

Senate Education Committee

Ava Hawkes 271-4151

HB 182, relative to approval of coursework completed at other approved schools

Hearing Date: April 20, 2021

Time Opened: 10:20 a.m.

Time Closed: 10:45 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Ward, Hennessey, Ricciardi and Prentiss

Members of the Committee Absent : Senator Kahn

Bill Analysis: This bill requires the principal or other administrator of a high school to grant credit for courses and programs completed at other approved schools.

Sponsors:

Rep. Ladd

Rep. A. Lekas

Rep. Allard

Rep. Cordelli

Rep. Boehm

Rep. Moffett

Who supports the bill: Representative Rick Ladd, Representative Deborah Hobson, Representative Glenn Cordelli, Representative Judy Aron, Representative Erica Layon, Alvin See, Sarah Scott, Eric Pauer

Who opposes the bill: 48 people signed up in opposition to this bill. Full sign-in sheet available upon request.

Who is neutral on the bill: None.

Summary of testimony presented:

Representative Rick Ladd – Grafton, District 4

- Representative Ladd introduced HB 182.
- We live in a highly mobile society.
- The bill requires a receiving principal at a school to grant credit for a course earned at a sending school.
- If the principal denies credit which could lead to high school graduation, they must show reasonable justification for denial.
- Transferring schools can be challenging academically, socially and emotionally.
- This bill mirrors current law used to approve or disapprove coursework from military children.

- This bill echoes RSA 110-d:8, I. This language already exists for military students; currently, there is not the same support for nonmilitary students and families.
- Looking to equalize playing field.
- Several examples brought before House Education as to why this bill was brought forth.
 - An 8th grader took and passed algebra I at his sending school, however, his receiving school did not accept credit as this course is taken in the 9th grade at the receiving school.
 - A 9th grader took a social study course in Maine. The receiving school did accept the class as they taught it in 10th grade. They made the student retake the class and they became more of a discipline problem after having to sit through a class they already took.
- This bill is logical and about fairness.
- Former NHDOE Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner worked with Rep. Ladd to put in place state competencies as opposed to the former of seat times.
- There are 43 required courses in high school and each has a competency assessment.
- If a principal plans to deny a receiving course, they could always administer a competency assessment to determine if child knows information.

Representative Erica Layon – Rockingham, District 6

- Supports this bill.
- Hopes to reinforce that House Education has spoken with NHDOE.
- Problems with transfer credits are real and happening now for course they've taken through VLACS.
- Senator Hennessey asked Representative Layon who looks at the reasonable justification for denial.
 - Representative Layon said she is unsure, Chairman Ladd may better answer that question.
 - Rep. Ladd said reasonable justification is to be determined by the principal of the school.
 - Reasonable is a legal term, as is negligent. The purpose of this term in bill is to clarify that a reason must be provided to the parent and/or the child for the denial of a course.
 - There is no requirement for that now.
- Senator Hennessey asked Representative Ladd what the recourse is if a parent does not agree with the principal's reasonable justification.
 - There is a whole process in military code compact in all 50 states.
 - They did not put that compact in bill.
 - The first step here should be appealing to the school board.

- Senator Prentiss asked Representative Ladd if this bill would apply to standardized testing or high stakes exams and if they're transferable.
 - There are a number of tests that test areas that the state does not test for.
 - Districts have used older criterion reference tests in the past.

Becky Wilson – Director of Governmental Affairs, NH School Board Association

- Opposed to this bill.
- They appreciate the drive for this bill.
- This bill, when referencing an approved school, does not identify if its speaking to approved programs or approved under attendance approval.
- There are a number of reasons why a student's VLACS may not transfer, which is part of a much bigger process.
- School counselors and administrators take good care when looking at credits for transferring students.
- They must look at competency of other schools and compare and contrast; some things are taught in different sequences or order, which requires a lot of follow-up.
- Order of content is done via local decisions for planning and instruction.
- The time of year when a student is enrolling also must be taken into consideration, i.e. halfway through the year versus end of year. Students can be awarded credits at different points throughout the year depending on district.
- Students can take outside courses and, with approval, ELO type experiences are also possible. Schools communicate with their students and parents to put a plan in place when taking outside courses.
- Most credits are accepted by districts; no recent issues from one district to another.
- When VLACS first started, there were issues. But no issues as of recent.
- Credits are often accepted by the receiving school even if they don't translate directly into the same category.
- They may be counted as elective credits depending on what was covered at the previous school. This doesn't necessarily shorten or lessen the requirements students need to graduate.
- Graduation requirements for local districts rest with the local school boards.
- It is up to school administrators to ensure that students coming into a new school have met the competencies in order to be considered for the local school board diploma.
- Senator Ward asked Ms. Wilson if there is an advantage in having consistency across all public schools on what they teach and when they teach it. There should be consistency in the public school system on major topics.

- Ms. Wilson said, having been a previous 8-9th grade administrator, there is a different conversation when looking at these two grades.
- Students, within their local districts, can take courses in middle school that bridge them into their local high school version of that class, i.e. algebra.
- Those bridge courses/work may not fit a receiving high school's standards.
- Many districts teach algebra at the 8th grade level, but they don't necessarily meet the algebra 1 competencies that fulfill graduation requirements.
- Then, those are the conversations that happen at the high school where they call the previous district to decipher whether credits meet statewide standards.
- Local decision-making has always been left to the school boards to develop their own competencies.
- What is consistent is the standards, but the other details vary as they are local decisions.

Jerry Frew – Associate Executive Director, NH School Administrators Association

- Seconded the local control issues expressed by Ms. Wilson.
- Even within some districts, an algebra one course doesn't necessarily contribute to high school graduation credit as it is taken in middle school, i.e. 8th grade, versus it being taken in high school, i.e. 9th grade.
- The integrity of local decision making needs to remain intact.
- For the last five years, he sits on the Board of Directors for VLACS.
- In their board level discussions, Mr. Frew has spoken with the learning director and asked if there are still difficulties in accepting VLACS credits.
- They admitted that several years ago it was a widespread issue, but now, not so much. There are now very few incidents where VLACS is not honored at the local level.
- Senator Prentiss shared with Mr. Frew that her daughter took a VLACS course and it worked seamlessly as it was handled locally. She asked Mr. Frew if since this coursework is already being handled and addressed at the local level, is this legislation unnecessary.
 - Mr. Frew said yes, it is unnecessary as their members do not cite this as a problem.
 - This bill is a solution in search of a problem.
 - Local competencies have to be met, therefore, school districts must make judgment calls.
 - They don't hear these complaints from school district leaders.

Nate Green – Bureau Administrator, NH Department of Education

- Every now and again you'll hear from a parent or school with concerns about the transfer of a VLACS credit. Does not have evidence to point to at this time.
- Senator Ward asked Mr. Green about credits transferring from one district to another being a problem.
 - Mr. Green said they've seen isolated cases, one or two.
 - Standards tend to be the same across courses around the state. However, local school districts are able to add additional requirements on top of standards.
 - For example, a health course in one district may simply teach standards alone, as where in another district, they may add on a community service component. That would be outside the normal standards.
 - If a student, in this case, were to transfer from outside the district into this district, they may ask the student to fulfill the community service requirement to be able to receive credit for the health course.

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Date Hearing Report completed: April 21, 2021