Merit Exam must include specific deadlines for all steps of the assessment process, including deadlines for the correct testing materials to

be supplied to schools and for the correct results to be returned to schools, and include penalties for noncompliance with these deadlines.

The Superintendent must ensure that the MEAP test and Merit Exam meet all of the following:

- Are designed to test pupils on grade level content expectations or course content expectations, as appropriate, in all subjects tested.
- Comply with requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.
- Are consistent with the Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education, prepared by the Joint Committee on Testing Practices of the American Psychological Association.
- Are factually accurate.

If the Superintendent determines that a question is not factually accurate and should be removed from an assessment instrument, the State Board of Education and the Superintendent must ensure that the question is removed from the test or exam.

Scoring

Previously, the MDE had to ensure that Michigan teachers, retired Michigan teachers, or Michigan school administrators scored the essay (or "constructed response") section of students' MEAP tests. The bills eliminated this requirement.

The bills require the State Superintendent to work with the provider or providers of the Merit Exam to produce subject area scores for each pupil participating in the exam, including scaling and merging of test items for the different subject area components. The Superintendent must design and distribute to school districts, public school academies, intermediate school districts, and nonpublic schools a simple and concise document describing the scoring for each subject area and indicating the scaled score ranges for each area.

Previously, the Superintendent was required to establish three categories for each subject area indicating basic competency, above average, and outstanding. The bills require the Superintendent to establish four categories indicating exceeds expectations, meets expectations, basic, and below basic.

Private or Home Schools

As already required for the MEAP, the Merit Exam must be made available to students in private or home schools. The districts in which the students reside must administer the test. The bills add that the scores for these students are not considered for any purpose to be scores of a pupil of the district where the child took the test.

Advisory Committee

Previously, an advisory committee was appointed by the Department to advise the State Board on the administration, scoring, and reporting of the MEAP test and its results. The bills eliminated this committee.

Students with Disabilities

The Code requires that school districts provide testing accommodations to pupils with disabilities, consistent with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The bills retain this requirement and add that the accommodations must be consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The provider or providers of the Merit Exam and the State Superintendent must mutually agree upon the accommodations.

Test Retake

Under the bills, until the end of the 2006-2007 school year, a person who has previously taken the MEAP test may take a retest for the purpose of qualifying for a Michigan Merit Award scholarship. The person may take the retest, without charge, at the district where he or she is enrolled or resides or, if the test is not available there, at another location within the intermediate district where he or she lives, at a regular testing time scheduled for the test or during a scheduled retesting period.

Also, a pupil who does not qualify for a Michigan Merit Award may repeat the Michigan Merit Exam in the next school year on a designated testing date. The first retest must be offered at no cost to the pupil, but the pupil is responsible for paying for any subsequent repeat.

State Endorsed Diplomas

Previously, when a student achieved a proficient score (as determined by the MDE)

on the high school MEAP test in a subject, the student received a State endorsement on his or her diploma and high school transcript for that subject. The bills eliminated the State endorsement on diplomas and on transcripts, and deleted other requirements associated with State endorsements.

At-Risk Pupils

Senate Bill 1155 includes in the definition of "at-risk pupil" one who did not achieve proficiency on the reading or math component, or did not achieve basic competency on the science component, of the most recent Michigan Merit Exam for which results for the pupil have been received. (Under the State School Aid Act, schools with a certain percentage of students who meet the income eligibility criteria for free breakfast, lunch, or milk are eligible for an additional State allowance to be used for services to at-risk pupils and other purposes specified in the Act.)

Ferris State University; Freedom to Learn Grants

The State School Aid Act allocated funds for the development, implementation, and operation of the Freedom to Learn program for the 2004-2005 school year, and for program grants. The Act states that the purpose of the program is to achieve one-to-one access to wireless technology for K-12 pupils through statewide and local public-private partnerships. Previously, the Michigan Virtual University and the Michigan Department of Education jointly administered the program grants. Under Senate Bill 1155, beginning January 1, 2005, Ferris State University is required to perform the functions of the Michigan Virtual University in administering program grants. (The Act had provided for Ferris State to perform these functions if the Michigan Virtual University ceased to operate.)

Also, the Act allocated \$300,000 to Ferris State University to develop or purchase an on-line assessment system to supplement the MEAP tests and provide immediate feedback on pupil achievement. The bill included the Michigan Merit Exam in this provision.

