

Approaching the 2021 Legislative Session, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was feared that K–12 budgets would suffer. Fortunately, the economy began to stabilize—along with the provision of significant federal stimulus funds—and catastrophic reductions were set aside. In fact, the Legislature was able to sustain most education funding, along with some additional key investments to get school districts through the pandemic. School administrators recognize and appreciate our legislators’ efforts. While K–12 budgets were largely protected, however, most of our school districts’ critical needs hit the back burner. During the 2022 Legislative Session, it is urgent that K–12 education’s ongoing concerns are addressed. After reviewing our needs and requests from a position of equity, school administrators are committed to pursuing the following priorities:

## Update Staff Allocations

In the 2011 transition to the Prototypical School Funding Model, original staffing allocations were funded at artificially low ratios based on historic staffing levels that had been in place since the late 1980’s to ensure the conversion was cost neutral. Since then, the need for student supports in local school districts has grown exponentially, yet the funding ratios for most staff positions have remained the same since the Model was first implemented. WASA urges the Legislature to begin fulfilling its commitment by phasing in updated ratios to achieve more realistic state-funded staffing levels in all schools, beginning first with investments to meet students’ needs for: mental health, social health, emotional health, and behavioral health; and safety.

## Provide Consistent, Equitable, and Ample Education Resources

Several components of K–12’s funding structure are underfunded or have embedded inequities between districts that urgently need to be addressed. WASA urges the Legislature to promptly take action on the following components:

- **Fix Pupil Transportation.** Under the current Pupil Transportation funding model (STARS), many districts experience significant funding gaps; in the last four years many districts received an allocation below their costs. OFM recently found in most situations, the STARS model will not provide adequate resources to school districts and recommends, at the very least, that more funding be provided to the system. It is time to fix this formula.
- **Fully Fund Special Education.** Prior to the 2019 Session, OSPI identified a special education underfunded need of at least \$300 million. In 2019, the excess cost multiplier was increased; in 2020, additional funding was provided for safety net awards; in 2021, funding was provided for additional transition services, for professional development, and for family liaisons. While these incremental steps to reduce the special education funding gap are appreciated, the 2022 Legislature must take more deliberate action to eliminate the current underfunding.
- **Adjust Regionalization/Experience Factors.** Regionalization and Experience Factors are intended to ensure school districts can provide fair and equitable salaries to staff, allowing districts to hire the best teachers available. Regionalization Factors, however, have intensified rather than lessened inequities between districts. Similarly, Experience Factors were intended to lessen inequities; however, as currently implemented, additional funding only assists one-fifth of the state’s school districts because the calculation is overly limiting. The calculation and application of both factors need to be evaluated and adjusted.
- **Provide State-of-the-Art Technology and Connectivity.** The COVID-19 outbreak exposed the current technology gap, including availability and affordability of devices and broadband connectivity. The Legislature must ensure there is equitable access to technology resources.

## Advance Equity

Closing opportunity gaps for students is critical. WASA urges the Legislature to provide school districts the resources, tools, and flexibility to: ensure equitable learning opportunities, and fair treatment for each student; and recruit, support, and retain effective classroom, building, and district staff who reflect the diversity of our student populations, including ethnicity, and gender.

## Invest in Learning Recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic, forcing school closures and long-term use of remote learning, was detrimental to many students. The 2021 Legislature recognized this, providing significant investments to support learning recovery and acceleration. Unfortunately, most of those programs are supported with one-time funds. Additional resources are needed to enhance, or at least sustain, learning recovery efforts to assist students academically and with mental health or social-emotional learning needs when the initial funds are exhausted.

## Support Capital Facilities

WASA urges the Legislature to: give Washington’s citizens the opportunity to decide whether school district bond issues should be approved with a simple majority vote; and enhance the state’s investment in K–12 construction by updating the current, outdated funding formulas for the Construction Cost Allowance and Student Space Allocation to ensure funding more closely reflects actual construction costs and educational space needs.