

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1683

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to school director districts.

Brief Description: Adjusting school director districts.

Sponsors: Representative Ortiz-Self; by request of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/10/25, 1/15/26, 1/27/26 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes a minimum number of school directors who must be elected by director district for certain school districts.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Shavers, Vice Chair; Bergquist, Callan, Donaghy, Ortiz-Self, Pollet, Reeves, Rule, Scott and Stonier.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Rude, Ranking Minority Member; Keaton, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chase, Couture, Eslick, Marshall, McEntire and Steele.

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

Background:

School boards of directors have broad discretionary power to provide for the development

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and implementation of education programs and services, and the school district's management and operation. With the exception of Seattle Public Schools, which has seven directors, school boards of directors consist of five members.

Among other requirements, school directors must be registered voters of either the school district or the applicable director district, a geographic subunit of the school district. School director positions are nonpartisan and elected directors serve four-year terms.

School directors are elected by voters throughout the school district, either in an at-large capacity without representing a specific director district, or in accordance with requirements obligating directors to reside within the applicable director district. Primary elections for director district candidates are also generally voted on by voters throughout the school district.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

By January 1, 2027, the elections of school district directors must be in accordance with the following:

- For school districts with an enrollment of between 2,000 and 5,000 students as reported on or before the last business day of September, at least three members of the board of directors must be elected by voters residing within designated director districts.
- For school districts with an enrollment of more than 5,000 students, as reported on or before the last business day of September, at least four members of the school board must be elected by voters residing within designated director districts.

School districts with enrollments of fewer than 2,000 students are exempted from the director district election requirements.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

In comparison to the original bill, the substitute bill:

- changes the date by which the modified election requirements would apply from calendar year 2027 to January 1, 2027;
- changes the student enrollment thresholds for the minimum number of school directors who must be elected by director district by requiring at least three members of the school board to be elected by voters residing within designated director districts for districts with enrollments of between 2,000 and 5,000 students, rather than requiring no less than three directors to be elected by designated member districts in districts with enrollments of 3,001 to 5,000 students;
- specifies that student enrollment numbers must be determined as reported on or before the last business day of September;
- exempts school districts with enrollments of fewer than 2,000 students, instead of

- 3,000 or fewer students, from the modified election requirements;
 - authorizes school districts to appoint a resident of a designated director district to serve as a school director if the district is unable to comply with the modified election requirements due to an insufficient number of qualified or willing candidates;
 - authorizes the board of directors to appoint a qualified resident of the school district to serve in an at-large capacity until the next regular election if no qualified or willing resident of the designated director district is available; and
 - removes intent language.
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Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute 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) This bill ensures that every part of a school district has a fair opportunity to elect a director who understands and advocates for their needs. When school boards reflect the geographic and demographic diversity of the students they serve, decisions are more informed and just. This bill applies only to larger districts where at-large voting is more likely to produce inequitable results.

Numerous studies show that designated member districts and proportional representation voting improve voter representation. Designated member districts attract more candidates who are parents of school-aged children. Twenty-three school districts would not conform with the bill's provisions if it were adopted. At-large elections in large school districts can dilute the representation of low-income communities, rural areas, and communities of color.

School boards have important duties and it is important to have school boards reflect the communities they serve. This bill will simplify the process and encourage a wider range of candidates to run for school board positions. Media campaigns to make people aware of school board positions that people may run for would be beneficial.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The intentions of the bill are commendable, but stakeholders have concerns about the bill. This is another unfunded mandate and will increase costs for school districts. This is a one-size-fits-all approach that will lessen local control and may complicate efforts to recruit school board candidates. Local districts should retain flexibility for recruiting and electing candidates.

This bill could increase proportional representation and increase the number of candidates who are parents of school-aged children. At-large elections allow a majority group to elect all candidates. Single-member districts could work for some communities but not others, and director districts can be subject to gerrymandering. The bill should be amended to include ranked-choice voting.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Lillian Ortiz-Self, prime sponsor; Tyler Muench, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Nina Martinez, Latino Civic Alliance.

(Other) Dr. Karen Bolton, Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA); and Shannon Grimes, Sightline Institute.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.