

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5091

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As of February 18, 2019

**Title:** An act relating to state and federal special education funding.

**Brief Description:** Concerning state and federal special education funding.

**Sponsors:** Senators Wellman, Conway, Darneille, Wilson, C., Kuderer and Takko.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/23/19.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Removes federal funding from the special education safety net in 2020 and makes changes to safety net eligibility thresholds.
- Requires per-pupil expenditures used to determine safety net awards to be based on aggregate special education expenditures differentiated by salary tier.
- Requires appropriations for professional learning days for special education staff to include federal special education allocations.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

**Staff:** Alex Fairfortune (786-7416)

**Background:** Special Education Funding. The state allocates funding for a program of special education for students with disabilities. Special education is funded on an excess cost formula for up to 13.5 percent of a district's students. This formula multiplies the district's base allocation for students enrolled in special education by an excess cost multiplier of 0.9609.

Safety Net Funding. Beyond these allocations, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) may provide safety net funding if a district can convincingly demonstrate that all legitimate expenditures for special education exceed all available revenues from state funding formulas, and that it is maximizing its eligibility for all related state and federal

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revenues. Districts must expend at least three times the statewide average per-pupil expenditure as a cost threshold prior to being able to receive federal safety net awards.

Professional Learning Days. State law defines professional learning as a comprehensive, sustained, job-embedded, and collaborative approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement. Beginning with the 2018-2019 school year, the Legislature must begin phasing in funding for professional learning days for certificated instructional staff, beginning with a minimum of one professional learning day in 2018-19, two professional learning days in 2019-20, and three professional learning days in 2020-21.

**Summary of Bill:** Safety Net Funding. Federal funding is removed from the special education safety net in 2020, eliminating the federal expenditure ratio requirement that districts expend three times the statewide average per pupil to qualify for safety net awards. A state expenditure requirement that is less than the federal expenditure requirement may be established in the state operating budget.

A district must demonstrate that its expenditures for special education exceed all available revenues from basic education funding formulas before being eligible for safety net awards, rather than state funding formulas generally.

Beginning in the 2019-20 school year, the per-pupil expenditure used to determine safety net awards must be calculated using the prior year's aggregate special education expenditures, differentiated by salary tier factor. Prior safety net funding cannot be considered when calculating the prior year's aggregate expenditures.

Language referring to special education students is changed to students with disabilities.

Professional Learning Days. OSPI must calculate each school district's professional learning allocation separately from the minimum state allocation for salaries and associated fringe benefits. The allocation must be equal to the proportional increase in professional learning days required by statute. For programs funded on a per-student basis, professional learning allocations must be included in per-pupil calculations. Beginning in 2020, appropriations for newly funded professional learning days for special education staff must include federal special education allocations.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: Currently districts are paying many of their special education costs with local levies, which is an encroachment on local levies for basic education. In one small school district there are two students who receive special education services at a cost of \$20,000 per student. The current safety net threshold is \$28,000, so the small district does not receive compensation. Removing the federal dollars would allow

districts to be compensated. All local education agencies should have equitable access to special education funding and this will help with that. Care must be taken in implementing the unknown threshold.

OTHER: While the removal of federal funds is well supported, there is a concern that it will result in just moving the federal money from student services into professional development.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Dr. Becky Clifford, Everett Public Schools; Kate Davis, CFO, Highline Public Schools; Julia Warth, League of Education Voters; Rosalind Medina, Tacoma School District; Charlie Brown, Carbonado School District; Melissa Gombosky, Vancouver and Evergreen School Districts; Rebecca Vaux, Washington's Paramount Duty.

OTHER: Nancy Chamberlain, Washington State PTA.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** PRO: Jennifer Ziegler, School Alliance; Kaaren Heikes, Washington State Board of Education; Jessica Vavrus, Washington State School Directors' Association; JoLynn Berge, Seattle Public Schools.

OTHER: Lorrell Noahr, Washington Education Association.