

REDUCE CREDITS REQUIRED FOR SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS

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House Bill 4069 as enacted
Public Act 236 of 2018
Sponsor: Rep. Jim Tedder
House Committee: Education Reform
Senate Committee: Education
Complete to 8-17-18

BRIEF SUMMARY: House Bill 4069 would lower the threshold for substitute teaching from 90 to 60 semester hours of college credit or attainment of an associate degree from a college, university, or community college. The 60 semester hours need not be from the same institution. [A bachelor’s degree is a four-year degree, requiring 120 semester hours. The 60-hour requirement in the bill, or the completion of an associate degree, equate to two years of college courses.]

FISCAL IMPACT: The bill would have no fiscal impact on the state or on local school districts, intermediate school districts (ISDs), or public school academies (PSAs).

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

House Bill 4069, along with House Bills 4421 and 4422, is the latest in a series of bills intended to address Michigan’s ongoing teacher shortage. Reportedly, fill rates—or the percentage of substitute teaching positions that are able to be filled—have dropped from 95% in 2012 to 85% in 2015.¹ This means that, for every 100 classrooms that are in need of substitutes, only 85 are able to be filled. The Michigan Department of Education’s (MDE) list of Critical Shortage Disciplines² for the academic year 2016-1017 lists “substitute teaching–ALL disciplines” (emphasis in original). Bills such as these are intended to expand the pool of eligible substitutes to fill those vacancies.

The committee also heard testimony about the declining number of teachers in teacher preparation programs—down 52% in Michigan in the six most recent years available, from 23,372 in the 2008-2009 academic year to 11,099 in 2014-2015 academic year.³ Nationwide between 2008-2009 and 2013-2014, enrollment in teacher preparation programs decreased by 35%.⁴

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would lower the number of required semester hours of college credit for substitute teachers from 90 hours to 60 hours; it would also introduce an alternative requirement that

¹ <http://wkar.org/post/mi-schools-struggle-lack-substitute-teachers#stream/0>

² https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/2016-17_Critical_Shortage_List_518812_7.pdf

³ https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Report/StateHighlights/StateHighlights.aspx?p=2_01

⁴ <http://beltmag.com/michigan-supplies-teachers-for-schools-across-the-nation-but-what-about-its-own-needs/>

the prospective substitute have an associate degree from a college, university, or community college. Finally, a person seeking to substitute teach in grades 9 to 12 would need to be at least 22 years old.

The bill would do so by amending Section 1233 within Part 16 (Boards of Education; Powers and Duties Generally) of the Revised School Code. In addition to describing the required qualifications of teachers and guidance counselors, generally, Section 1233 lists the required level of education for substitute teachers. At present, the board of a school district or intermediate school district (ISD) may employ a person as a substitute teacher, even if that person does not have a teaching degree, as long as the person has at least 90 semester hours of college credit from a college or university.

The bill also would require the Michigan Department of Education to amend any applicable rules to comply with this change.

Finally, the bill would remove a requirement that districts or ISDs that employ a person without a valid teaching certificate to serve in a counseling role must comply with certain rules.

MCL 380.1233

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The bill sponsor stated that the new standard could increase classroom exposure for individuals with some college credit who may be interested in becoming teachers. The ability to serve as a substitute teacher with fewer college credits—possibly in addition to another job, while earning a degree, or even while the person is taking a break from schooling—could inspire an interest in returning to school to earn a teaching degree.

According to committee testimony, substitute teachers were traditionally college graduates with teaching degrees who were looking for a permanent position; substitute teaching served as a “try out” for the school and for the substitute. Today, the average substitute is a 43-year-old working mother returning to the workforce. Perhaps introducing college students into the classroom at an earlier stage in their education could result in a resurgence of interest in teaching, some argued.

Against:

Critics argue, however, that the best way to address the shortage of qualified substitute teachers is not simply to lower the qualifications. After all, we profess concern that Michigan’s students are falling behind, scoring lower in assessment tests, and failing to achieve proficiency in critical disciplines—can we rationally expect better if we demand less of the teachers on whom their achievement depends?

After all, said critics, teachers today are being placed in a lose-lose situation. When they seek to adjust to changing standards and curricula, they are “teaching to the test.” And, if that is still unsuccessful or if students fail to grasp concepts for other reasons, they are

blamed and often penalized for low test scores. While some may feel that this is only fair—that their job is to teach children and that there are consequences if they fail—it may be an increasingly unattractive environment to college students exploring careers. A “quick fix” such as this bill allows us to settle for less instead of recognizing and addressing the systemic issues facing the teaching profession, say opponents.

According to committee testimony, substitute teachers in Michigan make between \$85 and \$100 a day. A representative for a teacher staffing agency relayed that one district had not raised its substitute teacher pay in 16 years. Even if a person substitute teaches each of the 180 days required of Michigan schools, at \$85 a day, that person would make \$15,300 a year, or roughly 129% of the federal poverty level. At this wage, some argued, how can we be surprised that substitute teachers are hard to come by?

Legislative Analyst: Jenny McInerney
Fiscal Analysts: Bethany Wicksall
Samuel Christensen

■ 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.