

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 6031

As Passed House - Amended:

March 1, 2024

Title: An act relating to modifying the student transportation allocation to accommodate multiple vehicle types for transporting students.

Brief Description: Modifying the student transportation allocation to accommodate multiple vehicle types for transporting students.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Braun, Dozier, Kuderer, Rivers and Schoesler).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Appropriations: 2/22/24, 2/26/24 [DPA].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/1/24, 90-6.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill (As Amended by House)

- Requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to study transportation formulas by comparing current formulas with alternative allocation formulas that reimburse special passengers, accommodate multiple vehicle types, and include per-rider and per-mile rates.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 27 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Corry, Ranking Minority Member; Chambers, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Connors, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Couture, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Callan, Chopp, Davis, Fitzgibbon, Lekanoff, Pollet, Riccelli, Rude, Ryu, Schmick, Senn, Simmons,

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

Slatter, Springer, Stokesbary, Stonier, Tharinger and Wilcox.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Harris and Sandlin.

Staff: James Mackison (786-7104).

Background:

Pupil Transportation Formulas.

The state's statutory program of basic education includes transportation to and from school for eligible students. To provide transportation allocations to school districts, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) uses the Student Transportation Allocation Reporting System (STARS), which is a regression formula that uses prior year expenditures, student passenger counts, average distance between bus stops and destinations, and other district characteristics to calculate the expected costs of to-and-from transportation. Information used in the STARS formula is reported by school districts. The STARS formula result is then compared to the district's allowable transportation expenditures from the prior year. The school district receives the lesser of the two calculated amounts, plus any compensation adjustments provided in the operating budget. The transportation distribution formula is for allocation purposes only and does not mandate specific levels of pupil transportation services by local districts.

The transportation formula also provides an allocation for transporting students in district-owned passenger cars using the private vehicle reimbursement rate, if a school district deems it advisable to use such vehicles after the school district board of directors has considered the safety of the students being transported and the economy of utilizing a car in lieu of a school bus. Students transported in district-owned passenger cars must be included in basic and special passenger counts.

Summary of Amended Bill:

By January 1, 2026, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must study transportation allocations in the 2024-25 school year by comparing current formulas with alternative allocation formulas. The purpose of the study is to recommend a new allocation formula that is more predictable, transparent, and comprehensive, and propose agency request legislation as needed.

The study must include, at a minimum, the following alternatives:

- an approach to accommodate multiple vehicle types that are used for pupil transportation;
- rates per mile and per rider;
- a minimum allocation;
- an inflation factor; and

- a cost and methodology for reimbursing special transportation for students receiving special education services, students experiencing homelessness, and students in foster care. Costs in 2024-25 that would be reimbursed under new formulas must be reported by accounting codes for program, object, and activity.

The OSPI must require school districts to report additional data in the 2024-25 school year to develop alternative allocations, including the number of miles per vehicle type and other data they deem necessary. Reported data must also include transportation required by federal law and individualized education programs for:

- passengers eligible for and receiving special education;
- passengers that are foster students; and
- passengers that are homeless students.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 29, 2024.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Small, rural districts strongly support the bill and provided initial input. It would allow schools to provide transportation to and from school in vehicles other than school buses. A van or other vehicle may be more suitable when a bus is not available, or a small number of students are being transported. The requirements that vehicles be inspected by the Washington State Patrol and driver requirements are helpful.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Jim Kowalkowski, Rural Education Center.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.