

“It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision the education of all children residing within its borders...”

—Article IX, Section 1, Washington State Constitution

School administrators acknowledge the Legislature’s efforts to fully fund basic education, including the provision of significant additional funding in the last ten years. Nevertheless, funding for at least three major components of basic education—Special Education, Pupil Transportation, and Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs (MSOC)—continue to be dramatically underfunded.

School administrators are committed to ensuring each and every student is provided with equitable learning environments where they can learn and achieve their educational goals and aspirations. In pursuit of this commitment, WASA urges the 2025 Legislature to fulfill their obligation to fully fund the following Basic Education programs:

Special Education

The 2025 Legislature must fully fund the cost of special education services. School districts have a legal obligation to serve all students with disabilities in Washington, regardless of cost of services, yet they do not have the necessary resources to provide those services. Even with recent funding enhancements, the gap between school district expenditures for special education and related services substantially exceeds funding—and continues to grow. This gap requires districts to continue to use local funding sources, including local levies, to cover necessary costs. To ensure school districts are provided with funding that reflects the actual costs of service delivery, the Legislature must increase special education tiered multipliers and remove the arbitrary enrollment funding cap.

Pupil Transportation

The 2025 Legislature must promptly fulfill its obligation to comprehensively fix the pupil transportation formula to ensure it is more transparent, predictable, and adequately funded. The intent of the current Student Transportation Allocation Reporting System (STARS) is to allow the Legislature to allocate funding to districts that aligns with actual costs of providing school transportation services. Regardless of the intent, the STARS formula has consistently underfunded districts’ actual pupil transportation expenditures. The STARS formula cannot forecast allocations with credible accuracy, calculates a final allocation in February which complicates budget decisions for school districts and the Legislature, and uses an efficiency rating that is detrimental to efficient districts because they are at risk of less funding in the model.

Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs (MSOC)

The 2025 Legislature must immediately address the significant underfunding of allocations for Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs (MSOC). While staffing represents the largest expense for school districts, there are many costs to running a school district which are non-staff related. The Legislature provides an allocation to cover these costs by providing for Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs (MSOC) at a specific rate per student; however, state funding for MSOC has not kept pace with actual school district costs. Liability insurance alone has increased over 100 percent in the last five years, while utility costs have increased more than 40 percent. Other costs, such as food and fuel, have also increased dramatically. Current per pupil rates for Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs simply do not come close to matching costs of running a school district. These costs are increasing through no fault of School Districts, superintendents or school boards and their decisions. When required costs of running a school district exceed state funding, local revenues, mostly levies, must be used to fill the gap, reducing local resources for school district and community expectations.

School administrators will focus their advocacy efforts in the 2025 Legislative Session on the full funding of basic education—specifically Special Education, Pupil Transportation, and Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs (MSOC). As school districts face increasing financial difficulties, however, school administrators have ongoing concerns about the state’s K–12 funding structure that must be addressed. These issues must continue to remain on legislators’ radar:

Update Staff Allocations

WASA urges the Legislature to continue to provide for more realistic staffing ratios in the Prototypical School Funding Model (PSFM). The Prototypical School Funding Model is a core, fundamental part of the education funding structure. The funding ratios for most staff positions, however, have remained the same since the Model was first implemented in 2010, resulting in outdated and unrealistic state-funded staffing levels. The first priority must be the completion of implementation of Phase I of the recommendations from the Staffing Enrichment Workgroup (2019): improving staffing allocations for critically needed school principals; providing additional professional development to close achievement gaps; and adding continuous improvement coaches as an enhancement to the PSFM.

Modify Regionalization/Experience Factor

WASA urges the Legislature to immediately revamp the methodology of regionalization and experience factors to ensure school districts receive more consistent and equitable resources. The current regionalization methodology of using housing costs is flawed and the implementation of experience factors is unsound. The current calculation of these factors has exacerbated inequities between districts and must be updated swiftly.

Reform Levy/Local Effort Assistance

Inequities between districts were exacerbated by capping levy authority of property rich districts at a higher level than neighboring property poor districts—while diminishing levy capacity for all districts at the same time. Spiking housing values are negatively impacting many districts’ efforts to adopt levies and are causing many districts eligible for Local Effort Assistance (LEA) to lose funding—or lose eligibility all together. Legislators have consistently stated their intent to “reform” levy/LEA policies; however, action has yet to be taken.

Support Capital Facilities

WASA urges the Legislature to provide robust and reliable funding for school facilities, including funding for school districts that have difficulty passing local bonds or have limited debt capacity to support necessary new construction or modernization. While WASA appreciates the recent update in the Construction Cost Allowance, the Legislature must continue to enhance the state’s investment in K–12 construction by updating the antiquated, pre-1980 funding formulas to ensure funding more closely reflects actual construction costs and educational space needs. Additionally, the Legislature must finally give Washington’s citizens the opportunity to decide whether school district bond issues should be approved with a simple majority vote.