

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5120

As Passed House:
April 14, 2015

Title: An act relating to school district dissolutions.

Brief Description: Concerning school district dissolutions.

Sponsors: Senator Parlette.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 3/16/15, 3/26/15 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 4/14/15, 89-8.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Changes the trigger for dissolution of a school district due to low enrollment from an average of five K-8 students in the preceding school year to an average of five K-8 students in the preceding three consecutive school years.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 19 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Ortiz-Self, Vice Chair; Reykdal, Vice Chair; Muri, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Stambaugh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Caldier, Fagan, Gregory, Griffey, Hargrove, Hayes, S. Hunt, Kilduff, Klippert, McCaslin, Orwall, Pollet and Springer.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Magendanz, Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Cece Clynch (786-7195).

Background:

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.

School districts are political subdivisions of the state, and the organization of school districts, including their powers, duties, and boundaries, are established by state laws. There are currently 295 school districts in Washington.

There are also nine regional educational service districts (ESDs) in the state. Each is governed by a board consisting of seven to nine members elected by the school directors of the ESD. The ESD responsibilities include:

- providing cooperative, administrative, and informational services to and on behalf of local school districts; and
- assisting the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education in the performance of their duties.

Each ESD has a regional committee on school district organization composed of registered voters in the ESD. There are statutory public processes that a regional committee must follow to transfer territory, consolidate one or more districts, or dissolve a school district and annex the territory to another district. If a school district's K-8 average enrollment is fewer than five during the preceding school year, the ESD superintendent is required to report that fact to the regional committee. The regional committee, in turn, must dissolve the school district and annex the territory to some other district or districts.

Summary of Bill:

The provision regarding dissolution is triggered if a school district has an average enrollment of fewer than five K-8 students during the preceding three consecutive school years, rather than just the one preceding school year.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on September 1, 2015.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Stehekin School District sits at the top of a 55-mile long lake. To get to Stehekin, a person must hike, travel by horseback, or take a boat. The school district was first established in 1907. The average enrollment since then has been about 11. Since 1997, the average has been closer to 13, but families do move in and out. The district just experienced a decline in enrollment when some federal employees were transferred. At this point, the average is four and a half. Next year, it will probably be seven. The district should not have to be dissolved when this may just be a blip. The law must be fixed in order that the school district survives. If the bill is not passed, the district would be dissolved. The law is too harsh, and puts veto power in the hands of the parents of a fifth student.

This district is unique, and its school board is composed of persons who themselves attended school in the district. This provides board members with the knowledge of what it is like to attend school in this location. Board meetings are on Thursday nights, and there is a report from the teacher first thing at every meeting. Board members learn about what has been

taught, and what will be taught. Stehekin already experiences a housing shortage, which could be aggravated if the district dissolved, another district took over the school, and housing for more teachers had to be found. The district has received sound financial reports, and its students are lifelong learners.

Stehekin is a K-8 district. When students move on to high school, they must either homeschool, enroll in online school, or move down lake to Chelan or Manson or other places to attend school. Upon request by families, the school board provides stipends and boat tickets so that the students can return to Stehekin for holidays.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Parlette, prime sponsor; and Ron Scutt, John Wilsey, and Tom Courtney, Stehekin School District.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.