

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5120

As of January 23, 2015

Title: An act relating to school district dissolutions.

Brief Description: Concerning school district dissolutions.

Sponsors: Senator Parlette.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/22/15.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Susan Mielke (786-7422)

Background: Educational Service Districts (ESDs) are regional agencies that provide services to school districts and assist the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and State Board of Education. There are nine ESDs. Each ESD has a regional committee on school district organization composed of registered voters in the ESD. There is a statutory public process that the regional committee must follow to transfer school district territory from one district to another, consolidate one or more school districts with one or more school districts, or dissolve a school district and annex the territory to another district or districts.

If a school district's enrollment drops below five students in kindergarten through eighth grade in the prior school year, the ESD must report this information to the regional committee which must then dissolve the school district. The school district is then annexed into another school district or districts.

Summary of Bill: The criteria for the dissolution of a school district based on student enrollment is changed to require three consecutive years of an average enrollment of fewer than five students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The Stehikin School District, which is located in Chelan County in the North Central ESD, currently has fewer than five students. To get to the school district you must go by boat, which only runs three times per week, or by plane. But the district doesn't have any transportation costs because everyone lives close to the school. For 107 years there has been an average of 11 students in the Stehekin School District. Only eight times have there been fewer than five students enrolled in this district. The experience of a one-room school house is unique to the school district. It provides individualized student instruction. If annexed into another school district it would increase transportation costs, teacher costs, and probably housing costs. The bill will help to avoid the dissolution of the district prematurely. The enrollment fluctuations are due to personnel changes of the National Park Service and Forest Service, Chelan Public Utilities District work-related projects that ebbed and flowed, and the Chelan County road and maintenance efforts which brought in families. Now the National Park Service will be reopening a road, which will increase the number of people on the island. A change in one or two families impacts the enrollment of the school. The school is the heart of the community.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Parlette, prime sponsor; John Wilsey, Stehekin School; Gene Sharratt, former North Central ESD Superintendent; Ron Scutt, Stehekin teacher; Tom Courtney, Stehekin School Board director.