FIRST PERSON: IN MICHIGAN, IT’S TIME TO OPEN UP NEW OPTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

Proposal would give schools more autonomy over graduation requirements

by Michigan Sen. Jon Bumstead (SenBumstead@senate.michigan.gov)

When I was in high school, I faced the same decision many teens face as they grow older: What do I want to do with my life? I did not follow what many would consider to be a traditional career path. During high school, I enrolled in Newaygo County’s Career Tech Center to learn real-world skills that can’t be taught by a textbook. I decided to learn skills for the construction industry and pursue a career as a home builder.

That opportunity helped me launch my own successful construction firm (Bumstead Construction) 40 years ago. I think all students in my home state of Michigan should have the ability to make similar decisions regarding their futures — though sometimes our current system doesn’t provide a good process for making those decisions.

I recently introduced legislation to give more flexibility to local school districts when choosing graduation requirements.

I believe our current requirements don’t always allow students to explore possibilities that better suit their interests or needs. These requirements sometimes limit student creativity and exploration. My goal is to better help students be prepared for life after school, even if those plans do not include a traditional four-year college.

END ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL POLICY

In 2006, the Michigan Merit Curriculum went into effect and created statewide requirements for high school students in our state. Prior to 2006, graduation requirements were left up to the local school districts. Currently, students who follow the traditional route in Michigan must complete the following courses and credits to receive a high school diploma:

• four credits in English;
• four credits in mathematics, including requirements that students complete yearlong courses in Algebra I, geometry and Algebra II;
• one credit making up both physical education and health;
• three credits in science;
• three credits in social studies, including yearlong courses in U.S. history and geography, world history and geography, as well as one-half credit in economics and civics;
• one credit in visual, performing and applied arts; and
• two credits in world language.

I have introduced two bills, SB 600 and 601, that would allow students more opportunities to enroll in courses or programs they find interesting or wish to pursue as a career.

For example, the bills would eliminate the state’s Algebra II requirement for graduation. Students could instead complete a state-approved career and technology education program — in areas such as electronics, machining, construction, welding, engineering, computer science or renewable energy.

Michigan currently is one of only a handful of states that require Algebra II for graduation, and eliminating this mandate would open up opportunities for students to enroll in courses that would better prepare them to meet their goals for the future.

These changes will make sure students are ready for the next step after high school, whether that’s entering the workforce or attending a trade school or college.

School districts should have the ability to make choices that are best for their students and their children, rather than being forced to follow a state-mandated, one-size-fits-all policy.

EMPOWER PARENTS, SCHOOLS

I’ve always believed that local schools have a better understanding than the state of what their students need to be successful. Parents, teachers and administrators who know and work with these students every day are more than capable of making these decisions, and my legislation will take steps to give schools the ability to do so once again.

Late in 2019, SBs 600 and 601 passed through the Michigan Senate’s Committee on Education and Career Readiness.

Michigan Sen. Jon Bumstead was first elected to the state Senate in 2018. He previously served three terms in the Michigan House.

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STATE MATH REQUIREMENTS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS (AS OF FEBRUARY 2019)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Program of study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Architecture and Construction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>Business Management and Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>Marketing, Sales and Services</td>
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<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>Business Management and Administration</td>
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<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>Human Services</td>
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<td>North Dakota</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
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<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>Education and Training</td>
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</tbody>
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Leading area of concentration in career and technical education among high school students

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