



School Funding Coalition Priorities Talking Points

The School Funding Coalition is comprised of seven statewide education associations, representing almost 8,000 school district leaders. In preparation for the 2021 Legislative Session (as well as any potential Special Session called before January), the Coalition developed a [short-list of priorities](#) to support. While each association has their own Legislative Platform, the Coalition's adopted priorities provide a set of issues in which we can come together and speak with one voice.

To assist your advocacy efforts, the Coalition has also created "talking points" for the priorities. The talking points below provide key message points for each priority, along with some additional information which provides further context behind the priorities.

We encourage you—individually and collectively—to use the priorities and talking points to guide your communications with legislators. While the Coalition supports each issue and we will strive to successfully advance each priority, we suggest that you focus on two or three specific issues to discuss as you communicate with your local legislators. Written messages should be short and concise, and in-person, phone or electronic (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc.) meetings should be narrowly focused. In follow-up messages or meetings, you can provide further support for the priorities discussed, or you can advocate for additional issues. Outlining all of the priorities at once, however, may overwhelm your policymakers—and there is a risk your message will be lost.

Use the talking points to better understand the priorities and to craft supportive arguments. We encourage you not to simply copy the talking points; use your own words and voice so your message is authentic. And add your own "stories" to illuminate the issues. For example, do not just ask for stable pupil transportation funding. Explain the consequences if you lack funding; describe the potential personnel impacts or what services you might have to eliminate. Make the words "real."

School Funding Coalition Priorities Talking Points

STABLE SUPPORT

- Reimburse for unfunded costs associated with COVID-19, beyond what is reimbursed by federal funds, such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for students and staff, food service, transportation, and online learning
- Promptly pass through federal funding dedicated for schools without supplanting state funding
- Hold the line on K-12 funding and prevent mid-year budget reductions; any budget reductions deemed necessary must not create or further exacerbate funding inequities between districts and must be tied to an expenditure-mandate that is also eliminated
- Maintain stable support for enrollment and pupil transportation

Talking Points:

- The Legislature must maintain the integrity of the public education system (including current funding formulas) to ensure students will return to high-quality schools.
- School districts are relying on existing and committed state funds for the 2020-21 school year while providing ongoing instruction and services.
- Additional resources are needed from the Federal Government while districts are expected to provide additional services to support their families and communities.
- Additional federal funds dedicated to education must be promptly provided to school districts, without withholding or supplanting state funding.
- In recent years, the state has provided significant investments to K-12 education and now is not the time for the Legislature to backtrack on complying with its constitutional obligation. Our students need support and resources now, more than ever.
- After school budgets are adopted, districts have contractual obligations and other costs that cannot be avoided. Any budget reductions that are deemed necessary must not be made mid-year. Mid-year reductions will force districts to layoff our lowest paid employees and/or reduce or eliminate programs and services.
- School district obligations to cover the unfunded cost of the School Employees' Benefits Board (SEBB) insurance program create additional financial requirements.
- Embedded in the current funding system are inequities between districts. Any budget reductions deemed necessary must not increase underfunded obligations and must be fair and equitable. For example, the current Local Effort Assistance (LEA or levy equalization) structure exacerbates inequities between "property-rich" and "property-poor" districts. LEA must be protected. Any reductions that are imposed must also eliminate associated costs for school districts and be uniformly imposed.
- The Legislature must provide stable funding support for student enrollment and pupil transportation. Reductions in enrollment or student ridership because parents are not comfortable sending their kids to school will dramatically impact district finances

and fund balances, negatively impacting the ability to offer programs and serve all students. Districts operating using a virtual model or a hybrid model must receive apportionment for student enrollment consistent with current practices; that is, funding for continuous learning based on the Prototypical School Funding Model. Continuous learning is an educational delivery model which can be easily transitioned in and out of based on community need or state or local health directives and should not be confused with Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) programs. ALE is a fixed educational delivery model intended to operate with non-seat-based time instructional components regardless of the status of the COVID-19 in our state.

- Funding for pupil transportation must be stable, using ridership from the 2019-20 school year; however, for districts opening virtually in the fall of 2020, funding must also be protected in spring 2021, otherwise districts will lose significant financial support for transportation, perhaps as the virus subsides and in-person instruction is considered. Without adequate support for pupil transportation, students who are low-income will be disproportionately impacted.

