

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5263

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to school bus driver requirements.

Brief Description: Concerning school bus driver requirements.

Sponsors: Senator Zeiger.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 3/25/19, 3/28/19 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Bill
(As Amended by Committee)

- Requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) to survey school districts about statutes, rules, and other factors that affect or may affect the ability of school districts to hire and retain qualified bus drivers.
- Requires the OSPI and the WSSDA to jointly report the results of the survey and to provide findings and recommendations to the education and transportation committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate by December 13, 2019.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 18 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; Paul, Vice Chair; Steele, Ranking Minority Member; McCaslin, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Volz, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Caldier, Callan, Corry, Harris, Kilduff, Kraft, Ortiz-Self, Rude, Stonier, Thai and Valdez.

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

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.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) is authorized to adopt administrative rules governing the qualifications and training of school bus drivers. Among other requirements, the rules must be designed to ensure that persons will not be employed to operate school buses unless they possess the physical health and driving skills that are necessary to safely operate school buses. Additionally, the rules adopted by the SPI may not conflict with the authority of the Department of Licensing (DOL) to license school bus drivers.

School bus drivers are required to possess a commercial driver's license (CDL) and the proper endorsement. In Washington, the issuance of CDLs are governed by requirements of the DOL, but each state is required to adopt and administer a licensing program for CDLs that complies with minimum federal standards for commercial motor vehicle operators.

Established by statute, the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) is the state agency that provides advice and assistance to local school boards. The WSSDA is charged with coordinating policymaking, control, and management of the state's school districts. Among other actions, the WSSDA adopts model policies and procedures, often in response to legislative directives, that school districts may adopt.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), working collaboratively with the WSSDA, is directed to survey each school district to determine whether and to what extent state statutory and rule requirements governing the hiring and training of school bus drivers, and other factors, affect or may affect the ability of school districts to hire and retain qualified school bus drivers. The DOL is directed to assist the OSPI and the WSSDA in developing questions to be included in the survey.

The OSPI and the WSSDA are required to jointly report the results of the survey and provide findings and recommendations to the education and transportation committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate by December 13, 2019.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The amended bill makes the following changes to the original bill:

- removes all requirements of the underlying bill and instead directs the OSPI and the WSSDA to survey each school district about statutes, rules, and other factors that affect or may affect the ability of school districts to hire and retain qualified school bus drivers;
- requires the DOL to assist the OSPI and the WSSDA in developing questions to be included in the survey; and
- directs the OSPI and the WSSDA to jointly report the results of the survey and findings and recommendations to the education and transportation committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate by December 13, 2019.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) School districts are experiencing difficulties in filling school bus driver positions. This bill is an attempt to address that issue, and there may be a role for the DOL in this bill.

It is difficult to hire school bus drivers because of the requirements for a CDL, especially the pre-trip requirements. The pre-trip requirements should be lessened for school bus drivers so that drivers can concentrate on the duties that apply to bus drivers. Because of a shortage of bus drivers, some school districts are having drivers work extra hours and some students are spending an hour or more on the bus each day.

The pre-trip requirements for CDLs are very technical and relate to the mechanical operations of the bus. They are challenging requirements and require significant memorization.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) It does take a lot of time and effort to become a school bus driver. Drivers must test to federal skills-testing requirements. The OSPI does not have jurisdiction over skills-testing requirements and is not sure how it would implement the bill.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Zeiger, prime sponsor; Damian Jenkins, Fife School District; and Neil Asay.

(Other) Patti Enbody, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.