

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5861

As of January 21, 2026

Title: An act relating to encouraging community representation in education.

Brief Description: Encouraging community representation in education.

Sponsors: Senators Cortes, Conway, Hasegawa, Lias, Nobles, Valdez and Wilson, C.; by request of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/22/26.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires that, in districts with 2000 to 5000 students, at least three school board directors be elected by voters residing within designated director districts.
- Requires that, in districts with 5000 or more students, at least four school board directors be elected by voters residing within designated director districts.
- Provides alternative appointment processes when qualified or willing candidates are unavailable.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Alex Fairfortune (786-7416)

Background: School board directors are elected officials that provide for the development and implementation of education programs and services, and direct a school district's operation and management. With the exception of Seattle Public Schools, which has seven directors, school boards of directors consist of five members.

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.

School board 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 an applicable director district.

Any school board of a first-class district that conducts at-large elections may submit, to the voters of the district, a proposition to approve dividing the school district into five director districts. Second-class school districts may divide into no fewer than three director districts and no more than two at large positions. If the proposition is approved by a majority of voters, the director districts become effective at the next regular school election.

Within eight months of receiving voter approval to divide a school district into director districts, the school board must prepare a redistricting plan that ensures each director district:

- is as nearly equal in population as possible;
- is as compact as possible;
- consists of geographically contiguous area;
- does not use population data to favor or disfavor any racial group or political party; and
- has boundaries that coincide with existing recognized natural boundaries and preserve existing communities of related and mutual interest.

Summary of Bill: By January 1, 2027, the elections of school board directors must be conducted in accordance with the following:

- in school districts with enrollments between 2000 and 5000 students, at least three school board directors must be elected by designated director districts; and
- in school districts with enrollments greater than 5000 students, at least four school board directors must be elected by designated director districts.

School districts with enrollments of 2000 or fewer students are exempted from the director district election requirements.

Any school district that is unable to comply with the director district requirements due to an insufficient number of qualified or willing candidates may appoint a resident of the designated director district to serve as a director on the school board. If no resident of the director district is available, the board may appoint a qualified resident of the school district to serve in an at-large capacity until the next regular election.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 13, 2026.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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