
Education Committee

SSB 5239

Brief Description: Requiring a definition of "resident" for purposes of the allocation method used to distribute federal forest revenue to schools.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senators Honeyford, Morton, Swecker and Becker; by request of Superintendent of Public Instruction).

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Distributes federal forest revenues to school districts based on their proportion of resident enrolled students, rather than all enrolled students, compared to the total number of students in the county.
- Directs the Superintendent of Public Instruction to define resident students for this purpose and in doing so, address the impact of alternative learning experience students on federal funds distribution.

Hearing Date: 3/18/11

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

Federal law requires that a portion of revenues from federal forests be distributed to the counties in which the forests are located, to be used for public roads and public schools. Washington law requires half of the funds to be distributed to school districts based on the proportion of students enrolled in each district compared to the total number of students in the county. However, the amount of the federal forest revenues is deducted from a school district's Basic Education allocation, so there is no financial advantage for school districts with federal forest lands.

One exception is the school districts in Skamania County, which retain 70 percent of any federal forest fund revenues under the terms of a legal settlement that occurred in 1989. Skamania was singled out because of special terms under the federal Mt. St. Helen's Act of 1982.

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

There are four school districts in Skamania County, which split the federal forest fund revenues based on the proportional share of their enrollment. In recent years, one of the school districts has begun to offer an online learning program that has caused an increase in its enrollment from non-resident students. According to recent reports, 28 percent of the total enrollment in the Stevenson-Carson School District is from non-resident students in the online learning program. Online learning is one form of alternative learning experiences that provide a way for school districts to count, for funding purposes, students who are not enrolled in a traditional classroom-based instructional program.

Summary of Bill:

Federal forest revenues are distributed to school districts based on the proportion of resident students enrolled in the district compared to the total number of students in the county, rather than based on the proportion of all students enrolled in the district. By June 30, 2011, the Superintendent of Public Instruction must adopt rules that define a resident student for this purpose. The rules must consider and address the impact of alternative learning experience students on federal funds distribution.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect September 1, 2011.