

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SSB 5418

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As Passed Senate, February 25, 2025

**Title:** An act relating to charter school contracts.

**Brief Description:** Concerning charter school contracts.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senators Wellman, Chapman, Harris and Nobles).

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/05/25, 2/13/25 [DPS].

**Floor Activity:** Passed Senate: 2/25/25, 48-1.

**Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill**

- Provides that charter schools must provide a program of basic education unless an exemption has been authorized pursuant to a charter contract.
- Provides that charter contracts may allow charter schools to seek exemptions to basic education requirements and directs a charter school authorizer to consult with the State Board of Education on provisions in charter contracts related to the State Board of Education's duties.
- Adds charter schools as entities that may receive waivers from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education.

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

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5418 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

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.

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*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)

**Background:** Program of Basic Education. The state's program of basic education is defined in statute as that which is necessary to provide students with the opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to meet state-established high school graduation requirements. Those requirements are intended to allow students to have the opportunity to graduate with a meaningful diploma that prepares them for postsecondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship.

The program of basic education includes requirements pertaining to enrollment ages, student instruction, instructional hours and days, student transportation, and statewide salary allocations necessary to hire and retain qualified staff.

Waiver of Requirements. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the State Board of Education (SBE) are authorized to administer waivers to certain basic education requirements, including:

- a waiver of the credit-based high school graduation requirements;
- a waiver of the total instructional hour requirements;
- a waiver of the minimum 180-day school year requirements; and
- waivers allowing calendar flexibility for economy and efficiency.

Charter Schools. Charter schools are privately run public schools that operate according to the terms of renewable five-year charter contracts that establish the roles, powers, responsibilities, and performance expectations of the parties to the contracts. Charter schools are alternatives to traditional public schools and are operated and funded separately from the traditional public school system.

During the establishment period, charter schools were authorized by either the Washington State Charter School Commission or a school district board of directors that was approved by the SBE as an authorizer. Charter school authorizers have numerous responsibilities prescribed in statute, including negotiating and executing charter contracts and determining whether charter contracts merit renewal or revocation.

The management and operation of each charter school occurs through a charter school board, the board of directors appointed or selected under the terms of the charter application. Except as provided otherwise, charter schools are subject to the supervision of OSPI and the SBE to the same extent as other public schools, and must provide a program of basic education that meets the basic education goals established in statute.

**Summary of First Substitute Bill:** A charter school must provide a program of basic education that meets the goals established in statute unless an exemption has been authorized pursuant to the charter contract.

A charter contract may allow a charter school to seek an exemption from OSPI and the

SBE. A charter school authorizer must consult with the SBE on provisions within new or revised charter contracts relating to the SBE's duties or authorizations.

Charter schools are added as entities that may receive waivers from OSPI and the SBE.

**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 on Original Bill:** *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: This is a technical fix that would allow charter schools to access waivers to basic education requirements as negotiated with their authorizer. Charter schools offer flexibility in learning environments which helps close gaps in marginalized communities. Lack of access to waivers has prevented access to certain opportunities. No parent-teacher conference waivers has led to more hours for lower pay for charter teachers and an extended school year. It forces schools to compress non-educational activities into school days which is a great inequity to communities already facing educational inequities. Charter schools should have the same flexibility to serve families as traditional public schools. This is the same technical fix that was made for state-tribal compact schools. It is a simple fix that will have a profound impact on students.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Barbara Gilchrist, Washington State Charter Schools Association; Dan Effland, Summit Atlas High School; Marcus Harden, WA State Charter School Commission.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.