Additional Requirements

Under the bills, various statutory provisions applicable to the MEAP test also apply to the Michigan Merit Exam. These include the purpose of the test; the requirement that scores be returned to schools, students, and parents by the first semester of 12th grade; the inclusion of a student's scaled score on his or her diploma; and testing irregularities.

As required for the MEAP test, the Superintendent of Public Instruction must ensure that the maximum length of time a school sets aside for the Merit Exam is eight hours.

Senate Bills 1154 and 1157

The Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act and the Career and Technical Preparation Act permit eligible high school students to enroll in courses at community colleges or universities, or at career and technical preparation programs operated by colleges and universities, for the purpose of earning academic credit. To be eligible to participate under either Act, a student must have achieved a State endorsement in all subject areas on the high school proficiency exam. Alternatively, under the Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act, a student may participate by enrolling only in a course in a subject area for which he or she achieved State endorsement, a course in computer science or a foreign language not offered by the school district, or a fine arts course as permitted by the school district. Under the Career and Technical Preparation Act, a student is eligible to enroll in a career and technical program if he or she achieved State endorsement in mathematics and a qualifying score on a nationally or industry-recognized job skills assessment test, as determined by the MDE.

Under the bills, beginning with the 2006-2007 school year, to be eligible to participate in either program, a student must achieve a qualifying score in all subject areas on a "readiness assessment" or the Michigan Merit Exam, as applicable for the student. Under Senate Bill 1154, a student not meeting this criterion may enroll in a course in a subject area for which he or she has achieved a qualifying score, or a course in computer science, a foreign language, or fine arts. Under Senate Bill 1157, a student is eligible if he or she achieves a qualifying score in mathematics and a qualifying score

on a nationally or industry-recognized job skills assessment test, as determined by the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The bills define "readiness assessment" as assessment instruments that are aligned with State learning standards; that are used nationally to provide high school students with an early indication of college readiness proficiency in English, mathematics, reading, social studies, and science and may contain a comprehensive career planning program; and that are approved by the Superintendent.

Senate Bill 1154 defines "qualifying score" as a score on the readiness assessment or the Michigan Merit Exam that has been determined by the Superintendent to indicate readiness to enroll in a postsecondary course in that subject area. Under Senate Bill 1157, the term means a score on the readiness assessment or a score on a nationally or industry-recognized job skills assessment test that has been determined by the Superintendent to indicate readiness to enroll in a course under the Career and Technical Preparation Act.

Both bills require the Superintendent, by July 1, 2005, to do the following: 1) approve one or more readiness assessments that may be used for the purpose of determining eligible students beginning with participation in the 2006-2007 school year; and 2) determine qualifying scores for each subject area component of a readiness assessment that determines readiness to enroll in a course under the Acts. Under Senate Bill 1157, the Superintendent also must determine qualifying scores for a nationally or industry-recognized job skills assessment test that indicates readiness to enroll in a career and technical preparation course. By July 1, 2006, the Superintendent must determine qualifying scores for each subject area component of the Merit Exam that indicate readiness to enroll in a postsecondary course in that subject area under the Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act, or in a course under the Career and Technical Preparation Act.

The bills require a student who takes a readiness assessment or a job skills assessment test for the purposes of the Acts to pay all costs for taking and obtaining qualifying scores on the test, unless the school district in which the student is enrolled elects to pay these costs.

Senate Bill 1156

Under the Michigan Merit Award Scholarship Act, an 11th-grade student is eligible for a \$2,500 scholarship to be used at a State college or university, or a \$1,000 scholarship to be used at an out-of-State postsecondary institution, if the student received qualifying results on the high school MEAP test in the subject areas of reading, writing, mathematics, and science. Alternatively, a student is eligible for a Merit Award if he or she did not receive qualifying results in one or two of these subject areas but received an overall score in the top 25% of a nationally recognized college admission exam, or received a qualifying score on a nationally recognized job skills assessment test designated by the State Board of Education.

Under the bill, each student enrolled in grade 11 in or after the 2006-2007 school year will be eligible to receive a Merit Award under the same conditions, except he or she must receive qualifying results in each subject area component of the Merit Exam, instead of the MEAP (or receive an overall score in the top 25% of a nationally recognized college admission exam or a qualifying score on a nationally recognized job skills assessment test). If the USDOE has not approved the use of the Merit Exam for the purposes of the NCLB, however, eligibility for a Merit Award will be determined as previously provided until the next calendar year beginning after the Merit Exam is approved, when eligibility for a Merit Award must be determined by Merit Exam results.

