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**SENATE BILL 6045**

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**State of Washington**

**68th Legislature**

**2024 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Hunt and Valdez

Read first time 01/09/24. Referred to Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education.

1 AN ACT Relating to school district efficiencies and  
2 consolidation; adding a new section to chapter 28A.345 RCW; adding  
3 new sections to chapter 28A.315 RCW; adding a new section to chapter  
4 44.28 RCW; and providing a contingent expiration date.

5 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** A new section is added to chapter 28A.345  
7 RCW to read as follows:

8 (1) The Washington state school directors' association must work  
9 with school districts to develop and implement a comprehensive  
10 statewide consolidation initiative to streamline and provide  
11 efficiencies in the administration and operation of school districts  
12 and educational service districts. The goals of the initiative are  
13 increased efficiency, cost savings, and an improved learning  
14 environment for students.

15 (2) The school directors' association must serve as the lead  
16 organization for the consolidation initiative, but must work  
17 collaboratively with and be assisted by state associations  
18 representing school administrators, school business managers,  
19 educational service districts, principals, teachers, classified  
20 employees, and parents.

1 (3) The following efficiency strategies must be considered and  
2 may be included under the initiative:

3 (a) Consolidation of districts;

4 (b) Consolidation of administration between or among districts;

5 (c) Development and implementation of shared services including,  
6 but not limited to, food services, transportation, administration,  
7 construction, technology, and instruction;

8 (d) Increased use of technology; and

9 (e) Other efficiencies and consolidations as appropriate.

10 (4) The school directors' association must file an annual report  
11 with the office of the superintendent of public instruction that  
12 includes documented and projected annual cost savings resulting from  
13 the consolidation initiative starting September 1, 2027, and each  
14 September 1st thereafter, with a final report by September 1, 2031.

15 (5) Cost savings resulting from the consolidation initiative  
16 under this section must remain in the public school system to allow  
17 school districts to redirect resources to activities that improve  
18 student learning.

19 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 28A.315  
20 RCW to read as follows:

21 (1) The commission on school district efficiencies and  
22 consolidation is established to develop and recommend a comprehensive  
23 plan for the consolidation of Washington school districts and to  
24 consider and determine appeals of or alternatives to the  
25 consolidation plan.

26 (2) The commission must be composed of the following members:

27 (a) One representative of the state board of education selected  
28 by the members of the board;

29 (b) Two representatives of school administrators selected by the  
30 Washington association of school administrators, with one  
31 representative from east of the crest of the Cascade mountains and  
32 one representative from west of the crest of the Cascade mountains;

33 (c) Two representatives of school board directors selected by the  
34 Washington state school directors' association, with one  
35 representative from east of the crest of the Cascade mountains and  
36 one representative from west of the crest of the Cascade mountains;

37 (d) One representative of certificated instructional school  
38 employees selected by the Washington education association;

1 (e) An individual with experience as a demographer or as a  
2 participant on the redistricting commission under chapter 44.05 RCW  
3 selected by the governor; and

4 (f) Four individuals selected jointly by the speaker of the house  
5 of representatives and the president of the senate, with two  
6 individuals from east of the crest of the Cascade mountains and two  
7 individuals from west of the crest of the Cascade mountains.

8 (3) Staff support for the commission must be provided by the  
9 office of the superintendent of public instruction. The  
10 superintendent of public instruction must convene the initial meeting  
11 of the commission, at which time the members of the commission must  
12 elect a chair from among the members.

13 (4) Members of the commission are entitled to receive  
14 compensation under RCW 43.03.240 and reimbursement for travel  
15 expenses in accordance with RCW 43.03.050 and 43.03.060.

16 (5) Any vacancies must be filled in the same manner as the  
17 selection originally provided.

18 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 28A.315  
19 RCW to read as follows:

20 (1)(a) The commission on school district efficiencies and  
21 consolidation established under section 2 of this act must develop  
22 objective criteria, ranked in priority order, for the consolidation  
23 of Washington school districts. The commission may consider but is  
24 not limited to the criteria in RCW 28A.315.015 and 28A.315.205. The  
25 commission must include, but is not limited to, the following in its  
26 criteria:

27 (i) School districts with fewer than 15,000 full-time equivalent  
28 students may be consolidated with school districts with more than  
29 15,000 full-time equivalent students;

30 (ii) School districts with more than 15,000 full-time equivalent  
31 students may not be consolidated with school districts with more than  
32 15,000 full-time equivalent students;

33 (iii) School districts that are consolidated must currently share  
34 boundaries;

35 (iv) An emphasis must be placed on consolidating school districts  
36 with 2,000 or fewer full-time equivalent students; and

37 (v) Remote and necessary school districts may continue.

38 (b) The commission must adopt the criteria as administrative  
39 rules under the provisions of chapter 34.05 RCW. The commission must

1 hold at least one public hearing on the proposed criteria in each  
2 educational service district before final adoption. The commission  
3 must cause notice to be given at least 10 days before the scheduled  
4 date of each hearing in one or more newspapers of general circulation  
5 within the educational service district and by posting on the website  
6 of the educational service district and the websites of the school  
7 districts within the educational service district.

8 (2) (a) Based on the adopted objective criteria, the commission  
9 must develop a comprehensive plan for the consolidation of Washington  
10 school districts. The plan must result in no more than 150 school  
11 districts in the state and establish their boundaries. The plan must  
12 consider dividing school districts with more than 25,000 full-time  
13 equivalent students into two or more school districts. The plan may  
14 include recommendations for consolidation of school districts or  
15 consolidation of services. Consolidated services may include, but are  
16 not limited to, joint transportation or food service operating  
17 agreements, consolidated administration, joint use of facilities, or  
18 joint delivery and management of special services. The plan may also  
19 result in a reorganization or consolidation of the number and  
20 boundaries of educational service districts.

