

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5187

As of February 10, 2025

Title: An act relating to providing adequate and predictable student transportation.

Brief Description: Providing adequate and predictable student transportation.

Sponsors: Senators Wellman, Dhingra, Conway, Shewmake, Bateman, Salomon, Riccelli, Hasegawa, Saldaña, Cortes, Frame, Krishnadasan, Nobles, Valdez and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/22/25, 1/30/25 [DP-WM].
Ways & Means: 2/11/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to provide an analysis of school district transportation costs and allocations to the Legislature by June 1, 2028.
- Requires OSPI to develop a transparent, predictable, and comprehensive student transportation funding model that addresses the diverse needs of students and the unique characteristics of school districts.
- Provides additional funding in the amount of \$400 per student for students that require special transportation due to the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Wellman, Chair; Nobles, Vice Chair, K-12; Wilson, C., Vice Chair, Early Learning; Harris, Ranking Member; Cortes, Dozier, Hansen, Krishnadasan and McCune.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff: Alex Fairfortune (786-7416)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Kayla Hammer (786-7305)

Background: State Funding Formulas for Pupil Transportation. The state's statutory program of basic education includes transportation to and from school for eligible students, including transportation of students for special education services and between schools and learning centers.

To provide transportation allocations to school districts, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) uses the Student Transportation Allocation Reporting System (STARS), which is a regression formula that uses prior year expenditures, student passenger counts, and district characteristics to calculate the expected costs of to and from transportation. The STARS formula result is then compared to the district's allowable transportation expenditures from the prior year. The school district receives the lesser of the two calculated amounts, plus any compensation adjustments provided in the operating budget.

The 2023 operating budget appropriated \$13 million for fiscal year 2024 and \$13 million for fiscal year 2025 for OSPI to provide transportation safety-net funding to school districts with a demonstrated need for additional transportation funding for special passengers.

Federal Requirements for Homeless and Foster Student Transportation. Federal laws include requirements for student transportation of homeless students and students in foster care, including transportation to and from a student's school of origin upon request and when it is in the child's best interest.

The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act) defines homeless children and youths to mean individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Under the McKinney-Vento Act, homeless children are entitled to receive transportation comparable to what is available to nonhomeless students.

The federal Every Student Succeeds Act includes requirements for school districts to develop procedures that address how transportation to the schools of origin for children in foster care will be provided, arranged, and funded. In cases where a student is living outside the school district where a school of origin is located, multiple school districts and child welfare agencies may coordinate in determining a method of transportation and arrangements to share costs.

Summary of Bill: Superintendent of Public Instruction. By June 1, 2028, OSPI must provide an analysis of school district transportation costs and allocations following the 2026-27 school year to the education and fiscal committees of the Legislature. This

analysis must include the mileage, ridership, and costs for each district, disaggregated by the following student categories:

- students who require special transportation services to access special education services documented in an approved individualized education program;
- students who meet the definition of homeless where transportation is required by the McKinney-Vento Act or other federal requirements;
- students who are in foster care where transportation is required outside of the normal school district boundary; and
- students attending skill centers.

OSPI must use the analysis to develop a transparent, predictable, and comprehensive student transportation funding model that addresses the diverse needs of students and the unique characteristics of school districts.

The new funding model must be inclusive of student transportation services for the disaggregated student categories addressed in the analysis. The new funding model must also include mechanisms to address the unique transportation challenges faced by high population density urban school districts and rural, geographically large districts that have a relatively low number of schools in proportion to the geographic size of the school district.

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act Transportation Funding. In addition to funding provided under the pupil transportation funding model, OSPI must provide additional funds to school districts in the amount of \$400 per student for students that require special transportation due to the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act. Such funds may only be used to address transportation costs associated with such students.

Current reporting requirements are expanded to require school districts to report the number of students requiring special transportation due to requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act.

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 (Early Learning & K-12 Education): PRO: This bill seeks to create a more adequate and predictable transportation funding system and reliably transport students who are homeless, which is a critical step towards equity. The state cannot fulfill basic education without a dependable transportation system that meets the needs of a diverse population. The current one-size fits all approach doesn't meet reality and those facing the greatest barriers deserve a transportation system that meets their needs.

The STARS formula doesn't adequately fund transportation or consider the challenges of rural districts that have large geographic areas or urban districts that have traffic and high gas prices. The gap in funding is between \$100,000 and \$600,000 in Franklin Pierce, which recently had to divert Title 1 funds to help pay for transportation instead of using that money to provide direct instructional support. The committee should consider moving up the date for the OSPI report and provide the \$400 per-pupil funding amount to other highly mobile populations such as those in foster care, those receiving special education, and those who attend skill centers.

Persons Testifying (Early Learning & K-12 Education): PRO: Moritz Maszhold; Advaita Mattam; Eric Marcu, Lake Washington High School; Gajanan Dhongade, Lake Washington High School; Tricia Lubach, Executive Director, Washington State School Directors' Association; Joel Aune, Executive Director, Washington Association of School Administrators; Melissa Stone, Secretary, Washington State PTA; Tyler Muench, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction; Jim Kowalkowski, Rural Education Center; Jeff Chamberlin, Superintendent, University Place School District; Lance Goodpaster, Superintendent, Franklin Pierce School District; Krestin Bahr, Superintendent, Peninsula School District; Charlie Brown, WA Skills Centers Directors.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Early Learning & K-12 Education): PRO: Dr. Kelly Aramaki, Superintendent, Bellevue School District; Dr. Concie Pedroza, Superintendent, Tukwila School District; Dr. Danni Pfeiffer, Superintendent, Federal Way School District; Dr. Ivan Duran, Superintendent, Highline School District; Dr. Brent Jones, Superintendent, Seattle Public Schools; Lindsey Yocum, Lake Washington School District; Sarah Milici, Parent advocate; Mary Templeton, Lake Stevens School District; Heather Tow-Yick, Issaquah School District; Holly Wehner; Stephanie Chase; Ryan Arnold; Rob Bryant, Federal Way Public Schools; Rivkah Thomson; Sydney Swalberg; Hannah Peek; Stephanie Jerdon, Central Valley School District board president; Bob Maxwell, Pullman Public Schools.