Previously, the State Board of Education had to obtain and make available to the public by September 1 all of the qualifying questions and answers from MEAP tests administered the preceding spring, unless the Board had designated a question for use in a future high school or middle school assessment test. The bill instead requires the Board to make available all qualifying test questions and answers to a high school or middle school assessment administered three to five years earlier. The bill also requires the Board to obtain and make available to the public preparatory materials for the Merit Exam that contain sample test questions and correct answers.

Under the bill, as previously provided, a pupil who does not initially receive qualifying

results must be given an opportunity to achieve the results by taking a subsequent test. If such a pupil is enrolled in 12th grade in the 2006-2007 school year, or enrolled in 12th grade in the first calendar year after the Merit Exam is approved, the pupil may choose to take either the MEAP test or the Merit Exam for the purpose of qualifying for a Merit Award.

Previously, the Board could not disburse funds for a Merit Award to a student or an approved college or university until it received a request for payment by October 15. (Exceptions were made for the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years.) The bill changed the deadline to December 15 for the 2004-2005 school year, and to November 15 for all subsequent years.

Provisions governing the Michigan Merit Award Scholarship, including award amounts and other eligibility criteria, continue to apply under the bill.

MCL 380.1278 et al. (S.B. 1153)
MCL 388.513 et al. (S.B. 1154)
MCL 388.1631a et al. (S.B. 1155)
MCL 390.1452 et al. (S.B. 1156)
MCL 288.1903 et al. (S.B. 1157)

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

Replacing the MEAP test with the Merit Exam, which will use as its foundation a test such as the ACT or SAT, will improve the credibility of State tests with students, parents, and educators. Students highly regard the ACT and the SAT because their scores are considered by colleges and universities in the admission process. The MEAP, on the other hand, is used only in Michigan for the purpose of evaluating a school's success at educating its students in the State's core curriculum. Many high school juniors are not motivated to take one more test if it only benefits the school and does nothing for them personally. Replacing the MEAP HST with the Merit Exam will allow more Michigan students to be compared with their peers nationwide.

Further, eliminating the MEAP test will lessen the burden on overtested juniors.

Besides the MEAP and a college admission test, many juniors also take advanced placement exams. Replacing the MEAP HST with the Merit Exam will mean less stress for students and educators, who will not have to work to motivate students for a test that has little credibility for them. In the past, one of the motivating factors for doing well on the HST was the Merit Award, a \$2,500 scholarship from the State to be used for educational expenses at an in-State university (or \$1,000 to be used at an out-of-State school). Under the bills, students will continue to be awarded the Merit Award scholarship if they do well on the Merit Exam. Another incentive for achieving a proficient score on the MEAP was the ability to earn college credit while still in high school (i.e., "dual enrollment".) Under the bills, students still will be able to participate in dual enrollment if they achieve a qualifying score on a "readiness assessment", such as the PLAN test, which is developed by the ACT and is currently administered to sophomores on a voluntary basis.

Replacing the MEAP test with a national standardized college entrance test was recommended by the Cherry Commission on Higher Education. According to the Commission's final report, replacing the MEAP with the Merit Exam could increase students' aspirations to attend institutions of higher education. Indeed, the ACT reports that this has occurred in Illinois and Colorado, the two states that have replaced their state-developed exam with a supplemented ACT. According to an ACT publication, results from Colorado and Illinois show that "the tests have identified college-ready students who otherwise might not have considered pursuing education after high school" and that "educational and career aspirations have increased for minority students". The new Merit Exam might help close the achievement gap between minority students and white students and force teachers to prepare all students for college.

The bills require that the Merit Exam also include a workplace readiness assessment, such as the ACT WorkKeys, which will motivate non-college-bound students to take the Merit Exam. Currently, the Merit scholarship is an incentive only to those students who see themselves as college-bound and believe they can score high enough on the HST to qualify for the award.

The WorkKeys test is an assessment for students preparing to enter the workforce directly after high school graduation and is highly valued by employers. The new Merit Exam will prove meaningful to all students.

Response: The WorkKeys assessment results are reported in terms of a total score ranging from 3.3 to 7. Very few employers know how to interpret a WorkKeys score. Many large employers routinely conduct their own battery of tests with applicants, while small employers tend to rely more on a student's success in certain high school courses and work experiences.