21 (b) The commission must hold at least one public hearing in each  
22 educational service district during the development of the proposed  
23 plan. The commission must cause notice to be given at least 10 days  
24 before the scheduled date of each hearing in one or more newspapers  
25 of general circulation within the educational service district and by  
26 posting on the website of the educational service district and the  
27 websites of the school districts within the educational service  
28 district.

29 (c) After considering the information from the public hearings,  
30 the results of the review under section 4 of this act, and any other  
31 information or considerations, the commission must submit the final  
32 comprehensive school district consolidation plan to the  
33 superintendent of public instruction, the governor, and the  
34 legislature by December 1, 2029, as provided in subsection (3) of  
35 this section.

36 (3) The comprehensive school district consolidation plan must  
37 consist of two parts, each of which must be submitted separately in  
38 the form of proposed legislation:

39 (a) Part A of the plan must be a list of the recommended school  
40 districts and educational service districts and their respective

1 boundaries. Except for amendments to correct technical errors or  
2 omissions, the legislation implementing part A of the plan as  
3 submitted by the commission may be amended only if approved by a two-  
4 thirds vote of each house of the legislature; and

5 (b) Part B of the plan must be recommended procedures and  
6 timelines for implementation of the consolidation plan, including but  
7 not limited to:

8 (i) A phased-in implementation schedule;

9 (ii) Procedures and timelines for determination, adjustment, and  
10 transfer of assets and liabilities among school districts, including  
11 bonded indebtedness;

12 (iii) Procedures and timelines for determination and election of  
13 school district and educational service district boards of directors,  
14 which must include a transition period for any consolidated school  
15 districts of up to two years, during which time all previous school  
16 district boards of directors of the consolidated districts must  
17 continue to have governing responsibilities until a single board is  
18 elected;

19 (iv) A process and a limited time frame for school districts to  
20 appeal or propose an alternative to their consolidation as provided  
21 under section 4 of this act; and

22 (v) Amendments to or temporary suspension of the provisions of  
23 this chapter, chapter 28A.310 RCW, and other laws that are necessary  
24 to implement the consolidation plan and also provide an ongoing  
25 process for management of school district organization and boundary  
26 issues after the plan has been implemented.

27 (4) School districts with enrollment of 20,000 or more full-time  
28 equivalent students in grades kindergarten through 12 as of the  
29 effective date of this section may not be considered for  
30 consolidation under this section.

31 (5) Nothing in this section requires consolidation or closure of  
32 high schools or other schools. Decisions regarding the disposition of  
33 schools rest with school district boards of directors.

34 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** A new section is added to chapter 44.28  
35 RCW to read as follows:

36 The joint committee must conduct an independent review of the  
37 comprehensive school district consolidation plan developed under  
38 section 3 of this act to assure that the proposed plan is based on  
39 and follows to the maximum extent possible the objective criteria

1 adopted by the commission on school district efficiencies and  
2 consolidation. The joint committee must submit a report of its  
3 findings, along with recommendations for any changes to the plan that  
4 would improve its alignment with the criteria, to the commission on  
5 school district efficiencies and consolidation by September 1, 2029.

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** A new section is added to chapter 28A.315  
7 RCW to read as follows:

8 (1) School districts whose organization is changed by a  
9 consolidation plan adopted by the legislature under section 3 of this  
10 act may appeal the consolidation to the commission on school district  
11 efficiencies and consolidation. An appeal that affects the  
12 organization of more than one district must be submitted jointly by  
13 all affected districts and must propose an alternative consolidation  
14 for consideration by the commission. No school district may submit  
15 more than one appeal under this section. The commission must adopt  
16 rules establishing the procedures, criteria, and time frame for  
17 consideration and determination of appeals, including a deadline for  
18 school districts to submit an appeal, based on the legislation  
19 enacted under section 3(3)(b) of this act. If the commission sustains  
20 an appeal under this section, the commission must order  
21 implementation of the alternative consolidation of the school  
22 districts as submitted in the appeal.

23 (2) As an alternative to a consolidation adopted by the  
24 legislature under section 3 of this act, school districts may submit  
25 for consideration by the commission on school district efficiencies  
26 and consolidation a proposal to achieve significant efficiencies and  
27 reductions in operating costs through the consolidation of services.  
28 Consolidated services may include but are not limited to joint  
29 transportation or food service operating agreements, consolidated  
30 administration, joint use of facilities, or joint delivery and  
31 management of special services. The proposal must be in the form of a  
32 memorandum of understanding signed by the school directors of each  
33 participating school district. The proposal must also include the  
34 proposed consolidation of the school districts submitting the  
35 proposal. The commission may approve an agreement under this  
36 subsection (2) only if the school districts demonstrate significant  
37 efficiencies and reductions in operating costs under the proposal.  
38 The commission must adopt rules establishing the procedures,  
39 criteria, and time frame for consideration and approval of

1 agreements, including a definition of "significant efficiencies and  
2 reductions in operating costs," based on the legislation enacted  
3 under section 3(3)(b) of this act. If the commission approves a  
4 proposal under this section, the commission must order implementation  
5 of the memorandum of understanding and implementation of the  
6 consolidation proposed by the participating school districts.

7 (3) Decisions and orders of the commission on school district  
8 efficiencies and consolidation under this section must be filed with  
9 the office of the superintendent of public instruction, the office of  
10 the state auditor, appropriate county officials, and the legislature.

11 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** If legislation submitted by the commission  
12 on school district efficiencies and consolidation as provided under  
13 section 3(3)(a) of this act is not signed into law before June 30,  
14 2030, sections 2 through 5 of this act expire July 1, 2030.

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