Additional Context:

- **Reimbursement.** Some federal funding was provided to reimburse districts for unexpected and unfunded costs for PPE, additional food service, and online learning programs. Costs for these services in most cases exceeded the federal reimbursement. More importantly, the reimbursement was one-time funding, while most of these unexpected and unfunded costs are continuing. Many districts provided day care on top of the other unfunded costs. Other districts provided mobile “hot spots” for wireless connectivity; however, many of those services have on-going subscriptions, rather than a reimbursable, one-time cost.
- **Federal funding.** Significant resources in the CARES Act were provided to states to support education. Rather than immediately transfer those resources to districts, OFM withheld much of the funding, delaying reimbursements and stalling implementation of additional programs and services. Funding that was to be passed onto OSPI and the ESDs was also held up by OFM, forcing the implementation of plans to assist districts to be delayed.
- **Additional stimulus funding.** Congress is likely to adopt further stimulus packages and will likely dedicate additional resources for education. Delaying that funding delays school districts’ use of those needed resources. Worse, there is a fear of the Legislature either withholding the funding from districts or providing the funding, but reducing other required funding (supplanting), causing the federal dividend to be a minimal, or potentially a net zero, gain. The Legislature used this tactic with federal funds dedicated to K-12 during the Great Recession.
- **K-12 funding.** Over the last several years, the Legislature has made great strides in implementing and funding the state’s new education funding system, including significant investments that have doubled K–12 appropriations since the Supreme Court’s 2012 *McCleary* decision. Now is not the time for the Legislature to backtrack on complying with its constitutional obligation; in fact, in the midst of a pandemic, with potentially large budget reductions on the horizon, our students need support and resources now, more than ever.
- **Mid-year reductions.** If K-12 funding is reduced, mid-year cuts must be avoided. School districts adopt budgets in July (second class districts) or August (first class districts) and have contractual obligations that cannot be avoided; they have little-to-no

options to reduce staff. Certificated staff must be notified by May 15 if they will be laid off, otherwise they are guaranteed employment in the district the following school year. Classified staff lack the same protections, so if there are mid-year reductions districts will be forced to lay off our lowest paid employees and/or reduce/eliminate programs and services.

- **Budget reductions.** The current school funding includes: program areas that remain underfunded (special education, for example); and embedded inequities between districts. Any budget reductions must not increase underfunded obligations. One major unfunded obligation is the SEBB insurance program. The state provides funding for these health benefits; however, many school district employees are levy-, grant-, or federally-funded. Current law mandates these employees receive full health benefits if they work at least 630 hours, but the state provides no funding, resulting in additional unfunded mandates on school districts. These mandates compete for limited funding with other obligations or priorities.

Any budget reductions must also be fair and equitable. The new levy and Local Effort Assistance (LEA or levy equalization) structure has exacerbated inequities between “property rich” and “property poor” districts. LEA funding must be protected to ensure these inequities are not further exacerbated. LEA funding must be protected to ensure these inequities are not further exacerbated.

- **Enrollment/Transportation.** During the current pandemic, many parents do not feel safe sending students on school buses or sending them to attend school in classrooms. A sudden and drastic decline in ridership or enrollment will have potentially huge negative impacts on district finances and fund balances, impacting the ability to offer programs and to serve all students. The Legislature must provide consistent funding for enrollment and transportation to ensure districts’ financial stability.
 - **Enrollment.** If schools open in a hybrid model or a 100 percent virtual model, stable funding, based on current practices, must be provided to school districts. Districts that are not providing in-person instruction are delivering continuous learning, an educational delivery model which can be easily transitioned in and out of based on community need or state or local health directives. Funding for continuous learning is based on the Prototypical School Funding Model. Continuous learning is NOT the same as an Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) program, which is a fixed educational delivery model intended to operate with non-seat-based time instructional components regardless of the status of the COVID-19 in our state. Funding for ALE is statutorily provided through the Running Start rate.
 - **Transportation.** Funding for pupil transportation must continue to be consistent. During the pandemic, districts should not be losing transportation funding. Many districts that move to distance learning will still use school buses to distribute paper instructional packets, school meals, and/or mobile “hot spots.” Districts that are fully reopened or are using a hybrid model may have additional costs, transporting students using social distancing.
-

SAFETY

- Support funding for staffing and materials to ensure buildings and buses are clean and sanitary

- Train staff in providing trauma-informed instruction that is embedded in the social emotional framework

Talking Points:

