MSOC | SPECIAL EDUCATION | SUBSTITUTE COSTS

FROM LOCAL REALITY TO LEGISLATIVE ACTION

A step-by-step guide for communicating WASA priorities on behalf of your district

EQUITY WASA
WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

SUMMER–FALL 2026 MEMBER ACTION GUIDE

Email. Meet. Invite. Show the Impact. Follow up.

The goal is not to send a generic message. The goal is to help each legislator understand what underfunding looks like in your schools — and what specific state action would allow students and staff to thrive.

Your Advocacy Roadmap

Use this guide as a summer-to-fall sequence. Each step builds the relationship and adds a layer of local evidence.

1. **Prepare Your District Story** Gather a one-page snapshot, real cost gaps, and two or three student-centered examples.
2. **Email Your Legislators** Share the WASA platform, introduce the Big Three, and request a summer conversation.
3. **Meet During the Interim** Use 20–30 minutes to connect local realities and student outcomes to state policy and funding decisions.
4. **Invite Legislators into Schools** Offer a fall visit that lets them see students learning, staff supporting, and operating needs firsthand.
5. **Deliver the Big Three Message** Use a consistent structure for MSOC, special education, and substitute costs.

6 **Make a Clear Ask** Ask for funding aligned with actual costs and relief from policies that divert classroom resources.

7 **Follow Up and Stay Connected** Send materials within 24–48 hours and continue sharing concise updates before and during session.

Core Message

Public education is Washington's promise. Districts are committed to helping every student succeed, but the state must fund the real cost of basic education — particularly MSOC, special education, and substitute costs.

Step 1 | Build Your District Advocacy Packet

Before contacting legislators, assemble a short, consistent packet. Keep the full packet to three or four pages plus the WASA platform. Legislators are more likely to use material that is concise, visual, and local.

- ✓ **District Snapshot:** Enrollment; schools; student demographics; geography; levy context; distinctive strengths and needs.
- ✓ **Big Three cost Snapshot:** Actual district costs, state funding received, and the remaining gap for MSOC, special education, and substitutes.
- ✓ **Two or Three Local Examples:** A program reduced, position left unfilled, insurance increase, substitute shortage, or service the district funds locally.
- ✓ **One Student-Centered Story:** A brief, privacy-protected example showing what adequate resources make possible.
- ✓ **WASA 2027 Legislative Priorities:** Attach or link the platform included in Appendix A.
- ✓ **Your Clear Ask:** One sentence describing the action you need legislators to take.

District Data Worksheet

Priority	Your District Evidence	Student/Staff Impact
MSOC	Insurance, utilities, technology, fuel, curriculum, supplies, liability costs	What was reduced, delayed, or shifted?
Special Education	Actual expenditures, state/federal revenue, local fund contribution	Which services, staffing, or general education resources are affected?
Substitute Costs	Required leave days, funded days, annual substitute expense, fill rate	How do vacancies or costs affect continuity, class coverage, and staff workload?

Step 2 | Email Your Legislators

Send the message to your state senator and both state representatives. Copy each legislator's assistant, who typically manages scheduling. Use your district office address when identifying the legislative district. Keep the email brief and attach the WASA platform and your one-page district snapshot.

Sample Email: Share Priorities + Request a Summer Meeting

Subject: [District Name] Students, 2027 K–12 Priorities, and an Invitation to Connect

Dear Senator/Representative [Last Name],

I am writing on behalf of [District Name], which serves approximately [number] students across [brief community description]. Thank you for your service to our community.

As we prepare for the 2027 legislative session, I am sharing WASA's legislative priorities and a brief district snapshot. Our central message is straightforward: public education is Washington's promise, and the state must fund the real cost of educating students.

For our district, the most significant pressures are:

- MSOC: [one sentence about insurance/liability, utilities, technology, fuel, or other operating costs].
- Special education: [one sentence about the local funding gap and impact on students/programs].
- Substitute costs: [one sentence about required leave, state funding, and local cost].

I would appreciate 30 minutes to meet with you in person this summer to discuss these issues, hear your priorities, and offer our district as a resource. I am available [provide two or three windows].

Thank you for considering this request. I look forward to working with you on behalf of students, staff, and families.

Sincerely,
[Name]
[Title]
[District]
[Phone] | [Email]

Email Checklist

- ☐ Use a local subject line, not a mass-email subject line.
- ☐ Attach the WASA platform and a one-page district snapshot.
- ☐ Offer two or three specific meeting windows.
- ☐ Keep the main message under about 350 words.
- ☐ Use district data and avoid partisan language.
- ☐ Follow up after five to seven business days if you have not received a response.

