
Education Committee

HB 2048

Brief Description: Concerning the division of large first-class school districts.

Sponsors: Representatives Santos and Pettigrew.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Provides that, effective September 1, 2018, no first-class school district may comprise more than 35,000 students or have more than five members on its board of directors.
- Tasks the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction with convening the educational service districts to analyze the options, make recommendations for a clear legal framework and process for dividing a school district that has more than 35,000 students into two districts, and report back to the Legislature and the Governor by December 1, 2015.

Hearing Date: 2/10/15

Staff: Cece Clynch (786-7195).

Background:

Local school districts are political subdivisions of the state and the organization of such districts, including the powers, duties, and boundaries, may be altered or abolished by statute. Current law provides a process for reorganization of school districts, but does not specifically address dividing one district into two.

A first-class school district is one that has an enrollment of 2,000 students or more. There is no maximum enrollment specified. A school district with enrollment below 2,000 is a second-class district.

Both first-class, and second-class school districts must have five member boards of directors, all of which members are elected. There is an exception, however, for a first-class school district

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having within its boundaries a city with a population of 400,000 people or more. In that case, the school district must have a seven member board of directors, all of whom are elected.

The Seattle School District is the only district that falls within the exception, and is governed by a seven member board. Seattle School District's enrollment is almost 52,000. It is the largest district in Washington. Spokane and Tacoma School Districts are the next largest districts, each with enrollment between 29,000 and 30,000.

Summary of Bill:

Effective September 1, 2018, no first-class school district may comprise more than 35,000 students or have more than five members on its board of directors.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction must convene educational service districts (ESDs) to analyze options and make recommendations for a clear legal framework and process for dividing a school district that has more than 35,000 students into two districts. The analysis must include:

- a time frame, criteria, and process for initiating a division of a school district;
- roles and responsibilities of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), ESDs, and regional committees on school district organization; and
- recommendations regarding:
 - drawing new district boundaries;
 - a process to transfer existing employees;
 - identifying issues related to collective bargaining agreements;
 - clarifying effective dates of transfers of property for taxation purposes;
 - dealing with levies and bonded indebtedness; and
 - circumstances that require approval of voters in dividing the school district.

In conducting the analysis, individuals with legal and financial expertise must be consulted.

The OSPI must submit a final report and recommendations to the Governor and the education and fiscal committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2015. The recommendations must address amendments to current law as well as propose new laws as necessary.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on July 1, 2015.