

One Hundred Fourth Legislature - First Session - 2015

Introducer's Statement of Intent

LB528

Chairperson: Senator Kate Sullivan

Committee: Education

Date of Hearing: February 10, 2015

The following constitutes the reasons for this bill and the purposes which are sought to be accomplished thereby:

Legislative Bill 528 would make several changes to learning community provisions regarding funding for research and evaluation, start-up grants for focus schools, transportation for open enrollment students, the calculation of state aid, school district reorganization, and advisory committees.

Learning communities are currently included with educational service units in the formula for distributing state core services and technology infrastructure funds. The funds received by learning communities are used for evaluation and research. The proposal would remove learning communities from the distribution of these funds and fund research and evaluation with up to \$600,000 in lottery funds for 2016-17 through 2021-22.

New provisions would provide up to \$500,000 annually for 2016-17 through 2021-22 from lottery funds for focus school start-up grants. The grants would be awarded by the State Board of Education after the focus school and the grant applications had been approved by the learning community coordinating council.

Transportation requirements for learning community districts would be the same as for other districts except that individual students qualifying for free transportation based on open enrollment transfers occurring prior to July 1, 2016 would continue to receive that benefit. Qualifying open enrollment students currently receive free transportation, not a transportation allowance, if the student qualifies for free or reduced price lunches, contributes to the socioeconomic diversity of the school, or attends a focus or magnet school or program. Students do not qualify if transferring to another school within their home district or to a school in a district that does not share a border with the home district. Option enrollment students receive a transportation allowance if they qualify for free lunches, regardless of the location of the option district.

Learning community school districts are currently viewed as a single local system for the purpose of calculating state aid pursuant to the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act (TEEOSA). The needs of the districts are calculated separately, but then combined to be compared to resources for determining equalization aid. The total of equalization aid and allocated income taxes for the system is distributed to districts based on the formula need of the individual districts. Other elements of aid are paid to the districts generating the aid. The proposal would treat each learning community district as its own local system.

School districts in learning communities would be authorized to use existing provisions available to other school districts to participate in the transfer or exchange of parcels of land not to exceed 640 acres with the approval of 65% of the school board of each affected district. The measure would also remove learning community coordinating councils from the reorganization process pursuant to the Learning Community Reorganization Act. Approval of the school boards of the affected districts would take place prior to the submission of any reorganization plan to the state committee under the Act.

The requirement for learning community advisory committees composed of the superintendents of member districts would be eliminated.

Principal Introducer: _____

Senator Kate Sullivan