Step 3 | Meet In-Person During the Summer

The legislative interim is the best time for relationship building and deeper policy conversations. A 20- to 30-minute meeting at the district office, a local coffee shop, or the legislator's district office is enough to establish trust and share the Big Three.

Consider Meeting as a Regional Team

Especially for newer superintendents, meeting with legislators alongside neighboring districts or colleagues from similarly sized districts can make the conversation more comfortable and impactful. A shared meeting also allows legislators to hear common themes across multiple districts while highlighting each district's unique local context.

Regional meetings can:

- Demonstrate that funding challenges are shared across communities, not isolated to one district.
- Provide an opportunity for experienced and newer superintendents to advocate together.
- Make scheduling easier for busy legislators by allowing one conversation to serve multiple districts.
- Present a strong regional voice while still leaving space for each district to share its own local examples and student stories.

A 30-Minute Meeting Agenda

Time	Focus	What To Do
0–5 min	**Welcome and Thanks**	Thank the legislator for any specific local and state support and ask what they are hearing from the community.
5–10 min	**District Snapshot**	Share who you serve, what is going well, any student growth data, graduation rates, secondary pathway pursuits, and what makes your district distinct.
10–20 min	**The Big Three**	Use the issue → local example → student/staff impact → action needed structure.
20–28 min	**Discussion and Listening**	Ask what information would help and what barriers they anticipate.
28–30 min	**Clear Next Steps**	Invite a fall school visit and commit to sending follow-up materials.

Questions to Ask the Legislator

- What are you hearing about K–12 funding from other districts and constituents?
- What information would be most useful as you evaluate MSOC, special education, and substitute funding?
- What opportunities do you see for addressing the gap between state expectations and actual district costs?
- Would you be willing to visit one of our schools this fall and see these priorities in action?
- Who on your staff should receive brief district updates as proposals develop?

Step 4 | Invite Legislators to See Students Learning and Growing

A fall school visit moves the conversation from a budget spreadsheet to the student experience. The visit should showcase success, allow educators and students to speak, and help legislators see the consequences of funding choices without turning the event into a press conference or partisan activity.

Sample School Visit Invitation

Subject: Invitation to Visit [School Name] This Fall

Dear Senator/Representative [Last Name],

Thank you again for speaking with me about the needs and strengths of [District Name]. I would like to invite you to visit [School Name] this fall to see students learning and growing and to meet the educators and staff who support them each day.

During a [45–60]-minute visit, we can highlight [literacy/math instruction, special education services, student supports, career pathways, or another local strength] and show how MSOC, special education funding, and substitute availability affect the learning environment.

Possible dates include [option 1], [option 2], or [option 3]. We will coordinate all logistics and ensure the visit is focused, informative, and respectful of instructional time.

We would be honored to host you.

Sincerely,
[Name and title]

Suggested 50-Minute Visit

5 minutes: Welcome, safety/visitor logistics, and one-sentence purpose.

10 minutes: District and school overview: strengths, students served, and the Big Three context.

20 minutes: Classroom or program visit. Let the learning and staff expertise be visible.

10 minutes: Conversation with a small group of students, educators, specialists, or families.

5 minutes: Close with the district ask and agree on follow-up.

Make the Visit Meaningful

✓ Choose one or two classrooms or programs; do not over-schedule.

✓ Prepare staff and students, but do not script personal stories. Provide an opportunity for students to share.

✓ Protect student privacy and obtain any required permissions.

✓ Show both success and constraint: what staff are accomplishing and what inadequate funding makes harder.

✓ Provide a one-page takeaway, not a binder.

✓ Send a thank-you and requested information within 24–48 hours.

Step 5 | Deliver the Big Three Message

Use the same four-part structure for every priority: (1) student need, (2) current funding reality, (3) local impact, and (4) specific state action. Customize the bracketed fields with your district's numbers and examples.

MSOC: Fund the Actual Cost of Operating Schools

- **Student Need:** Students need safe, open, connected, and well-equipped schools every day.
- **Funding Reality:** Insurance and liability coverage, utilities, technology, fuel, curriculum, and supplies have risen faster than state MSOC allocations.
- **Local Impact:** Our district's [insurance/liability] cost increased from [$] to [$] over [time period]. That gap competes with [staffing/program/student support].
- **Ask:** Increase and regularly update MSOC funding based on actual cost growth, and reform liability drivers that force districts to redirect classroom resources.

Plain-language version: *"These are not optional expenses. We must insure buildings and staff, keep schools heated and connected, maintain technology, and provide materials. When state funding does not reflect those costs, the difference comes out of resources intended for students."*

Special Education: Fully Fund Required Services

- **Student Need:** Students with disabilities deserve timely, individualized services and access to a full school experience.
- **Funding Reality:** Special education is a basic education obligation, yet district costs continue to exceed state and federal funding.
- **Local Impact:** Our district redirects approximately [$] in local resources to cover required special education services, affecting [general education staffing, programs, class size, or enrichment].
- **Ask:** Provide sustainable special education funding aligned with actual costs so districts can meet every student's needs without straining other essential programs and services.

