



SB 169/170 – STEM LEGISLATION AND THE HOME SCHOOL PROTECTING HOME EDUCATIONAL FREEDOM

INTRODUCTION

A proposal before the Michigan Legislature creates a special Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Endorsement option for high school diplomas. Under the proposal, home school parents may place a STEM Endorsement on their child's high school diploma if they choose to do so. The optional Endorsement allows the homeschool parent to certify that their child earned extra credits in math and science. Some opponents to the proposal argue that it opens the door to Common Core and helps establish a P20 system (a pre-natal to college level educational scheme) by nationalizing educational control. The proposal, however, actually undermines Common Core/P20 by vesting full control in the issuance of the Endorsement in the homeschool parent, while expressly preventing any state control over the decision.

1. SB 169/170 RETAINS PARENTAL CONTROL

In Michigan, local school districts, private schools, and homeschool parents all issue their own high school diplomas. Homeschool parents are free to decide what curriculum and teaching techniques to use. It is the parent who certifies that the student completed enough credits to graduate. Indeed, no homeschool parent has to report anything to the Michigan Department of Education.

Under the proposal, if homeschool parents, in their sole discretion, certify that their child completed 12 extra math and science credits, they may place an Endorsement on their child's diploma. The state has no oversight over what method a parent may choose to use to complete those extra credits. No parent has to report, submit, or give anything to the state in order to put the Endorsement on the diploma. Thus, SB 169/170 undermines the goals of a Common Core system because it precludes any state or national oversight, allows no standardized government testing, and leaves it to the complete discretion of the parent to certify that the child completed the extra course work.

2. SB 169/170 MAINTAINS CURRICULAR FREEDOM.

Homeschoolers educate their children under Michigan's homeschooling law (MCL 380.1561(a) and/or (f)). Section (f) states the child must be taught in reading, mathematics, science, etc. Nowhere in the statute does it dictate to parents what curriculum a parent must use to teach those subjects. It is left to the sole discretionary choice of the parent.

In a similar way, if parents desire under SB 169/170 to include the 12 extra credits in their homeschool curriculum, they simply pick from a list

of germane subjects to teach their children the extra credit work. For example, under the proposal the extra credit courses logically include subjects such as statistics, pre-calculus, accounting, etc. The proposal expressly does not dictate what curriculum, books, or methods a parent must use to teach those subjects.

SB 169 empowers parents to determine whether the extra credit curriculum they choose for their child is "substantially the same" as that which is sufficient for an Endorsement at the public school. This provision guarantees that parents retain the freedom to use their own discretion as to how to teach the relevant subjects. SB 169/170 imposes no curriculum or textbook requirements on parents in any way. If the goal of Common Core is to take away any discretion from individual parents regarding curriculum choices and standardized testing, then this proposal clearly undercuts that effort.

Over twenty years ago the Michigan legislature passed MCL 380.1561(f). At the time, many opponents attempted to use "sky is falling" arguments to say that it gave the state full oversight over what parents had to teach their children because it simply gave a list of subject areas. They argued that it would open the door to full state control of homeschooling. However, after 20 years, Michigan remains one of, if not the most, homeschool friendly states in the country and none of the arguments made against the legislation ever proved true. Many of the same arguments raised against Section (f) 20 years ago are now being asserted against SB 169/170. The evidence suggests, therefore, that those arguments were flawed 20 years ago and they are still flawed today.

3. SB 169/170 ARE COMPLETELY OPTIONAL

SB 169/170 imposes no mandate on homeschool parents. The STEM bill as originally intended only benefited public school students, to the express exclusion of the home educated. To ensure that that the proposed law treated homeschool students as fairly as public school students, the legislature added language protecting a parents' right to utilize the Endorsement if they so choose. If parents decide to opt in, there is no state oversight or requirement for the parents to register with the state. The bill simply provides the means for parents to self-certify that their child completed "substantially the same" course work as a student benefiting from the Endorsement in a public school. This is what educational freedom is all about. Homeschool families should have as many options as possible. Each family should individually decide if it is something in which they would like to participate.



SENATE BILL 169:

The people of the state of Michigan enact:
1 Sec. 1278E.

- (1) A school district or public school academy may notate a pupil's transcript or diploma to indicate that the pupil has earned a STEM Endorsement under Section 1278D.
- (2) **For an individual who is educated at home** or in a non-public school, as described under Section 1561(3), **if the individual's parent or legal guardian** or, for a non-public school, the principal or chief administrative officer of the non-public school, **determines that the individual has met substantially the same requirements as the requirements under Section 1278D for a STEM Endorsement, the individual's parent or legal guardian** or, for a non-public school, the principal or chief administrative officer of the non-public school, **may issue a STEM Endorsement for the individual** (Emphasis added).

SENATE BILL 170:

The people of the state of Michigan enact:
1 Sec. 1278D. If a pupil successfully completes all of the following credit requirements while in grades 7 to 12, the pupil is eligible for a STEM Endorsement.

- (A) All applicable requirements of the Michigan Merit Standard for a high school diploma under Sections 1278A and 1278B.
- (B) At least 6 credits in mathematics. At least 5 of these 7 credits must be in courses that are either listed in Section 1278A(1)(A)(i), including a credit that covers the content standards for pre-calculus or calculus.
- (C) At least 6 credits in science. At least 4 of these credits must be in courses that are either listed in Section 1278B(1)(B) or that cover the same content standards as a course listed in section 1278B(1)(B).
- (D) At least ½ credit featuring significant course work involving technology activities and at least ½ credit featuring significant course work involving engineering activities. These credits may be gained through separate technology and engineering course work or in conjunction with course work associated with the credits required under subdivisions (B) and (C).