Supporting Argument

The Merit Exam should save the State and local districts time and money. The State has spent a great deal of time each year developing new test questions, reviewing them for curriculum alignment and bias, and piloting new tests. The MDE then has contracted with various vendors to score the exams and enter the scores into the State's Single Record Student Database. Under the Merit Exam, test-development and computer processing and costs will be borne by the vendor. In addition, the State will save money by limiting the number of test retakes to one, instead of allowing students to repeat the MEAP test twice, at State expense. The State also wastes money because it prints many more tests than are used.

At the local level, schools will not face the same lengthy process of reviewing for the MEAP, both because students will be more motivated to take the new Merit Exam and because many may take ACT or SAT preparation classes outside of school. Perhaps most welcome, however, will be an abbreviated testing period under the new system. For example, the new ACT, which includes an essay question, takes four hours to administer. The MEAP test takes about eight hours to administer, and is typically spread out over two weeks to avoid testing fatigue. This two-week period is a time of disruption for schools, which may reassign teachers and counselors to administer the test and hire substitutes to cover for them. Further complicating matters, all MEAP tests are untimed, so students may continue to work on their tests, with teacher supervision, after the end of the group testing. Under the Merit Exam, lost instructional time will be restored, and teachers and counselors will be free again to educate and to counsel.

It is likely that the Merit Exam will be scored and returned to students and districts much more quickly than under the MEAP system, which took up to six months to turn around test results in the past. The ACT typically returns scores in three to five weeks. Finally, many students and their parents will save money, because the State will now pay for them to take the ACT or SAT the first time, a cost they have had to absorb themselves.

Response: The Michigan Merit Exam will not be a straightforward ACT or SAT; rather, writing, social studies, and possibly science content components must be added to meet NCLB standards. (Under NCLB, a state may not replace a test used to measure AYP with one that is perceived as less rigorous. Under this standard, it is possible that the constructed response questions will have to be restored to each subject-area test.) Once supplemented, the new Merit Exam may take as much time to administer as the MEAP test requires: In Illinois, which uses a supplemented ACT test, administration takes eight hours. The Merit Exam also may take as long to score, given the addition of writing components (although the constructed response questions possibly could be scored by a computer). Further, there will be a cost to make the transition to the new Merit Exam and to run both systems simultaneously for at least one year, until the tests are approved by the USDOE. Moreover, because the stakes will be just as high under the Merit Exam as they were under the MEAP (e.g., the scores will be used to determine AYP, and schools failing to meet AYP will face sanctions), teachers will spend as much time teaching to the Merit Exam as they did teaching to the MEAP. Perhaps, because students will be allowed only one retest at State expense under the Merit Exam, teachers might spend even more time preparing students.

Opposing Argument

The MEAP HST may be unpopular with students and some educators, but that does not mean that it should be abolished. Since its inception, the test has been regarded as one of the most comprehensive, valid, and creditable exams in the country. Perhaps some of the MEAP HST's unpopularity is due to its rigorous nature. The test set a high standard, which not all students met. Rather than scrap the test, Michigan should continue on its course toward helping as

many students as possible master the State's rigorous curriculum.

It is possible for every student to do well on the MEAP test, because it is a criterion-referenced exam. This means that the test results are reported as performance against a standard. In contrast, most national tests, such as the ACT and SAT, are norm-referenced. This means that each student's performance is compared with his or her peers' performance, and not with expectations set by educators. No matter how well students do on a norm-referenced test, half will always be "below average", even if they meet expectations. Further, unlike the MEAP, the ACT test is timed, so many students cannot finish it. This further differentiates students and does not allow every student to demonstrate what he or she knows and is able to do. Under a norm-referenced test such as the ACT, which spreads students out on a bell curve, it will be difficult for Michigan to comply with NCLB, which requires, eventually, that every child achieve 100% proficiency on state-established reading and math tests in the next 12 years.

The MEAP HST provides specific feedback that schools can use to improve their teaching and learning. The results indicate overall strengths and weaknesses of a school district's curriculum and can be used to modify instructional practice. The ACT, in contrast, is not designed to provide information to teachers, school administrators, parents, or teachers; it is designed to help college administrators determine whom to admit to their institution. The ACT provides only data that demonstrate how one student compares with his or her peers.

Millions of taxpayer dollars have been spent on MEAP development, and perhaps as many hours spent by teachers and educators aligning their curriculum with the MEAP HST. Eliminating the test will require educators to change course, perhaps even to go back to the drawing board. The MEAP HST is the only high school test that is based on the State's model core curriculum outcomes. An off-the-shelf test such as the ACT or SAT cannot match Michigan's standards. Doing away with the MEAP HST will be a step backward for the State.