Plain-language version: *"The question is not whether we will serve students with disabilities — we will. The question is whether the state will meet its obligation or require local districts to pull funds from other student supports to do so."*

Substitute Costs: Fund the Leave the State Requires

- **Student Need:** Students need continuity of instruction and safe, adequately staffed classrooms when educators are absent.
- **Funding Reality:** The state requires districts to provide a minimum of **ten** days of educator leave but funds only **four** days.
- **Local Impact:** Our district spends approximately [$] annually on substitutes for required leave, while also managing a fill rate of [%] and added workload for remaining staff.

- **Ask:** Fund the full cost of state-required leave and support a sustainable substitute workforce.

Plain-language version: *"Districts should not have to choose between complying with state leave requirements and protecting classroom resources. When the state requires the benefit, it should fund the real substitute cost."*

When Discussing All Three Together

"These are three expressions of the same problem: the state sets expectations for what schools must provide, but funding does not match the actual cost. Our district fulfills these obligations because students depend on us. The growing gap, however, forces us to redirect staff, programs, and opportunities. We are asking the Legislature to fund the real cost of basic education so local resources can strengthen student learning rather than backfill state shortfalls."

Connect Every Number to a Consequence

Instead of Only Saying...	Add the Student/Staff Consequence...
"Our insurance rose by $___."	"That increase equals approximately ___ paraeducator positions / ___ classroom supply budgets / ___ days of student support."
"Special education is underfunded by $___."	"We cover that obligation with local dollars that otherwise could support ___."
"Substitutes cost us $___."	"When positions go unfilled, staff lose planning time, administrators cover classrooms, and students experience less continuity."

Step 6 | Make a Clear, Respectful Ask

A strong advocacy conversation ends with an action the legislator can take. Avoid ending with "we just wanted you to know." Choose one or two asks that match the purpose of the conversation.

- Support 2027 budget and policy proposals that fund MSOC according to actual operating cost growth, or reduce policy burdens, including escalating insurance and liability costs.
- Provide sustainable special education funding sufficient to cover required services without relying on local enrichment dollars.
- Fund the full substitute cost associated with state-required educator leave.
- Oppose new unfunded mandates and identify a funding source for any new district obligation.
- Protect existing funding for K–12 including for early learning programs (TTK) and Local Effort Assistance (LEA).
- Visit a school this fall and continue meeting with local school leaders before session.
- Contact the district when a proposal could create operational or fiscal impacts so local leaders can provide timely information.

Tone: Urgent Without Being Hostile

Use	Avoid
• "Here is what this means for students in our district."	• Partisan labels or assumptions about motive
• "We appreciate past investments, and the remaining gap is..."	• Jargon without explanation
• "What additional information would be helpful?"	• A long list of unrelated priorities
• "We want to be a reliable resource."	• Threats, blame, or only contacting legislators when asking for money

Step 7 | Follow Up and Continue the Relationship

Send follow-up within 24–48 hours. Restate the ask, answer questions, attach only the most useful materials, and confirm the next step. Continue communicating when you have meaningful local information — not only when a vote is imminent.

Sample Follow-Up Email

Subject: Thank You and Follow-Up — [District Name] Priorities

Dear Senator/Representative [Last Name],

Thank you for meeting with us on [date]. I appreciated the opportunity to discuss how MSOC, special education, and substitute costs affect students and staff in [District Name].

As a follow-up, I have attached [district snapshot / WASA platform / requested data]. Our central ask is [one sentence].

You also asked about [question]. [Provide concise response or state when you will provide it.]

We would be pleased to host you at [school] this fall. I will follow up with possible dates, and please contact me anytime our district can provide information as proposals develop.

Thank you again for your time and service.

Sincerely,

[Name and title]

Year-Round Contact Rhythm

Summer: Introductory email and in-person conversation.

Early Fall: School visit featuring students, instruction, and staff expertise.

Late Fall: Pre-session update with district data and the Big Three ask.

During Session: Short, timely messages tied to specific budget or policy proposals.

After Session: Thank legislators, explain local implementation, and identify remaining gaps.

