

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2024 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 5673

By Delegate Mallow

[Introduced February 13, 2024; Referred to the
Committee on Education]

1 A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding thereto a new section,
 2 designated §18-2-5i, all relating to the unification of county school districts in the state;
 3 establishing findings; require county school districts be unified with other county school
 4 districts by July 1, 2027; require State Board of Education to study and provide
 5 recommendation regarding school district unification by October 31, 2024; creating School
 6 District Unification Committee to assist State Board of Education; and authorizing
 7 rulemaking to aid in the transition process.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 2. STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

§18-2-5i. School district unification; establishing effective date; requiring State Board of Education provide recommendations; rulemaking; and creating School District Unification Committee.

1 (a) The Legislature finds that the 55 county school districts across West Virginia face
 2 challenges related to accessibility, funding, population, and topography. In many cases, the
 3 challenges county school districts face is shared by bordering county school districts. With this
 4 knowledge, the Legislature recognizes the need to:

- 5 (1) Unify and consolidate county school districts;
- 6 (2) Adequately plan for benefits and detriments that may come with unifying and
 7 consolidating county school districts; and
- 8 (3) Determine how the county school districts should be unified and consolidated into no
 9 more than 27 districts.

10 (b) The Legislature finds that the State Board of Education shall study and make
 11 recommendations to the Legislature regarding the possibilities for and implications of school
 12 district unification.

13 (c) Effective July 1, 2027, the 55 individual county school districts will be unified with other
 14 county school districts into to regional or area school districts.

15 (d) Beginning on July 1, 2024, the State Board of Education shall, with input from the
16 School District Unification Committee, created in subsection (f) of this section:

17 (1) Study issues pertaining to the unification and consolidation of county school districts in
18 West Virginia;

19 (2) Develop proposed legislation for consideration during the 2025 Regular Session of the
20 Legislature creates the initial framework to unify and consolidate the existing county school
21 districts into not more than 27 districts;

22 (3) Consider any recommendations or proposals for school district unifications or
23 consolidations that include:

24 (A) A regionally facilitated process that allows a school district governing board to develop
25 its own unification or consolidation plans; and

26 (B) A process for a county superintendent to develop a school district unification or
27 consolidation plan.

28 (4) Submit to the Governor, the Senate President, and the Speaker of the House of
29 Delegates, a report containing the requested information on or before October 31, 2024.

30 (e) There is established the School Board Unification Committee. The committee consists
31 of 11 members representing educational interests across West Virginia.

32 (f) The following people serve as ex officio members of the committee:

33 (1) The State Superintendent of Schools, who serves as chair;

34 (2) The chair of the House of Delegates Committee on Education; and

35 (3) The chair of the Senate Committee on Education.

36 (g) The Governor shall appoint members of the committee by July 1, 2024, and shall
37 appoint the following people to serve as members of the committee:

38 (1) Three county school superintendents;

39 (2) One person representing the interests of the West Virginia School Board Association;

40 (3) One person representing the interests of the American Federation of Teachers--West

41 Virginia;

42 (4) One person representing the interests of the West Virginia Education Association;

43 (5) A public school teacher currently teaching a kindergarten through fifth grade class;

44 (6) A public school teacher currently teaching a sixth through twelfth grade class; and

45 (h) A majority of the members constitutes a quorum for the purpose of conducting
46 business.

47 (i) The committee shall meet at least once per month between August 1, 2024, and
48 October 31, 2024. Thereafter, the committee may continue to meet upon the call of the chair or a
49 majority of the committee members.

50 (j) The committee shall assist the State Board of Education in its preparation of information
51 required by this section

52 (k) The State Board of Education is authorized to submit rules for legislative approval
53 pursuant to §29A-3-1 et seq. of this code that establish interim policies and procedures to aid in
54 the orderly and efficient process during the district unification process and during the phase-out
55 period prior to the termination of the county school districts.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to unify of county school districts in the state; establish findings; require county school districts be unified with other county school districts by July 1, 2027; require State Board of Education to study and provide recommendation regarding school district unification by October 31, 2024; create School District Unification Committee to assist State Board of Education; and authorize rulemaking to aid in the transition process.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.