
Detailed Fiscal Analysis

The bill would permit a local school board or a chartered nonpublic school to furnish, in lieu of traditional textbooks, electronic textbooks to students free of charge. An “electronic textbook” is defined to include computer software, interactive videodisc, magnetic media, CD-ROM, computer courseware, on-line service, electronic medium, or other means of conveying information to the student or otherwise contributing to the learning process through electronic means. The bill also requires a school district or chartered nonpublic school that furnishes electronic textbooks to make them reasonably accessible to students for completion of assignments.

Current law specifies that the list wholesale price of a computer diskette that contains the text of a schoolbook can not exceed the list wholesale price for the printed version of that schoolbook. While the definition of an electronic textbook is much broader than a computer diskette, it is assumed that school districts are unlikely to incur additional costs as a result of the bill. Furthermore, the development of technology may reduce the price of electronic textbooks. CD-ROM and diskettes are much cheaper to produce and distribute than traditional textbooks. The completion of SchoolNet and SchoolNet Plus will make electronic textbooks more accessible to students. Therefore, while school districts may not immediately experience the benefits of the bill, the potential exists for school districts to reduce textbook purchase related expenditures in the future. School districts will also be able to furnish more updated electronic textbooks to students. By extending the authority to purchase electronic textbooks to chartered nonpublic schools, these private institutions might experience some long-term savings as well. Currently, the state provides assistance to chartered nonpublic elementary and secondary schools to support the purchase secular textbooks and a range of other activities not related to religion. This support in fiscal year 1999, as provided through the 200-511 line item (Auxiliary Services) provides a payment of \$426 per student. Despite the long-term savings that might occur as a result of purchasing electronic textbooks, LBO believes that it is unlikely that state subsidy payments to chartered nonpublic schools through the Auxiliary Services line item will decrease.

According to the Department of Education, there are 46 approved textbook publisher companies currently selling textbooks in Ohio. The textbook prices vary significantly from one company to another company and from one subject to another subject.

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