One-Page Conversation Cheat Sheet

OPEN	Thank you. Our district serves [#] students, and we are proud of [strength].
FRAME	Public education is Washington's promise. Districts are committed to student success, but state funding does not match the real cost of basic education.
MSOC	Actual operating costs — especially insurance/liability, utilities, technology, fuel, and supplies — are rising faster than state funding. Local impact: [example].
SPECIAL EDUCATION	Required services exceed state and federal support. Local impact: [$ gap and consequence].
SUBSTITUTES	The state requires a minimum of 10 days of educator leave but funds four. Local impact: [$ cost, fill rate, and consequence].
ASK + NEXT STEP	Please support funding aligned with actual costs. May we host you at [school] this fall and continue serving as a resource?

Final Member Checklist

☐ Identify your senator(s), representatives, and legislative assistants. See Legislator Roster for contact information.

☐ Customize district data for MSOC, special education, and substitutes.

☐ Email the WASA platform and request a summer meeting.

☐ Use a 30-minute agenda and make a clear ask.

☐ Invite each legislator to a fall school visit.

☐ Send follow-up within 24–48 hours.

☐ Coordinate messaging with your board, leadership team, regional colleagues, and WASA—and consider requesting a joint meeting with neighboring districts or similarly sized colleagues to present a shared regional perspective.

☐ Share significant responses, questions, or commitments with WASA Government Relations.

Appendix A | WASA 2027 Legislative Priorities

Share these pages with legislators and use them as the common statewide framework for your local message.

Public schools educate 90% of Washington students.
Washington families continue to choose and rely on public education.

Public education is Washington's **PROMISE.** That promise is falling short.

More than 1.1 million students attend Washington's public schools. They create opportunity, strengthen communities, prepare the future workforce, and serve as the **FOUNDATION** of our democracy. But too often, districts must redirect classroom resources to cover the basic education costs the state does not adequately fund. **Putting students first requires all of us to do our part.**

THE PROMISE

Every child benefits from a high-quality education regardless of ZIP code, family income, or local property wealth.

OUR PROMISE

Washington's school leaders are committed to ensuring every student develops grade-level skills in reading and mathematics.

With updated state learning standards being implemented beginning in 2027–28, schools have a critical opportunity to focus on the essential literacy, and math skills students need to succeed in school, careers, and life.

Every student in Washington State demonstrates grade-level knowledge in reading and mathematics.

School districts will continue to prioritize evidence-based instruction, early intervention, educator support, and student success.

YOUR PROMISE

If Washington is serious about improving student outcomes, the state must fund the real cost of educating students, especially for **the big three:**

the big three

MATERIALS, SUPPLIES, & OPERATING COSTS (MSOC)

Inflation continues to drive significant increases in insurance, utilities, technology, fuel, and operational expenses. Districts should not be forced to cut student programs to pay basic operating costs.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Students with disabilities deserve timely, individualized support. Full state funding is essential to ensure districts can meet every student's needs without straining other essential programs and services.

SUBSTITUTE COSTS

The state requires districts to provide a minimum of 10 days of sick leave but only funds four. Districts absorb millions in substitute costs each year, pulling resources away from classrooms and student learning.

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Putting students first also means reducing costs and mandates that divert resources away from students:

Protect Classroom Funding and Promote Fairness

- ✓ Reform tort and liability laws that drive escalating insurance costs.
- ✓ Protect districts from abusive public records requests that divert staff time and taxpayer resources.
- ✓ Fully fund, revise, or eliminate unfunded mandates imposed on school districts.
- ✓ Protect and maintain Local Effort Assistance (LEA) to ensure students have equitable opportunities regardless of local property wealth.
- ✓ Preserve proven student success programs, including Transition to Kindergarten.
- ✓ Expand the Learning Assistance Program (LAP) to better support students experiencing poverty and academic barriers.

If we ***don't*** keep our promises:

Without our commitments supported by legislative action, districts will continue to face funding shortfalls that result in larger class sizes, fewer learning opportunities, reduced student supports, and staffing and program cuts.

Students deserve stable, accessible, and resourced schools where educators can focus on reading, mathematics, learning, safety, and opportunity.

If we all keep our promise, Washington students will thrive and achieve their aspirations.

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for more information

Appendix B | Local Impact Story Builder

Use this worksheet to prepare a two-minute story. Protect student and staff privacy; focus on the experience and the policy connection.

Prompt	Your Notes
Student or Staff Need *What did the student, classroom, program, or staff member need?*	
What Staff Did *How did educators or district staff respond?*	
Funding or Policy Gap *What cost or requirement was not adequately funded?*	
Real-World Consequence *What was delayed, reduced, shifted, or made more difficult?*	
What Adequate Funding Would Change *What could the district sustain, restore, or improve?*	
Legislative Ask *What specific action should the legislator take?*	

Two-Minute Story Template

"In our district, [student/staff need]. Our team [response]. The challenge is that [funding or policy gap]. As a result, [real-world consequence]. With adequate state support, we could [positive outcome]. We are asking you to [specific legislative action]."