- School districts are incurring additional costs associated with COVID-19 response to ensure the health and safety of students and staff.
- Districts are committed to creating physically and emotionally safe learning environments, in-person and remotely, and need the resources to do so. The Legislature must create, or at the least support, safety systems that help schools get back to in-person education.
- Many tactics are needed to fully address the social, emotional, and instructional needs of students and schools, especially as students are experiencing increased isolation and potential abuse during this time.
- Embedded and ongoing trauma-informed instruction is one approach to address the social, emotional and instructional needs of students and recognizes that students often have many different types of trauma in their lives that impact their ability to learn.
- Trauma-informed instruction is in response to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).
- Teachers and staff need training in order to provide effective instruction that responds to student needs.
- Social and emotional learning and mental health supports and programs are needed, now more than ever; along with expanded instruction on digital citizenship and student engagement. ^[1]_[SEP]

Additional Context:

With plans for some schools to reopen in-person and the hope that most all schools will reopen in-person at some point during the 2020-21 school year, consistent funding is needed to allow for custodial staffing to remain whole. Additional staff may be needed to provide for cleaning of classrooms, buildings, and buses in between shifts of students and staff. While people are in the buildings, there must be adequate PPE provided (including but not limited to: masks and face shields, hand sanitizer, disinfectants, and plexiglass shields).

Staff returning to schools this fall will need to have training in trauma-informed instruction in order to meet the needs of students who have and will continue to experience trauma through this COVID-19 crisis. Trauma-informed instruction may be a part of the three professional learning days in a district but it also may be outside of those days depending on what districts have planned. Paraeducators also need to make sure this topic is included in their training as they work closely with students.

ACCESS TO LEARNING

- Provide equitable access to technology resources including devices and broadband connectivity

- Ensure resources for individualized needs of all students

Talking Points:

- In response to COVID-19, school districts have been and will continue to be required to provide at least some distance learning opportunities for students in grades K-12.
- Many students from throughout the state, in both rural and urban areas, have limited access to hardware, software, and Internet. This includes availability and affordability. Without any one of these elements, students cannot receive effective or adequate instruction in a distance learning environment.
- School districts need support from the state to provide lasting access to technology and broadband, including for students with individualized learning needs.
- Providing Internet access is not a school districts' area of expertise and individual hot spots provided by the districts are not the long-term answer.
- The existing opportunity gap is increasing for students who do not have equitable access to technology, broadband, and/or a supportive adult at home.
- Resources are especially needed to support students with individualized education plans and students who are disproportionately and negatively impacted by remote learning.

Additional Context:

With plans for many districts to begin the 2020-21 school year with online learning only, it is absolutely critical that students and families have access to a reliable Internet connection as well as appropriate devices for each student to complete their work. Staff need to have stable connectivity and devices as well. In many cases last spring, mobile hotspots provided to families were not adequate for their data needs. In addition, families need information about how devices and Internet access works, often in a language other than English.

As students return to school this fall and teachers administer screening assessments, there will be a variety of needs that each and every student will have. Districts need to have resources for the unique needs of students including those who are identified as needing special education instruction, English Language Learners, students experiencing homelessness and foster care, students in highly capable programs, and others. These resources may need to be adapted to online instruction as well.

WELL-EQUIPPED STAFF

- Provide professional development for staff about racial literacy, cultural responsiveness, and stereotype threat for purposes of closing persistent opportunity gaps

- Provide professional development for staff so that they can effectively engage students in online learning

Talking Points:

- Many schools will begin the 2020-21 school year online and it is essential that staff are trained to effectively shift their instruction and curriculum to online platforms.
- Many teachers were not prepared to provide remote instruction in the spring of 2020 and have needed to scale their competency quickly to start and continue teaching in 2020-21.
- To reduce opportunity gaps, educators must be able to reach each and every student by reflecting on their own practices and reviewing their materials to remove bias and racism. This is the only way to provide equitable learning opportunities for students who are disproportionately underserved.
- Effective professional learning must be embedded throughout a school year and additional funding including staff time will be needed as schools continue distance learning or move back to distance learning models throughout 2020-21.

Additional Context:

SB 6168 (2020 Supplemental Operating Budget) requires one of the three state-funded professional learning days in the 2020-21 school year to be used to train staff on “racial literacy, cultural responsiveness and stereotype threat for purposes of closing persistent opportunity gaps.” This funding is greatly appreciated and this training is greatly needed at this time in our society. Adults need to develop their racial literacy skills so that they feel confident in navigating important and difficult conversations with both students and families. One day of training will not be sufficient for these topics.

In addition, because so many schools will be beginning the 2020-21 school year online, it is essential that staff are trained in how to effectively shift their instruction and curriculum to online platforms. The ESSER funds from the CARES Act provide some funding for ESDs to provide training. Good professional learning needs to be embedded throughout a school year and additional funding for this purpose may be needed as schools continue distance learning or move back to distance learning models depending on how COVID-19 continues.