

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5409

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As of February 1, 1999

**Title:** An act relating to school district organization.

**Brief Description:** Revising school district organization provisions.

**Sponsors:** Senators McAuliffe, Rasmussen and Bauer; by request of Board of Education.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Education: 2/3/99.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

**Staff:** Natalie Adams (786-7444)

**Background:** The Legislature does not set school district boundaries but has established regional committees and statutory procedures for changing school district boundaries. The regional committee members are elected in each educational service district and serve four-year terms. The committees govern the formation of new districts, the alteration of boundaries and any adjustments to assets and liabilities that result from such change.

A regional committee may initiate a change in district boundaries on its own motion or on a petition. If the committee determines the proposed change provides a satisfactory improvement, the committee recommends the change to the State Board of Education for approval. The committee considers eight factors in making its recommendations: (1) equalizing educational opportunities of pupils; (2) equalizing tax burdens on school districts; (3) considering geographical features such as lakes and rivers, climate and transportation; (4) considering convenience and welfare of pupils; (5) improving educational opportunities through extension programs; (6) equalizing the burden of financing school facilities; (7) considering future effective utilization of existing facilities; and (8) any other matter related to equalization or improvement of the district. If the committee finds the improvement unsatisfactory, no action is taken.

**Summary of Bill:** The State Council on School District Organization is created. The council is comprised of nine elected members, one representing each educational service district. The members serve four-year terms and receive annual training. The council governs the formation of new districts, the alteration of boundaries and any adjustments to assets and liabilities that result from such change.

Proposed organizational changes are initiated by a petition signed by the required number of registered voters in the district. In some cases, the petition may be submitted by a majority of the members of the board of directors of the district. The petition is presented to the educational service district superintendent.

Upon receiving the petition, the superintendent must notify the affected districts that they are required to enter into negotiations. If the districts are unable to negotiate an agreement, a mediator may be appointed. In the event the districts cannot reach an agreement by these means, the district that did not initiate the negotiation may file a request for a hearing with the state council. The state council must schedule a hearing on the proposed organizational change within 60 days and issue written findings and a decision on the petition within 30 days thereafter.

In making its decision, the council must consider the factors considered by the regional committees and two new factors: the history and relationship of the property to the students and communities affected; and inclusion within a single school district for attendance and tax purposes of entire master planned communities with over 1,000 dwelling units. The school district or citizens may seek judicial review of the council's final decision.

In addition to the methods of organization formerly available, the council can form a new district from the territory of a single, existing district, subject to restrictions.

Other provisions in the chapter on organization and reorganization of school districts are rearranged and amended to conform with the changes.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 27, 1999.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.