Response: The ACT develops its test questions based on the curricula of schools across the country. According to ACT

representatives, initial research has indicated that the skills and knowledge tested by the ACT overlap with most of Michigan's standards, and everything the ACT measures is included within Michigan's standards. The USDOE has granted AYP and Title I approval to Illinois and Colorado, which currently use the ACT as the basis for their high school tests.

Legislative Analyst: Claire Layman

FISCAL IMPACT

Senate Bill 1153

The bill will phase out the existing MEAP high school test and replace it with the Michigan Merit Examination, as defined in the bill, beginning in school year 2006-2007. According to the Michigan Department of Education, the FY 2003-04 MEAP high school test cost a total of \$8.5 million, and included questions in the subject areas of math, science, reading, writing, and social studies. Of this, \$7.1 million was the cost for the contract with Measurement, Inc., the test developer and scorer. (Nearly half of this cost is to read, grade, and respond to open-ended questions.) The contract for the high school test expires in September 2005, which means that the last high school test to be covered under the existing contract was administered in the spring of 2005. (The fall exam occurs in late October or early November.) Of the remaining cost, \$950,000 is for MEAP staff and State oversight, and \$460,000 covers Department of Information Technology costs.

Students presently take the MEAP high school test in the spring of their 11th grade, with retesting possible in the fall of their senior year and again in the spring of their senior year before graduation. Approximately 119,000 students in 11th grade take the test yearly, with another 38,000 retesting over the next two cycles, for a total of 154,000 tests administered for any given graduating class.

Two of the three components of the Michigan Merit Examination correlate closely to the national ACT exam and the ACT WorkKeys exam. The cost of the basic ACT exam is \$28 per student. The cost of the writing exam will be \$14 per student. The cost of the ACT WorkKeys exams for reading and math is \$3.20 for each subject area per student.

The bill, in addition to requiring the new examination, restricts the number of retakes to one. (Currently, there are two opportunities to retake the MEAP test.) Assuming the same 119,000 first-time test takers and only 38,000 retakes, and using the costs of the ACT and ACT WorkKeys listed above, the estimated cost for administering and scoring two of the three components of the Michigan Merit Examination is \$7.6 million.

A study released by the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals found that the science portion of the ACT aligns with about 50% of the State standards because it uses only science reasoning, while State standards also include science achievement. Therefore, an additional science achievement exam will need to be purchased as well. The cost per science achievement test was estimated to be \$3.66 by the Department. Using this estimate, the total cost for this additional science test is estimated at \$0.6 million. (Under the No Child Left Behind Act, if an assessment instrument is replaced, then the new assessment must demonstrate alignment with state standards to satisfy the requirements under Federal legislation. Depending upon the result of an independent review of the ACT with Michigan's standards, other tests might be needed to augment the ACT and ACT WorkKeys.)

The additional cost of a social studies component is estimated at \$0.4 million. This brings the testing cost to an estimated \$8.6 million, without any State oversight. If the current \$1.4 million cost for administering the program is added to the testing cost, the total estimated cost under the new program will be \$10.0 million, or \$1.5 million more than what is currently spent.

This estimate assumes two independent test systems. Because of the phase-out period required by the legislation, when both exams might be made available, there likely will be additional costs to the State for contracting with at least two vendors to provide the two tests at the same time.

One additional item that might have fiscal implications is the degree to which the new test contractor will be able to deliver data (test scores) to the State using the State's Single Record Student Database (SRSD)

system, and the Unique Identifier Code component of the SRSD. Data will need to be sent to the State for the purpose of determining Merit Award eligibility.

Senate Bills 1154 and 1157

The ACT offers a "readiness assessment" exam that will satisfy the definitional requirements laid out in the bills. This exam is called PLAN and costs \$8.50 per scored test. If a student pays for such an exam in order to become eligible for enrollment under the Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act or the Career and Technical Preparation Act, there will be no cost to the district. If, however, districts choose to offer the readiness assessment, the cost to the districts will be \$8.50 per 10th grader.

Senate Bill 1155

The bill requires districts to administer the Michigan Merit Examination if it is approved to replace the MEAP high school test, in order to receive any State aid payments appropriated in the State School Aid Act. If a district chooses not to administer this test, it will not be awarded State aid under the Act.

Senate Bill 1156

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

Fiscal Analyst: Kathryn Summers-Coty

A0304\S1153ea

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.